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The Sacred Conspiracy

Georges Bataille

1936

A nation already old and corrupted which will courageously shake off the yoke of its monarchical government in order to adopt a republican one will only be able to maintain itself by many crimes, for it is already in crime, and if it wants to pass from crime to virtue, that is, from a violent to a gentle state, it will fall into an inertia which will soon result in its certain ruin. (SADE)

That which had a political face and imagined itself political will unmask itself one day and reveal itself to be a religious movement. (KIERKEGAARD)

Today solitary, you who live separated, you will one day be a people. Those who appointed themselves will one day form an appointed people — and it is from this people that will be born the existence that surpasses man. (NIETZSCHE)

What we have undertaken should be confused with nothing else, cannot be limited to the expression of an idea and even less to what is justly considered art.

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It is necessary to produce and to eat: many things are needed that are yet nothing, and this is equally the case with political agitation.

Before fighting to the bitter end, who thinks to leave his place to men it is impossible to look upon without feeling the need to destroy them? But if nothing could be found beyond political activity, human greed would meet nothing but the void.

WE ARE FEROCIOUSLY RELIGIOUS, and insofar as our existence is the condemnation of all that is recognized today, an internal requirement wants us also to be imperious.

What we are undertaking is a war.

It is time to abandon the world of the civilized and its light. It is too late to want to be reasonable and learned, which has led to a life without attractions. Secretly or not, it is necessary to become other, or else cease to be.

The world to which we have belonged proposes nothing to love outside of each individual insufficiency: its existence is limited to its convenience. A world that can't be loved to death — in the same way a man loves a woman — represents nothing but personal interest and the obligation to work. If it is compared with worlds that have disappeared it is hideous and seems the most failed of all of them.

In those disappeared worlds it was possible to lose oneself in ecstasy, which is impossible in the world of educated vulgarity. Civilization's advantages are compensated for by the way men profit by it: men of today profit by it to become the most degraded of all beings who have ever existed.

Life always occurs in a tumult with no apparent cohesion, but it only finds its grandeur and reality in ecstasy and ecstatic love. He who wants to ignore or neglect ecstasy is a being whose thought has been reduced to analysis. Existence is not only an agitated void: it is a dance that forces us to dance fanatically. The idea that doesn't have as object a dead fragment exists internally in the same way as does a flame.

One must become firm and unshakeable enough that the existence of the world of civilization finally appears uncertain. It is useless to respond to those who are able to believe in this world and find their authorization in it. If they speak it is possible to look at them without hearing them, and even if we look at them, to only “see” that which exists far behind them. We must refuse boredom and live only on that which fascinates.

On this road it would be vain to move about and to seek to attract those who have vague impulses, like those of passing the time, laughing, or becoming individually bizarre. One must advance without looking back and without taking into account those who don't have the strength to forget immediate reality.

Human life is defeated because it serves as the head and reason of the universe. Insofar as it becomes that head and reason it accepts slavery. If it isn't free, existence becomes empty or neuter, and if it is free, it is a game. The earth, as long as it only engendered cataclysms, trees, and birds was a free universe; the fascination with liberty became dulled when the earth produced a being who demanded necessity as a law over the universe. Man nevertheless remained free to no longer respond to any necessity. He is free to resemble all that is not he in the universe. He can cast aside the idea that it is he or God who prevents everything else from being absurd.

Man escaped from his head like the condemned man from his prison.

He found beyond him not God, who is the prohibition of crime, but a being who doesn't know prohibition. Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless, who fills me with anguish because he is made of innocence and crime. He holds a weapon of steel in his left hand, flames like a sacred heart in his right hand. He unites in one eruption birth and death. He is not a man. But he isn't a god, either. He is not I, but he is more I than I: his belly is the labyrinth in which he himself goes

astray, led me astray, and in which I find myself being he, that is, a monster.

What I think and represent I didn't think or represent alone. I am writing in a small cold house in a fishing village; a dog has just barked in the night. My room is next to the kitchen of Andre Masson, who is moving happily about and singing. At the very moment I am writing he has put on the phonograph a recording of the overture of "Don Giovanni." More than anything else, the overture of "Don Giovanni" ties what is given me of existence to a challenge that opens up a ravishment outside of the self. At this very instant I look upon that headless being, made up of two equally strong obsessions, become "Don Giovanni's Tomb." When a few days ago I was in this kitchen with Masson, sitting with a glass of wine in my hand while he, suddenly imagining his own death and that of his kin, his eyes fixed, suffering, almost crying out that death had to become an affectionate and passionate death, crying out his hatred for a world that made weigh even on death its worker's hand, already I could no longer question that the lot and the infinite tumult of human life are open not to those who exist like poked out eyes, but to those who are like clairvoyants, carried away by an upsetting dream that could not belong to them.