

The Hatred of Poetry: Barthes and Bataille

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I will sketch a parallel between Roland Barthes's and Georges Bataille's attitudes towards poetry with the aim of showing why the issue of 'poetry' cannot be tackled without ambivalence, doubt or hesitation as to the value of poetry as such. Assuming that Barthes and Bataille evince a similar love-hate relationship, I will wonder whether such an attitude could not help define poetry with greater semantic sharpness, emotional accuracy and historical relevance. Indeed, Bataille and Barthes seem to have assumed that one can only love poetry if one hates it at the same time. A key reference or example in their analyses is Surrealism, taken to mean both a corpus of texts and a movement leading to avant-gardist politics, a revolutionary and utopian group of artists whose hopes and aspirations were often met with scepticism by Barthes and Bataille, but who, if they expressed impatience, stopped short of rejection. The context of my discussion will thus be both historical and theoretical following a problematics developed in *The Pathos of Distance*, a book in which I situated Barthes in a line of descent stemming from Nietzsche's philosophy of pathos and distance; here, I will argue more precisely that poetry meets conditions needed for an unfolding and unpacking of what the 'pathos of distance' means.¹

I. Fear and Laughing

Quite early, assuredly, Bataille stood out as an important point of reference for Barthes. In his second book, his *Michelet*, a long quote refers to Bataille's 1946 Preface to *La Sorcière (The Witch)*. Later on, the choice of Balzac's novella 'Sarrasine' as a text exemplifying the 'death of the author' had been triggered by Bataille's promotion of that story in the Preface to *The Blue of the Sky*. For Bataille indeed, Balzac's story rivaled Blanchot's *Death Sentence*, Sade's *Eugénie Franval*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Trial* and Proust's entire *Recherche*. This left an echo in Barthes when he devoted a whole seminar to the study of 'Sarrasine'. Here is how Bataille introduced the story:

The narrative that reveals the possibilities of life does not necessarily call you, but it calls up a moment of *rage*, without which its author would be blind to its excessive possibilities. I believe this: only an ordeal that will be suffocating and impossible will provide the author with the means of attaining the distant vision the reader is seeking, tired of the tight limitations conventions impose.²

Already, symptomatically, Bataille curiously misspelled ‘Sarrasine’, writing it with a Z, an orthographic hesitation exploited to the full in *S/Z*.

In 1954, Barthes provided a long quote of Bataille’s preface for Michelet’s *La Sorcière*. The pre-structuralist Barthes paid attention to the contrarian views on literary history put forward by the scandalous dissident Surrealist. Indeed, Bataille had been the first to point how Michelet rehabilitated medieval women accused of being witches not because he wanted to correct an historical error due to fanaticism and intolerance, but more radically, because the historian was fascinated with evil. For Bataille, Michelet wrote his sulphurous book because he had been impelled to it by an anxious and perverse passion. Bataille knew that in order to overcome his frequent writer’s block, Michelet was in the habit of visiting a public urinal nearby, and then would immerse himself into its putrid stink in order to ‘approach as close as he could to the object of his horror’.³ After which, Michelet returned to his desk and wrote. Bataille’s portrait of Michelet carried his own fascination, his identification and his note of approval: ‘I cannot help recalling the author’s countenance, noble, emaciated, the nostrils quivering.’⁴ Suddenly, Michelet takes on Bataille’s face, a face evoked in many novels and essays, drunk, obsessed, ready to scream to the top of his lungs in a seedy brothel. The ‘biographeme’ concerning Michelet was taken from a diary that Bataille had not been allowed to read fully any more than Barthes when he wrote his book a few years later. Curiously, both hit by pure empathy on the darker idiosyncrasies of the French historian.

If Bataille’s recurrent and insistent pathos of excess paved the way for the early Barthes, it could not but lead to polite but obstinate resistance in the later Barthes who captures this vividly:

Bataille, la peur – Bataille, fear

Bataille, after all, affects me little enough: what have I to do with laughter, devotion, poetry, violence? What have I to say about ‘the sacred’, about ‘the impossible’?

Yet no sooner do I make all this (alien) language coincide with the disturbance in myself which I call *fear* than Bataille conquers me all over again: then everything he *inscribes describes* me: it sticks.⁵

This remark echoes the entry on 'Fear' from *The Pleasure of the Text*, in which Barthes quotes Hobbes and asserts that the main 'passion of his life' was fear. Stressing the close proximity of fear and *jouissance*, Barthes quotes Bataille's famous statement: '*J'écris pour ne pas être fou*' ('I write so as not to become mad') but adds that, if that sentence makes sense, it would be absurd to write: 'I write not to be afraid.'⁶ Madness would be incompatible with fear. Here is the loaded division: to Bataille, madness, to Barthes, fear. Barthes confesses here that his pathos shuns the frenzy in eroticism and transgression displayed by Bataille. It is only because this fear remains 'unavowable' and partly clandestine that it can be linked with Bataille's strategies of subversion and all-over excess. A schema makes this clearer in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, for we find a list of authors who had been key influences – the series begins with Gide and ends with Nietzsche, a philosopher who would have given Barthes the wish to write 'moralities' (*RB by RB*, p. 145). While Bataille's series is indeed 'laughter, devotion, poetry, violence' (*RB by RB*, p. 144), Barthes's series moves from the simple 'desire to write' to a widening circle, leading from 'social mythology', to 'semiology' and then 'textuality' before culminating with 'morality' (*RB by RB*, p. 145).

Barthes's Nietzsche would thus be different from Bataille's Nietzsche who would be more 'poetic'. However, we can note that Barthes began by warding off the fear Bataille inspired in him by tackling him at the level of *poetics*. This is how we can approach Barthes's ground-breaking study of Bataille's notorious *Story of the Eye*. Barthes shows in a wonderful essay on the short pornographic novel that a single poetic metaphor underpins the whole text. Barthes's essay was published in *Critique*, which had been founded by Bataille. The special issue on Bataille was dated August-September 1963. Bataille had died one year earlier, in July 1962. The homage organized by Jean Piel, who had taken over *Critique*, included authors like Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault, Pierre Klossowski, Michel Leiris and Philippe Sollers. Whereas other writers stressed the philosophical or biographical dimensions of Bataille's works, Barthes remained safely on the ground of close reading. His first step in his critical analysis of the 'story of an object' was to deny *Story of the Eye* the status of a novel or a prose narrative: 'Should one give this type of composition the name of poem?' (*OCT*, p. 1346).

Of course, Barthes answers his own question in the positive. Bataille's entire work is subsumed under the category of a poetical imagination for which the real does not matter – what matters is the 'improbable' if not the 'impossible':

The poem is what should never, in no case at all, happen, except precisely in the dark and burning region of fantasies, a region that it only can designate; the novel proceeds by a random combination of real elements, the poem by a complete and exact exploration of virtual elements. (OC I, p. 1347).

What follows is a poetic – one could say poetological – reading of Bataille's novella. In Barthes's inspired commentary, the program of the *Story of the Eye* is presented as deploying metaphorical series of images moving from eyes to eggs, from eggs to testicles, and from testicles to the sun. A second series is drawn from the first, the association of metaphors leading by metonymy with dynamic flows, which in the end leads to the soft 'urinary liquefaction of the sky itself' (OC I, p. 1348). This 'poetic' reading of Bataille's text is well-known, and I will just focus on its methodological stakes. After having connected the two series with a biographical foundation in which they refer symptomatically to Bataille's obsession with his Father whose blind eyes and demented sexual obsession echo throughout the works, Barthes tackles the narrative itself. The point he makes is that the narrative elements showcase the interpenetration of metaphorical series that exchange their properties: thus one can speak of 'breaking an eye' and 'blinding an egg'. Parallel metaphors connect distant chains of images, which calls up the principle of the Surrealist image formulated by Pierre Reverdy and taken up by André Breton: '*the more distant and just the relations between two realities are, the stronger the image will be*'. (OC I, p. 1350) Barthes is here linking Bataille's poetics with the basic tenets of Surrealist poetics. Such a poetical art will be both free and bounded. In the end, it will be identical with eroticism because of the sequence of metonymic exchanges. Thanks to the metonymic interactions that insert the metaphors in a narrative, the world becomes strange and troubled. Basic physiological activities like crying, urinating, ejaculating, spitting, thus acquire a new force along with original vibrations and functions.

A new sexual rhetoric is ushered in. Unlike Sade's rhetoric of structural combinations and permutations, Bataille's rhetorics would belong to the history of modernity. If Sade's erotic language had

launched a new way of writing, Bataille's eroticism gives birth to an original style: 'between the two, something has been born, that transforms all experience into a perverted, depraved, corrupted language, *langage dévoyé* (to use again a Surrealist term), which is literature'. (OC I, p. 1351). Here, once more, Barthes quotes Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism*. Breton had been presenting childhood as a model for Surrealist nostalgia; the point was to show that 'true life' can be experienced poetically: 'Des souvenirs d'enfance et de quelques autres se dégage un sentiment d'inaccaparé et par la suite de *dévoyé*, que je tiens pour le plus fécond qui existe. C'est peut-être l'enfance qui approche le plus de la "vraie vie"' (OC I, p. 340). Or, in a literal rendering: 'There emanates from childhood memories and from some other memories a feeling of being unclaimed, thus of a *straying* that I hold to be the most productive feeling one can have. Childhood might approach "true life" most closely.' Breton's sentence provides a resounding rhetorical conclusion following a rather technical discussion of Reverdy's poetics (OC I, p. 337). This shows that Barthes was reading Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* alongside *Story of the Eye*. In the quote, Breton's term of '*dévoyé*' is loaded and tricky; it is not adequately rendered, as Richard Seaver and Helen Lane had it, by 'having gone astray' (see p. 40). The word suggests aberration, going awry, and even evokes sexual transgression; it comes closer to the title of the play that *Nadja* discusses, *Les Détraquées*. Moreover, *dévoyé* keeps a link with 'voyou', as in 'Rimbaud le Voyou': Rimbaud turned into a rogue seer in Benjamin Fondane's 1933 book. For Barthes, the term *dévoyé* also indicates a way of playing with the codes of language. By making them go awry or rendering their 'normal' functions go idle, one subverts them while using them.

The term *dévoyé* condenses Barthes's repeated worry about Surrealism. It recurs in 'The Death of the Author' (1967) when Barthes alludes to Surrealism as one of the important movements defining modernity because it contributed to diminishing the place of the Author. As a way of qualifying the praise, Barthes adds however that the best Surrealism has even been able to do was simply to '*dévoier*' language and its codes:

Lastly, to go no further than this prehistory of modernity, though unable to accord language a supreme place (language being system, and the aim of the movement being, romantically, a direct subversion of codes – itself moreover illusory; a code cannot be destroyed, only 'played

off' (*déjoué*), contributed to the desacralization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning (the famous surrealist 'jolt'-- *saccade*), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing together.⁷

I will return to this discussion in order to show that Bataille's attacks on Surrealism helped Barthes formulate his own critical views. What matters at this point is that Bataille's erotic and excessive poetics should be read by Barthes as part and parcel of the framework of Surrealism – even if this Surrealism will have been *dévoiyé*. This term provides a good handle to tackle Bataille's work on poetry.

A different strategy appears in 1972 when Barthes is discussing 'The Big Toe' for a Cerisy conference devoted to Bataille's work. This Bataille conference was organized by Philippe Sollers who gave a tribune to Julia Kristeva and Jean-Louis Houdebine, which then marked it as 'Tel Quelian'. To stay in line with the *Tel Quel* model, Barthes was reading Bataille more theoretically – his philosophical reading was inflected by Nietzsche who introduced him to the theme of a 'flattening' of modern values. Only distance, difference and verticality would combat against his levelling tendency. This allowed Barthes to propose an entire Bataille lexicon; its entries were listed in alphabetical order. Next to 'Flattening of Values', we find 'Beginning', 'Playing out' (*Déjouer*), 'What and Who?' There were also a few remnants of the semiotic classification, such as 'Codes of Knowledge', 'Idiomatic', 'Paradigm', or 'Vocables'. The later terms fitted more directly the aims and vocabulary of a poetological analysis.

Barthes does not try to provide a close reading of any text but introduced readers to the whole gamut of Bataille's anthropology by moving from Lacanian psychoanalysis (the 'big toe' is a phallic excrescence) to a philosophical lineage aligned with a Deleuzian reading of Nietzsche. The entry entitled 'What and Who?' illustrates this strategy:

Knowledge says of each thing: 'What is it?' What is the big toe? What is this text? Who is Bataille? But value, according to the Nietzschean watchword, prolongs the question: *What is it for me?* In a Nietzschean way, Bataille's text answers the question: *What is the big toe for me, Bataille?*

And by displacement: What is this text, *for me, the reader?*
(Answer: It is the text I would want to write.)⁸

Barthes is paraphrasing Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.⁹ Deleuze had mentioned Plato's metaphysical question ('What is this...?'), a question that for him would reveal the stupidity of metaphysics, its true *bêtise* (*N&P*, p. 86); to this, Deleuze opposed the Nietzschean question, which consists quite simply in asking: 'Who?' (*N&P*, p. 87.) Here would lie the root of Nietzsche's perspectivism: "'Essence," the "essential nature," is something perspective and already presupposes a multiplicity. At the bottom of it there always lies 'what is that for *me?* (for us, for all that lives, etc.)'¹⁰ This subjectivist point of departure then ushers in Barthes's own 'philology of forces, differences, intensities', which is as well an 'active philology of discourse'.¹¹

In what sense can this reading be linked with poetry, as Barthes did when he analyzed *Story of the Eye*? Here, Barthes defines first poetics in an etymological sense. He is interested in sketching *poesis* as a verb, a *poeien*, an active 'making'. Such creative 'making' will affirm the possibility of continuing Bataille's writing. Barthes appears more mimetic here, especially when he follows the gist of Bataille's classification in *Documents*. In a section entitled 'Habillé' (Dressed), he lists items that do not belong to Bataille's references but draw on his own culture and experiences, including mention of 'the habit – reported by a contemporary author – of certain hustlers who remove every garment except their socks'.¹² Barthes adds a remark that might come from *Mythologies*: 'As it happens, for us *the nude* is a plastic value, or even erotico-plastic; in other words, *the nude* is always in a position of *figuration* (this is the very example of strip-tease); closely linked to the ideology of representation, *the nude* is the figure par excellence, the figure of the figure'.¹³ Barthes adds ten more lines on the topic; interesting as these considerations may be, they have indeed little to do with Bataille's essay on the big toe.

A second meaning of 'poetic' can be underlined here. Bataille concluded his 'Big Toe' essay (published in *Documents 6* in 1929) with a caveat; he was warning his readers both against idealization and against poetry:

The meaning of this article lies in its insistence on a direct and explicit questioning of *seductiveness*, without taking into account poetic concoctions that are, ultimately, nothing but a diversion (most human beings are naturally

feeble and can only abandon themselves to their instincts
when in a poetic haze.)¹⁴

We recognize Bataille's wish to escape from the idealism that he denounced early in Breton and his fellow surrealists. His answer was to call upon a 'base materialism'. Such materialism is exemplified by the fact that what makes us human is not our souls or our minds, but our big toes: they allow us to achieve an erect posture while keeping us in close contact with the soil, a humus more often than not dirty and excremental.

Barthes's essay, although the double in length of Bataille's short piece for *Documents*, pays scant attention to the materialist program. He barely mentions the comparative anthropology of organs such as feet and toes. However, the section 'Codes of Knowledge' launches a different vocabulary, and returns to the issue of poetry, albeit obliquely when he writes: 'In Bataille's text, there are many 'poetic' codes: thematic (high/low, noble/ignoble, light/muddy), amphibological (the word *erection*, for instance), metaphorical ('man is a tree)...'¹⁵ If the idea of treating the amphibology of 'erection' – Bataille's essay rests on a sort of pun, the double meaning of man 'standing upright' thanks to the big toe as opposed to apes, and the sexual sense of 'erection' – is logical enough, Barthes's treatment of couples such as 'high' and 'low', 'noble' and 'ignoble', etc., as poetic may come as a surprise. *S/Z*, for instance, never mentions any 'poetic' code. This is a term that one might find under Roman Jakobson's pen, but very rarely under that of Barthes. Is it the fact that Bataille's thinking is structured by couples of opposites? Can this be called 'poetic'? This is doubtful, unless one thinks through Aristotle's *Poetics*, with the discussion of 'high' characters fit for Tragedy and 'low' characters fit for Comedy. If this were the case, the whole of Bataille's works should be understood as a Human Comedy *à la* Balzac.

Subsequent discussions of the same dichotomies place them more sensibly under the heading of ethics, or of a 'baffling' fragmentation of the codes:

Thus, Bataille assures the baffling (*truquage*) of knowledge by a fragmentation of the codes, but more particularly by an outburst of value (*noble* and *ignoble*, *seductive* and *deflated*). The role of value is not a role of destruction, nor yet of dialectization, nor even of subjectivization, it is perhaps, quite simply, a role of *rest*...¹⁶

Such a paradoxical rest entails an equation of *jouissance* and heterology, which is confirmed by another passage in which heterology is situated within a Nietzschean paradigm. But whereas Nietzsche had two terms only at his disposal, *noble* and *base*, Bataille deploys three terms: *noble / ignoble / low*. The *low* is represented by spittle, mud, blood streaming, fury, terrors and obsessions, the violent discord of the organs, the bellowing waves of the viscera (p. 245). As Barthes analyses the third term, it is not neutral. It gives birth to a value, although this generates an eccentric and irreducibly baffling process. Here, we find a double pathos: what matters for Nietzsche is the distance between the high and the low. This distance is irreducible and will not allow for reversal or subversions capable of transforming the high into the low and conversely. To this, Bataille adds this own pathos: it is the pathos of desperate or tragic laughter, the laughter of the low.

In this complex disentangling of Bataille's themes from those of Nietzsche, Barthes points out that the French writer always refuses to create an anti-theology or to launch a gnostic system: '... a third term appears: *Laughter*, which baffles Modesty, the *meaning* of Modesty; and on the other hand, language itself is audaciously distended: *low (bas)* is used as a positive, approbative value ('the low materialism of gnosis'), but its correlative adverb, which according to language should have the same value as the original adjective, is employed negatively, disparagingly ('the *basely* idealistic orientation of Surrealism').¹⁷ We will have to take a closer look at such a 'baser' idealism of Surrealism, along with the specific pathos that it calls up.

II. Pathos, Poetry and Tragedy

In order to ward off the '*Aplatissement des valeurs*' denounced by Nietzsche and Bataille, Barthes introduces an ethics of poetry that underpins the 'pathos of distance' repeatedly evoked in *How to Live Together*. The expression of 'pathos of distance', once more, is borrowed from Nietzsche. We find it in the session of 4 May 1977 of *How to Live Together*: 'Distance as value. This is not to be considered from the narrowly selfish perspective of plain "reserve," "*quant-à-soi*." Nietzsche makes distance a strong value – a rare value: "... the chasm between man and man, between one class and another, the multiplicity of types, the will to be one's self, and to distinguish one's self – that, in fact, I call the *pathos of distance* is proper to all ages' (*The Twilight of Idols*, p. 70)' (*LT*,

p. 132.) The expression evokes a whole network of meanings, and Barthes praises it enthusiastically on 4 May 1977: ‘... “pathos of distance”: an excellent expression’, adding that the main issue becomes: ‘What is desired is a distance that won’t destroy affect’ (p. 132). His Index Card number 64 states: ‘Pathos: it is, in sum, the (affective) Imaginary’ (quoted p. 196; it is not found in the French version.) Here is the place where poetry appears as a self-condensation, half-way between affect and the imaginary world inhabited by the artist’s body.

Nietzsche’s phrase is introduced in *Twilight of the Idols*:

‘Equality’, a certain actual rendering similar of which the theory of ‘equal rights’ is only an expression, belongs essentially to decline: the chasm between man and man, class and class, the multiplicity of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out – that which I call *pathos of distance* – characterizes every *strong* age. The tension, the range between the extremes is today growing less and less – the extremes themselves are finally obliterated to the point of similarity.¹⁸

Why should there be pathos where there is ethical distance, Barthes wonders. He keeps the terms coupled but somewhat unsteadily, especially when devoting a whole entry of his subjective encyclopaedia to ‘Distance’. In that sub-section, Barthes develops the idea that ‘living together implies an ethics (or a physics) of distance between cohabiting subjects’ (*LT*, p. 72). This is a fundamental problem and his whole course will hinge around it. He provides marvellous examples, an aporetic juxtaposition of texts, periods, and concepts. The apparently curious qualification added in a parenthesis after ‘ethics’: ‘(or a physics)’ can be explained by the fact that Barthes discusses bodies in rest or motion as they interact (or not) together. There is a physics of distance according to which one calculates ratios, speeds, measures, moving from minimalist elements like the different between touching and brushing against (*frôlage*) to the loaded link between mother and son, which leads Barthes to mention a ‘threshold between anaclitism and erotic pleasure: the mother caring for her newborn baby’ as entailing a ‘strategic play of distances (always keeping the other at an arm’s length)’. This yields then ‘strategies of furtive contact (cf. *Werther*)’ and finally a complete ‘manual of the pleasures of contact, of brushing up against’ (all these quotes from *LT*, p. 74).

Barthes thus systematizes an ethics of distance. What the rules of Saint Pachomius, Saint Benedict and other founders of religious communities had in common was a complex regulation of distances that respected individual affects. The 'idio-rhythmicity' of Greek monks of the Mount Athos who live partly in isolation looks like a strange guide if we want to understand how to live together. But deeper than this, one finds a psychoanalytic ethics of desire consistent with Freud, Winnicott, and Lacan. There is also a 'morality' in the 'pathos of distance', for it underpins all at once a maxim of non-moral morality, a principle allowing one to keep the delicacy of feelings, and a new philosophy of values presented in a subjective manner. Here one meets again Nietzsche, who allows Barthes to see culture as a play of forces generating distance and difference. Culture is a 'dispatching' (*LT*, p. 4), an eccentric array of subjective differences. The Nietzsche presented by Gilles Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* goes in the same direction, especially when Deleuze examines 'genealogy', a term meaning not simply 'origin or birth' but 'difference or distance at the origin': 'Genealogy means as well nobility and lowness, nobility and the vile, nobility and decadence at the origin' (*N&P*, p. 3). The differential element, based upon *Genealogy of Morals* entails the loss of any foundation. A *feeling* of distance or difference offers the only key.

Deleuze explains that any 'genealogy' entails some form of 'pathos' and to make the point clearer compares Nietzsche with Spinoza (p. 70). He notes that Spinoza's *Ethics* posited that the power to be affected accompanies each source of force: 'The same obtains with Nietzsche: the power to be affected does not mean necessarily passivity but affectivity, sensibility, sensation. It is in this sense that Nietzsche, even before having elaborated the concept of will to power and having endowed it with all its signification, talked already about a *feeling of power*' (*N&P*, p. 70). The issue had been explored by Deleuze in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Deleuze's analysis of 'expression' in Spinoza's *Ethics* distinguished between suffering, passion, feelings, affection and affect.¹⁹ Above all, he reiterated Spinoza's famous interrogation: 'What can a body do?' He answers: a body expresses. This triggers a whole poetics of expression that generates affects. For Spinoza, the main affects of philosophy are joy, when our being is augmented, and sadness, when it is diminished. The main thrust of Deleuze's book is to link pathos with the will to power with the idea of side-tracking or undermining themes that could sound reactionary. Fundamentally,

power will give birth to a differential sensibility; power is a power to be affected. Art posits affects and poetry is a generator of affects.

The theme of joyful pathos is related to aesthetics via the analysis of tragedy in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. This book was not one Barthes praised in his early essays. In a 1953 text on the 'Powers of Ancient Tragedy', Nietzsche is taken to task for having reduced Greek tragedy to Wagner's drama.²⁰ However, after having read Deleuze, Barthes was reconciled with Nietzsche. Poetic joy is the affirmation of what is, even if it leads to a desire that everything should be repeated eternally. In his *gaya scienza*, Nietzsche asserted a knowledge akin to the tragic '*pathos mathos*' (we learn when we suffer) of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*.²¹ Thus tragedy can bring joy, and that it remains far from negative affects like terror or pity highlighted by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

On May 4, 1977, Barthes ends and recapitulates with a recall of Deleuze on Nietzsche (*LT*, p. 133), insisting that he has followed a poetical and subjective trajectory moving in a non-linear manner from force to force, from affect to affect, from radiant node to radiant node.

Nietzsche, mediated by Deleuze, suggests that Barthes appears as an artist or a poet, someone who creates an 'affect', much more than a philosopher, i.e., someone who creates a concept, to use Deleuze's distinction in *What is Philosophy?* Thus 'living together' refuses to be contained or constrained by the strength of a problematic but appears underpinned by lyrical, anguished or ecstatic questions touching upon Barthes's body. If there is any ethics of distance to be deduced from those pages, it will be an ethics that we elaborate from our own bodies, persons, lives.

The Nietzsche who emerged for Barthes in the last years hesitated between the figure of the distraught lover writing to Cosima Wagner 'Ariadne, I love you', quoted in *How to Live Together* (p. 92), and the mad philosopher embracing a horse in Turin before collapsing, as Barthes reminisced in *Camera Lucida*. Watching moving photographs, Barthes has 'entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die, as Nietzsche did when, as Podach tells us, on January 3, 1889, he threw himself in tears on the neck of a beaten horse: gone mad for Pity's sake.'²² This leads to a definition of Poetry as sandwiched between Maurice Blanchot's *Writing of the Disaster* and D. W. Winnicott's last, posthumous, paper, 'Fear of Breakdown'.²³ We now understand why Barthes could translate Bataille's erotic excess into his own pathos of fear, a pathos condensed in this vivid expression: 'I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a*

catastrophe which has already happened' (CL, p. 96). Barthes was meditating on his own 'catastrophe', his mother's recent death. Its tragedy was encapsulated in a photograph of the mother when she was five, a photograph that functioned like a personal haiku. He wisely decided not to reproduce it in *Camera Lucida*. However, all the other photographs he shows keep alive the future death of the subjects who posed for them, as with Lewis Payne in Alexander Garner's 1865 portrait. The subject was awaiting his execution. He is both dead and going to die, for ever, exemplifying a perfectly Nietzschean 'eternal return of the same'. Barthes concludes: 'Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe' (CL, p. 96) but we could generalize the insight to poems and poetry.

These poignant images, so many beacons in an endless labyrinth, offer all their pathetic metaphors. Unspeakably private, they all testify to communal grieving. *How to Live Together* presents Barthes's version of the impossible or 'unavowable' community called for by Bataille. Bataille stated this about Nietzsche, highlighting a 'desire for a community' along with the sad fate of being condemned to mere poetry for want of the 'sacred':

Literature (fiction) took the place of what had formerly been the spiritual life; poetry (the disorder of words) that of real states of trance. Art constituted a small free domain, outside action: to gain freedom it had to renounce the real world. [...] Nietzsche is far from having resolved the difficulty. Zarathustra is also a poet, and a literary fiction at that!²⁴

III. Barthes 1947: Bataille and Beckett against Sartre

Bataille then became the poet who hates poetry as well as the philosopher who hates philosophy. We understand this if we read *La Haine de la poésie*, then retitled *The Impossible*. A rapid glance at the contents reveals is that it begins like a prose narrative and ends with a sequence of free-verse poems. Often, there is a mixture of prose poems and philosophical meditations. The poems are found in the last section entitled 'Oresteia' beginning thus:

Oresteia
skydew
bagpipe of life

night of spiders
of countless hauntings
inexorable play of tears
o sun in my breast long sword of death
rest along my bones
rest you are the lightning
rest viper
rest my heart

the rivers of love turn pink with blood
the winds have ruffled my assassin hair²⁵

This poem was published in 1943. One can date from 1942 the moment when Bataille began writing poetry, and he wrote a lot of poetry in fact when planning what he saw as the core of his work, the trilogy of *Inner Experience*. Just then he was drafting *La Haine de la poésie* along with *Story of the Rats*. As we have seen, Bataille's hatred of poetry did not entail a rejection of poetry but registered deep ambivalence about its origin, value and function. 'Oresteia' concludes the narrative about a new love for the poet with a series of meditations on poetry as a play with chance and the disorder of the universe. Here is a revealing passage, written in the form of Nietzschean aphorisms:

The heart is human to the extent that it rebels (this means: to be a man is 'not to bow down before the law'.)

A poet doesn't justify he doesn't accept – nature completely. True poetry is outside laws. But poetry ultimately accepts poetry.

When to accept poetry changes it into its opposite (it becomes the mediator of an acceptance)! I hold back the leap in which I would exceed the universe, I justify the given world, I content myself with it.²⁶

For Bataille, poetry can only be appreciated after it has been negated; as he writes in the same Oresteia: 'Poetry that does not rise to the non-sense of poetry is only the hollowness of poetry, is only beautiful poetry' (p. 161). The poet becomes like Orestes, the mad killer, the dispatcher of the family Ate, and abandons even poetry at the very end – it was only a

detour, not the Night itself. In these vignettes, we see that even if Bataille is often echoing poets like Nerval and Racine in a rather classical manner, he consistently tries to push the limits of poetry. Poetry, on his view, has to dramatize the statement of a non-dialectical dialectics; thus poetry should express a thinking of the Outside, leading the poet to an excess of meaning overcoming any stable meaning.

Hence the paradox that poetry is only possible when it becomes radically Impossible. The first paradox generates a second paradox, historical this time: if Bataille kept attacking the Surrealists and André Breton for being too idealist, lyrical, literary therefore wrongly 'poetical' before the war, if he played the role of the enemy of Surrealism from within, he came closer to Surrealism during and after the war. When he founded *Critique* in 1946, Bataille reviewed in the first issue (June 1946) Jules Monnerot's book *Les Faits Sociaux ne sont pas des choses*. In this review he alludes to Monnerot's earlier *La Poésie Moderne et le Sacré* (1945) in order to offer a surprisingly positive appreciation of Surrealism: 'Between the two wars poetry ceased to be seen as the supreme honour of an isolated individual. From this perspective surrealism was decisive; it caused the poetic text to become the expression of common elements in a way similar to what was revealed by dreams' (*AM*, p. 104). Monnerot, a sociologist, had connected his assessment of the place of disenfranchised people in society with the 'accursed' role played by poets like Rimbaud and Lautréamont, both famously dubbed 'accursed poets' ('*les poètes maudits*').

The second issue of *Critique*, published in July 1946, continued this rapprochement with Surrealism. There, Bataille reviewed Breton's *Arcane 17* under the revealing heading of 'Surrealism and How It Differs from Existentialism'. On Bataille's view, Surrealism was still a vital and dynamic movement in 1946, asking: 'Who today could deny the radiant power of Surrealism?'²⁷ Bataille praised in Surrealism the combination of independent aims recognizing each individual's violent or anarchic desires with the need to keep a group activity: 'It was André Breton who rightly recognized that a poet or painter does not have the power to say what is in his heart, but that an organization of a collective body would. This 'body' could speak in different terms from an individual' (*AM*, p. 60). However, commenting on the praise of the child-woman who seduces the poet in *Arcane 17*, Bataille voices some doubts: 'If André Breton's position demands a body in whose name to speak, if the body establishes a point of departure, it does not always follow that the agreement could go beyond the foundation (which maintains that all art

that is not the liberty of poetry would be servile and betray)' (*AM*, p. 63). Cryptic as they may sound, these terms point to directions followed by Barthes in his last years.

In his flattering account of André Breton's life and art, Bataille stresses that Surrealism embodied the freedom of poetry. This is what he opposes to the freedom celebrated differently by Sartre's existentialism:

The profound difference between surrealism and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre hangs on this character of the *existence* of liberty. If I do not seek to dominate it, liberty will *exist*: it is poetry; words, no longer striving to serve some useful purpose, set themselves free and so unleash the image of *free existence*, which is never bestowed except in the instant. (*AM*, p. 66)

Bataille even quoted Breton's definitions from the second Manifesto of Surrealism, a Manifesto that he would have had good reason to excoriate since it contained a vicious *ad hominem* attack against him; but in 1946, Bataille sided with Breton against Sartre's existentialism, rejecting it as a humanist philosophy.

Finally, in a 1947 article on Jaques Prévert also published in *Critique*, Bataille provided a sustained definition of poetry. There was a time, Bataille remembers, when poetry adhered to rules of diction and propriety – all this has been abolished. Today, he claims, poetry is '*literature which is no longer literary*' (*AM*, p. 138). It gives voice to what, in us, is '*stronger than us*' (*AM*, p. 138). After a detailed comparison between Kafka's *The Castle* and Prévert's *Paroles*, he concludes that the latter's poetry is preferable because it contains the derision of poetry along with the lyrical impulse. He liquidates greatness and pomposity by taking as his focal point the discourse of childhood and immaturity – but presents his subject in a state of eternal freedom. A long section is devoted to the sacred, to myth and ritual, to sacrifice and destruction, in which one can see the lineaments of the main theses of *The Accursed Share*. Facing such ponderous notions, Prévert's light verse might seem not weighty enough. Not so, says Bataille: they also contribute to a wholesome destruction: 'It is poetry, because, in itself, it harshly effects the ruin of poetry' (*AM*, p. 152).

By then, Bataille had joined forces with Surrealism. He participated in the 1947 Surrealist exhibition, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and wrote a short essay on 'The Absence of Myth' for its catalogue. It was this exhibition that Sartre attacked in the articles that together

constituted *What is Literature?* His last chapter, 'Situation of the Writer in 1947', mentioned Bataille who had withdrawn an article for *Les Temps Modernes*; Bataille would have told Merleau-Ponty that all must unite against Communism.²⁸ Sartre, then Stalinist, decided that a Trotskyite position was anti-communist. He devoted a long footnote to Surrealism so as to reject it vehemently. As to Bataille, Sartre thought that he could refute him by comparing his repeated invocation of 'negativity' with the Scepticism denounced as a mistake by Hegel. Thus alluding to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Sartre meant to show that Bataille, who was always quoting Hegel, had no monopoly on the philosopher.

In sum, Sartre rejected Surrealist poetry in order to praise the political efficacy gained by the novel. *What is Literature?*, first published in instalments in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1947, contains a critical interpretation not only of Surrealism as a movement, but also of poetry as such. The first essay in the book tackles poetry as the emancipation of the word from all other constraints (p. 6). The word becomes a mirror of the world for the poet. Sartre quotes Breton on Saint-Pol Roux (who refused to deliver any 'message') and Michel Leiris's *Glossaire* to argue that it would be wrong to request a social commitment from poetry. However, the freedom gained is short-lived: the poet will have missed on the most important element of literature for Sartre in 1947, commitment to politics and the real world. Prose, a mode of expression that bets on the contrary on the transparency of language, is better suited for this serious task.

In 1947, Barthes too was engaged in a critical dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre's dialectics of 'commitment' and his clear rejection of Surrealist poetry in order to praise a new political efficacy of prose writing. The first sections of *Writing Degree Zero* were published in *Combat* in 1947, months after the publication of Sartre's *What is Literature?* Barthes's first chapter 'What is Writing?' echoed Sartre's first chapter, albeit inverting its terms. Sartre had defined writing in terms of communication, as a collective response to historical situations. Barthes wrenched the term from humanistic existentialism and neo-Marxist dialectics and endowed it with renewed dynamism. Sartre had only two terms in a dialectics predicated upon the old 'form and content' division: language boiled down to the communication of ideas and style provided the means of expression. By providing three terms, Barthes escaped from such a conceptual deadlock. *Écriture* was emancipated from Sartre's dilemma, the choice between a private discourse and a socially responsible position, that is to say the position of a 'committed'

intellectual. When Barthes' *writing* took upon itself features usually attributed to *style*, it also eschewed the usual formalism of stylistics. Defining writing, in effect, as the morality or responsibility of form, Barthes was lending moral and political weight to formal innovation, a point that Sartre had all but rendered impossible.

Barthes's essay on the degree zero of *écriture* sketched a history of modernity from the Revolution to the *nouveau roman* via Flaubert and Mallarmé. However, the poetry chapter remained very close to the terms outlined by Sartre. When Barthes wonders there is a 'poetic writing', he stresses the fact that contemporary writing begins, not with Baudelaire, but with Rimbaud (*WDZ*, p. 42). He quotes twice René Char, who had the distinction of being politically active and a companion of the Surrealists, but concludes firmly that there can be no poetic writing, only poetic styles (*WDZ*, p. 52). The violence of the autonomous and vertical word destroys any humanism, any ethical scope. What would have been positive for Bataille becomes a hedging admission that there is an inhuman world out there:

The explosion of the poetic word institutes then an absolute object; Nature becomes a succession of verticalities; the object suddenly stands erect, filled with all its possibles: it can only be a landmark in an unfulfilled and thereby terrible world. [...] these poetic words exclude men: there is no poetic humanism of modernity: this erect discourse is full of terror, that is to say, it relates man not to other men, but to the most inhuman images in Nature: heaven, hell, the sacred, childhood, madness, pure matter, etc. (*WDZ*, p. 50, modified).

It looks as if Barthes had Bataille in mind, more than Char, at this point – but in order to move into the direction previously taken by Sartre.

Barthes's modernity, then, would not be epitomized by poetry but by the *nouveau roman*. Its catalogues, its descriptive vertigo, its games with pseudo-objectivity destroy a previous generation's grandiloquence. Alain Robbe-Grillet, Albert Camus or Maurice Blanchot promoted a 'neutral' style so as to stage a passive resistance to the belated political rectitude of writers who postured in distasteful pseudo-heroics. The 'neutrality' of this new language, language as it was spoken in the streets – since one can say that the concept of a 'writing degree zero' restates Blanchot's 'neuter' – rejected the high modernist idea of mastery over a plurality of 'styles'. What was lost for stylistics was gained for the ethics

of language. The new prose writing would usher in the later concept of the 'morality of form'.

At the same time, better than Bataille, or more subtly and durably, Barthes found a way out of neo-Hegelian dialectics of form and content. He saw this in Camus's *The Stranger* in 1944. The text displayed proudly its vernacular; the famous present perfect of the narrative exemplified a 'style-less style' and created a first 'writing degree zero', because Camus had launched a style of 'indifference', a new absurd that felt as 'flat and deep like a mirror'.²⁹ Barthes's review argued that in *The Stranger*, 'we see the beginning of a new style, style of silence and silence of style, in which the voice of the artist – equally removed from sighs, blasphemy and gospels – is a white voice, the only voice that can fit our unredeemable distress' (OC I, p. 63). Barthes accepted the validity of Camus's ethical stance not because he endorsed Camus's alleged moralism but because he saw there the emergence of writing – a flat writing capable of rising to the challenge of recent historical catastrophes.

Beckett, a prose writer, a playwright as well as a poet, can provide an unexpected link between Bataille and Sartre. All three agreed in their critical assessments of the power and limitation of poetry in an age that saw the demise of the historical avant-gardes. If for Bataille, 'poetry' tended to absorb 'philosophy', one can say the same of Beckett whose texts can be subsumed under the heading of 'poetry'. Beckett participated in the first and the second journals that went under the name *transition*, while Barthes moved from *Combat* to *Tel Quel*: these four reviews never saw any difference between experimental prose and poetry. Both *Tel Quel* and *transition* would take *Finnegans Wake* as an example of autonomous and autotelic 'writing' progressing on its own and beyond meaning.

It was also *Tel Quel* that introduced Barthes to the thought of Derrida, since both were often paired by the review. Derrida did not hesitate to criticize Bataille rather violently as one sees in *Writing and Difference*. Barthes had been impressed by Derrida's critical assessment of Bataille and quotes the discussion several times. He too agreed with the view that Bataille's heterology was simply a misguided or twisted Hegelianism. However, in a 1980 'Preface for an Album of Photographs by Lucien Clergue', we see that Bataille's key term of 'excess' can bleed into Derridean concepts like the 'supplement': 'When a work exceeds (*déborde*) the meaning that it seems to have posed, this means that the Poetic (*le Poétique*) is in it: the Poetic is one way or the other the supplement of meaning' (OC III, p. 1204). This echoes exactly what

Bataille had written in *Guilty*: 'Poetry that is not engaged in an experience exceeding poetry (distinct from it) is not the movement but the residue left by the turbulence. [...] Further along than poetry, the poet laughs at poetry. The poet laughs at how delicate poetry is.'³⁰

Bataille would say that he only approached poetry either to 'miss' it, or, better, to be missed by it. 'I approach poetry but only to miss it' has the translation of *The Impossible* by Robert Hurley. The original is slightly different: 'Je m'approche de la poésie; mais pour lui manquer' (RR, p. 561). This implies not just 'missing' the poetic aim but also being lost to poetry. It is in fact 'poetry' as excess that cannot but miss Bataille himself.³¹ On the whole, Barthes's thinking never shifted facing Surrealist poetry. His critical point of view remained fundamentally 'Bataillean', but his Bataille was later tempered by deconstruction. Derrida shows that Bataille misses the issue of language by engaging in misdirected grappling with Hegel and Nietzsche. Derrida pinpoints the very impossibility of Bataille's theory of the Impossible as Poetry, as in the following illuminating passage:

The poetic or the ecstatic is that *in every discourse* which can open itself to the absolute loss of its sense, to the (non-)base of the sacred, of nonmeaning, of un-knowledge or of play, to the swoon from which it is reawakened by a throw of the dice. What is poetic in sovereignty is announced in 'the moment when poetry renounces *theme* and meaning' (EI, p. 239)

If it is reduced to 'playing without rules', poetry will lose its edge and risk being tamed, turning into an inconsequential parlour game. Such a risk is properly *modern*. To avoid it, Bataille always argues that poetry should be 'accompanied by an affirmation of sovereignty'. Thus Derrida praises Bataille's 'admirable, untenable formulation, which could serve as the heading for everything we are attempting to reassemble here as the form and torment of his writing, the commentary on its absence of meaning'.³² He adds: 'Without this, poetry would be, in the worst of cases, *subordinated* and, in the best of cases, *inserted*'. For then, 'laughter, drunkenness, sacrifice and poetry, eroticism itself, subsist autonomously, in a reserve, inserted into a sphere, *like children in a house*. Within their limits they are minor sovereigns who cannot contest the *empire* of activity' (WD, p. 261)

Derrida reminds us that Bataille's paradoxical definitions of poetry derive from his repeated confrontation with Surrealism on the one

hand and with Hegel on the other. For Bataille, poetry is the dominant expression of a wish to be sovereign, free, and non-repetitive. Poetry is a rupture with the economy of meaning, even if the phrasing leads to an impression of great ‘ambiguity’, as Derrida states (*WD*, p. 261). This concept of poetry is then ground to pieces by Derrida’s debunking machine; the deconstructive reading ends up proving that the extreme position of a free poetry could not avoid being caught up in the totalities of Hegel’s philosophy, from which even Nietzsche cannot provide a way out. If there is a circular link joining poetry and sovereignty, the loss of meaning implied always attributes meaning to the very absence of meaning (*WD*, p. 262).

The hypothesis that Barthes approaches Surrealism via a Derridianized or ‘deconstructed’ Bataille can be confirmed if one looks at an interview in the *Quotidien de Paris* in May 1975. Barthes’s interlocutor, Daniel Oster, a poet and novelist himself, was also a specialist in Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, about whom he had written ‘docufictions’. The heading of the piece makes it clear why Oster had chosen the topic of Surrealism to talk with Barthes: ‘The Surrealists have missed the body’. In less than two pages, Barthes demolishes the Surrealist ideology of Romantic origins of language; he debunks its naïve belief in the spontaneity of the Unconscious achieved via automatic writing:

I do not like the notion of *automatic writing* at all. [...] If we imagine that the fairy *Automatism* touches the speaking or writing subject with her magic wand, the toads and vipers falling from his or her mouth will only be stereotypes. The very idea of automatic writing implies an idealist view of man, split between a deep subject and a speaking subject. The text can only be a plait (or a braid, *une tresse*) that has to be conducted in a very wily (or devious, *retorse*) way between the Symbolic and the Imaginary. (*OC* III, p. 364)

Barthes attacks Breton by name. It was Breton who imposed a strong sexual repression and a no less strict syntactic ‘corset’ constraining his own language. The Surrealists were not able to let the body speak, and therefore remained caught up in literature. They believed in a Nature where they thought they could witness the ‘birth of the signifier’, a poetic primitivism that Barthes abhors. The only positive element he finds in Surrealism is their recurrent attempt – although doomed – to

link writing with collective practices, to move from literary experiments to actions in real life. Their cult of friendship is to be praised in so far as they tried to create a textual and social space (OC III, p. 365). However, Surrealism has only proposed a 'gesture', not a 'fiction'. Oster asks Barthes why he has forgotten Desnos and the *Magnetic Fields*. He replies offhandedly that one always forgets someone when writing about literature; there cannot be a perfect adequation between rules and examples. Barthes then ends with a typical pirouette that will serve as my own: 'In my forgetting [Desnos, Breton, Soupault], there may have been something in the wind (*il y a sans doute anguille sous roche*): infinite difference' (OC III, p. 365).

Notes

- ¹ Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Pathos of Distance: Affects of the Moderns* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).
- ² Quoted in Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1974), p. 267. Translation modified. Original text in Georges Bataille, *Romans et Récits*, Pléiade edition (Paris, Gallimard, 2004), p. 111. Hereafter *RR*.
- ³ Bataille is here quoted by Barthes in *Michelet*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 221.
- ⁴ Barthes, *Michelet*, p. 221.
- ⁵ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 144. Hereafter *RB by RB*.
- ⁶ Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 1994), vol. II, p. 1519. I hereafter refer to the three volumes of *Œuvres complètes* as *OC I*, *OC II* and *OC III*.
- ⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 144.
- ⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Outcomes of the Text', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 247.
- ⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1967). Hereafter *N&P*.
- ¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 301.
- ¹¹ Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 107, 168. Hereafter *LT*.
- ¹² Barthes, 'Outcomes of the Text', p. 243.
- ¹³ Barthes, 'Outcomes of the Text', p. 243.
- ¹⁴ Georges Bataille, 'The Big Toe', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekel, trans. by Allan Stoekel et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 23.
- ¹⁵ Barthes, 'Outcomes of the Text', p. 239.
- ¹⁶ Barthes, 'Outcomes of the Text', p. 242.
- ¹⁷ Barthes, 'Outcomes of the Text', p. 246-47.
- ¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 102 (paragraph 37).
- ¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1992), pp. 218-21.
- ²⁰ Roland Barthes 'Pouvoirs de la tragédie antique', in *OC I*, p. 222.
- ²¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, p. 19.
- ²² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981), p. 117. Hereafter *CL*.

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- ²³ Donald W. Winnicott, 'Fear of Breakdown', publication overseen by Clare Winnicott, *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 1 (1974), 103-07.
- ²⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 340.
- ²⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991), 121. Translation modified. See *L'Archangélique et autres poèmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), p. 89, plus notes on pp. 193-94.
- ²⁶ Bataille, *The Impossible*, p. 158.
- ²⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, trans. by Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2006), p. 57. Hereafter *AM*.
- ²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 231.
- ²⁹ Roland Barthes, 'Réflexion sur le style de *L'Etranger*', in *OCI*, p. 63.
- ³⁰ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. by Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), p. 93.
- ³¹ Bataille, *The Impossible*, p. 159. The original is in *RR*, p. 561.
- ³² Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 261. Hereafter *WD*.

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