

GEORGE BATAILLE'S NOTION OF TRANSGRESSION: THE QUESTION  
OF A POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE CONCERNING ART AND PHILOSOPHY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE DEPARTMENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN  
AND  
THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OF BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY  
MEHMET ŞIRAY

MAY, 2000

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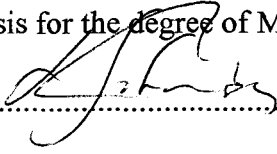
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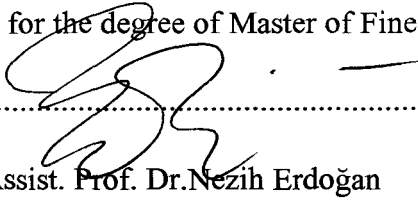
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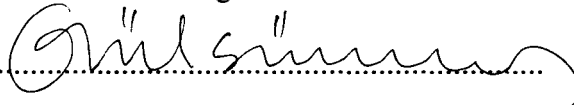
  
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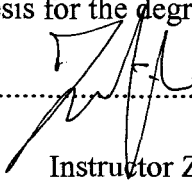
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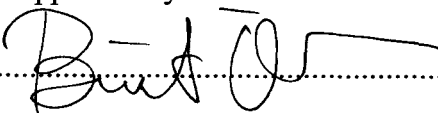
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## ABSTRACT

### GEORGES BATAILLE'S NOTION OF TRANSGRESSION: THE QUESTION OF A POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE CONCERNING ART AND PHILOSOPHY.

Mehmet Şiray

M. F. A in Graphical Arts

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Lewis Keir Johnson

May, 2000

This study aims at analysing George Bataille's notion of transgression. In this respect, the concepts of Bataille's discourse such as 'general economy', 'sovereign operation', 'inner experience', 'impossible', 'absence of myth' and 'sacred', are taken into consideration within the context of some recent post-structuralist texts. In addition, this study focuses on transgression in Bataille's discourse reading it as a passage from interior to exterior. For this purpose, this study aims at showing that the transgression implied in Bataille's discourse transgresses itself. In that manner, this thesis brings two readings of Bataille's notion of transgression together: one is the reading of surrealism through George Bataille's and André Breton's approaches, and the other is the reading of the notion of transgression through some recent post-structuralist texts. In the final analysis, this study discusses the discourse of transgression in Bataille with respect to both philosophy and art considering the problem of representation.

**Keywords:** Transgression, general economy, impossible, inner experience, sacred, absence of myth, sovereign operation, representation, surrealism, post-structuralism.

## ÖZET

### GEORGE BATAILLE'İN İHLAL KAVRAMI: SANAT VE FELSEFE AÇISINDAN OLANAKLI BİR DENEY (İM) SORUSU

Mehmet Şiray

Grafik Tasarım Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi: Yard. Doç. Dr. Lewis Keir Johnson

May, 2000

Bu çalışmada George Bataille'in ihlal kavramının çözümlenmesi amaçlanıyor. Bu açıdan bakıldığında; genel ekonomi, egemen operasyonu, iç deney(im), olanaksız, mit'in yokluğu, kutsal gibi Bataille söyleminin kavramları yapısalcılık sonrası bazı metinler ışığında inceleme altına alınır. Ek olarak bu çalışma ihlal kavramını içeriden dışarıya doğru bir pasaj olarak okuma eğilimindedir. Bu amaçla Bataille'in ihlal kavramının kendisini ihlal ettiği gösterilmeye çalışılır. George Bataille'in ve André Breton'un tartışmaları üzerinden gerçeküstücülüğün, yapısalcılık sonrası metinler dolayısıyla da ihlal kavramının kendisinin bu tezde biraraya getirilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Son tahlilde bu tez çalışması temsil sorununu gözönünde bulundurarak, felsefe ve sanat açısından ihlal söylemini irdeler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İhlal, genel ekonomi, olanaksız, iç deney(im), kutsal, mit'in yokluğu, egemen operasyonu, temsil, gerçeküstücülük, yapısalcılık sonrası.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Assist. Prof. Dr. Lewis Keir Johnson for his guidance and insight in the study, as well as his encouragement for the development of my interest in philosophy of art.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is very difficult to name Bataille's work as philosophy, anthropology, sociology or literature. In fact, one may consider Bataille's work neither as one of these fields nor as the totality of them. Bataille's project may be regarded as a revolt against the categories of truth in metaphysics and his revolt against absolute truth always turns around the question of non-knowledge which makes the contemplation of knowledge possible for Bataille.

Bataille always aims towards the transgression of the discourse of metaphysics. Although Bataille refuses any absolute truth, he believes general truth that had to be exposed. His project may be considered as the promise for a lost unity between psychic and social. In this process, Bataille mainly focuses on the excess which is the necessary condition of knowledge. On the other hand, one cannot construct such an awareness without contemplating inner experience in which knowledge and unknowledge are connected with each other. For Bataille, this margin is experienced at the limit of the impossible character of existence.

Usually, Bataille's project is called as paradoxical, but this paradoxical nature of Bataille's arguments is, at least for Bataille, necessary in order to reveal what is hidden in discourse. Hence, the consciousness of the limit(s) of discourse is necessary for the synthesis of consciousness and the unconscious in a lived experience.

This thesis aims to explore the concept of transgression. Transgression- the breaking of a rule or law- is connected with the dynamics of artistic activity in modern art. By theorising transgression with respect to Bataille's analysis of general economy, I will be able to make a claim that transgression is essential both to our understanding of contemporary world and of art.

In this thesis, I will focus on the following question: in what sense Bataille's sovereign operation or inner experience is an attempt to transgress the discourse of metaphysics. Whenever Bataille uses the term 'sovereign operation', he insists on the necessary condition of general economy. He uses general economy as strictly different from traditional economics, which is related to restricted economy. Bataille differentiates restricted economy from general economy in order to expose the difference between what comes to discourse (such as philosophy and sciences) and what remains as an excess for discourse. On the one hand, for Bataille, restricted economy reduces the relation between individual and society to Homogeneity. On the other hand, general economy, which is the economy of waste expenditure, is where the economising bias of economy is broken, and the meaning and the truth are linked

not to themselves but to their others: non-meaning and unknowledge. The originality of Bataille's approach lies in the way he appreciates this feeling of excess.

It can be stated that Bataille's notion of transgression could help us to rethink the question of transgression. Although Bataille's work, as Foucault claimed in his article '*A Preface to Transgression*', is "a guiding light in the darkness of a new area of the unthought", Bataille's project, in some sense, lacks and limits the heterogeneity in transgression (Foucault quoted in Pefanis 1991, 40). In that sense, it can be claimed that transgression cannot be identified by transgression itself, and the necessity of transgression in Bataille's work posits itself as the rule or the law of transgression. In that framework, Bataille's sovereign operation turns out to be an economy, the economy of restricted. In this respect, it can be proposed that general economy cannot be thought as distinct from restricted economy. Transgression of restricted economy as general economy shows itself in the production of restricted economy. Therefore, the transgression implied in Bataille's project transgresses itself.

This thesis aims to discuss Bataille's notion of transgression and focuses on the evaluation of his approach in the context of some recent post-structuralist texts. It can be argued that Bataille's work has an influence on post-structuralism. The thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Blanchot consider Bataille's work directly. It can be claimed that Bataille's writing has a strong impact on these thinkers. In fact, it can be said that they share the same critical standpoint in the transgression of metaphysical discourse(s), although there are several differences in their approaches.

This thesis brings two readings of Bataille's notion of transgression together: one is through the postmodernism, such a reading is through Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Blanchot, and the other is through surrealism in which the debate between Breton and Bataille constitutes the surrealists' approach and gives rise to the discussion which aims to comprehend the transgression in surrealism.

In chapter two, this thesis will attempt to give an analysis of some of Bataille's notions such as inner experience, sovereign operation, sacrifice, impossible, general and restricted economies, heterogeneity and the absence of myth. In this chapter, it will be claimed that Bataille's work may not be considered as aiming at the essential separation between social and personal being. For Bataille, sacred is the unifying aspect of society and without this fundamental element the continuance of society is not possible. In that manner, chapter two will concentrate on Bataille's notion of sacred, which is for Bataille, at the centre of communication.

In chapter two, Bataille's emphasis on excess is discussed, because for him sacred can be seen in extreme emotions, in useless activities. They all take the form of heterology and expel homogeneity. In this respect, Bataille's book *Eroticism* is emphasised. It can be claimed that the useless activity and extreme emotions are put into consideration in Bataille's sovereign operation. This nature attributed to sacred can only be understood by Bataille's comprehension of death. The section, 'Death, Communication and The Experience of Limits', in chapter two, aims to construct Bataille's analysis of death as an active principle and as a completion of life.

Bataille claims that it is not possible to contemplate philosophy without taking economic factors into account, but his approach on economic factors cannot be understood by conventional economics. In section three, 'Expenditure and General Economy' it will be argued that his sovereign operation is strictly connected to his notion of general economy. In order to understand the economical factors in life for Bataille, one must comprehend life's inner activity. In that sense, Bataille's notion of expenditure plays an important role in understanding this inner activity. In this section, it will be attempted to discuss the relation between restricted and general economy by following Bataille's notion of non-productive expenditure. In this section, it will be claimed that Bataille aims to transgress restricted economy, and general economy provides a basis for this transgressive activity.

Bataille gives credit to some primitive societies in his account of sacred. Aztec societies and Potlatch tribe are crucial for Bataille in order to exhibit the lost nature of the sacred. Bataille shows how excess and transgression play an important role in these primitive societies. In chapter two, it will be argued that the exemplification of sacrifice in these societies is problematic. As a result, chapter two aims to reconstruct Bataille's work in the light of his main notions discussed above. In that manner, this chapter helps us to place his notion of transgression in his discourse.

Chapter three combines two things together: one concerns Bataille's arguments in surrealism, the other discusses Bataille's arguments against surrealism and especially against André Breton. In fact, surrealism can be regarded as a shifting terrain of representation using difference in order to generate meaning. It can be claimed that

the desired effect in surrealism was to reveal the unconscious in representation, and to undo prevalent conceptions of order and reality. Hence, chapter three discusses two modes of representations in surrealism: one is Breton's surrealism, the other is Bataille's surrealism in which Bataille tries to construct a new mode of representation.

In chapter three, it will be showed that surrealism aims to make desires manifest, in which the state of ambiguity is the condition imposed on spectators reading of images, so the movement from fragment to fragment is inherent in looking at images. In fact, it can be argued that the reception of Freud's psychoanalysis plays an important role in surrealist project, although there were different uses of Freud's psychoanalysis in Bataille's and Breton's works.

In chapter three, it will be attempted to discuss Breton's idea of surrealism in which surrealists posit their work as a strategy 'from the point of view' of the unconscious (Fer 1993, 176). Hence, it will be emphasised that Breton's use of psychoanalysis is different from Freud's psychoanalysis. For Breton, dream work is crucial for the surrealist approach. Madness, hysteria, earlier myths, memory lapses and day dreams are also important for surrealism, because they searched for the mechanisms at work in unconscious. Breton argues that all these repressed conditions are means to transgress the established boundaries.

The section displaying the debate between Bataille and Breton in chapter three discusses their way of using myth in their projects. They both emphasise the absence



of myth in contemporary world. On the other hand, Bataille accuses of Bretonian surrealism as becoming a part of capitalist production, because Bretonian surrealism aims to go back to the past in order to recreate the notion of ritual by imbuing ritual with meaning. For Bataille there is no possibility of imbuing any ritual with meaning. No ritual, for Bataille can go beyond the immediate context of its performance. In that manner, chapter three also discusses how surrealism makes a fetish of ritual and in what sense Bataille shares this outcome in his analysis of the absence of myth in contemporary world. In chapter three, I will concentrate on the need for communism in surrealism, because the surrealists claimed that the reinvigoration of myth could take shape only through communism.

It will be showed in chapter three that there are differences between Bataille and Breton in their understanding of beauty. By separating normality from pathology, Breton claims that there is always residual hope for freedom and beauty. On the other hand, Bataille proposes a real practice of imbalance. Therefore, beauty, which is only in the moment of obsolescence, is linked with decay and death.

The last section in chapter three, 'Crime and Art' focuses on the surrealist reception of crime as the revelation of a real nature possessed by human beings. Hence, this section aims to comprehend in what sense the surrealists see crime as the transgression of taboos, the release of a desire that constitutes the origin of art. In this section, it will be attempted to claim that Bataille sees crime different from

surrealists. He conceives crime as both hiding and proclaiming itself. Bataille criticises surrealists in that they turned crime into art at the expense of crime itself.

Chapter three aims to present that while the transgression in Bretonian surrealism searches the possibility of a new language or a new mode of representation in repressed desires and in unconscious wishes in which surrealism consists of the claim of truth within the project, Bataille, on the other hand, claims that desire is always linked to repression that it constitutes, so self is only caught up in mobility in which the transgression of limits and boundaries are at work. Hence, Bataille rejects the surrealists' project in a sense that the surrealists stabilise the concepts and the self. As a result, chapter three discusses how transgression is at work both in surrealism and in Bataille's discourse.

Chapter four deals with Bataille's comprehension of Hegel's master and slave dialectics. In fact, this chapter discusses how Bataille contemplates Hegelian notions with respect to the notion of transgression. Chapter four begins with discussing Bataille's famous article, *Hegel, Death and Sacrifice*. The first section, 'Negation as Affirmation', aims to comprehend the notion of negation both in Bataille's discourse and in Hegel's master and slave dialectics. In this respect for Bataille, the abstract negation as an unconsidered fact in Hegel's dialectic is evaluated in sovereign operation as an active principle. In that sense, Bataille argues that sovereign operation puts abstract negation into work. Hence, the section one discusses how Bataille places his general economy and sovereign operation in the consumption of bodily energy outside the world of rational and useful productivity. In that sense, Bataille argues

that laughter, eroticism or the experience of the sacred exceeds the logic of metaphysics. In this section, I will focus on Jacques Derrida's article, *From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve*, in order to show in what sense Bataille's sovereign operation transgresses Hegelian discourse. By claiming Bataille's general economy and his sovereign operation refers to restricted economy, to the economy of Hegel, I will show that sovereign operation is the desire for meaning attributing a meaning to the absence of meaning. Section two and three, 'The Writing of the Sacred' and 'General Economy' aim to develop the discussion which turns around the notion of transgression in Bataille's discourse. In these sections, there will be attempted to show Derrida's two forms of writing in order to comprehend Bataille's general economy and sovereign operation.

In section four, 'General Writing' debates the notion of neutrality. Derrida claims that what erases the traces of classical discourse is not alone the concept of sovereign, nor the sovereign operation. It is the discourse, of sovereignty, which neutralises metaphysical discourse. In this respect, section four discusses Bataille's notion of sovereign operation and sovereignty with respect to the work of neutralisation. Besides, I will consider Rodolphe Gasché's arguments that criticise Bataille's project as aiming to transgress the discourse of philosophy. He claims that exceeding the discourse of philosophy cannot possibly mean to step outside the closure, because the outside belongs to the categories of the inside. Therefore, section four intends to develop and sharpen the analysis of transgression.

Section five, 'Blanchot and the Limit-Experience' purposes to explain Blanchot's notion of limit-experience with respect to Bataille's 'at stake' operation. This section aims to comprehend the play of thought and the infinite affirmation of thought in Blanchot in order to show the impossibility of absolute transgression that differs in itself from discourse and law.

Finally, the last section considers Bataille's comprehension of Lascaux paintings. Bataille argues that Lascaux paintings present transgression in relation to a sacred moment of figuration. Bataille in his study of Lascaux, constructs the figuration as an origin of art. In this section, I will use Bataille's argument against him claiming that if prehistoric art is the other or the origin of art, it is situated within the same status, and rather the beginning of art shows also the end of art.

The last part of the thesis begins with Bataille's project in *Documents*. In *Documents*, Bataille discusses the nature of representation in philosophy and sciences. For him, scientists and philosophers use dictionaries in order to give references for the consistency of their systems. In that sense, they produce dictionaries in order to generate meaning. In these systems, one word is linked to another without contemplating how it works and what sort of space it creates. This space for Bataille, is the job of words. Therefore, Bataille reorganises some of the words that he found necessary for his project, such as formless or low. In this respect, the conclusion examines Bataille's efforts in connecting words with their jobs. Besides, this part gathers Bataille's notion of transgression with respect to language. In that sense, it can be claimed that Bataille's project aims to transgress the boundaries that

surrounded the communication. The metaphor of 'dust' in *Documents* unveils this phenomenon. As a result, conclusion part discusses in what sense Bataille's attempt can be thought as legal and consistent work with respect to the notion of transgression.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO BATAILLE'S DISCOURSE

#### 2.1. BATAILLE'S NOTION OF UNKNOWLEDGE

Foucault claims that "Bataille's thought is a guiding light in the darkness of a new area of the unthought" (Foucault quoted in Pefanis 1991, p 40). Bataille was aware of the fact that knowledge is always in connection with unknowledge. He defined this as a dialectical relation between knowledge and unknowledge. Hence, rather than accepting knowledge in its totality, he grasps it in a relation to unknowledge. He refuses any absolute truth. But, still he believes general truth to the universe that had to be sought out. One can recognise this truth in the margin of between knowledge and unknowledge. What is the meaning of such a transgression of the discourse of Metaphysics? Is it an attempt to reach a simple outside or a beyond philosophy? Can someone contemplate this truth without taking into account of metaphysical knowledge in the history of philosophy? Bataille claims, before we contemplate non-knowledge, we must pass through knowledge. The former can never precede the latter.



According to Bataille, knowledge and power can never be taken as independent from individual's self-experience and social reality. They are dynamic concepts inherent in human activity and having no meaning in themselves. Power does not exist in the abstract as it does in Foucault's analysis. Both Foucault and Bataille saw excess as a necessary condition for knowledge but for Bataille, it can not be thought as disconnected from un-knowledge. In this respect, with this concept of un-knowledge in mind, we know this margin, which exists in this relation between knowledge and un-knowledge, with knowledge that is not knowledge at all. May be the excess of knowledge makes knowledge possible in the first place. He pointed out that the limits cannot be considered without engaging with complementary need for non-knowledge.

Plotnitsky claims that "Bataille's 'concept' of *sur* (sur-realism) suggests, this margin -that which is minimised within the text of philosophy- will exceed the centre in the power of efficacy and will be reconfigured as one of the conditions of the possibility of all centres"(1993, p 68). The role of this margin is crucial, yet it cannot be absolutely or unconditionally central. Bataille saw excess as a path of awareness. Nevertheless, he did not consider excess in isolation from a sense of order. Duality is necessary for him and his position is a refusal of all hope placed in any form of transcendence. Hence, his addition to philosophy can be shown as a confrontation between existence and its paradoxical (impossible) character. In fact, the question of existence is non-sense. The problem of existence lies in socialisation.

In second manifesto of surrealism André Breton claims that “everything tends to make us believe that there exists a point of mind at which death and life cease to be perceived contradictorily”(Richardson 1994, 26). Bataille’s work is based on the supposition that all things are interconnected with each other and it is possible to discover the correspondences between them. Therefore, there is no longer any priority between knowledge and un-knowledge or internal being and external reality or individual and society.

Derrida says, alluding to Kant, but possibly also with Bataille’s (un) concept of ‘un-knowledge’ in mind, “ we know this... only now, and with a knowledge that is not a knowledge at all ”(1976, 164). Bataille claims that the true relationship between knowing and doing lies in a lived experience. A lived experience (may be as a surplus value) which would effect the synthesis- at once decisive and impossible – of consciousness and the unconscious, which is for Bataille the ultimate possibility of that which is. In this process, present and future involving the experience of un-knowledge would emerge in a lived experience. Hence, the one, which exceeds, is preserved in the trace of experience. Trace of experience, because Bataille tried to deal with the impossibility of the impossible. One is the impossibility of experience; the other is the impossibility of showing present and future in a lived experience. In this dangerous and surprising work, Bataille did not aim to appropriate thought. The theme of exclusion in classical philosophy refers not to the myth of origin of humanity, but to its end. As Dennis Hollier claimed in his article on Bataille, ‘The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille’: “rather than a system of thought, Bataille’s

dualism is an attitude of thought; it is not a dualist system, but a will to dualism, a resistance to system and homogeneity”(Botting and Wilson 1998, 62).

Anxiety Bataille placed at the heart of his philosophy. For Bataille, this is true since all communication involves loss, but this is the price that has to be paid for someone who needs to communicate. It is a necessity that can not be avoided. Therefore, the condition of life would be silence for Bataille.

## 2.2. THEMES AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

For Bataille, there is no any essential separation between social and personal being. Society is like an entity. The collectivity between individual and society make impossible to establish true or absolute reality, because there is always an account of the distortion that is brought by one's own perspective on the material. Hence, it is difficult to determine boundaries of collectivities.

According to Bataille, the fundamental element that makes possible unity and continuance of society is the sacred. For him, sacred is the unifying aspect of society, taking shape where people need to offer themselves up in a sacrificial consecration to the values of the collectivity. The sacred is the forbidden element of society that exists at the margin where different realities meet. Sacred shows the need for communication and it is shaped in this process. If we accept that the sacred is by definition the totality of the world and since what embodies totality can be considered sacred, how can it be subject to the abstraction from totality that is the necessary pre-

requisite for scientific analysis? In the vortex of communication in which the essence of the sacred is founded the distinctions that scientific research needs for its methodology are broken-down. Faced with reality of the sacred, Bataille asks, how can disinterested knowledge do other than fail at a basic level, since it is constraint to “itself serve to alter the meaning of what it reveals”(Bataille quoted in Richardson 1994, 48). How can there be (the) sacred state at the heart of the vortex of communication when the absence or the lack of sacred is placed into discourse? Perhaps, the reason for Bataille is that we lack on essential factor of life. This causes an anarchy or crisis. This led to the sacred inevitably meant that one had to make an abstraction of it and translate into the terms of a lost paradise and so, seek it only in societies that were far from us in time or space. We can not accept it as being in present. Therefore, the sacred can only exist as a contradiction of profane or it survives in primitive societies. This means that other is derivative. According to Bataille, sacred can be observed internally and externally. Sacred is a question of communication. Hence, it seems that the place of sacred in societies as unifying element, which is the possibility of completeness, is paradoxical. Although Bataille aims to place sacred as an impossible experience in the heart of communication, sacred can not come to light as present, so its existence always shows impotency. In fact, Bataille was aiming to demonstrate sacred was to be a starting point so as to understand the paradoxical structure of communication. In this respect, may be he was restraint-to conceive sacred as complete being in order to escape from scientific analysis. Nevertheless, showing that the only possibility to understand sacred as unifying element between society and individual, revealing it before the experience

of it, presupposes sacred as an empty structure which stands far from Bataille's insistence on experience as a present activity, without which nothing is possible.

Bataille distinguishes societies' structures into two: homogeneous and heterogeneous societies. Homogeneity reduces itself to functions and it shows organised societies. Homogeneity causes capitalism and it destructs heterogeneity which engages with sacred. Heterogeneous society needs to take account of points of intersections where societies exist in the interconnection of different cultures and social structures, which have been expelled from the structure of the integral body. Sacred can be seen in bodily exhalation (blood, tears...), in extreme emotions (laughter, anger, drunkenness, and ecstasy.), in useless activity (poetry, games, crime, and eroticism). They all take the form of heterology and expel homogeneity. According to Bataille, they are all the possibility of otherness. They assert the value of the forbidden, which is allowed free play at times of transgression, a festival of expenditure and loss that complements the needs of work and the rule of law. In that sense, Bataille's understanding of sacred resembles to fear in the philosophy of Heidegger. Its unifying element appears only in those extreme emotions. Although it seems as if opposed to the profane in scientific analysis, contradicting its opposite and existing with respect to its other, in those activities (extreme emotions) it exists as totalising and directly.

We can claim that although it seems paradoxically, it stands in the last analysis as being plural. This nature attributed to the sacred can only be understood with Bataille's comprehension of death.

For Bataille, death is an active principle. Death completes life; its aim and dissolution is also the negation of life; its condition and essential quality. Even as life itself negates death in the moment of reproduction and there after seeks to exclude it, death remains as an ever-present active principle that alone makes life possible. Death brings into play continuity and discontinuity by showing the essential quality of being. For him, to live is to exist within limits. Richardson claims, "being always accords with the limit that defines it."(1994, 37). Our essence is thus to be incomplete beings. Discontinuous being aspires to achieve a state of continuity with what is external to it. This unity is, for Bataille, impossible, our condition depends on loss.

Bataille insists that we, discontinuous beings, always desire to transcend the limits that define us. This anguish which is marked by an urge towards what is impossible. In that sense, anguish is the fundamental condition of existence. It is the recognition of the incompleteness of being, yearning for a lost continuity. A sense of anguish, as an urge to go beyond our limits that defines our existence whilst at the same time being connected with the nakedness of existence, a nakedness that, for Bataille, is rending and painful.



There is always something that holds Bataille back from any sense of the transformation of being. Though he wanted his work to be treated as a whole, he did not want the different elements to be subsumed together. Richardson claims,

“Above all science needed to recognise the need not only for knowledge but also for non-knowledge. Without the latter, ‘knowledge is an enslavement’, a meaningless accumulation that destroys the meaning of life. He wrote that we are ‘enslaved by knowledge’ that there is a servility fundamental to all knowledge, an acceptance of a mode of life such that each moment has meaning only in terms of another, or of others to follow”(1994, 66).

Against this enslavement knowledge needs to be recognised as what is: the path to knowledge is impossible. But it is in recognising this impossible quality that the real meaning of knowledge becomes apparent. Bataille says, “the door must remain open and shut at the same time”(1998, 92). Hence, true knowledge needs to recognise its provisional nature and stands against eternal truths.

### 2.3. EXPENDITURE AND GENERAL ECONOMY

Bataille claims that it is not possible to contemplate philosophy without taking economic factors into account, nor the economy without considering the effusion of poetry. He always focuses on the struggle between project of totality and one person’s life experience.

Bataille’s approach to economic questions quite openly contradicts the basis of economic science; one can understand the difficulty of integrating his theories into

any sort of conventional economics. He uses general economy as strictly different from traditional economics, which he defined as being concerned with the restricted economy. It is also connected to the notion of sovereignty and ties in with the interplay between individual needs and the requirements of social interaction. Analysis of general economy must consider economic factors in their totality, taking into account not simply the objective fact of the financial structure of society, but also the social and psychological factors upon which it is founded.

For Bataille, life is energy that is always founded in work. Humanity has needed to control this basic principle of life. The human has developed an urge to exist in duration, so has tried to create a secure environment. This shows that societies are not primarily structured in order to satisfy the needs of subsistence (although this is an important factor), but through a need to obtain prestige by accumulating a surplus that could be disposed of in a prodigal way. As a result, there is a useless consumption (life strives to expend itself uselessly). According to Bataille, the notion of expenditure is very important in order to comprehend life's inner activity. For Bataille, the notion of expenditure is in the nature of things for any given organism to produce more than it needs for its own survival. As such, economic activity is determined not by scarcity but by the need for circulation of the excess wealth produced. This circulation between individual and society resembles to father and son relationship. Father who denies his son whilst providing clothes, food... for his surviving; this denial is not for production. This exclusion is superficial. Richardson claims,

“ The son is guaranteed security to the extent that he abides by what his father has in mind for him. But to the extent that he does remain true to his subservience, the son must be untrue to himself, and remains incapable of expressing what he really cares about, which has to be hidden away. As the key, son’s real needs lies in the unavowed pleasures rather than the practical activities his father consign him to, so the key to economy, he asserts, lies not in the productive process, but in the surplus that must be expended. But this is not an expenditure that should feed back into the productive process but one that is excessive and serves no useful purpose, indeed functions in a way to destroy the very productive process itself by exploding its truth.”(1994, 70-71).

In so far as we do accumulate we do so only in order to expend the surplus we have acquired in a glorious way and for a purpose that satisfies us precisely because it serves no utilitarian purpose.

According to Bataille, there are distinct elements of the process of consumption. The one is reducible part, which is represented by the minimum needed for “the immediate conservation of life” -restricted economy and the other is wealth that needed to be created precisely for “unproductive expenditure”-general economy (1988, 18-23). This relation between general and restricted economy causes the constitution of society. In order to be able to increase production and to cause to produce, capitalism explored leisure time. People need play and rest but this is negatively related to the need for work.

In the first place, Bataille denies that a concession of leisure is at all necessary to the smooth functioning of the economy, since the principle of work is inherent in

mankind's nature and we necessarily produce more energy than we need for our subsistence. He asserts that leisure and the expenditure it demands lies at the heart of the effective economy, and in this perspective any work that simply satisfies accumulation is a perversion of real human needs. Capitalist society, which is explicitly based on economy of scarcity, is thus a perverse society, devoted not to the satisfaction of its own needs, but to the benefit of a particular part of society that controls the productive process. The displacement of economic needs from expenditure to accumulation serves to unbalance mankind's inner sensibility. Hence, individual and society are alienated from their own beings (reduction to homogeneity). In that framework, society is more dominant than individual. Nevertheless, capitalism does not give any concession to society as it made for the individual. Therefore, society always stands as an abstraction.

For Bataille, society is a living body and in a detailed analysis, there can be no discrimination between society and individual. Like individuals, societies need non-productive expenditure. For instance, war is an expenditure that represents the continuation of the economy, in contemporary societies, by other means. Thinking society as if it is a non-being and giving undervalue to it causes savage revenge that goes beyond all limits. Expenditure, in that sense, is more important than accumulation. It is the whole ideology of the reformation that provided the moral rationalisation necessary to give accumulation its legitimation. The act of giving is no longer perceived as a necessary gift to the community, but a voluntary dispensation that remains under the control of the person who makes the gift. This process of

giving reduces the person who takes this 'gift'. Bataille calls this 'universal meanness'. Hence, value became displaced. Therefore, economy is organised according to the relation with things rather than the relation between individuals. In this respect, Bataille calls capitalism as an unreserved surrender to things.

Social distinction is the basic reference for individuals. Servility is established as the principle against which one measures oneself. Although social structure seems not to insist on class distinction- because it works as if it defends equality between individuals-distinction and ability to make it (power) is tested in servility rather than sovereignty. This doesn't mean that the need for unproductive expenditure has been overcome. It survives in 'accursed' form. The human need expressed in luxury, mourning, war, cults, monuments, games, spectacles, arts and non-reproductive sexual activity remains as great as ever, but everything is done to divert such activity (unproductive expenditure) to the needs of utility rather than accept them as the pure effusion they are. Hence, societies give a place for joyful destruction of accumulated wealth.

Social cohesion is an active principle that is embodied in myth and affirms the social body. This gives to each individual a sense of being in which social and individual reality is one. According to Mauss, powers of exchange covers all social domains so that not only goods and property are exchanged but also entertainment, rituals, dance, even women (Richardson 1994, 77). So, the person receiving gift must return it. In such a way wealth circulates. The system works that both establish social hierarchy and it also acts to prevent destructive class conflict. Therefore, a kind of obligation is

created by exchange (Bataille takes this form from Mauss). In that manner, Bataille researches Aztec and Potlatch societies. Bataille sees in Aztec ritual sacrifice, which is devoted to the sun, a movement of expenditure that is comparable to the sun's generosity. Richardson claims that "Aztec societies are servitude rather than sovereign as Bataille insisted, because what is sacrificed can not be sacrificed" (1994, 77-9). Therefore, there is no sacrifice in itself in these societies. In Aztec societies, we can talk about duplication in their sacrificial ceremony. The survival of the warrior depends on his death in a sacrificial act. In that manner sacrificial act turns back to its profane nature and in a sense, it works against itself. This sacrificial act resists societies' homogeneous structure by serving taboo.

According to Richardson, there is no excess and transgression in Aztec societies in which sacrifice is neutralised and reduced to something daily and habitual. The second example is the Potlatch tribe situated in the north west of Canada. This example shows that the concept of 'gift' lies in the centre of economy rather than trade. So, trade is later. Hence, economic life was not begun with 'self interest'. Excess in the tribe of Potlach was not for the purpose of the deconstruction of wealth but for its maintenance and distribution.

For Bataille, sacrifice is the antithesis of production, it is a consumption that is concerned only with the moment and may be he does not say that sacrifice is made for the salvation of mankind. According to him, sacrifice is the opposite of salvation and served the social solidarity of the immediate group, not of mankind in its generality. Its aim is to protect the instant. Sacrifice, performed in public, testifies to



the strength of the social fabric and only takes place within societies which are founded around intimacy and heterogeneity. Sacrifice, for Bataille, can be seen as the experience of self-sufficient societies that cohere in a heterogenous way. How can a body produce more energy than it will expend? According to Bataille, this emerges from the inner drives of the organism. It is not spontaneously produced out of nothing.

As human beings, then, is it not precisely because we have an inner need for work that our energy surplus is created? Nevertheless, if we insist on work more than the energy we produce and expend for surviving, this energy can escape from our understanding. Bataille's argument about eroticism is based on the fact that work is indeed what determines our being and without which we should 'flounder' although this conception consists of inconsistencies. Michael Richardson asks that if expenditure is a human necessity, it is so only through the prior need to accumulate. Bataille was right to focus on the problem of surplus value and the necessity for expenditure, but it needs to be emphasised that expenditure has meaning only in relation to accumulation. The problem arises when he isolates expenditure from the entirety of social relations. It is difficult to see how any conception of a general economy can have analytic value unless it treats the problems of accumulation and expenditure as being inextricably linked. We can argue that no separation is possible. In that manner, surplus value is still a problem. If a surplus energy is naturally generated within us, then how does this occur? He says it is simply a natural process. But, is it not the case that the production of energy requires the intervention of the

will into being that produces the surplus? Is it not precisely because we have an inner need for work that we are able to satisfy more than our own energy needs and that, deprived of this urge, we should immediately cease to produce the energy we need for our survival? Is it not, then, urgent to engage with the nature of our will to work before we can seriously consider the importance of expenditure? Richardson says following Norman O. Brown's perspective,

“The rule of economic activity lies not in the exchange, but in the act of giving. For Norman the gods exist in order to structure the human need for self-sacrifice. It is for this reason necessary to create a surplus”(1994, 89-91).

Like Bataille, Brown agrees that it is guilt that provides the basis for the need to give, which is equally tied in with neurosis and excretion. To this extent Brown is in accord with Freud who considered human guilt to be based in a primal crime which can be mitigated only through social solidarity. Brown, rather than Freud, believes that primal crime is an infantile fantasy created by the child as a brake on the excessive vitality (the id) which it is unable to control. So, sexual organisation is therefore constructed by the infantile ego to repress bodily vitality.

Brown locates guilt as an infantile fantasy that serves to place a brake on instinctual response defined by the id. Why does such a need arise? He ascribes it to neurosis. Bataille, on the other hand, is very clear about where such a primary need for repression arises: it is a manifestation of mankind's guilt at separating itself from nature and assuming a mastery over it by means of work. If this is neurotic it is still essential to our sense of us as human beings. This sense of guilt lies in an elementary

alienation. According to Marx, alienation estranges man from nature, from his own active function, from vital activity, from others (Richardson 1994, 90-2). Like Marx, Bataille considers that all alienation is self-alienation and society is also alienated. Social cohesion is guaranteed by heterogeneity. The overcoming of alienation can only be achieved by engaging with new possibilities of heterogeneity. This means a confrontation of one's own alienated self. For Bataille, the recreation of heterogeneity begins when no longer perceive a distinction between our own desire and those of society. Bataille denies Hegel's contention that the slave could obtain liberation through work, since work is the condition of enslavement. The only way for the slave to obtain his freedom was to refuse work and engage freely in non-servile, heterogeneous activity. In this respect, the proletariat can only be free by way of rejecting its status as worker. In so doing they assert their own universality. But, in rejecting work which is surely man's universal experience, could the proletariat still be seen as a universal class? Richardson claims that Bataille, in an economy based upon the concerns of the restricted economy, is incapable of handling the implications raised by the general economy. He looks towards the possibility of establishing the basis for economy, which would respond to the natural rhythms of the world rather than upon the calculated needs of mankind. An economy based upon the needs of expenditure in today's world would be a contradiction in terms: it would negate itself at the moment it was put into practice, particularly given that the needs of expenditure can not by definition be calculated. What was necessary was a completely new vision of the way society was structured so that the general economy

could assume its appropriate form. It required the reconstitution of heterogeneity. Capitalism treats (restricted economy) productive needs as the primary.

This is the illusion. Bataille, may be, tends to make a fetish of expenditure or he establishes an inverted form of the restricted economy. In that case, Bataille's work bears witness to what came up as the dice were thrown. His work can be considered as a beginning not as an end.

#### 2.4. DEATH, COMMUNICATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF LIMITS

General economy for Bataille is the framework in which social phenomena can be analysed. He also seeks the inner aspects of being (examination of self). By way of exploring individual(s), he mainly emphasised inner experience and sovereign operation. In Bataille's book 'Eroticism', work and sexuality converge on each other at the heart of social that is strictly linked to our understanding of death.

For Bataille, human experience is an experience of limits and these limits are defined by the fact that the condition of life for human beings is the recognition of death. In order for life to become complex it imposes limits on itself. It needs death (may be only negation in the name of death). Life requires separation in order to develop. Meanwhile, it needs sexual difference. Through one's death the continuity of life process is affirmed. Therefore life emerges from death which is its condition and foundation. Life creates death for its own purposes but it also remains the negation of death. In the final analysis, death and reproduction negate and affirm the process of

life. Hence, birth and death meet in the sexual act. Eroticism affirms life to the point of death. It also affirms life even in death. Death and sex bring with them a residue experienced even at a primitive level, for the loss of the continuity of being that had been the condition of scissiparity. It is anguish, for life asserts itself at the expense of the living being, which is caught in a double bind. It returns to undifferentiation of continuous being and wishes to surpass its limits and unite with the otherness it fears even as it desires it, seeking to transcend the separation that exists between itself and the other. The motivation for such desire is that it will, in the process, overcome death and return to continuity in higher a form. Through differentiation life creates our sense of other and instils such a separation from our own sources. One can not know other's experience so no desire can transcend this gap. As Bataille claimed "our existence is an exasperated attempt to complete being" (1988, 99). Anguish is therefore present in all sexualised living beings (because humans are aware of death, but animals have limited sense). Their urge (clothing themselves) to preserve becomes primal.

It seems paradoxical that we protect ourselves from death and welcome death. For Bataille, eroticism is a kind of break; it is assenting to life even in death (or up to the point of death). In that sense, it undercuts our own sense of being. It calls inner life into play. In human consciousness, it is which what calls his being in question. Hence we are marked. In becoming aware of death human requires security and this needs work. Work in its turn needed to be protected from disorder. It became a psychological necessity to rationalise work. This involved a collective crime that

founded a notion of guilt, which took effect in the human mind in an analogous way to the primal scene. Therefore taboos come to be erected as an essential protection for the structure of society. While he might agree that the taboo would take shape as an infantile fantasy in each generation, this does not mean that it is purely to be ascribed to a neurotic basis. He says, like Freud, primal scene took shape as an actual event that stands at the heart of human psychological reality. It is the very prodigality of life transferred into the human soul that makes taboos a necessity. Life annihilates what it has created. It can never be externally imposed. The imposition of taboo implied at the same time the need to transgress it. This was the time the world would be turned upside down and all that had been denied in the course of principle work was brought back to the social sphere. Transgression is an important part of taboo. Transgression completes and transcends it. Transgression obeyed its rules and implied the consciousness, never the absence, of limits. There is also subsidiary play between life instinct and the impulse for death which Bataille characterised this as a conflict between continuity and discontinuity, play between taboo and transgression.

Death is violence but it is at the same time communication. It is the consciousness of death that makes community a possibility. In its transgressive role, sexuality brings together both the awareness of death and the need for work and recognition of death. Our sensibility is tied to a lost continuity framed by our awareness of death. By destroying the discontinuous being, death affirms the underlying continuity of being. Eroticism is life momentarily overflowing its limits, but these possibilities are framed by the realisation of death. Sexual act reveals death before us. Sexual act functions as

the mark of our intimate relation with nature, recognition of our own mortality and recognition of the discontinuity of our being. According to Bataille, eroticism cedes sovereignty by degrading itself to animal activity. Nevertheless, eroticism defines us completely (it does so) only in conjunction with its opposite, which is work.

Social life needs to be regulated through the interplay of profane and sacred, so personal life too needs to be aware of the relation between taboo and transgression. The denial of this necessity is the denial of sacred. Bataille believes that this lies within the ideology of Christianity. According to Bataille, by way of having allowed ourselves to be born and so turn from universal continuity, we are guilty. We separate ourselves from nature (other), so this is may be essential to our nature. Christianity is not a religion. The religious sentiment is born of man's need for communication. In denying this need for communication, Christianity denies religion. This reinforces the extent to which the taboo is affirmed at the expense of transgression. This requires a denial of death. Therefore Christianity neutralises transgression. Eroticism lies in the heart of sacred. It represents both a mediation point between ourselves and the forces of nature and at the same time both differentiates as well as emphasising our essential unity. The sexual act must be equated with sacrifice. He never rejects Christianity but he gives rise to the going beyond it. 'Hyper-Christianity' which would give meaning to the experience of life as it was really lived (Richardson 1994, 115). This is what Bataille calls 'atheology' (1988, 32).

Inner experience in Bataille, which Richardson criticises, can recognise heterogeneity in so far as it can reduce it to the level of a thing. It serves the purposes of self-

knowledge. Because Bataille's experience remains an individual encounter not consisting of collectivity. Is it not clear that the experience of sacrifice must be impossible in contemporary societies, since everything we know about sacrificial practices suggests that it was entirely free from any sense of individual guilt- the guilt of which it was the expression was undoubtedly collective? Sacrifice can not be experienced in individual terms, and so it would seem to follow that the frame established by western individualism would make the experience an essentially alien one for us. How can we recover the social frame that has been lost?

There is not one experience (universal) of sacrifice but the essence(s). In this respect, the sacrificial experience appears inseparable from its form and can only be experienced within the social context in which it takes place. It needs complicity for Sade, there is no relation between life and death, and there is only life and non-life. Death in this sense does not exist (everything was possible and there were no limits for Sade's position- absolute relativism), so there is no universal for him. Only by such bursting of limits would sovereignty become possible. Sade denies the notion of otherness and the possibility of communication. It is a profound affirmation of the world in which transcendence and hope are emphatically denied.

Is it possible, as Bataille advocates, living entirely in the moment? How can one renounce concern for the future without renouncing life itself? Is it not life always defined by a concern for the next moment? Bataille writes, "if we live sovereignly, the representation of death is impossible, for the present is not subject to the demands of the future"(1988, 219). Richardson says, "yet, if this is so is it not a denial of life



itself, since Bataille has told us quite categorically that death is the condition of life”(1994, 122).

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. SURREALISM

Some critics claim that surrealism can be defined as an alternative to 'realism'. In fact, surrealism interrogated the legality and the scopes of the notion of 'real'. In realism, the opposition between nature and human is prior to every construction. In a way this is both presupposed in the history of art as intrinsic to art history and preserved as an absolute category in life. Hence, surrealism is a 'project' which aims to show the inconsistency of the category of 'real' as an absolute construction. In this respect, surrealism is not an alternative to realism, but a reaction to it.

Surrealist work can be regarded as a shifting terrain of representation that constantly uses difference to generate meaning. The desired effect was to reveal the unconscious in representation, and to undo prevalent conceptions of order and reality. Not only a matter of questioning reality but also how reality was normally represented. The state of ambiguity is the condition imposed on the spectator's reading of images. There had to be flow in reading of an image, so looking at image is to move from fragment to fragment, each clue displaced by a further one.

Breton's idea of surrealism with the first surrealist manifestation in 1924 consisted of a 'complete state of distraction' that aims to make desires manifest (Fer 1993, 173). There was a refusal to recognise the utility or supposed rationality of the mass-produced objects defining the logic of the rational mind and to express a deeper sort of logic, that of unconscious in Meret Oppenheim's, Man Ray's and Masson's art works. All of them were also a strategy to attempt to work 'from the point of view' of the unconscious (Fer 1993, 69-71). The usage of unconsciousness in Surrealism depends on the fact that young surrealists were exposed to psychoanalytical categories. The French reception of Freud was also very crucial for surrealism although there was no strict theoretical proximity between Breton and Freud. Hal Foster in his book 'Compulsive Beauty' claims,

"They differed on the value of hypnosis: whereas surrealism began with hypnotic sessions, psychoanalysis commenced with the abandonment of hypnosis. So, too, they disagreed on the nature of dreams. While Breton saw them as portents of desire, Freud read them as ambiguous fulfilments of conflictual wishes. For Breton dreams and reality were *vases communicants*, and surrealism was pledged to this mystical communication; for Freud the two were in a relation of distorted displacement, and the very antirationality of surrealism on this score made it suspect. Finally, they differed on questions of art. Freud regarded art as a process of sublimation, not a project of desublimation, as a negotiation of instinctual renunciation, not a transgression of cultural prohibition"(1993, 2-3).

Lastly, especially Breton developed a concept of unconscious different from the Freudian concept of the unconscious, a remove from Freudian models of conflictual

forces. Unconsciousness is based on an ordinary unity rather than primal repression. This surrealism, an essentially Bretonian one, defines surrealism as 'psychic automatism'. This style, as it is explained by Rosalind Krauss in 'L'Amour Fou', can be disclosed as 'privileged visuality'. According to Krauss,

"Breton had located his own invention of psychic automatism within the experience of hypnogogic images-that is, of half waking, half-dreaming visual experience. For it was out of the priority that he wanted to give to this sensory mode-the very medium of dream experience- that he thought he could institute a pictorial style"(1985, 20).

Freud's terminology is in this respect a little bit different because for him, any attempt deliberately to contrive the effects of the unconscious mind was a contradiction. But in the cultural context in which the surrealists worked, the most effective strategy available to them appeared to be to speak from the position of the irrational, to attempt to speak of madness from the place of madness itself rather than from the point of view of reason.

The most literal way in which the surrealists used many Freudian motifs. However, as it was not only motifs that Surrealism took from Freud, but more importantly "a poetic sense of the mechanisms involved in the dreaming process" (Fer 1993, 180).

Dream work was crucial for the Surrealist approach. Dreams unlocked the unconscious in a way not possible in waking life- as did connected phenomena such as day dreams, slips of tongue, and memory lapses. They (especially Breton) were interested in these areas because they were in pursuit of what Breton called "the

arbitrary to the highest degree” (1924, 38). The Surrealists searched for the mechanisms at work in the unconscious. They looked inside themselves for what was infantile. But they also sought to explore the memory lapses, the repressions of a whole culture; they looked back to the past, or to earlier myths, to question the present and imagine their way out of present conditions- as a means to transgress established boundaries of representation. The surrealist use of psychoanalysis cannot be separated from their social project. So, the transgression envisaged in Surrealism requires the integrity of psychic and social. In that sense, Marx’s diagnoses of the ills of capitalism and Freud’s diagnosis of the ills of patriarchy come together in Surrealism. Freud and Marx argue that relations between people or between social groups were veiled and hidden by what was normally accepted as reality. They criticised social structures and oppressive, sovereign culture. In that sense, the surrealist project was a critical conjuncture of the psychic and the social.

### 3.1. BRETON’S NADJA

Breton’s most famous book ‘Nadja’, written in 1928, had a strong impact on Surrealism. Breton, with ‘Nadja’, refers back to the Surrealists’ fundamental scepticism about the kind of freedom possible under present conditions.

The understanding of ‘flaneur’, which is a compulsive observer of modern life, had been for Baudlaire distracted and fragmented by the experience of modern life. Breton’s ‘Nadja’ is engaged in activity of a ‘flaneur’. Nadja is also a compulsive

observer who walks around the Paris aimlessly. Briony Fer quoting Breton says “ ‘ever while I am close to her, I am closer to the things which are close to her’- becomes a sign for these shifts of places and things”(1993, 183). Intimacy is always mediated, for Breton, by the city itself-on which he focuses attention. He says, “ It seems to me that I observe her too much, but how could I do otherwise”(Fer 1993, 183). In Breton’s book, desire that is the main subject of the book is tied up with looking and observing. It also involves submission –to danger or to endless possibility.

For Breton, desire is necessarily elusive and distracted. The object being pursued becomes, for Breton, almost secondary to the pursuit itself. The pursuit not of an essence but of distraction. The pursuit could bring into play ‘every artifice’ and it could enable an escape from the ordinary into a marvellous dazed state; the fleeting moments that he experienced with ‘Nadja’.

Another of Breton’s aims is to posit reader as ‘flaneur’ although he does not use the term. The reader watches Breton’s fragmented narrative. Nadja and city are dealt with as the traces of Breton. The fantasy, then, was not only about femininity, but also about men’s desires and masculinity. The flaneur needed to be in control of the gaze, since gazing, was one of the characteristic activities of the flaneur. This meant having possession of the gaze rather than being the object of it. Nadja accepted men’s compliments with pleasure and gratitude. A further part of Breton’s fantasy is that this receptiveness gives her a power over men. In fact, Breton aimed to control Nadja-flaneur before she left the city. The Nadja of Breton’s text may be a projection

of his own faltering identity, where he consistently fails to focus on the woman and instead displaces his attention onto the objects around her.

Breton's essay on 'Gradiva' centred on the theme of metamorphosis, from life into death, unconscious to consciousness- on the idea of a transition from one thing to another, ie-the condition of metaphor that preoccupied Surrealism. The surrealists were interested in Freud's analysis, especially of repressed desire, the role of dreams and with the unconscious workings of the mind. Breton projected some Freudian themes in Gradiva's two-fold character and in the precarious state of ambiguity between the muse and the 'real' woman. For Freud, both science and art could both reveal unconscious processes and shed light on the workings of the unconscious. So, Gradiva was the metaphor for surrealist avant-garde. Here, we find a calculated reversal of available models of modernity. An ancient relief is, for example, taken as a sign for cultural advancement. Nadja for Breton was the reminiscence, " I am the wandering soul", and the theme of the woman as the artist's muse (Fer 1993, 183). There is a problematic in surrealism. There is a distinction between the woman as muse and the woman as artist. As much as it celebrates the fusion of the muse with the woman, the Gradiva myth also points to an unsolved problem for surrealism. One can claim that Surrealism considered the question of sexuality without the aim of psychoanalysis. In that sense, as some feminists claimed, surrealism failed to express sexuality. As Briony Fer claimed, the sociological theories of sexuality can be insufficient in explaining how certain patterns of behaviour, certain names and attitudes are internalised by human beings.

### 3.2. BATAILLE AND BRETON

In many respects, one can claim that the issues raised in surrealism were related to the nature of freedom. The surrealists were soon faced with a paradoxical truth that if it is to be realised, liberty has need of a moral basis. Bataille's insistence on a collective truth, if it is recognised directly, was crucial in the development of surrealist way of thinking. For Bataille, a poet or a painter does not have a power to say what is in his heart, but an organisation or a collective body could.

It seems likely that Bataille was drawn closer to surrealism after the war by his friend Michel Fardoulis-Lagrange, animating the journal '*Troisième convoi*', of which five issues were published between 1945 and 1952 and in which Bataille published three articles. The first of these texts is particularly significant, for it signals the change in Bataille's perception and the fact that he believed the reappraisal of surrealism had become necessary. Describing himself as 'surrealism's old enemy from within', he remains highly critical of surrealist practice, which he views as being too concerned with a place in the world: "he considers that with its books on the shelves and its paintings on the walls, a great surrealism begins" (Bataille 1994, 6). Bataille argues that such 'great surrealism' suggests that surrealism has lost its vigour and surrendered to the necessities of utilitarian society.

In fact, Bataille's reaction to surrealism can sometimes be related to his relationship to Breton. Michael Richardson defines this as a complicated love-hate relationship. Although the debate between Breton and Bataille seems to be extrinsic to surrealism,



one can claim that the conflict arising between them is inherent to surrealism that is the content of 'sur' or the question of surrealism, its limits and realisation, which is resisted. According to Richardson, "where Breton's writing is crystalline and lyrical, reflecting the light and transparency with whose hope he would like to imbue the world, Bataille's writing is marked by a dark humour in which any notion of hope is absent"(1994, 5). In the first Manifesto, Bataille and Breton disagreed on many different topics. Nonetheless, Bataille's criticism was crucial:

"The dialectic between revolt and conservatism, between excess and a need for restraint. This is preliminary to his discussion of the relation between taboo and transgression in Eroticism, but it also identifies the importance of what one can see as a deeply conservative strain within surrealism itself "(Richardson 1994, 9).

Bataille and Breton had completely different attitudes in the first Manifesto. Although an ambiguous incompatibility had been appeared in their discourses, they shared the same ideology in many respects. For instance, Bataille and Breton had relations with communist party in France. Actually, the connection between surrealism and Marxism was not coincidental. For this reason, like Breton, Bataille was also aware of the need for communism in order to realise surrealism's way of thinking. In fact, following the second Manifesto, a certain kind of problem came to the fore. For Breton, the main concern in the political domain had been a fraught collaboration with the French Communist Party, which by 1935 was over, brought to a definitive end with surrealist' tract 'On the Time the Surrealists were Right'. Despite the unhappy outcome of the relationship between surrealism and

Communism, it would be erroneous to see the conflict between them as inevitable, and any collaboration as being doomed from the start. Almost all surrealists had seen the necessity for some form of collaboration with Communism, and they were not naive in the realm of political theory.

After the groupings of 'Contre-Attaque', 'Acéphale' and the 'College of Sociology', with the outbreak of war in 1939 and Breton's exile in the USA, surrealists who continued to be active in Paris remained interested in Bataille, sending him their questionnaire on poetry, to which he replied. But in 1943 after the publication of '*The Inner Experience*', they issued a violent tract, '*Nom de Dieu*', which recalls Bataille own attack on Breton fourteen years earlier. This time it is Bataille who is accused of mysticism, idealism and wanting to be a priest.

Following Breton's return and constitution of a wider based group, Bataille's attitude was transformed from dismissal to active involvement, to the extent of participating in the 1947 exhibition and contributing the important text '*The Absence of Myth*' to the catalogue. This text defined one of Bataille's central preoccupations, something which linked him closely with surrealists, and especially with Breton's own current preoccupations (the theme of the exhibition itself was 'myth'). Bataille's interest in myth had developed in the late 1930 through Acéphale and the College of Sociology, both of which were based on investigations that would try to reinvigorate myth in contemporary society. In early 1940s Bataille was trying to justify myth as a ground for society but he totally rejected the meaning of myth in contemporary world. For him, myth as mediation between mankind and natural world can not be accepted

although the place of myth in society is necessary. Bataille argues that the myth of contemporary society is an absence of myth, since that society deluded itself into believing it was without myth by making a myth of its denial. Both Bataille and the Surrealists claimed that contemporary society was in need of mythical foundation, but denying that fact it was simply making a fetish of its absence and denying part of itself. Surrealists immediately noticed the uselessness of reviving ancient myths. Instead, like Bataille, they concentrated on the concept of its absence. Although they shared the same outcome, Bataille argued that this absence of myth was merely one aspect of a more generalised absence. It also means the 'absence of sacred' for Bataille. By definition the sacred was defined for him as 'communication'. Hence, its loss is an absence of communication. Quite simply, the notion of absence of myth meant a failure of communication which touched all levels of society. Therefore, a society, which ceases to communicate ceases to be a society, more specifically becomes an absence of community.

Surrealists' analysis of myth (the absence of myth) touches Marxist notion of alienation. Bataille, myth appropriates reality, such a concept destroys the nature of myth. According to Bataille, everything about the concept of reality is mythical. Bataille's basic criticism lies in the solid understanding of society. Surrealism does not deny the 'primitive'; rather it looks back to the past in order to recreate it. For Bataille, it is necessary to recreate the notion of ritual in a society within which the value of it represented (the value of community) has been destroyed by Christianity, which had been the basis for Capitalism. The problem of surrealism is that there is no

possibility of imbuing any such ritual with meaning. No ritual, for Bataille, can go beyond the immediate context of its performance. This is contagious nature of ritual. Like capitalism, surrealism also makes a fetish of ritual. In that way, they make ritual absolute. This tragic outcome is, may be, the power of industrial culture, everything become part of the very absence of myth they sought to confront. One of the solutions, the most crucial one, surrealists emphasised is the moral status of community. Actually, they were thinking that if it is established a new way of community not based upon the principle of individualism, the true nature of myth could be achieved. That was, of course, Communism. "The surrealists had made revolt a moral value, calling themselves 'specialists in revolt' and Bataille was later to define surrealism as a state of rage"(Rishardson 1994, 24). This served to emphasise its relation to his own thought, and served especially to provide a preliminary definition for what would become one of Bataille's central precepts, the notion of sovereignty.

This notion was parallel to Breton's supreme point in the second manifesto. With this notion of sovereignty and its realisation, an individual becomes free of given conditions without transcending society. It was a state characterised as impossible. This impossibility is directly connected to fundamental paradox of existence in which the highest aim is the resolution of what can not be resolved. Unlike Sade's notion of sovereignty, Bataille's notion welcomes death. Sade's work can be accepted as an affirmation that denies death. Bataille's own statement that eroticism is the assenting to life even in death, but he does not deny death. Eroticism is very crucial for

Bataille. What is at stake in sex is communication between two beings, and pushing sexuality to its limits, he wants to test to breaking point the emotional boundaries of the personality of the man and the woman. This point of undifferentiation causes anguish in which their separate identities disappear. Sade totally rejects this conclusion, because an identity is not what he wanted. For Sade, an individual acquires his/her sovereign power in the end of extreme experiences.

For Bataille, the more otherness is denied, the more sexuality is reduced to a mechanical act. Bataille's postulation of the other always refers to his understanding of 'death'. He affirms that 'life in its plenitude includes death' (Richardson 1994, 16). In a way, Bataille reminds us that if we don't become aware of the basic need for communication that lies in human activities, which is the basic principle for socialisation for Bataille, we cannot be free. Bataille with his understanding of the other or with the consciousness of death in life implies the notion of mediation, as in Hegel's dialectic, necessary for liberty. The condition of liberty is the recognition of its limits. Again, quite opposite from Sade's position, denying the limits or trying to break completely free from them is to deny one's own humanity. Bataille distinguishes his own 'philosophy' from Sade and Breton's in all these topics which have been mentioned above. In fact, the point Bataille wants to come is to show the necessity of 'work'. Only with work is transgression possible and one can only transgress the limits by being aware of the limits which encloses 'man'.

Some of surrealists accused Bataille of mysticism. According to Dennis Hollier, this term 'mystical' is misconceived in the characterisation of Bataille. The confusion

arises because Bataille's primary concern is with communication. But such communication cannot be a beyond, as is the case of mysticism. For Bataille, it is conceptually impossible to know or communicate with what is beyond death, since death is an absolute limit of human experience. In introduction to '*The Absence of Myth*' Richardson claims,

“The most one can experience is the vertigo of the edge of chasm. This is the point at which the erotic and the mystical experience meet, but contrary to the aim of mysticism. Bataille believed that it was impossible to experience the fall itself without actually falling”(1994, 18).

It seems accurate to say that Sade was materialist, because a consistent materialism cannot admit death. None of Sade's heroes really fears death. In that sense, Sade's materialism is directly connected with his atheism. On the other hand, one can claim that Bataille's concept of otherness welcomes 'idealism'. Like Sade, Bataille desires consecration in action but this does not satisfy him. Here, the problem is how to place thought in our essential beings. Believing that we can live in accordance with our passions is an empty nostalgia for Bataille. From that respect, may be we can replace his idealism, his understanding of death as otherness and his notion of undifferentiation in his materialism and in a consistent materialism, the material only takes form with respect to the mental (and vice versa). In that manner, it seems Bataille's thought is remarkably close to that of Breton. Surrealists' way of using Sade's ideas is established on the light of Bataille's criticism of Sade. Therefore, the very basis of Surrealism is social.

Although Bataille traces the unifying elements between individual and society, he claims that unity of the world is a hidden unity, on which surrealists insisted. Richardson claims that “in positing an ‘absence of myth’, Bataille was looking not for a new form of mysticism, but to reintegrate the notion of ecstasy into the body social, within which it would have a virulent and contagious quality”(1994, 21). The same thing is true for surrealists but surrealists recognise this as an intolerable situation, and the urge of surrealism is to overcome the isolation it implies. This is why it needs communism, since in communism the urge towards a society that is not based on the needs of personal interests. In fact, communism constructed its identity by denying the needs of personal interests although it needs them in order to establish itself. This is the tragedy of Communism in practice. Although communism had some problems in practice, it embodies the principle more powerfully than surrealism ever could. In other words, the re invigoration of myth for which surrealism called could take shape only through Communism.

### 3.3. BATAILLE’S FORMLESS

In Surrealism there were two uses of Freud and his theory, two point of views for literature in relation to psychoanalysis each of which may be represented by Bataille and Breton. Breton attempted to negate the distinction between normality and pathology (man is still free to believe freedom –there is always residual hope for him-beauty). Bataille had quite different ideas from Breton. He proposed a real practice of imbalance, a real risk to mental health. He refused to entertain available

images of liberation preferring to participate in its trauma, to engage in baseness with no claim for objective distance. For him illumination is fall from grace: beauty which is only in the moment of obsolescence linked with decay and death.

According to Bataille baseness is which triggers rot and decay- the characteristic processes of the formless, or the process by which form is 'undone'. Fer argues that in *Documents* the words he selected for definition such as mouth and eyes are sketched in a way that stops the words being fixed in their meanings (1993, 206). They follow the form of a dictionary, but undo that form at the same time. That is, the words are displaced from any absolute definition and are further displaced by the images. Many of Bataille's terms in the dictionary and elsewhere refer to parts of the body as a dismembered anatomy of the modern. Bataille shared Sade's importance, but stressed his 'fleeing for the terrible', the violence and cruelty of his writing (Fer 1993, 208). In his view of modern art Bataille internalised Sadean principles. Miro's work, for example-which decomposed the image and broke up its unity-was, like Dali's, indicative of the principle of destruction at work in modern art. Fer following Bataille's arguments claims,

"Modern art began with Manet because he was the first to 'destroy' the subject of painting. With Manet began the obliteration of 'text'- that is, the story that might have been the painting's pretext. In the case of 'Olympia', the 'text' of prostitution is repudiated or cancelled out by Manet's handling, making the 'text' and the painting 'part company': the picture *obliterates* the text, wrote Bataille, and the meaning of the picture is not in the text behind it but in the 'obliteration' of that text"(1993, 209).



Breton represents unity in comparison with Bataille's sense of disunity or decenteredness. Bataille simply represents surrealism without politics as opposed to Breton's revolutionary credentials. Surrealism, itself many-faceted, has become a site of conflicting accounts of what the modern means. Breton's model of Surrealism engages directly with revolutionary politics and has been influential in attacking the view that art can be autonomous from social and political concerns. Bataille's ideas no more asserted an independence for art or culture than did Breton's, nor idealised art as free from politics. Utopian fervour, all hope for liberation, is turned in on itself in a terminable state of trauma. For Bataille, if psychic disorder was to be merely imitated- even as a mode of critique- all was lost. In this respect, madness and hysteria are not pathological but rather supreme forms of expression and that provides breaking down of repressive laws. May be this can be characterised by the subversion of the relations between subject and the world of morality outside of any system of delirium. This is an unconscious protest (perhaps the feminine protest against the law of the father).

Freud's theory lies partly at least in his analysis of how sexual difference is not a biological given but is made in culture. So the symbolic is important for Freud where the law of the father stands metaphorically for the domination of men over women. May be sexual difference is made in culture not in nature. Hysteria from this respect can be seen as failed masquerade.

For Breton aesthetic response is integrally tied to an experience of erotic pleasure. According to him, there are three elements of convulsive beauty: veiled erotic which

is the process of representation at work in nature; one animal imitates another, a delirium which shows that aesthetic can not be revealed by normal channels and the freezing of the wild movement of something.

Like hysteria, paranoia also (as Lacan claims) entered the surrealist aesthetic, through Dali in particular: the idea that one thing simultaneously can be read as another while never losing its original identity entirely. The figuration can theoretically and practically be multiplied. Dali developed his own paranoid-critical method in painting. For Surrealists, the idea of object as fetish could be used by the artists. Fer says,

“This is not to suggest that the appeal of fetish was as a universal, transcendent category, but that it lay in the sorts of mechanism and process that were in the idea of the fetish. In Freud’s view the fetish is always a substitute for something else, and in surrealism’s terms is an obsessional object. But we should bear in mind the point made earlier, that it is the sight of the object, the process of fixation, which also establishes one thing as a fetish for another. An object or image may be repeatedly used to show this obsessional aspect or, equally significant, the emphasis may be on the angle of the look”(1993, 227).

The idea of the angled look, that isolates the image from its familiar context, was characteristic of surrealist photography (Man Ray’s photographs, 1933, Collection Rosabianca Skira).

Surrealism was nurtured by Marx (commodity fetishism) and Freud (fetishism). Commodity fetishism described the ritualistic value that is ascribed to such goods

because of their exchange or monetary value. For Marx, value is given to things rather than people. In this context, the actual use value of goods recedes into the background and all commodities act symbolically as social hieroglyphs. This extends to social life in general. For the surrealists, the art object as fetish tended to reify desire-to convert it into a ritual object of exchange, like any other commodity-through the process of displacement. In the fetish, the social and psychic could meet. The surrealist object might even be seen to call into question where the real fetishism of modern culture lay.

For Bataille, it was not only a matter of redefining and reascribing use and symbolic value to objects, but precisely that the full force of the fetish was lacking in surrealism. Bataille wrote “ I defy any amateur of paintings to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves a shoe”(Bataille quoted in Fer 1993, 231).

### 3.4. CRIME AND ART

The surrealists conceived crime as the revelation of a real nature possessed by all human beings. They also saw crime as a subversive and hence affirmative gesture that demolished rather than confirmed or erected hierarchies between the great and the ordinary. The surrealists thus celebrated and defended famous criminals, including the Papin sisters, because they saw them as victims. As Carolyn J. Dean put it, “surrealists did not conceive crimes as testimony to criminals distance from

humanity, as expressions of reserve or alienation, but rather (as they had with Sade) to their humanness”(1992, 210).

The surrealist writers sought through art to recover the hidden, repressed criminal or other in themselves and in the world. They used convulsion and automatic writing as the aesthetic techniques for revealing this repressed other. Breton says in *Nadja*, “Beauty will be convulsive or not be at all”(1928, 160). Hence, they saw crime as the transgression of taboos, the release of a desire that, as they saw it, constituted the origin of art. Through art the creator returned to something once lost. Therefore it represents the recovery of a truth. In this manner, the relation between art and crime becomes imperceptible. Art becomes crime and vice versa. Dean says,

“Surrealist writers, thus, eroticised art by merging it with violence and they reconceived it as the product of a libidinal, primarily sadomasochistic drive that metamorphosed everyday objects, especially the human body. The violent and sensual image of the convulsion was thus central to surrealist method. It was not always literally erotic but its origins were libidinal; it represented a metaphorical lovemaking that shocks, startles, and wrenches apart what Breton called ready-made realities” (1992, 214).

It can be said that surrealism transforms decomposed images into new language. In fact the techniques they used were for this possibility of a new language. In this respect the art produced by automatic writing seeks to go beyond the material boundaries of literary form.

Bataille saw crime differently from surrealists. He claims that crime hides itself and that which escapes us is the most horrible. In this respect surrealist project hid crime by means of claiming that surrealism may totally reveal the hidden nature of crime. But Bataille both hides and proclaims it. Therefore he uses crime as a metaphor for literary production. For Bataille surrealism turned crime into art at the expense of crime itself.

Bataille's criticism of crime is connected to his analysis of fascist power in relation to the heterogeneous forces of human life. Dean claims that "heterogenous forces defined, heterogeneous as unproductive expenditure, as a force that exists for itself" (1992, 228-30). Fascism uses powerful symbolic rituals both to mobilise the masses and to ground its authority. In this respect for Bataille fascism denies itself by means of drawing its force from the effective dimension of human existence which characterised primitive societies and their symbolic structures. Therefore, it takes its force from bourgeoisie's own repressed material. Hence, its force comes from this unconscious. Bataille was interested in fascism because it confirmed his belief in the transgressive and hence revolutionary quality of self-loss. For Bataille, Dean claims, fascists

"...transcend themselves by identifying with the sacrificial victim. They experience an essentially vicarious death, self-loss, and hence oneness with the community. The spectacle is a simulation of self-loss which feels real, a mimetic reproduction of an experience that can be experienced only through an imaginary identification with the victim. In this sense, *surfascisme* as strategy represented an effort to challenge fascism with an organic antifascist movement

to which Bataille and other antifascist intellectuals subscribed as an alternative to Soviet-style communism”(1992, 229).

Bataille thinks that *surfascisme* would permit the self-transgression and affirmation of community characteristics of fascist movements without degenerating into real murder. Therefore, *surfascisme* takes in the self-destructive erasure of the boundaries between self and other. Thus for Bataille, the heterogeneous or other can be rendered only as art, as spectacle. Nevertheless, Bataille reintegrates art into the body in order to create heterogeneity. Therefore, art is organised around the sacrificial ceremonies and rituals.

In Bataille, writing no longer represents the sublimated other: it symbolizes an other, an unconscious, that can not be symbolized, that is always already written. In that sense Bataille constructs other as different from surrealists. Breton sees a way out from ordinary discourse in which art has a specific place in order to construct a new language. In this project, Breton defines or substitutes other as a way to heaven, so automatic writing and convulsive beauty are the methods for achieving this aim. On the other hand, Bataille took the surrealists conflation of prohibition and transgression, of the self and the criminal other, as a starting point from which to draw new boundaries. For Bataille, “manhood is the impossibility of ever being a whole man”(1992, 243).

Although both Bataille and Breton place pleasure at the centre of their projects, Bataille’s pleasure has no reference other than the repression that constitutes it. The

criminal, sadistic father, Van Gogh were not metaphors for our deeper or other being for Bataille, as they had been for surrealists. They were metaphors for an otherness that had ceased to be referential, that was always already symbolised. For Bataille, self is always already split. Self is only caught up in mobility in which the transgression of limits and boundaries are at work. This paradoxical nature of the constitution of self in Bataille's discourse mainly depends on the supposition that desire is always linked to the repression that it is constituted by. Therefore, Bataille claims that one cannot transgress the limits and the boundaries without the law of transgression that constitutes transgression. In this respect, as Dean argued Bataille's formation of self is inseparable from "the love of the law"(1992, 247).

The surrealists used criminality in order for rehabilitation and they constituted and constructed self as other. Therefore, they theorised the self as an other, at once fixed and eroded, explained and inexplicable, present and uncannily absent. Bataille, on the other hand, "tried to save the self by defining the other (true or real) self as an (now irretrievable) other" although he participated the renewal of self with surrealism (1992, 249).

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. THE FOUNDATIONS OF SOVEREIGN OPERATION IN BATAILLE'S DISCOURSE

#### 4.1. NEGATION AS AFFIRMATION

Following Bataille's own views, Bataille's confrontation with Hegel may be seen as central to his thought and writing. Bataille's reading of the lectures of Alexander Kojève was very important in his encounter with Hegel. Viewing Kojève, Bataille interpreted and modified the dialectic of master and slave. In this respect, the concepts of sovereignty and general economy were developed by Bataille through a reading of Hegel's narrative of master and slave.

Bataille quotes from Kojève, "the central and the final idea of Hegelian philosophy," which is "the idea that the foundation and the source of human objective reality (Wirklichkeit) and empirical existence (Dasein) are the Nothingness which manifests itself as negative or creative Action, free and self-conscious" (Kojève, 1947, quoted in Bataille, 1990, p.10). The master and slave struggle in Hegel's philosophy can be read as an encounter of the two self-consciousnesses. Before the "first fight", they do not have any certainty. Kojève explains that "The beings that are separated from one



another are the master and slave who are created in and by the first fight and who are essentially different from one another”(Kojève, 1947, p.244). For Hegel, the difference between master and slave is created in and by this struggle. In master and slave dialectic each wants to destroy the other and each risks his life. This phenomenon is considered as a life and death struggle. One puts one’s life at stake in order to be recognised. By means of doing this one gains one’s freedom. In that sense, in order to be an ‘I’ one needs to be recognised by another self-consciousness. Putting one’s own life at stake is (to be) required for certainty. So, recognition in master and slave dialectic always necessitates mediation, because the truth of my own being is secondary. According to Hegel, the most important characteristic in distinguishing man from other existents is an act of desire. All men are animated by desire for recognition.

For Kojève, “the dialectical or anthropological philosophy of Hegel is in the final analysis a philosophy of death”(Kojève, 1947, Bataille, 1990, p.10). In the meeting of two self-consciousnesses, the master does not fear death and risks his life, while the slave fears to do so and gives recognition to the one who does not fear death. In that struggle, slave transforms object and prepares it for master’s consumption. The slave works on the object. The master becomes independent consciousness by way of the slave’s recognition. Therefore, he who risks his life is the master. He puts his life at stake. Negativity is actualised through the negation of being and this can be perceived in the following way: first of all, man must become conscious of being limited or being ‘mortal’ and then, he must risk his life in order to be a different existence from

others. So, a human distinguishes himself from others by means of negating his existence. Kojève claims “ man knows that he must die”(1947, 256).

For Hegel, the history of relationships between men is the history in which master and slave have been effected, so they change themselves correspondingly. Nevertheless, the narrative of master and slave dialectic is not naively the narrative of the evolution of history; such meaning and truth are also established in the system of Hegel. The negative relation between ‘man-nature-man’ determines the connection between man and the thing. This connection between man and nature prepares the ground of the emergence of the historical person. Thus, man distinguishes himself from thing by means of negation, so he gains his social ego. For Hegel man is a historical and free individual. Man can only be human within the dialectical process. Kojève claims that “ in this dialectical period, the totality of man consists of three major phenomena: Individuality, freedom and historicity” (1947, 254-255). For Hegel, these three major conditions are only grasped by a dialectic in which death is the appearance of negativity and actualised through the negation of being. This economy of life, in the final analysis, holds the totality of what is. Hegel says “ Everything depends on one’s expressing and understanding Truth not (only) as substance, but also as subject”(1977, 9-10).

For Hegel, the dialectical being is necessarily temporal and finite. This means that death alone assures the existence of a dialectical being. If death, or fear of death which is the basic mode of existence in master and slave struggle, did not dwell in man as the source of his anguish, there would be no man or liberty, no history or

individual. Bataille says “ he is no longer, like a stone, an immutable given, he bears within him Negativity; and the force, the violence of negativity cast him into the incessant movement of history, which changes him and which alone realises the totality of the concrete real through time”(1990, 12). In that framework, God cannot occupy a sovereign position. Rather, it is “*I* that is *We* and *We* that is *I*”(Hegel 1977, 110), i.e., the spirit of the sage (Hegel), that occupies a sovereign position as a regent. Bataille laughs at this conclusion and he argues that “this way of seeing things can with justice be considered comic”(Bataille, 1990, p.13). Following Jacques Derrida’s reading of Bataille, Bataille’s concepts of sovereignty and general economy can be represented as a way of eliminating the truth of self-consciousness and work. In that sense, Bataille’s sovereign operation tries to put ‘abstract negativity’, pure and simple death into work. Therefore, Bataille’s general economy and his sovereign operation depend on “the experiences which all signify consumption of bodily energy outside the world of rational and useful productivity: laughter, eroticism, sacrifice, or the experience of the sacred, and poetic effusion”(Mutman 1995, 188).

Derrida claims that “a complicity without reserve accompanies Hegelian discourse, ‘takes it seriously’ up to the end, without an objection in philosophical form, while, however, a certain burst of laughter exceeds it and destroys its sense, or signals, in any event, the extreme point of ‘experience’ which makes Hegelian discourse dislocate *itself*; and this can be done only through close scrutiny and full knowledge of what one is laughing at”(1978, 104). Bataille considers that sovereign operation, as an operation to put Hegel’s abstract negativity into work, refers to the total risk of

meaning in which meaningless negativity is considered. In that manner, sovereign operation risks what the master neglected (abstract negativity) by employing it. Bataille's sovereign operation is thus in excess of dialectics which is the method of preserving what is transgressed.

Hegel's notion of 'Aufhebung' plays an important role in the act of transgression. Hegel claimed the necessity of the master's retaining the life that he exposes to risk. Without this economy of life, "the trial by death, however, cancels both the truth which was to result from it, and therewith the certainty of self together"(Hegel, 1977, quoted in Derrida, 1978, p.106). Thus, the truth of life is grasped by the ruse of reason in which an essential life that is combined to the first one making it work for the constitution of self-consciousness, truth and meaning. Everything covered by the name lordship is guaranteed in dialectic by Hegel's notion of the Aufhebung. As Derrida puts it, Bataille laughs at this victory of life. Laughter alone exceeds dialectic, because Bataille pushes the negative to such an extreme that it is not possible for it to produce truth and absolute meaning. "It burst out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls 'abstract negativity' "(Derrida, 1978, 107).

While the truth in Hegel links to itself, in sovereign operation it links to its other. The sovereign's failure, as Derrida put it, is the absolute loss of meaning, but as Hegel said, sovereign operation also needs life in order to be in relation to itself. So, it must simulate the absolute risk in order to weld natural and sovereign lives together. While Aufhebung leaves nothing behind because it wastes nothing and profits from

everything, sovereign operation considers what is left behind, with the excess which the *Aufhebung* excludes because it cannot profit from it. Hence, sovereign operation ceases to be a dialectic of the master and slave dialectic and it opens Bataille's text to general economy that is place of sacrifice, the domain of loss and consumption.

“The privileged manifestation of Negativity is death, but death, in fact, reveals nothing. In theory, it is his natural, animal being whose death reveals Man to himself, but the revelation never takes place. For when the animal being supporting him dies, the human being himself ceases to be. In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living-watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-) consciousness at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being. In a sense, this is what takes place (what at least is on the point of taking place, or which takes place in a fugitive, ungraspable manner) by means of a subterfuge. In the sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies himself with the animal that is struck down dead. And so he dies in seeing himself die, and even, in a certain way, by his own will one in spirit with the sacrificial weapon. But it is a comedy”(Bataille, 1990, p.19).

Destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice constitute a radical negativity without reserve. Such a negativity that is no longer determined in dialectic. In Hegel's system negativity is always connected to positivity, but sovereign operation, as a point of non-reserve, is neither positive nor negative. Derrida argues that with the term *Aufhebung*, Hegel uses negativity in order to reassure us of the other surface of the positive. So, it can no longer be called negative because “it can no longer permit itself to be converted into positivity, because it can no longer *collaborate* with the continuous linking-up of meaning, concept, time and truth in discourse; because it

literally can no longer *labour* and let itself be interrogated as the 'work of the negative' "(Derrida 1978, 111).

The displacement of Hegel refers to the experience of the sacred and to eroticism and laughter in Bataille's form of writing. In fact, Bataille aims to undo the self-certainty in Hegel's discourse. For him, useless consumption such as eroticism and laughter refers to the general economy in which experience of the sacred finds its proper place. In that manner, general economy exceeds the horizon of modern economy that is defined with the principle of productivity. For Bataille, a general economy cannot totally be detached from a restricted economy, because these concepts are inseparable. With a new form of writing, writing of the sovereign, Bataille intends to create a kind of experience which communicates with unknowledge.

"Indeed, if Hegel's attitude opposes learned consciousness and the limitless organisation of a discursive thinking to the naivete of sacrifice, still that consciousness and that organisation remain unclear on one point; one can not say that Hegel was unaware of the 'moment' of sacrifice; this moment is included, implicated in the whole movement of 'Phenomenology'— where it is the Negativity of death, insofar as it is assumed, which makes a man of the human animal. But because he did not see that sacrifice in itself bore witness to the entire movement of death, the final experience—the one so peculiar to the sage— described in the Preface to the Phenomenology was at first initial and universal— he did not know what extent he was right—with what precision he described the intimate movement of negativity" (Bataille 1990, 19).

Although there is a difference between Hegel and the man of sacrifice, Derrida claims sovereignty does not escape dialectic. He says " it could not be said that it

extracts itself from dialectics like a morsel of dialectics which has suddenly become independent through a process of decision and tearing away”(Derrida, 1978, 112). Sovereignty is articulated to the economy of reason. It inscribes the dialectical synthesis and makes it function within the sacrifice of meaning. It does not suffice to risk death, rather death is the investment as the work of negative in sovereign operation. Bataille’s operation can be considered as a linkage, which is only possible by the experience of the sacred, between knowledge and unknowledge. As Derrida put it, “sovereignty must still sacrifice lordship and, thus, the presentation of the meaning of death”(1978, 112). Bataille’s failure essentially lies in the notion that sovereign operation is another discourse which gets around Hegel. In that sense, sovereign operation basically refers to the restricted economy, to the economy of Hegel. In this respect, sovereign operation, which attributes a meaning to the absence of meaning, is the desire for meaning.

#### 4.2. BATAILLE’S WRITING

In speaking at the limit of silence, Bataille finds a way in order to reorganise silence of sovereign. For Bataille, silence is the condition for sovereign writing which exceeds the logic and the aim of Hegelian discourse. The difficulty in speaking of an absence of meaning and the impossibility of considering it without giving it a name underlies the urge for Bataille that the sovereign must be considered as impossible

which is the repressed source for knowledge. Bataille argues “being is given to us as impossible”(1988, 89).

Bataille shows that in order for one to have transgressed articulated knowledge, one needs to ruin discontinuity and remain foreign to difference as the source of signification. The possibility of erasing discontinuity and the necessity of continuity lies in communication. This communication is not the one that is affirmed by metaphysics, rather it requires “beings who have put the being within themselves at stake, have placed it at the limit of death, of nothingness”(Bataille, 1988, P.283). This writing, writing of the sovereign, requires a certain sliding which aims to relate its syntax and its lexicon to a major silence.

For Bataille, the sovereign operation must be related to scientific discourse. Differing from Hegelian Lordship, it is attached to nothing and conserves nothing. This is not an easy task that directly makes itself connected to common syntax. “Like lordship, sovereignty makes itself independent through the putting at stake of life”(Derrida 1978, 116).

“At stake in the operation, therefore, is not a self-consciousness, an ability to be near oneself, to maintain and to watch oneself. We are not in the element of phenomenology. And this can be recognised in the primary characteristic-illegible within philosophical logic- that sovereignty *does not govern itself*”(Derrida, 1978, p.116).

As Derrida put it, sovereignty does not govern things and discourses. Nevertheless, this furious task is always at the core of dialectic. Bataille simulates Hegelian



concepts in a way that shakes their secure ground and displaces their meaning. The identity of Bataille's sovereign which aims to simulate Hegelian concepts in order to find a real basis for knowledge requires the unity of knowledge with unknowledge. For Derrida, "sovereignty has no identity, is not self, for itself, toward itself, near itself" (Derrida, 1978, p.117). This difference between master and sovereign shows the way to sovereignty. Derrida claims that Bataille's sovereignty assigns a new form to writing that produces the trace as trace. According to Derrida, if it eludes presence and constitutes itself as the possibility of absolute erasure, it may be called trace. Hence, it is necessary for sovereign writing to erase the trace, because "unerasable trace is not a trace" (Derrida 1978, 117). In this respect, Derrida reconstructs Bataille's form of writing with respect to his propositions on these two relations, minor and major writing, to the trace.

In minor writing, sovereign operation establishes a relationship with the servile writing in which reason is sacrificed and the poetic is erased. These residues of the sacrifice of reason survive in the minor form of writing although sovereign operation defies these residues. "The survival of that which is written is the survival of the mummy" (Bataille 1988, 104). Major form of writing implies the interruption of servile form of speech and meaning. In these two forms of writing, sovereignty alone does not exceed the logic of lordship but the space of writing between major and minor form of writing performs the exceeding of the logos (of meaning, lordship, presence). Therefore, sovereignty as a concept is directly linked to the lordship, but only in writing and with the space of writing (major writing) can dialectic be

exceeded. As Derrida claimed “in order to maintain sovereignty, in order to lose it, in order still to reserve the possibility not of its meaning but of its non-meaning; in order to distinguish it”, “we must find a speech which maintains silence”(Derrida 1978, 114).

The transgression of meaning is not a path to the immediate; also it is not an access to the identity of non-meaning. Phenomenology reduces everything for the production of the meaning, but sovereign operation is the reduction of this reduction: “not a reduction to meaning, but a reduction of meaning”(Derrida 1978, 120). Nevertheless, this form of writing does not totally depend on the agency of sovereignty. So, this form of writing exceeds sovereignty. One cannot find any fundamental or essential element in sovereignty that gives rise to the major form of writing. Therefore, sovereignty is not a condition of possibility.

#### 4.3. GENERAL ECONOMY

For Bataille, general economy is the basis for the relation between the objects of thought and sovereign moments in which every object are related to the loss of meaning. In general economy, useless energy or excess of energy is put at stake. “It is this useless, senseless loss that is sovereignty”(Bataille quoted in Derrida 1978, 122).

Derrida claims,

“In so far as it is a scientific form of writing, general economy is certainly not sovereignty itself. Moreover, there is no sovereignty *itself*. Sovereignty dissolves the values of meaning, truth and a grasp-of-the-thing-itself. This is

why the discourse that it opens above all is not true, truthful or sincere. Sovereignty is the impossible, therefore it is not, *it is*—Bataille writes this word in italics—‘this loss’. The writing of sovereignty places discourse *in relation* to absolute non-discourse. Like general economy, it is not the loss of meaning, but, as we have just read, the relation to this loss of meaning. It opens the question of meaning. It does not describe un-knowledge, for this is impossible, but only the effect of un-knowledge” (1978, 123).

The writing of sovereign is not sovereignty in its operation, also it is not the scientific discourse. One can think of sovereign as a path to non-discourse, but one must not reduce it to a non-discourse, because it always manifests a relation to non-discourse as in the case of general writing which has also meaning since it is only relation to non-meaning. “A moment that is only sketched in the poetic image”(Derrida 1978, 123). In a way, Derrida differentiates general writing from sovereignty. For him, sovereignty cannot be a substance for general writing. Bataille uses general economy for the sovereign writing. Thus, Bataille predicates general economy as ‘super-essentiality’. For Derrida, this is central dilemma of discourse in Western thought.

Derrida claims that the concepts of general writing are not there in order to mean something or to oppose the concepts of restricted economies, rather general writing makes sense slide. Therefore, this form of writing does not produce new conceptual unities. The concepts of general writing are qualified only by metaphor. For Derrida, “this is the only way, within the discourse, to mark that which separates discourse from its excess”(1978, 125). Bataille’s discourse must protect itself from the

appropriation of meaning. Hence, the concepts such as experience, interior, sovereign have some contents. One has to pay attention to understand the contents of these concepts which are determined according to the law of their own sliding. One cannot ignore the play of difference in the writing of general economy. Therefore, “the reading of Bataille must pass through these dangerous straits”(Derrida 1978, 125). The error in ignoring these straits lies in the misinterpreting of the concepts in discourse. One cannot take the concepts as natural elements of a discourse. The isolation of concepts, detached from the discourse to which they belong, brings the erasure of the excess of non-meaning and falls back into the closure of meaning.

#### 4.4. GENERAL WRITING

Derrida claims that Bataille proposes a neutral knowledge rather than liberated knowledge. Bataille, of course, aimed to detach knowledge from metaphysical discourse(s). In that sense, he related the known to the unknown. Derrida claims,

“ We must attentively consider the fact that it is not the sovereign operation, but discursive knowledge that is *neutral*. Neutrality has a negative essence (*ne-uter*), is the negative side of transgression. Sovereignty is not neutral even if it neutralises, *in its discourse*, all the contradictions and all the oppositions of classical logic. Neutralisation is produced within knowledge and within the syntax of writing, but it is related to a sovereign and transgressive affirmation. The sovereign operation is not content with neutralising the classical operations in *discourse*; in the major form of experience it transgresses the law or

prohibitions that form a system with discourse, and *even with the work of neutralisation*”(1978, 126).

For Derrida, what erases the traces of classical discourse is not alone the concept of sovereign, neither the sovereign operation. It is the discourse, of sovereignty, which neutralises metaphysical discourse. The problem in neutralising, neutralisation of the power of relating concepts is in the renunciation of the law which is the transgressing both of discourse and of the change of concepts. Hence, the difficulty arising in Bataille’s discourse is the way of determining the meaning of transgression. While transgressing the discourse of Metaphysics, Bataille links the work of transgression to meaning and transgressive affirmation. This dangerous work puts his legal status at stake, because one risks immediacy and subordination.

In that framework, the concepts are determined in relation to each other and the same time they destroy and neutralise each other. This transgression of discourse (law in general) confirms and conserves what it exceeds. Derrida claims, “ This is the only way for it to affirm itself *as transgression* and thereby to accede to the sacred, which is presented in the violence of an infraction”(1978, 127). Bataille believes that this kind of transgression is different from the ‘return to nature’. It does not suppress the prohibition. Therefore, for Bataille, it is useless to insist on Hegel’s notion of ‘Aufhebung’. For Derrida, Bataille neglects the Hegelian character of this operation without contemplating the nature of Aufhebung both in Hegelian dialectic and his own operation.

For Bataille, taboo makes any rational order of society possible, but differently from Hegel, Bataille says that taboo does not have a rational basis itself. In that sense, Bataille starts from the work or production, but he searches another basis for the sacred in order to separate man from other beings. Therefore, the prohibitions, which regulate our social life, exceed a rational basis. According to Bataille, the world of prohibitions in its totality cannot be conceived as belonging to the world of work. Bataille, thus, uses the empty form of *Aufhebung* in order to link the world of meaning to the world of non-meaning. Derrida claims that *Aufhebung* in Hegel's dialectic does not exceed the world of work, so it belongs to the circle of absolute knowledge. On the contrary, Bataille attributes a positive characteristic to the term *Aufhebung*. For him, this term, the empty form of *Aufhebung*, implies the transgressive relationships between the world of meaning and the world of non-meaning. Derrida sees that this displacement is 'paradigmatic'. He claims,

“ Within a form of writing, an intraphilosophical concept, the speculative concept *par excellence*, is forced to designate a movement which properly constitutes the excess of every possible philosopheme. This moment then makes philosophy appear as a form natural or naive consciousness (which in Hegel also means cultural consciousness)”(1978, 128).

Bataille's use of empty form of *Aufhebung* refers to the transgression without suppressing, but this also requires the confirmation of that which it exceeds. In that sense, Bataille has to go back to the Hegelian operation. Therefore the transgression

of transgression is necessary, because stated in terms of Hegelian discourse, within the restricted economy, it affirms transgressing with suppressing.

Michel Foucault in his article "*A Preface to Transgression*" reconstructs Bataille's argument about transgression. For Foucault, transgression is an act which involves the limit. Foucault says, "it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses"(Foucault in ed Botting and Wilson 1998, 128). For Foucault, limit opens to the limitless and finds itself carried away by the content it had rejected. In that manner, transgression forces limit to the limit of its own being. Transgression "does not seek to oppose one thing to another"(Foucault 1998, 128-129). For Foucault transgression contains nothing negative and positive. Therefore, there can be no limit to restrict it. Transgression opens to the space of limitlessness into which it leaps. This is what Blanchot called the principle of contestation which is an affirmation that affirms nothing, a radical break of transitivity.

Sovereign operation and the notion of general economy are very crucial in Bataille's writing. Bataille proposes a new form of writing with sovereign operation which is called general writing. In this respect, this is a relation to the non-meaning or the loss of meaning or the non- basis of meaning. Writing of general economy does not use new concepts but it takes concepts into consideration as they slide into one another. It makes this in a new way of writing. In that sense, "general writing affirms play and chance as the non-basis of meaning"(Mutman 1995, 190). Foucault was right that transgression is neither negative nor positive, because the affirmation of chance and play as the rule or law transgresses discourse, but "such a transgression should also

confirm that which it exceeds, i.e. significative discourse and law” (Mutman 1995, 190).

For Derrida, “Hegelian negative can no longer labor and let itself interrogated as the work of the negative” (Derrida 1978, 259-260). Instead of determining negativity as only a moment or a condition of meaning, Bataille and Derrida push the negative to its logical end. In that point, where the negative seems an afterimage of something that resists all salvage by the system of meaning. Therefore, negativity is a resource for Derrida. Rodolphe Gasché in his book, *The Tain of the Mirror*, claims that “ by annulling and equalising all oppositional forces in the mode of pro and contra, such an operation would not only stabilise these forces in an economy of decidable polarities, but would also be a free shot which aims nonetheless to collect its interests”(Gasché 1986, 138). Following Gasché , one can claim that Derrida’s deconstruction controls the neutralising moments of any deconstruction (Bataille’s sovereign operation). In that sense, deconstruction is not neutral and neutrality is the negative side of transgression. In Bataille’s sovereign operation, all the contradictions and all the oppositions of classical logic are overcome-in the work of neutralisation. Neutralisation is a negative image of deconstruction within discursive knowledge.

Bataille’s sovereign operation transgresses the law or prohibitions that form a system with discourse, but a transgression must, in order to affirm itself as transgression, conserve and confirm in one way or another that which it exceeds, in so far as it is only with respect to the limit it crosses, it can only consist of a sort of displacements of the limits and closure of the discourse. As Gasché claimed, “ to exceed the



discourse of philosophy cannot possibly mean to step outside the closure, because the outside belongs to the categories of the inside. The excess of transgression of philosophy is, therefore, decided at the margins of the closure, only, in an always strategical- that is, historically finite-fashion”(Gasché 1986, 139-140). Gasché sharpens his analysis of transgression and he says “even in transgressions, we are consorting with a code to which metaphysics is tied irreducibly, such that every transgressive gesture reenclaves us- precisely by giving us a hold on the closure of metaphysics- within this closure. One is never installed within transgression, transgression implies that the limit is always at work”(Gasché 1986, 139-140). Even in transgression the concepts of outside and inside cannot be overcome, rather this activity produces an outside with regard to an inside.

For Derrida, what exceeds meaning is the thought which is “given precisely as the thought for which there is no sure opposition between inside and outside”(1981, 12). This determination lies in the meaning of difference. For Hegel, difference is determined as contradiction that is meaningful difference. Therefore it becomes relation to the negative. The difference that such negatively characterised ‘otherness’ makes to thought is that it allows for reflexive determination in a developing dialectical system. Difference makes negativity one face of positivity in the self-exposition of the absolute knowledge. That is why Derrida and Bataille, mostly the former, consider negativity as a resource. Gasché claims,

“ The infrastructures related to the origin, the principle, or the a priori through inscription are in excess of phenomenality in general- that is in excess

of what represents the absolute possibility of the meaning of what is, of what exists: they are more and less than an origin. The infrastructural possibilities represent an irreducible plurality in contrast with the uniqueness of the origin that they make possible but also impossible, since the origin can never dominate their system”(1986, 160-161).

The relation of this system to what it constitutes can no longer be described as a linear genesis. Derrida claims that dissemination is true of inscription in general. It only affirms the play of thought. Thus, inscription contextualizes that which claims uniqueness and oneness. Therefore, deconstruction, for Gasché, reinscribes the origin into the context or text of its infrastructural possibilities. Gasché says, “Infrastructures are conditions as much of the impossibility as of the possibility of origins and grounds”(1986, 160-161).

Derrida defines inscription as a putting into relation and it has also a function of linking two forms of writing: major and minor writing, two economies: restricted and general; as well as the known and the unknown, meaning and non-meaning, but none of the terms of these relations are the principle or ground of this inscription which is harmony, accord, or affinity. Inscription, the operation of deconstruction par excellence, is thus a form of accounting, but a mode of accounting that, like the principles it inscribes, would account for itself. “At stake operation” or inscription, writes Derrida, “is not a self consciousness to maintain and to watch oneself. We are not in the element of phenomenology” (1978, 264). Gasche claims that this operation can function as that alterity that absolutely escapes the logic of philosophical accounting while at the same time accounting for it. Gasche says, “the infrastructures

or the deconstructive operation of inscription or 'mise en rapport' tries to subject something to itself, itself included, it turns into what it purports to account for. In order not to govern, in order not to be subjugated, it must subordinate nothing (direct object), that is to say, be subordinated to nothing or no one (servile mediation of the indirect object)"(1986, 161). For Gasché, this is a 'rapport' (a putting into relation) in the form of 'non-rapport'. It is impossible to account for something that inscribes the operation of accounting in a cluster of structural possibilities that exclude their own self-domination and self-reflection. It is this impossibility of accounting that allows inscription, or 'mise en rapport' (at stake in the operation), to explain what it inscribes—the origins, the principle of legitimacy and responsibility. Thus, inscription, to inscribe or deconstruct or put into relation the transcendental conditions of possibilities with their structural possibilities is to displace the ground of reasonable speech. Gasché says, "this is not to annul or discord reasonable speech. On the contrary it is an attempt to count for the ratio, for the difference between rationality and irrationality, in a gesture that both fulfils and transgresses the most insistent and intimate goal of philosophy" (1986, 163).

#### 4.5. BLANCHOT AND THE LIMIT-EXPERIENCE

Derrida and Gasché showed that in order not to articulate meaning or in order to exceed the philosophical discourse, the transgression of transgression is necessary. Derrida believes that general writing can accomplish this task. Maurice Blanchot's

article on Bataille “Affirmation and the passion of negative thought” also shows the possibility of transgressing the classical discourse without suppressing.

Blanchot does not employ totally different language which would bring us closer to the truth. He also thinks the work of an accompanying discourse might limit itself, so he develops a point from which one would better hear what only a reading can bring forth. Therefore, Blanchot manifests the possible experience as an impossibility which he calls ‘limit-experience’. “Limit-experience is the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically in question”(Blanchot, edited in. Botting and Wilson, 1998, pp: 42-43). For Blanchot, this is a movement of contestation that traverses all of history but it also closes up into a system. Passion of negative thought does not aim to work with classical philosophy’s scepticism or method.

Blanchot claims that in an ‘at stake’ operation, man has a capacity to realise everything. He is capable of all the categories of knowledge and with the passion of negativity, man distinguishes himself from the nature. Negating himself and nature produces himself in producing the world. Therefore man achieves contentment to become discontent. He accomplishes this, because he carries through all his negations. As Blanchot argued, one cannot carry through and exhaust all his negations, since one cannot transform into power all nothingness that he is. On the other hand, the passion of negative thought or the desire to transgression is the experience of what is outside the whole when the whole excludes every outside. This is, Blanchot calls, the experience of the inaccessible, the unknown in itself. In that

sense, Bataille's notion of inner experience comes to the screen. Blanchot says, "the interior experience is the manner in which this radical negation, a negation that has nothing more to negate, is affirmed"(1998, 45). Blanchot continues,

" This is what we have just attempted to clarify by stating that this experience cannot be distinguished from contestation. It affirms nothing, communicates nothing. Maybe the affirmation is this nothing communicated. But there is a risk of substantializing this nothing. The limit experience is still more extreme. This act of supreme negation we have just supposed still belongs to the possible. Power, the power that is capable of everything- is able even to do away with itself as power. Such an act will in no way make us accomplish the decisive step to the surprise of impossibility by allowing us to belong to this non-power that is not simply the negation of power"(1998, 45-46).

For Blanchot, limit-experience is something like a new origin. What it offers to thought is an affirmation. Blanchot calls it 'the essential gift'. This affirmation does not affirm itself rather it affirms affirmation. Limit experience only reaches us at the limit when the limits fall (the experience of non-experience). This is what Bataille called chance and play. Blanchot claims, this point is the 'ultimate exigency' and it never offers itself as accomplished since no memory could confirm it.

One can never comprehend Blanchot's notion of double affirmation as a path to a new origin which defines all discourses and suppresses them within the play of thought. In fact, Blanchot does not aim to reach a singularity in his discourse. Rather than the play of thought, with the second affirmation what he aims is to posit the plurality of speech in which what is essential is to reach an infinite affirmation. For

Blanchot, in the play of thought, a mutual promise is made that commits the play of thought to a common openness. An affirmation, which is always questioned by the thought, has a relation to the unknown. Blanchot claims that this affirmation is not sufficient for infinite affirmation. Hence, other can be defined with this second affirmation and it shows more than one origin or ground for the play of thought. Thus, as Derrida called it, the non-originary origin exceeds the discourse of presence or communication. The heterogeneity is provided in this form of experience and each time there is an infinite difference between interlocutors. This moment of turning together toward the infinite of affirmation is similar to the dialogue that occurs between two persons throwing dice. For Blanchot, speech is dice in the redoubling of affirmation.

Bataille claims that writing, which is metaphoricity itself (Derrida), transgresses the hierarchical order of discourse and of the world associated with it. On the other hand, Derrida and Blanchot show that there is no any absolute transgression that differs in itself from discourse and law, although Derrida also thinks writing exceeds the classical operations in metaphysics. One of Bataille's most radical gestures is to insert the ethnographic distinction sacred and profane into philosophical discussion. Post-structuralist analysis reinscribes transgression within the intertextual field of philosophy. In this respect, Derrida, Blanchot and Foucault displays the meaning and the field of transgression. Bataille sees philosophy as totally other and in this act, he normalises the discourse of philosophy. General writing shows the impossibility of transgressing the other as other. Whether we call conversation or writing to this

infinite affirmation, a text (as a model of poetry), which is always more than itself, exceeds the production of a text within the play of thought. In this play, a text (as a possibility of general writing) can only open a window for heterogeneity by making itself slide with other texts. Hence, the infinite affirmation of thought can only be grasped when it escapes from us. The possibility of difference, thus, lies in the impossibility of awakening.

One can place art in this play of thought and one can claim art has an indispensable role to play. Bataille devoted a specific article to a discussion. In the early primitive art in the caves of Lascaux, Georges Bataille speaks of 'the birth of art'.

#### 4.6. THE CAVES OF LASCAUX AND THE BIRTH OF ART

Bataille calls the findings of early primitive art in the caves of Lascaux around Paris miraculous. He describes these paintings with a strong feeling of excess and presence. Bataille says, "men were suddenly seized by an acceleration of movements, an unexpected overstepping that intoxicates and, like strong alcohol, gives a feeling of power"(1955, 23).

Bataille's study of Lascaux presents transgression in relation to a sacred moment of figuration: Lascaux painting that links the origin of art to the origin of species, that is, human beings as subjects of transgression. Thus, Bataille rewrites the history of a world of the sacred as against the history of a world of reason. Lascaux transfigures us, Bataille writes, and it does so through a force of figuration that transfixes and

fascinates. If Lascaux transfigures us, it also transfigures animality, and this involves a double gesture. The paintings in the cave transfigure the animal they figure, giving it a beautiful form. It is precisely this transfiguration- one that passes through the figure- that transfigures us. But at the same time, the very seductive force of the painted figures also transfigures the artist who created them, transforming the cave man from animal to man.

For Bataille, if art is born of emotion and addresses itself to emotion, the sentiment experienced by historic man is felt by us to parallel our own. What overwhelms us at Lascaux, for Bataille, is the useless figuration of these signs that seduce. According to Bataille, transfiguration of us is the sign for the transfiguration of the other. This communication, this circuit of emotion, the one that links art and the sacred, performs the origin of art and the origin of man at the same time. Bataille tries to pass from non-person to person through an act of figuration received as an act of address. An address that crosses death and time, because it collapses linear time. In that framework we become the subject of transgression. Man becomes animal and vice versa and the difference(s) between them disappears. The most critical point in that commentary is the status of (the) thing or (the) work of art. While defining art or transgression as the other of discourse, the singularity of work is destroyed. Bataille identifies the law of transgression with the necessity of figuration that is origin of art and of man.

Lascaux gives us the image of the origin of art inasmuch as it gives us the origin of art as image. It also suggests one origin of the meaning of the story of



interdiction/transgression, namely Bataille's meditation on the origin of prehistoric figurative art. Interdiction and transgression do not give us the key to Lascaux. Rather, primitive art yields the secret of the theory of alteration and provides the interpretation of its change of meaning through the dual operation of the sacred. "Lascaux" is the story of this story, that is, the origin of art as origin of transgression.

The reason Bataille gives a special place to the figurative images of the animals is not only that they illustrate his theoretical fiction (especially the hybrid figure of the man-beast) but because, when they are interpreted as a reversal of meaning through the theory of alteration, they bear witness to the refusal of the human world of work, which corresponds to the moment of sacred transgression. The visual realism of the animal figures gives a meaning of refusal to the representations of the human, which are construed as having been denied the light of appearance or subjected to wilful deformation, since the animal images attest to the figurative powers of the prehistoric artists. The difference implies that the human was represented as inhuman and guides Bataille's interpretation of this gesture as a refusal of the human world of work.

This all depends, however, on the uselessness of these figures, for it is only as such that they can inscribe the sacred moment of transgression in their figuration. Bataille refuses the conventional interpretation of the animal paintings, which endows them with magical force in an instrumental sense, placing them in the service of a ritual whose aim was to enhance hunting prospects. He allows that the creation of these figures was a magical operation, but he insulates this notion of the magical from any instrumentality. For Bataille, the magical nature of artistic creation implies that a

value of work has been superseded by a value of the sacred; it implies a recognition that no amount of work could obtain the desired result, and hence abnegates human instrumental powers. Bataille wants to convince us that these paintings were useless to primitive man, created in sheer exuberance as a celebration of the magical per se, the sacred.

What he does not explicitly say, however, is that it is just as important that these images remain useless *to us*. Otherwise they would lose their power of seduction and cease to communicate. But the paintings do not operate this resemblance by a self-portrait that would allow us to see ourselves in an image, and so verify the resemblance. Instead it is the inhuman figure that marks the passage to the human; we see only the non-person.

The paintings do not give us the image our curiosity demands: the portrait of the caveman. They convey no useful information, yet in their uselessness they seduce us and enable us to find our "sensible presence" in the cave. It is the mask, the inhuman (all too human) figure of the animal that guarantees the uselessness of these images--to us. And it is the figural image that bears witness to transgression and performs our transfiguration into divine animal.

Sacrifice opens up a different dimension of time-lost: time-for sacrifice is the catastrophe of time as experience of being, that is, of time as being, or being as time. In Lascaux, transgression occurs through the figure or the fiction--for Bataille there is nothing less like a thing than the *useless* figure. Figuration is necessary so that the

play of dissimulation can occur and inscribe the animal into a second-order circuit of address which passes through the image. The figure is necessary for an act of address to communicate across time-to trans-figure. It is the fictive that operates the reciprocal relationship of future, past, and present time in the afterlife of images.

For Bataille, the representations of animals in Lascaux paintings were situated in an ambiguous way. Hence the ambiguous status of animal figures shows what is at the centre of figuration, Bataille calls this 'alteration'. This alteration is specifically characterised by an act of destruction. For Bataille, this defines all representation. In this respect, primitive art is functional and different from the history of art which reflects the history of reason and technology. This explanation can be used against Bataille. If prehistoric art is the other or the origin of art, it is situated within the same status, rather the beginning of art shows also the end of art. For Derrida, the orientation of this symbolic act must be displaced. This process of becoming other, at least for Derrida, is marked by a writing which is older than the symbolic past that it produces. As Blanchot emphasised, at Lascaux, "art is not beginning, nor is man beginning" (1997, 10).

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. CONCLUSION

As Dennis Hollier argued in his book 'Against Architecture' the transgression in Bataille is "the transgression of form"(1989, 24). Hollier claims that form is discourse's temptation. Discourse is developed and then become fixed by means of taking form. For Hollier, in some ways Bataille escapes from this and saves the violence of desire from the temptation of form. The term 'writing' indicates this refusal, a refusal that produces heterogeneity. Hollier thinks that this does not mean to reduce everything to this refusal or to make writing the locus of a new totality. Moreover Hollier claims, "writing does not acknowledge any privilege, hence also does not acknowledge privilege for itself"(1989, 24). For Bataille, writing produces a hole where totality becomes incomplete, so writing marks this incompleteness. Bataille claims that this transgression is never an object of knowledge or recognition.

Hollier argues that "form is the temptation of discourse to arrest itself, to fix on itself, to finish itself off by producing and appropriating its own end"(1989, 24-5). In this respect, for Hollier, Bataille's writing endlessly deforms itself and disguises itself. The writing is always already in connection with death. Bataille was conscious of the fact that only death can bring to an end the language that he used, so for

Bataille, “writing is never more than a game played with an ungraspable reality”(1961, 59). Hollier argues that nowhere in Bataille’s writing one can disapprove this, nowhere does writing meet with the opportunity to conform itself. Hollier says, “ instead of completion, obliteration”(1989, 25).

In that framework, transgression does not belong to theory but to practice. Writing shows one of the modes of this practice. The dead person, Bataille himself, does cease or end to ‘play’. As Hollier argued, without death there can be no room for play. The meaning goes back to itself without completing itself. The corpse, the death body puts meaning in play. The meaning put in play by Bataille’s writing expands itself. Hollier claims, “meaning exists only at risk”(1989, 25).

Bataille believes that science and philosophy would like to fix and accumulate meaning in a closed language, so they invest meaning in the lexicon. For Bataille, there is no meaning except through sacrifice which is meaningless. In dictionary, every word refers to the other, so there is always mutual references in dictionaries. For Bataille it is not easy to escape from this system in language. However, sciences determine the rules of this game in which the moment of words is determined, so they stop the circulation. For Bataille, this can be transgressed by the transgression of the lexical stability. Hollier says,

“There is no possible dictionary for a language whose violent syntax undoes the meaning of all those words. Whereas the formal discourses, science or philosophy, because they want to retain meaning, are condemned to be totally meaningless, the paradoxical project of such a dictionary would consist not in

endowing words with one or more meanings but in expending them unthinkingly”(1989, 27).

For Bataille, painters need no dictionary. This is in contrast to what sciences construct, whose production is encoded in a language requiring specific dictionaries. Literature, joining modern painting in its critique of sciences’ architecture, works against dictionary and grammar.

In *Documents*, Bataille assembles the style of subversion of lexical order. In this respect, Bataille no longer rejects “the fundamental distribution of language between signifier and signified, but discerning behind the meaning, and sometimes independent of the meaning, what ‘job’ words do”(Hollier 1989, 28). In *Documents*, Bataille tries to wrest lexical units from the symbolic code. Hence, he put these units into relation with extralinguistic practices, so the word is not defined by what it means but by what it does, by the effects it induces.

Breton and Eluard had also started a new project with the manifesto of surrealism. They had a promise to subvert the dictionary. Besides, there was not any detailed work in surrealist project. They only proposed unexpected associations between the word and its definition. In this respect for Hollier, Bataille’s project is more comprehensive than the surrealist project.

Bataille first started to transgress the meaning of dictionary, because for him this is the first and the most important difficulty placed at the heart of the discourse that one has to transgress. The second transgression is “the valorisation of

formlessness”(Hollier 1989, 29). For Bataille every dictionary aims to repress the function and the real usage of this word, ‘formless’. Bataille defines this word as such,

“A dictionary would start from the moment in which it no longer provides the meaning of words but their job. *Formless* is thus not merely an adjective with such and such a meaning but a term for lowering status with its implied requirement that everything have a form. Whatever it (formless) designates lacks entitlement in every sense and is crushed on the spot, like a spider or an earthworm. For academics to be content, the universe would have to assume a form. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of fitting what is there into a formal coat, a mathematical overcoat. On the other hand to assert that the universe resembles nothing else and is only *formless* comes down to stating that the universe is something like a spider or spit”(Bataille quoted in Hollier 1989, 30).

Bataille differentiates words’ meaning from their ‘job’. To privilege meaning at the expense of work is to believe that practise can be put into parentheses. For Bataille the job cannot be reduced to the usage. Usage introduces a certain kind of historicity of language because it refers to the current linguistic practices. In that sense, usage is dominated by the category of meaning. On the other hand job refers to a different order. Hollier argues that “it indicates all those processes of repulsion or seduction aroused by the word independent of its meaning”(1989, 30).

As Hollier argued, the job of the word contains the reaction of disgust accompanying its utterance. Therefore it is presented in this state of affairs, so one must evaluate formlessness by taking into consideration this locus of an event. This, in fact, is not a

means for the expression of meaning. Bataille's project allows us to shatter the accumulation of meaning. Writing provides the possibility of the locus of this fissile energy in which the formless as unnamable is put at stake. In fact, Bataille's project is not only limited with the reconfiguration of dictionaries. The nameless is excluded from reproduction. Hollier argues that through the 'formless', "Bataille's language opens up onto an incomplete universe with which his interrupted dictionary communicates through this very wound, through this flaw in form that prevents it from folding back on itself" (1989, 31).

Briony Fer in her article '*Bataille on Painting*' is concerned with the ways in which the constellation of metaphors of dust relates to Bataille's view of the origins of modern painting. Fer mainly focuses on how Bataille described reality disintegrated into dust in Miro's work. In *Documents*, Bataille described the metaphor of dust as the pleasure of not seeing, or at least of not seeing clearly. It is as if grains and specks produces a field of vision in which they form a veil against the light. For Bataille this idea is connected to the fact that "the art of picture making lies not in composition, as it is normally understood, but in decomposition"(Fer ed in Bailey Gill 1995, 155).

Both the word 'formless' and the metaphor of dust shows in what sense Bataille focuses on the loss or the void in representation. For Bataille, Miro's work provides us with a theoretical basis in which decomposition or the relation between word and meaning, image and text or 'thing' and image are obliterated.



In *Documents* Bataille gives a critical account of surrealism. For him, the surrealists' project fails in showing the impossible character of representation. Surrealists change only the forms of objects. In that sense, Bataille emphasises the need for 'work' in order to have the possibility of heterogeneity. In that framework, Bataille claims that servility is essential to communication and society, and sovereignty can only be exposed by 'work'. Hence, sovereignty, appearing in the form of servility, cannot be detached from servility. In fact, for Bataille sovereignty belongs to the sacrifice and it can only be revealed by 'inner experience' or the 'impossible'. At that point, Bataille believes that general economy is the locus of exteriority in which the true nature of sacred is unveiled. However, this last point takes us back to the fact that sovereignty can only be revealed by profanity, but for Bataille, sovereign operation in the end transgresses profanity, either by revealing the essentiality of the sacred or in order to manifest this essentiality. For one thing, this conclusion is paradoxical because sovereign operation becomes something more than the difference denoted by the relation between servility and sovereignty. Consequently, the possibility of sovereign operation lies in the difference rather than the essentiality of the sacred. A yearning for an essential basis for lost community takes us back to the primitive societies' consecrations and rituals in Bataille's discourse. This basis reconstructs both the concept of primitiveness as an originary experience and the meaning of society in contemporary world with respect to the experience of sacred. Therefore, the difference between sacred and profanity shows the priority of the experience of sacred, so the difference between them is reconstructed by this experience. This dislocates the relation between them and reduces the experience of the difference

between them to the hierarchical knowledge. This is the main problematic in Bataille's discourse that we have to recover.

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