

6-1-1988

The Maze of Taste: On Bataille, Derrida, and Kant

Arkady Plotnitsky
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>



Part of the [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#), [German Literature Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Plotnitsky, Arkady (1988) "The Maze of Taste: On Bataille, Derrida, and Kant," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2, Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1216>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

The Maze of Taste: On Bataille, Derrida, and Kant

Abstract

The case of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* offers a powerful example of the radical disruption of the metaphysical text, enacted by Bataille's major concepts. The analysis of the metaphor of economy in Kant, Bataille and Derrida suggests the crucial importance of Bataille's general economy—*as the economy of loss*—for deconstructing the Kantian conception of genius and the whole scheme of taste—*as an economy of consumption*—and inscribing a complex interplay forces that the general economy is designed to account for. Once however taste, art and the economy of genius can no longer be inscribed through the restricted economy of the metaphysical text, the question of genre and style of a different inscription—a general economy—acquires a crucial significance. Bataille's own discursive practice can be seen as an exemplification of such a different—*plural*— style.

Keywords

Kant, Critique of Judgment, metaphysical, metaphysical text, Bataille, metaphor, Derrida, economy, economy of loss, genius, scheme of taste, economy of consumption, art, plurality, German philosophy, modern philosophy

THE MAZE OF TASTE: ON BATAILLE, DERRIDA,
AND KANT

Arkady Plotnitsky
University of Pennsylvania

If Bataille's confrontation with Hegel can be seen as central to his thought and writing and has become a relative commonplace (albeit a productive one), Bataille's references to Kant are only casual. I shall not, however, argue the significance of Kant in Bataille's discourse in specific (let alone textual) terms. Rather, I want to explore what can be seen as a Kantian *moment* in Bataille, as it appears within the historical and conceptual closure that, according to Derrida, defines Western philosophical discourse, or theoretical discourse, or even discourse in general. Indeed it is far from self-evident that this closure can be subsumed under the rubric of the Occident, however convenient or comfortable that demarcation might appear.

That Kant influenced Bataille is best illustrated by Bataille himself in a passing remark in "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*": ". . . it was necessary to endow antinomies in general with a mechanical and abstract character, as in Kant and Hegel."¹ This coupling of Kant and Hegel is familiar to the point of triviality. It is far less trivial and far more significant, however, that this coupling and this unity are, to a considerable degree, conceived of by Bataille in terms of a historical and conceptual closure of metaphysics, the closure on which our discourse must depend, even when it is aimed at undermining the power of metaphysics and philosophy.² The concept of closure, furthermore, includes a crucial idea of the necessity—psychological, social, cultural, historical, perhaps even political—of metaphysical thinking. Indeed, the phrase immediately preceding the one just cited defines the philosophical closure of language: ". . . for human vocabulary continues everywhere to maintain throughout a faithful memory of fundamental categories" (*Visions*, p. 35).

With the exception of Derrida's seminal formulations, one can hardly think of a better invocation of closure: however much "philosophical usages are in question" (*Visions*, p. 35) and however transformed they might become, the metaphysical remnants, including those left by the history of this questioning, are ineluctable in our language. It is this configuration that is powerfully explored by Derrida. The notion of closure, so conceived, is perhaps Derrida's most significant contribution to modern theoretical thought and to intellectual history in general.

It is of course true that the very concept (or category) of category is itself a Kantian, as well as an Aristotelian one. The closure begins neither with Kant (nor Aristotle, nor anyone else), nor does it end with Hegel, Bataille, or Derrida. The title of Bataille's essay (accompanied by its epigraph from Marx, metaphorically defining historical materialism: "In history as in nature decay is the laboratory of life" [*Visions*, p. 32]) announces this closure and the proper names that demarcate it in more recent historical terms: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and several others as well. In doing so, Bataille's text inscribes "the historical and theoretical situation that is also our own" (*Positions*, p. 51), simultaneously framing it—incribing its "parergon—between the communist and surrealist manifestos."³

These later parergonal structures still await an analysis at the level that their complexity and richness demand, whether we view them in a general context or see the locus of Bataille's discourse between Breton and Aragon—in, as it were, the Breton/Aragon parergon. It is not that this context or (for it can hardly be subsumed under the rubric of context), this configuration, can exhaust the parergon of Bataille's discourse. It can only provisionally open it. The parergon defining Bataille's discourse or, as Derrida persuasively argues, *any* parergon can neither be exhausted nor saturated. It can be neither uniquely originated, nor unequivocally closed. This is why these parergonal effects cannot be subsumed under the rubric of context, particularly *conscious* context.⁴ One of my goals in this essay will be to follow the *complexity* of the parergonal in the context (that is to say, *parergon*) of Bataille's discourse, specifically in relation to the question of general economy and of the major form of writing opened by Bataille.

Undoubtedly, the shadow of Hegel looms large over all this, whether in Marx, Bataille, Derrida or in general. But Kant's shadow no less so. For, if "Hegel is always right as soon as one opens one's

mouth in order to articulate meaning," he cannot be right without Kant.⁵ It is this Kantian margin (or center) that I want to explore, borrowing in part my title from Bataille's "The Labyrinth." This proximity of closure might, along the way, also suggest a certain textual proximity on which I shall not insist but which cannot be ignored either.

There will be a further specificity, for my theme will be a very small but extraordinarily interesting and important portion of Kant's third critique. As in Bataille's essay cited earlier, the question of the philosophical will be situated in Kant between the question of the aesthetic (analogous to surrealism in Bataille) and the political. It is this "left" artistic margin that will be my major concern in this essay. As Bataille's "sur" suggests, this "margin"—that is, what is marginalized and minimized within the text of philosophy—will, in the power of its efficacy, *exceed* the "center" and will thus be reinscribed as the condition of the possibility of the center. Kant already knew (or was afraid to know) that, suppressing the *excess* of knowledge that makes knowledge (i.e. philosophy) possible in the first place. My major concern however will be what Bataille manages to do with this "knowledge," for, as Derrida says, "We know this . . . only now, and with a knowledge that is not a knowledge at all."⁶ This is what Bataille had in mind or what we would do best to infer from his concept of un-knowledge.

In establishing his division and, a bit later, his hierarchy of the beautiful arts, Kant writes of the arts of speech (of which poetry will be then specifically assigned "the first rank"):

The *orator*, then, promises a serious business, and in order to entertain his audience conducts it as if it were a mere *play* with ideas. The *poet* merely promises an entertaining play with ideas, and yet it has the same effect upon the understanding as if he had only intended to carry on its business. The combination and harmony of both cognitive faculties, sensibility and understanding, which cannot dispense with each other but which yet cannot well be united without constraint and mutual prejudice, must appear to be undesigned and so to be brought about by themselves; otherwise it is not *beautiful* art. Hence, all that is studied and anxious must be avoided in it, for beautiful art must be free art in a double sense. It is not a work like a mercenary employment, the greatness of which can be judged according to a

definite standard, which can be attained or paid for; and again, though the mind is here occupied, it feels itself thus contented and aroused without looking to any other purpose (independent of reward).

The orator therefore gives something which he does not promise, viz. an entertaining play of the imagination; but he also fails to supply what he did promise, which is indeed his announced business, viz. the purposive occupation of the understanding. On the other hand, the poet promises little and announces a mere play with ideas; but he supplies something which is worth occupying ourselves with, because he provides in this play food for the understanding and, by the aid of imagination, gives life to his concepts. (Thus the orator on the whole gives less, the poet more, than he promises).⁷

It might seem astonishing, but also, given the structure of closure as delineated earlier, rather natural or logical, how much of Bataille's problematics is inscribed in this and surrounding passages in Kant. Given the transformations of the concepts of text and history enacted by the recent transformations of the theoretical field itself, including those in Bataille's text, one hesitates to use the word "anticipated." These transformations, specifically those inscribed in Bataille's text, affect our conception of what constitutes the theoretical field and how it is constituted as much as they affect the concepts of text and history.

There is, to begin with, the question of "economy" in its most conventional sense, the economic question raised by Kant's conception of beautiful art as free art (in the first sense). One might and indeed must see it as the question of political economy as well: it is hardly useful—"economical" or "productive"—to speak of an economy that would not be political in the context of Bataille, even as Bataille subjects the science of political economy and its concepts to a radical critique as a *restricted* economy. It is a far more complex question whether, while retaining the significance of the political and, at the same time, inscribing the general economy as an economy of waste and expenditure, Bataille avoids a certain idealization of *waste* as against *consumption* accounted for by a restricted economy. The latter in Bataille manifests itself precisely at the level of the classical science of political economy.

Beautiful art, then, "is not a work like a mercenary employment,

the greatness of which can be judged according to a definite standard, which can be attained or paid for" (p. 165). Derrida was perhaps the first to draw attention to these "economic" connections in Kant in "Economimesis," expanding the general concept of economy as grounding the question of genius in its relation to the question of imitation. The imitative work of genius (with respect to Nature) is an imitation, mimesis, of economy as *process*, play of forces and so on—*economimesis*—not an imitation of the product. Genius in its creation, in its *production*, imitates *how* Nature (or God) produces, not *what* is produced. Economic metaphors, including those of political economics, still permeate the *philosophical* account, the science of this "economy," expanded by Kant from a difference between beautiful art and a material ("hard") economic process, "a work like a mercenary employment," to a difference (still economic) in the occupation of the mind. Kant's "and again" is most telling in this respect: "And again, though the mind is here occupied [employed], it feels itself thus contented and aroused without looking to any other purpose (independently of reward)" (p. 165).

Kant's *borrowing*, both negative and positive, of the economic inscriptions does not in itself constitute a problem, particularly if considered in the context of Bataille's discourse. First of all, the discourse of political economy might itself be seen, historically speaking, as *borrowing* from Kant in this respect, though it would be silly to see Kant's in turn as an original discourse in this sense. Kant must have borrowed his "mercenary" metaphors from some forms of economic and political economic discourse. There can be an original metaphor here no more than anywhere else. Second, the history of theory from Kant to Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Bataille demonstrates that the metaphors of economy have proved to be as theoretically *productive* as they are unavoidable. Indeed, as Bataille's discourse shows with extraordinary power, it is the economic insistence on consumption at the multiple and often interacting levels of theoretical economies—economic, political, conceptual—that is most problematic. The theoretical problem is a metaphoric loss of the economy of loss and thus of the general economy.

It is not that consumption and the pleasure of consumption are not important or theoretically and otherwise pleasurable. To reverse the configuration absolutely and to privilege expenditure unconditionally would be just as untenable. As I indicated earlier, Bataille's heavy insistence on waste and expenditure must be seen as

problematic in this respect, and is “saved” only by the enormous *labyrinthine* complexity of Bataille’s inscription of these concepts.

A considerable portion of the third critique might be seen as Kant’s attempt at a science of this—non-economic—economy of the poet or genius, represented best by the genius of poetry, which “of all the arts . . . maintains the first rank.” Or, closer to Bataille’s terms, one might speak of economy as the science of this operation of genius, analogous to, but also different from, the sovereign operation as conceived by Bataille, requiring a major form of writing and a general rather than restricted economy as its science. Like Hegel’s economy of Absolute Knowledge, the economy inscribed in Kant, being an economy of *consumption*, must still be seen as a restricted economy: the science of the operation of mastery rather than the general economy and sovereignty in Bataille.⁸

One might feel a certain uneasiness with regard to the metaphoric fusion, transfusion or, at times, a metaphoric confusion arising in these labyrinths of “economic” inscription in Kant, Bataille and Derrida. It is useful to keep in mind for clarity’s sake that “economy” in Bataille always designates a science, a theory: in the most significant case, that of the general economy. It is a science of the sovereign operation, whereas in Derrida’s reading of Kant, “economy” designates an operation, an activity of genius. In general terms, however, particularly in those of general economy, the metaphorical transfusions of that type are as productive as they are inevitable. For it is our economies as sciences or theories—accounts—that produce the economies or operation we want to account for. The economic metaphor of *accounting* is, in turn, not accidental in this context. It is an accounting or calculation of certain operations, however endless or interminable, that we want to inscribe as calculus and accounting of the interminable and the indeterminable.

Hegel in making the philosophy of history into the history of philosophy, already knew it quite well and was one of the first to understand the depths and labyrinths of this problem that can only be finally resolved at the level of the Absolute, that is to say, impossible knowledge. Derrida, in commenting on the transgression of Hegel enacted by Bataille’s sovereignty, correctly points out the necessity of this Hegelian moment: “Not that one returns, in classical and pre-Hegelian fashion, to an ahistorical sense which would constitute a figure of the *Phenomenology of Mind*. Sovereignty transgresses the

entirety of the history of meaning and the entirety of the meaning of history, and the project of knowledge which has always obscurely welded these two together" (*Writing and Difference*, p. 269). In his essay, Derrida also speaks of "the rigorous and subtle corridors" (p. 254) of dialectic. Quite so, yet corridors of dialectics are not the labyrinths of the general economy. Life in the labyrinth may not be easy; it is, however, preferable to life in a more comfortable corridor. (Nobody any longer even dreams about rooms, let alone apartments or houses. Well, some do.)

That is not to say, particularly given the labyrinths of our theoretical household (in Greek, *oikonomia*, economy), that our accounting will be able to comprehend everything—"to take everything into account." That would still be an illusion, however comfortable, a dialectical corridor—that is, a restricted economy, whether political (as in Marx) or general, most general, conscious or conceptual (as in Hegel). Nobody understood this difference better than Bataille. And we may think of the word difference here in either sense: a difference between two economies of accounting, restricted in general, and one between an economy and an operation that it wants to account for. The most radical difference announced by Bataille as he inscribes the general economy has to do with problematizing the possibility of an account and economy (as science or theory), *however conceived*.⁹ This double (at least double) difference, therefore, this *difference* if you like, will affect enormously and multiply the shape our "accounting" *must* take. In these regions the category of choice must seem particularly trivial.¹⁰

Kant's economic considerations imply a fundamental asymmetry between two economies at issue. One, "a mercenary employment," is the economy of exchange, actual or potential, including, but not exclusively, a monetary exchange. We might call it an "economic" economy. Another, a "non-economic" economy, the economy of the beautiful art and genius, is conceived above all through a radical prohibition of exchange. To be rigorous one should speak of at least three economies here, for Kant also suggests a possibility of an exchange-reward economy at the conceptual level (in the domain of understanding) as well, which the economy of the genius of the beautiful arts escapes: "and again, though the mind is here occupied, it feels itself thus contented and aroused without looking to any other purpose (independent of reward)." There is a certain

purpose and reward economy in the *occupation* (employment) of the mind. But such is not the case in the employment classified as beautiful art.

This asymmetry is of fundamental significance in Kant, though it cannot be sustained on Kant's grounds, as an absolute or fundamental distinction. It is not only that the economy of beautiful art cannot be fully liberated from an exchange or reward of some sort. It must be factored in, whether we inscribe the economy of the beautiful or the economy of beautiful art. It might include, for example, an exchange and reward for "the mind . . . occupied" by a play of imagination and feeling "thus contented and aroused without looking to any other purpose (independently of reward)." As we have seen, however, an *unconditional* insistence of this form of pleasurable consumption must in turn be seen as problematic. *Conditionally*, this consumption and this exchange must be taken into account. More significant is the impossibility of an "absolute" reduction of the mercenary or "economic" economy and employment to a definite standard or (paid) reward implied by Kant. As Bataille's analysis of expenditure suggests, no economy of any kind can be unconditionally reduced either to an exchange economy or an economy absolutely free of exchange. "The Notion of Expenditure," for example, powerfully inscribes the structural (and *structuring*) supplement of exchange.¹¹ Indeed, by insisting, in a certain proximity to Nietzsche, on the *exuberance* of "exchange" and expenditure or on the exchange of expenditures in that essay, Bataille's text problematizes quite radically the concepts of expenditure and waste. Exuberant, the operations involved there are always more than simply expenditure, more than merely waste.

It does not mean that such reductions *in either direction* are not found in theoretical practice, including in Bataille, who tends to subordinate the effects of exchange and consumption. What Bataille's analysis demands, however, is a different inscription of the economic and its efficacy.¹² Neither the structures of rewards, including at the level of the monetary or political economy, nor the differences between these various economies would disappear in this inscription. How could they? Rather they must be inscribed otherwise, in effect with an increased rigor, necessary precisely in order to account for the multiplicity and richness of these differences. For in this enlarged difference of inscription one would no longer be able to speak either of

one operation or parcel operations *categorically* in a demarcated accountable set.

The crucial question that poses itself with regard to Bataille is whether the difference between restricted and general economy, even given the interaction between them, does not retain a kind of Kantian (and thus also inescapably Hegelian) trace of absolute difference—a trace not sufficiently erased or comprehended by Bataille. For a certain trace, given closure, will be unavoidable. This difference concerns not only an unconditional privilege or priority of expenditure over consumption. It could be pointed out in this context that the difference and asymmetry so inscribed in Bataille can be seen either as the difference between an economy of non-exchange—a non-economic economy—and an exchange economy, or as the difference between the economy of expenditure and the economy of consumption. Given Bataille's analysis of exchange (inscribed quite differently, precisely through *expenditure*) in "The Notion of Expenditure" and elsewhere, I would see the second possibility, the priority and even *idealization* of waste, as more significant in Bataille's case. A most important issue, however, is an unconditional privilege of the general economy, however inscribed, or, in general, of any economy over any other.

The labyrinth of this question is enormous and is in the end intractable. That is, in the end it cannot be mapped once and for all. What I want to do in this paper is rather to articulate the differences between Bataille and Kant, whose significance will be undiminished whatever the answer and will enable us to inscribe the difference (radical enough) from Kant and Hegel. The answer, it might be said, is important only with respect to the question of inscribing or situating Bataille's "own" text. In general theoretical terms, one might say that there is no question here. No economy of any kind might be seen so unconditionally privileged. Such is, for now at least (that is, at this particular moment in the history of theory and, of course, for specific theorists so implied) the law of the economy of the theoretical. Such is the constraint of the conditional. But then again, we cannot unconditionally separate the question of theory and the question of Bataille, particularly the question of situating Bataille's own text historically.

With the qualifications elaborated earlier, the differences between Kant and Bataille might be subsumed under two interactive

rubrics: the differences in the inscriptions of the economic operation, and the differences in respective sciences or accounts of the operation. It is useful to recall Bataille's own formulation of this economic problematic in *L'Expérience intérieure* before proceeding to an articulation of these differences:

The science of relating the object to sovereign moments, in fact, is only a *general economy* which envisages the meaning of these objects in relation to each other and finally in relation to the loss of meaning. The question of this *general economy* is situated at the level of *political economy*, but the science designated by this name is only a restricted economy (restricted to commercial values). In question is the essential problem for the science dealing with the use of wealth. The *general economy*, in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless, senseless loss that *is* sovereignty.¹³

Whatever differences Kant inscribes, first in the aesthetic economy (either as the economy of the beautiful or of the sublime), and secondly in the economy of the genius of beautiful art, it always remains an economy of consumption (as Kant's metaphor *taste* indicates), and, indeed, the economy of pleasurable consumption. Furthermore, in the case of the beautiful art, it remains the economy of consumption of meaning. For, as we recall, "[the poet] provides in this play [of ideas] food for the understanding" (Kant, p. 165). This is why one must rigorously insist on the difference between the economy of the beautiful and the economy of beautiful art; as the latter includes the former, it also exceeds the aesthetic economy of beautiful feeling by a philosophical (though still inscribed through consumption) dimension of understanding. As Kant maintains, "For beautiful art, therefore, imagination, understanding, spirit, and taste are requisite" (p. 164).

As in Aristotle and in the tradition he initiated, after the initial demarcation of art by its difference, specifically in affecting feeling and the feeling of pleasure, the value of art will be established on the basis of philosophical criteria of one type or another. Poetry, for example, is more philosophical than history is in Aristotle or than

rhetoric is in Kant. An account of this difference still remains within the domain and power of the philosophical explanation, and making poetry “more philosophical” might be necessary precisely to maintain this parergon, maintain it by identifying the difference that in part establishes its boundaries. It can be shown, however, that neither Aristotle nor Kant will be able to sustain the boundaries and parergon at issue. From within their own discourse (this is, of course, what makes the configuration so interesting), poetry and art can be shown to exceed the containment of the philosophical account in Aristotle and Kant.

The inscription of the philosophical into the poetic is, in Kant, non-trivial enough. It should be recalled that Kant’s opposition (and thus a certain excess) is set between the orator and the poet rather than between the philosopher and the poet, as this opposition must be, given the philosophical nature of aesthetic value in Kant. The orator, of course, also gives more than he promises, just as the poet does; “the orator therefore gives something that he does not promise, viz. an entertaining play of imagination.” There is a difference, however, indeed a crucial difference for the orator “also fails to supply what he did promise, which is indeed his announced business, viz. the purposive occupation of the understanding” (p. 165). That, according to Kant’s division of intellectual labor, will be supplied by the philosopher. The orator thus fails because he in fact entertains, rather than conducting “a promised serious business.” The poet’s (announced) entertainment, in contrast, “has the same effect upon the understanding, as if he had only intended to carry on its business” (p. 165), its serious, that is its philosophical, business. Beautiful art, particularly poetry, in contrast to the experience of the beautiful, is bound to be philosophical.

Given these corridors of the economy of taste, Kant’s division of the beautiful arts that gives poetry priority over rhetoric is inevitable, even though both are arts of speech that are related to the mouth, the organ of both taste and speech. This priority of voice and the hierarchies of arts and senses it entails are exhaustively analyzed by Derrida in “Economimesis.” It might be further pointed out that the poet as discussed in the passage at issue and the genius of the beautiful art in the third critique in general are inscribed so as to efface in the end the material substance produced by the mouth or the phonetic substance, to make it disappear in fully internalized play. The immediate proximity—presence—of “voice” to “mind” finally allows one

to dwell in the absolute presence of mind and ideas. The “speech” and “voice” of poetry become thus “the art of mind” similar to the internal self-present speech of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology.¹⁴ Husserl’s dependence on Kant in general is, of course, huge. In the context of the present discussion, however, Husserl writes in one of his very rare specific references to art:

It is naturally important, on the other hand (once again as in geometry, which has recently and not idly been attaching great value to collections of models and the like), to make rich use of fancy in that service of perfect clearness which we are here demanding, to use it in the free transformation of the data of fancy, but previously also to fructify it through the richest and best observations possible in primordial intuition; noting, of course, that this fructifying does not imply that experience as such can be the ground of validity. We can draw extraordinary profit from what history has to offer us, and in still richer measure from the gifts of art and particularly of poetry. These are indeed fruits of imagination, but in respect of the originality of the new formations, of the abundance of detailed features, and the systematic continuity of the motive forces involved, they greatly excel the performances of our own fancy, and moreover, given the understanding grasp, pass through the suggestive power of the media of artistic presentation with quite special ease into perfectly clear fancies.

Hence, if anyone loves a paradox, he can really say, and say with strict truth if he will allow for the ambiguity, that the *element which makes up the life of phenomenology as of all eidetical science is “fiction,”* that fiction is the source whence the knowledge of “eternal truths” draws its sustenance.¹⁵

As the foregoing discussion would suggest, the presence of Kant here is mighty. The insistence on poetry is *particularly* revealing, though it is also necessary, given the privileged role of voice and phonetic substance in their immediate proximity to mind, the “voice that keeps silence,” in Husserl. What is most interesting, however, is the question of profit or even extraordinary profit in Husserl’s formulation. The philosopher “can draw extraordinary profit from what history has to offer [him], and in still richer measure from the gifts of art and particularly of poetry” (p. 184). The philosopher’s desire to consume

and to take full economic advantage of both history and art (particularly poetry) is irrepressible. But it is the consumptive desire—the appetite of the philosopher—that would inscribe the philosophical into the arts in the first place in order to make it ready for philosophical consumption.

Here we might expect a burst of laughter from Bataille. First of all, the surrealist Bataille would laugh at the possibility of pleasure and of the pleasure of consumption without displeasure or even without disgust—taste without dis-taste, *gôût* without *dégoût*. It should be pointed out at this juncture that, as Derrida shows in “Economimesis,” it is not that the economy of dis-gust goes unnoticed or is *discounted*. It is philosophically accounted for, but is not on that account part of the economy of taste. In a singularly bad theoretical taste it is accounted for precisely as dis-gust, dis-taste, as what does not belong. A more significant issue however, in Bataille’s context, is the more general conceptual or metaphoric structure of the Kantian economy and Kantian economimesis as economy and mimesis of consumption. It is this, whether in Kant or Hegel, that would be unacceptable or laughable to Bataille. “Waste and taste” might occupy separate compartments in the corridors of dialectic or philosophy in general, but they are ultimately and intimately related in the labyrinths of the general economy. That would also refer to the general economy of Bataille’s own life, where the inscription of production—philosophical, sociological, artistic or other—must have been multiply related by Bataille himself to the economy of waste, including the inscription of the difference between *consummation* and *consumption* and to the unreserved expenditure of tuberculosis, Bataille’s disease, *consomption*, that consumes—that is, *wastes*—without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the general economy—as the economy of loss, waste, expenditure without reserve, and so on—and the operations it aims to account for cannot be reduced to the economy of disgust exemplified by Derrida’s analysis in “Economimesis” of “disgust” and “vomiting” in Kant. The loss and expenditure enacted by Bataille’s sovereign operation and inscribed in the general economy as the science of sovereignty are enormously rich and complex structures. Their inscription includes, for example, the conceptions of “gift” and “sacrifice” (analyzed at great length by Bataille) and a formidable array of other structures that must be considered with utmost rigor and precision.

“Vomiting,” however, remains important in the context of general economy as an exemplification of the absolute dis-gust, something that cannot be consumed, has to be “thrown up.” Or must it be? Certainly by definition, it cannot be in Kant; this is Derrida’s major point in “Economimesis.” In general, however, in the *general economy*, things are not so simple or restricted, threatening the whole Kantian or the philosophical scheme of taste, and in every sense conceivable making the issue into a labyrinth—maze—populated with all sorts of monsters. The question of vomiting has, of course, its place in Bataille, a very definite place in a memorable quotation from Sade in a great and important essay, entitled, quite pertinently, “The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade.” As Bataille writes, quoting Sade:

The process of simple appropriation is normally presented within the process of composite excretion, insofar as it is necessary for the production of an alternating rhythm, for example, in the following passage from Sade: “Verneuil makes someone shit, he eats the turd, and then he demands that someone eats his. The one who eats his shit vomits; he devours her puke. (*Visions* p. 95)

The pleasures (or pain) and taste (or disgust) that take place here might be seen as monstrous enough, but they must be accounted for as what Derrida calls in “Signature Event Context” “a *structural possibility*,” even if they would occur only once, and they have, in fact, certainly occurred more than once. In a certain sense, they occur all the time; not necessarily in the specific shape described by Sade, but as analogous effects of the general economy of “taste” that must incorporate “dis-taste” and “dis-gust” as its ineluctable constituent.

As Derrida shows it is only in the Kantian economy of taste as an economy of pleasurable consumption that the question of vomiting and disgust must acquire and be philosophically accounted for as having a *unique* position, from which the whole scheme might thus be deconstructed. This special position precisely allows and invites a critical scrutiny and deconstruction. Once such a deconstruction is performed and the economy of taste is re-inscribed as the general economy, “vomiting” and “disgust” become regular effects of this enriched economy, though they might under certain conditions have asymmetrical relations and be subordinated by the effects of taste and consumption.

By the same token the general economy cannot be seen as only the economy of loss, waste, unreserved expenditure and so on. It can never be unconditionally separated from the restricted economy in the first place. Both "taste" and "disgust" are in fact still restricted effects of the complex labyrinth of the general economy; this, perhaps, was also Derrida's point in "Economimesis." Bataille, in the essay at issue, in inscribing this complexity, brilliantly relates Sade's passage to the question of sacrifice, communion, gift, general expenditure, and so forth, thus establishing the affects of disgust precisely as a manifestation, however extreme, of the general rather than of the exclusive, as philosophy would want to do.

It is because philosophy or traditional theory have throughout their history (with some notable exceptions, such as Sade or Nietzsche) suppressed and/or repressed the economy of expenditure that the expenditure must be brought into the foreground, but not because it has the absolute privilege over the economy of consumption. The latter economy (as science) must now be made general as well, that is, to take into account (or dis-count) and reinscribe a consumption and production as an effect of expenditure and unreserved expenditure. Since the restricted economy manifests itself, above all, at the level of the political economy, these consequences and implications *are* the value (it can no longer quite be called the use-value) of D. A. F. de Sade, the value brilliantly exposed in Bataille's "Open Letter to My Current Comrades," as his essay is subtitled. The political economy as the economy of the political must take the effects inscribed by de Sade into consideration, not an "account" perhaps.

Conversely, the economy of the sexual must take into account the effects and the very economy of the political. The relationships between these two economies should not be seen as always necessarily symmetrical. To begin with, there are more than two economies involved here. The hypothesis that such economies form a *countable* set is hardly tenable, though there will certainly be multiple "set-effects" in our economic calculations, in our calculus and our accounting, of these interactions.

Derrida's extraordinary analysis of Kant in "Economimesis" depends fundamentally on Bataille's conceptions. It opens by introducing (in Bataille's sense) the concept of "economimesis" in the context of relationships between the restricted and general economies, or rather referring to Bataille's terms from infinitesimal to radical,

including (as in the case of the difference between Derrida's *différance* and Hegel's *Aufhebung*) both at once.¹⁶ As Derrida writes:

It would appear that mimesis and oikonomia could have nothing to do with one another. The point is to demonstrate the contrary, to exhibit the systematic link between the two; but not between some particular political economy and mimesis, for the latter can accommodate itself to political systems that are different, even opposed to one another. And we are not yet defining economy as an economy of circulation (a restricted economy) or a general economy, for the whole difficulty is narrowed down here as soon as—that is the hypothesis—there is no possible opposition between these two economies. Their relation must be one neither of identity nor of contradiction but must be other. (pp. 3–4)

The two sections into which Derrida divides his essay—"Production as Mimesis" and "Exemporality"—might be seen as demarcating the problems involved along two lines or rubrics indicated earlier. The first section explores the nature or the structure of the operation, inscribing the economy of mimesis as a mimesis of the economy. The second could be seen as a critique of an attempt at the philosophical, conceptual account of both the economy of the beautiful and the economy of beautiful art. These two economies, as we recall, remain interactive in Kant, but their difference is also rigorously maintained in the third critique. Since I have considered the structure of the economic operation and the role of the difference between consumption and expenditure in some detail earlier, I would like to conclude with some remarks on the nature of the account, that is to say, precisely with the question of the general economy as science in Derrida and Bataille. It must still be kept in mind that these two issues—"operation" and "its science"—remain in a complex interaction as indicated earlier.

Derrida, in his account of the Kantian or even philosophical in general, seems in the essay at issue to stress the "desire" of the system to account for its other, specifically the system of the beautiful for the (absolute) dis-gust. The issue, clearly enough, is more general. It is the issue and account of the other of the system. The other, as the term and concept of the other, is in fact already an account of the other, and "vomit" takes in Kant a specific, privileged role in this configuration. As Derrida writes at the conclusion of "Economimesis":

Disgust is not the symmetrical inverse of taste, the negative key to the system, except insofar as some interest sustains its excellence, like that of the mouth itself—the chemistry of the word—and prohibits the substitution of any non-oral *analogue*. The system therefore is interested in determining the other as its other, that is, as literary disgust.

What is absolutely foreclosed is not vomit, but the possibility of a vicariousness of vomit, of its replacement by anything else—by some other unrepresentable, unnameable, unintelligible, insensible, unassimilable, obscene other which forces enjoyment and whose irrepressible violence would undo the hierarchizing authority of logocentric analogy—its power of identification. . . .

The word vomit arrests the vicariousness of disgust; it puts the thing in the mouth; it substitutes; but only, for example, oral for anal. It is determined by the system of the beautiful, “the symbol of morality,” as its other. It is then for philosophy, still, an elixir, even in the quintessence of its bad taste. (p. 25; emphasis on “anal” added)

We have seen earlier the significance of this configuration in Bataille’s inscription of the interplay between consumption and expenditure, including the substitution, not by analogy only; of oral for anal. Both Bataille and Derrida make quite apparent the folly and “naïveté” of this powerful and irrepressible desire to exclude. The latter is itself a gesture of rejection and not consumption; a rejected (repressed) rejection makes its powerful return, the return of the repressed into the structure of the philosophical that is, consumptive) account. Derrida thus inserts in the passage just cited:

Vicariousness would in turn be reassuring only if it substituted an identifiable term for an unrepresentable one, if it allowed one to step aside from the abyss in the direction of another place, if it were interested in some other go-around [s’*intéresse à quelque manège*]. But for that it would have to be itself and represent itself as such. Whereas it is starting from that impossibility that economimesis is constrained in its processes.

This impossibility cannot be said to be some thing, something sensible or intelligible, that could fall under one or the other senses or under some concept. One cannot name it within the

logocentric system—within the name—which in turn can only vomit it and vomit itself in it. One cannot even say: what is it? That would be to begin to eat it, or—what is no longer absolutely different—to vomit it. The question what is? already parleys [arraisonne] like a parergon, it constructs a framework which captures the energy of what is complete inassimilable and absolutely repressed. Any philosophical question already determines, concerning this other, a paregoric parergon. A paregoric remedy softens with speech; it consoles, it exhorts with the word. As its name indicates. (p. 25)

This question of the excluded (the most general logic of philosophy, perhaps logic itself) and paregoric remedy of parergon would, however, constitute only a part, however indispensable and however structuring, of the inscription of the general economy as science, in both Derrida and Bataille. Bataille's greatest laughter comes as he looks at the naïveté of the philosopher accounting for beautiful art. The very term beautiful would be laughable enough. Bataille's laughter would in fact be most "logical" here. The philosophical (conscious and conceptual) accounts and the *science* of philosophy (such as Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, subtitled "The Science [*Wissenschaft*] of the Experience of Consciousness") are, by definition, consumptive, and thus remain a *restricted* economy. As Derrida notes in "From Restricted to General Economy," such a restricted philosophical economy would "pleasurably consume an absolutely close presence" (*Writing and Difference*, p. 273).

The philosopher, it is true, often "forgets" this pleasure of the conceptual consumption and conceptual mastery. The "forgetting" may take the form of either unconscious repressing or conscious concealment or various combinations of both) of the knowledge of this pleasure. It has been around ever since Socrates based the difference between and opposition of philosophy and literature on the difference and opposition between truth and pleasure. Once the philosophical discourse "*pleasurably consumes*," however, would not the framing—the parergon—that divides the philosophical and the literary or artistic be threatened in its very core? This parergon also fundamentally divides that which accounts (namely, philosophy), and the experience of the beautiful and beautiful art, that are accounted for by a philosopher. Derrida's analysis of Kant in "Economimesis" and *La vérité en peinture* suggests at least that much. Cannot, then, the

third critique, an account that pleasurably consumes, be itself read as an aesthetic experience or as a work of beautiful art? The latter parergon is already to some extent violated in Kant's own text, as it is in Aristotle, by establishing the fundamentally philosophical value of the beautiful art of the highest rank, poetry. The parergonal violation inscribed in the questions just asked is of a more radical, more violent and, in theoretical terms, more fundamental nature.

First of all, the economy of such an "aesthetic" account, an account as beautiful art, must, according to both Bataille and Derrida, exceed the economy of consumption, that is, the restricted economy to which both philosophy and beautiful art conform in Kant. It is precisely a belief, a "naïve" or "vulgar" (that is to say "philosophical") belief, in the possibility of the utilization of all intellectual energy that Bataille laughs at. For the philosopher can only believe or *claim* to take everything into his account or into his dis-count, but not "actually" do so. The economy of every account—literary, philosophical or other—is always already a general economy.

Still more significant is the question of the law or the style of a discourse in the general economy and of major writing. It would be most naïve or vulgar to reverse the configuration—to reverse the parergon—and replace philosophy or theory, make literature or the "beautiful art" into a unique or ultimate genre of general economy. The latter, as we recall, still remains a science, though, to be sure, in neither a Hegelian nor a positivist sense; it is not a "positive science." But it must retain a scientific rigor in its discourse. Like Nietzsche, Bataille practiced a plural style and plural genre in his own discourse, making it both literary (in his novels or poetry) and theoretical (in his essays). But he also attempted something else in his activities related to the *Collège de Sociologie*. One must then speak of at least three genres for enacting a general economy of discourse and major form of writing. It must be pointed out that one must be rather cautious in relating the general economy and major writing in Bataille. Bataille, let us further recall, was also a librarian and the founder and editor of the journal *Critique*. Since in all of these "genres" or "styles," the social or general political economy are heavily involved, what is most at stake (*en jeu*) in the question of general economy is the law and the style of the *social* and *institutional* forms of our accounts. And this law and this style, or this genre, *cannot* (and in practice should not) be established once and for all, though some claim to have done so. As Derrida writes, "referring to the entire French landscape" (in

1968), where Bataille is inescapably present: "What we need, perhaps, as Nietzsche said, is a change of 'style'; and if there is style, Nietzsche reminded us, it must be *plural*" (*Margins*, p. 135).

Bataille, however, in Derrida's own words, "considered himself closer to Nietzsche than anyone else, to the point of identification with him" (*Writing and Difference*, p. 251), most of all, in the force of the impact, in the radical transformation of the "theoretical" or "literary" style, in making it *plural*. It is the maze of style and the style of a maze. "NIETZSCHE'S DOCTRINE CANNOT BE ENSLAVED. It can only be followed" (*Visions*, p. 184), a thought and style—*writing*—that must be entered like a labyrinth. In a brilliant little chapter "Nietzsche/Theseus" of "The Obelisk", Bataille, anticipating much of deconstruction, invokes "a derisive and enigmatic figure placed at the entrance of the labyrinth" and speaks of "the *foundation* of things that has fallen into a bottomless void. And what is fearlessly assented to no longer in a duel where the death of the hero is risked against that of the monster, in exchange for an indifferent duration—is not an isolated creature; it is the very void and vertiginous fall, it is TIME" (*Visions*, p. 222). No wonder that Kant, in *contemplating* the beautiful, prefers tulips in the garden to the vertiginous and even nauseating experience of the labyrinth. We must say, in all fairness to Kant, that he approaches some of this vertiginous experience in his analysis of the sublime, and thus can be seen as a precursor of both Nietzsche and Bataille (as well as Sade) in this respect. But then the whole opposition between the beautiful (the one that is framed, in a parergon) and the sublime (the one—"absolutely great"—that exceeds all parerga) collapses. It is also a collapse of the philosophical style.

It is not that in so recognizing Bataille's enormous contribution one would want to claim for Bataille, or Nietzsche, or indeed anyone, a unique significance in this transformation of the theoretical field. Rather, in an *account* that, in an absence of a better word might still be termed "historical," one would want to explore in a stratified ensemble—from Kant and Hegel, to Nietzsche, Bataille and Derrida—what has made and still makes possible the radical transformations of the field, the transformations that make the field *plural*. And in thinking of the theorists and practitioners of the *plural style*, one will have to refer to a landscape that can no longer be demarcated as either French or German, however important these two *landscapes* might be. Like style, if there is landscape, it must be *plural*.

NOTES

1. In Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 35.

2. Derrida defines the “historical and systematic unity” of this closure in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). He writes:

Don't you see, what has seemed necessary and urgent to me, in the historical and theoretical situation which is our own, is a general determination of the conditions for the emergence and the limits of philosophy, of metaphysics, of everything that carries it on and that it carries on. In *Of Grammatology* I simultaneously proposed everything that can be reassembled under the rubric of *logocentrism*—and I cannot pursue this any further here—along with the project of *deconstruction*. Here, there is a powerful historical and systematic unity that must be determined first if one is not to take dress for gold every time that an emergence, rupture, break, mutation, etc. is allegedly delineated. (p. 51)

One of Derrida's major points, however, regarding this “historical and systematic unity,” the point defining the closure, is that, operating at “the limits of philosophy,” *deconstruction* does not imply an absolute and unconditional break with the language and concepts of philosophy, and the structures, such as *différance*, trace, and so on, can only be defined or rather inscribed *within* this closure. In fact even an absolute break is impossible, and particularly, when such a break is claimed. Deconstruction, therefore, must take place utilizing the *resources* of philosophy: “And this in no way minimizes the necessity and relative importance of certain breaks, of the appearance and definition of new structures” (p. 24). As I shall consider below, the forms—the style—of discourse where such structures can be inscribed themselves become a crucial issue in the context of Bataille and Derrida's reading of Bataille. See also Derrida's comments on pp. 6–7. As all these statements indicate, the problematic of closure permeates Derrida's project throughout.

3. The term “parergon” functions in this sense of deconstruction and reinscription of the classical notion of framing, boundaries, margins, and so on, in Derrida's analysis of Kant in: *La vérité en peinture* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1978), and “Economimesis,” *Mimesis des Articulations* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1975), reprinted in English translation in *Diacritics*, 11, No. 3 (1981), 25. The word “parergon” itself initially occurs in Section 14 of Kant's *The Critique Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), defining “those things that do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements, but only externally as complements” (p. 61). It thus invites the deconstruction of the whole Kantian scheme of taste.

4. See Derrida's discussion in "Signature Event Context" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), and Derrida's subsequent reply to Searle "Limited Inc., abc," *Glyph*, 2 (1977). 162-254. "Signature Event Context" was originally published in French in 1972 and then in English translation in *Glyph*, 1 (1976). 172-97.
5. Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 263.
6. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 164.
7. Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951). pp. 165-66.
8. See Derrida's analysis in "From Restricted to General Economy," *Writing and Difference*, pp. 274-75.
9. It might in fact be seen as the major theme of Derrida's reading of both Bataille and Kant.
10. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 293.
11. See specifically the discussion in *Visions*, pp. 116-29.
12. As Derrida suggests, ". . . we must interpret Bataille against Bataille, or rather, must interpret one stratum of his work from another" (*Writing and Difference*, p. 275). Derrida supplies a long and extremely important footnote to this statement, containing one of his rare, but perhaps so much more significant references to Sartre.
13. *L'Expérience intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967). Cited by Derrida in "From Restricted to General Economy," *Writing and Difference*, p. 270. For a general critical introduction to these issues and Bataille's major concepts see Michèle H. Richman's *Reading George Bataille; Beyond the Gift* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
14. See Derrida's critique in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
15. Husserl, *Ideas*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1972), p. 184.
16. See Derrida's comment in "Différance" (*Margins*, p. 14).