An Anarchist Conjuration

The Benjamin-Bataille Meeting and the Critique of Left-Wing Progressism

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Contents

Abstract

The article explores the theoretical complicities between the thought of Walter Benjamin and Georges Bataille. Taking as a starting point the anecdote of the Book of Passages, according to which Benjamin would have entrusted this manuscript to the care of Bataille, questions are raised about the possible link between the two thinkers. The relationship that both authors maintained with the leftist political thought of the time and the way in which their revolutionary conceptions distance themselves from orthodox Marxism and dialectical materialism are particularly problematized. In this way, through an analysis of Benjamin's gothic Marxism and Bataille's cursed materialism, an anarchist political trait common to both is noted, which leads to a critique of left-wing progressivism with Soviet roots.

Introduction

Walter Benjamin was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin in 1892. Five years later, in the small village of Billom (France), Georges Bataille was born, the second of two brothers from a poor atheist family. Although close in age, Benjamin and Bataille seem distant in the space that was their lot. However, the fascist rise of the 1930s in Europe in the last century brought them closer together, but also drove them apart for good.

Benjamin's forced exile from Nazi Germany led him to settle for a long time in Paris, where he formed a bond with Bataille. In June 1940, in the face of the advance of German forces into Vichy France, Benjamin entrusted Bataille with his manuscript of The Book of Passages (a project he had been working on for the last fifteen years of his life) to be hidden in the Bibliothèque Nationale before he attempted to emigrate to the United States. The story that follows is sadly well known. Benjamin committed suicide a few weeks later, in September 1940, cornered by Franco's forces and the Gestapo in the now mythical Franco-Spanish border town of Port Bou.

Bataille, for his part, kept the manuscript, which after the end of the war came into Adorno's hands to be edited and published over the years[1].

While the fate of the voluminous papers that make up the Book of Passages is of paramount importance for the study of Benjamin's work in particular and the history of philosophy in general, it opens up some other little-explored questions that are worth examining. Is it possible to recognise some theoretical complicity between Walter Benjamin and Georges Bataille? It is true that at the time Bataille was working as a librarian at the Bibliothèque Nationale, so he was the right person, given his functions, to preserve the valuable manuscript there. However, the question remains as to whether there was some other affinity between the two thinkers for such an act of trust to take place. That is to say, beyond the vicissitudes of urgency that surely tormented Benjamin in his attempt to preserve his writings, could one think of some shared philosophical position between him and Bataille that would link them in the history of ideas independently of the now famous anecdote of the manuscript?

Certainly, both Benjamin and Bataille are thinkers who are difficult to categorise within the canonical traditions of thought. In both cases we are dealing with sui generis intellectuals, who slip between watertight knowledge, making it impossible to label them in defined disciplines. In

[1] The collection of papers that make up the "Libro de los Pasajes" (Paris, Capital of the 19th Century, 1935) will only be published in its entirety in 1982, in a careful edition prepared by Rolf Tiedemann, Adorno's disciple.

this sense, it is not possible to find in these authors a common belonging to a certain current and, consequently, to conjecture a shared theoretical horizon. Rather, it would seem that it is the singular and unclassifiable character of their works that brings them closer together. That is to say, it would seem that it is in what they differ from established traditions that they find their similarity. Indeed, there is a distinctive heretical feature in both Benjamin and Bataille in that both are equally resistant to adopting any conceptual tendency without first sifting or metamorphosing it with their own conceptions. The latter is especially evident in the link they maintained with the left-wing political thought of their time, with which they undoubtedly sympathised, but not without wielding strong criticisms or observations. I will now explore the latter political aspect of their reflections, since in both cases they derived a revolutionary conception far removed from that preached by dialectical materialism and in which a notable anarchist inspiration can be perceived. Perhaps, who knows, between their shared hours and dialogues in the library, there was a certain complicity against all kinds of authority and a common contempt for state institutions.

To begin this analysis, it is important to consider the historical context in which Benjamin and Bataille lived at the time of their meetings, for it was largely the events unfolding in Europe in the 1930s that marked the course of their reflections. Benjamin, in exile in Paris since 1933, spent long hours researching for his Passages project at the Bibliothèque Nationale. It was there that he probably began to forge his bond with Bataille, who even invited him on several occasions to attend meetings of the Collège de Sociologie, which he headed[2]. These were turbulent years in Europe, with fascist rises across the continent and Marxist communism emerging on the counter-offensive as the ideological shock force. Both Benjamin and Bataille adhered fiercely to left-wing currents and were alarmed by the reactionary deployment in the region. Benjamin explicitly mentions the importance of the discovery of Marxism in his thinking; Bataille, for his part, records an intense involvement in revolutionary movements, such as his participation in the Cercle Communiste Démocratique and the Contre-Attaque group. But the truth is that both refused to join the ranks of the Communist Party, and in this refusal lies a common criticism.

Indeed, as the 1930s wore on, the Soviet Union was already beginning to show its totalitarian traits. News of Stalin's repressive actions and purges began to circulate. It was not until 1939 and the German-Soviet pact that disenchantment became complete. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the decade in question, both Benjamin and Bataille were critical and distant from the policies and dogmatism of the Komintern. Both agreed in warning of two concomitant problems that were obscuring the times: on the one hand, the totalitarian threat of fascism and, on the other, the emancipatory direction taken by the Soviet-rooted Marxist traditions. Both thinkers, although each in his own way, not only coincided in prematurely warning of the dangers of the rising right, but also expressed their differences with the left revolutionary paradigm preached from the USSR. Now, much has been written in academic circles about Benjamin's or Bataille's warnings against fascism, but little has been written about their criticisms of official Soviet communism. What

[2] Pierre Klossowsky, in his testimony on the Collège de Sociologie, notes that Benjamin was concerned about the "pre-fascistic aestheticism" of the group led by Bataille. This remark seems to be projective, as it coincides with Klossowsky's own accusations against Bataille and the Collège. Of course, Benjamin may well have objected to some of the ideas at those meetings, as is the dynamic of any exchange of opinions and knowledge. However, his frequent participation in that space does not suggest a radical rejection of it, as Klossowsky would have us believe. Benjamin was even scheduled to be a speaker at the inaugural conference of the autumn 1939 cycle, but the outbreak of war prevented it from taking place. For a record of Benjamin's participation in the Collège de Sociologie and Klossowsky's testimony see: Hollier, D. (1982). El Colegio de Sociología. (The College of Sociology, 1937–39) Madrid: Taurus.

did the latter consist of? What was the basis for these authors' slippages from the dominant revolutionary political programmes of the time? Let us look at it case by case.

Benjamin's Gothic Marxism

The expression "Gothic Marxism" at the head of this section was first introduced by Margaret Cohen in her study Profane Illumination[3] in which she examines Benjamin's link with surrealism. Later, Michael Löwy took up the same expression to refer to Benjamin's political stance, since there is in that locution a certain figuration that allows us to understand the way in which the philosopher received Marxism. As Löwy (2021) points out, the adjective Gothic serves the function of linking historical materialism with the magical or enchanted dimensions of pre-modern societies and cultures of the past. For Benjamin, it was precisely surrealism that was interested in this linkage and delved into a set of phantasmagorical experiences that showed a remarkable revolutionary scope. It is here that this avant-garde movement becomes relevant when analysing the Marxism adopted by Benjamin. Benjamin himself relates in a letter to Adorno that it was his reading of Aragon's The Peasant of Paris that inspired his plan for a materialist cultural history of the nineteenth century -which would immediately become his Passages project. In the same epistle, he adds that, although his project might be criticised by "orthodox Marxism", it could 'in the long run achieve a solid position in the Marxist discussion' (2016, p. 920). Now, how does this ardent interest in surrealism expressed by the German philosopher link to his political positioning, what does Benjamin call 'orthodox Marxism' and what is the 'solid position in the Marxist discussion' he aims to achieve?

Key to this analysis is his article published in 1929: "Surrealism. The last snapshot of European intelligence". In it, Benjamin emphasises the revolutionary link that the avant-garde establishes with the past. Here he writes about Breton:

> [...] he was undoubtedly the first to come across the revolutionary energies that are contained in the 'aged', as in the first iron constructions, the first factories, the first photographs, or the objects that are beginning to die out, as in the salon pianos, or in the dresses of five years ago, or in the mundane meeting places when vogue begins to withdraw. (2008, p. 305)

Thus, this text seems to announce what Benjamin would systematise eleven years later, in 1940, in his theses On the Concept of History, insofar as there, through a kind of exaltation of the past, what would become an articulated critique of the ideologies of progress[4] begins to be clearly delineated. For Benjamin, "orthodox Marxism", also called in other passages "vulgar Marxism", responds to the evolutionist conception of history that understands progress in an automatic and linear way in a temporal and teleological continuum — as in the case of the productivist and technomodernist Marxism of the Stalinist USSR in the years of the Five Year Plan. With surrealism, Benjamin questions the one-sidedness of time thought mechanically towards

[3] Cf. Cohen, M. (1995) Profane Illumination. Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution. London: University of California Press.

[4] Susan Buck-Morss points out that the theses On the Concept of History were intended by Benjamin as the methodological introduction to the Libro de los pasajes. See: Buck-Morss S. (2014) Walter Benjamin. Escritor revolucionario. (The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project, 1989) Buenos Aires: La marca, p. 13.

the future in order to understand it as an eminently dialectical process, in which the present clarifies the past and the enlightened past becomes a rebellious and subversive force in a present that is moving towards catastrophe.

In one of the preparatory notes to the 1940 theses, Benjamin expresses this idea in a few words, making clear his distance from left-wing progressivism: "Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which humanity travelling on that train applies the emergency brakes" (quoted in Löwy, 2021, p. 106). Implicitly the image suggests that, if the breakneck race of progress is not stopped, humanity will plunge into the abyss. For Benjamin, therefore, revolution does not make history, but rather aims to break out of it. It is, according to his thesis XIV, "a leap of the tiger into the past" (Löwy, 2021, p. 135). That is, a dialectical leap out of the continuum of history. The tiger's leap into the past consists, in Löwy's words, in "saving the heritage of the oppressed and drawing on it to interrupt the present catastrophe" (2021, p. 137).

In the aforementioned essay on surrealism, however, it is not only the eminently dialectical interpretation of historical time that has a prominent place in understanding what Benjamin's 'Gothic Marxism' is all about. Numerous elements also emerge from that same text that reveal the philosopher's sympathy and affinity with libertarian thought[5]. At the very beginning of the text, Benjamin assumes "an extremely risky position" between "the anarchist horde and revolutionary discipline" (2008, p. 301). But what specifically does his anarchism consist of, and, again, how does it relate to surrealism?

The truth is that Benjamin has an extremely broad concept of anarchism, taking it more as an inspiration than as a party affiliation. When he refers to this current he does so above all to indicate a critique of the figure of the state or a radical and categorical rejection of established institutions or forms of power. In this sense, Benjamin understands surrealism as encroaching on libertarian dimensions. In this respect, he says: "Not since Bakunin's writings has there been a radical concept of freedom in Europe. The surrealists have" (2008, p. 313). But what particularly interests Benjamin about this avant-garde is the way in which it combines anarchism and communism, which seems to be the objective he himself is pursuing. It is, in effect, to endow the revolution with a subversive character that does not instrumentalise it in the service of any power; it is, in Benjamin's words, to 'win the forces of drunkenness in the service of revolution' (2008, p. 313).

Here, once again, we enter the enchanted terrain of gothic Marxism, for the forces of drunkenness are those that for Benjamin bring about a "profane illumination of 'materialist inspiration' (Benjamin, 2008, p. 303). This illumination — described as more powerful than those produced by hashish or opium — consists in an experience in which the genuine revolutionary opportunity of each historical moment is confirmed. That is to say, it consists in turning "into revolutionary experience, if not revolutionary action, what we have lived and experienced" (2008, p. 306). It is, in effect, a matter of exploding the formidable forces hidden in the things of everyday life. Benjamin will say this by appealing to the most pedestrian situations, such as the forces hidden "in sad train journeys [...], in those empty Sunday afternoons in the proletarian slums of the big cities, in the first glance out of the rain-soaked windows of a new house" (2008, p. 306). In short,

[5] The adjective libertarian refers to the revolutionary anarchist movements in 19th and early 20th century Europe that fought for a free society without the state and without social classes. In no way does it refer to the more radical conservative liberalism which in recent decades has appropriated the term libertarian in defence of the free market.

it is a matter of changing the historicist view of the past as "already been" for a political one, in which the past emerges explosively in the present as a power of revolt.

In thesis XVII A of On the Concept of History, Benjamin insists on the same idea. There he writes: "In reality, there is not a single instant that does not carry within itself its revolutionary possibility" (Löwy, 2021, p. 150). As can be seen, this sentence not only makes explicit his anarchising trait insofar as there is no order that is preserved, but also evidences his distance from orthodox Marxism, since the latter conceives that each epoch generates its own contradictions through natural laws, so that the revolution will come in its own time. Thus, orthodox Marxism passively awaits revolutionary action in the hope that it will eventually take place as an inevitable result of economic and technical progress. Indeed, Benjamin rails against this latter leftist optimism — which he describes as a bad spring poem — and assumes that the experience of his generation is "that capitalism will not die a natural death" (2016, p. 678). In this direction, he uses an expression of the surrealist Naville and calls for the organisation of pessimism (2008, p. 314). Such a political gamble — on the flip side of Marxist progressivism — consists in understanding history as a catastrophe, which makes it necessary, consequently, to prevent by all means the advent of the worst.

Organising pessimism rightly indicates acknowledging defeat, but actively preventing the triumphal procession of the powerful from continuing its course. It is, in Benjamin's words, "to cut the burning fuse before the spark reaches the dynamite" (2021, p. 91).

Benjamin's revolutionary character is thus undeniable. In fact, revolution is a figure that appears a thousand times in his writings, as if his thought went nowhere else but there. Certainly, if the German philosopher criticised the Marxist tradition, he did so insofar as it was based on a progressive idea of history. Conversely, he was convinced of the strategic necessity of combining Marxism with anarchist elements: "to connect revolution with revolt" (2008, p. 313). In this respect, Benjamin writes in another of his theses: "[the classless society] is not the ultimate goal of progress in history, but rather its interruption a thousand times aborted but finally consummated" (Löwy, 2021, p.150). Its anarchic revolutionary vocation is therefore to interrupt the course of history, which is always advancing towards catastrophe at the hand of the powerful. But in order for there to be no god and no master — as the dictumlibertarian proclaims — Benjamin reminds us, with his characteristic theological language, that the Messiah (or the revolution) is ready at every second to enter through a narrow door (Löwy, 2021, p.159). Incidentally, Daniel Bensaïd (2021) rightly pointed out that behind Benjamin's gentle gentleness lurked an armed messiah.

Bataille's Cursed Materialism

During the 1930s, while Benjamin was in exile in Paris and spent his days studying in the Bibliothèque Nationale the documents he would include in his Book of Passages, Bataille was experiencing his most intense period of political activism; although, like the Berlin philosopher, he remained outside the political agenda of official communism. Indeed, it is difficult to label Bataille as a Marxist thinker; it is even difficult to identify him as a heterodox Marxist, as one can easily do with Benjamin. The figure of Bataille does not seem to resist any kind of identification, and this is true not only for his political or ideological orientation, but also for the kind of discipline he develops: is Bataille a philosopher, a sociologist or an anthropologist, a mystic or a pornographer? If we manage to avoid the nickname that is often superimposed on authors to

determine their field of study, we could simply say that Bataille was a thinker who devoted himself to reflecting on the place of negativity: negativity in philosophy, negativity in anthropology, in sociology, in economics, in aesthetics, and so on. Thus, if we are dealing with negativity, it is clear that we are dealing with an eminently dialectical thinker, which is why his relationship with the Marxism of the time is unavoidable.

It was in the journal La critique sociale, between 1932 and 1934, that Bataille deepened his political thought and made explicit his theoretical link with Marxism. The editorial line of the journal perhaps speaks for itself: it was headed by Boris Souvarine, a Russian leader who, after having broken with the Communist Party, proclaimed himself an 'independent communist' and deployed a left-wing critique of official Soviet communism. Indeed, La Critique Sociale was one of the first journals in France to denounce Stalin's tyranny and the excessive bureaucratisation of the USSR (Souvarine himself owes the apt phrase 'the dictatorship of the secretariat' to Moscow's policies). In this space, historically marked by the totalitarian threat of the rising fascisms and Soviet Stalinism, Bataille wrote some of the most famous articles of his work, such as "The Notion of Expenditure" and "The Psychological Structure of Fascism", and radicalised his most notable socio-political criticisms.

The key point to note from this politicised period of Bataille's is his critique of dialectical materialism. In a way, as will be seen, his remarks are close to Benjamin's remarks on orthodox Marxism. Indeed, the very fact of speaking of dialectical materialism already inserts us into the Russian reception of Marxist thought, since it is a concept developed by Georgy Plekhanov at the end of the nineteenth century through which he disseminated Marx's work in a doctrinaire way in the region. Bataille criticises, above all, the claim of this tradition to understand dialectics as a general law of a fundamental reality. In an article written for La critique sociale in 1932, entitled "Critique of the foundations of Hegelian Dialectics"[6] , he points out that it was a mistake of Marxism to try to ontologise the law of the negation of the negation as if it corresponded to the structure of the world and nature[7]. Bataille not only opposes the idea that negativities that synthesise evolutionarily actually operate in nature, but argues that such a conception inevitably leads to the failure of dialectical thought because it is untenable and unprovable. The dialectical operation, Bataille will say, can only take place "on the immediate terrain of the class struggle, of experience, and not in the aprioristic clouds of universal conceptions" (2016a, p. 88).

As can be seen, while the French thinker criticises the ontologising and evolutionary feature of dialectical materialism, on the other hand, he unhesitatingly adopts the Marxist schema of class struggle. Indeed, he will say in the same article cited above that the dialectical method is the "only adequate one, when it is a question of representing the life and revolutions of societies" (Bataille, 2016a, p. 91). Thus, there is no doubt that Bataille was a thinker interested in the revolutionary character of Marxism. However, his critique of dialectical materialism unfailingly also impacts on the paradigm of class struggle, resulting in a singular interpretation of revolution at a distance from that preached by Marxist dogmatism. Such an operation is certainly linked to the dynamic that Bataille gives to negativity in the dialectical process.

As will be recalled, in the Marxist tradition the class struggle — and with it negativity taken from a historical point of view — is interpreted teleologically. That is to say, the class struggle is

[6] Text written in the company of Raymond Queneau.

[7] It is not clear that Marx pursued this idea, but in the annotations of Engels' Anti-Düring the intention to demonstrate dialectical operativity in nature is explicit. This positivist conception will be inherited by dialectical materialism.

understood as the march of humanity that advances by overcoming its historical contradictions with the aim of resolving itself definitively in a classless society. Under this paradigm there is a final unifying instance that synthesises the contradictions. The proletarian revolution, in effect, is responsible for realising this final resolving and emancipatory movement. Bataille, for his part, following a heated discussion in 1937 with Alexander Kojève on the Hegelian conception of the "end of history", will maintain that negativity is never absolutely overcome, since there always remains a remnant or remainder in any process of unification, which is his conception of "negativity without employment" (Bataille, 2016b, p. 100), that is to say, a negativity not employed in the synthesis of contradictions. It is an irreducible negativity, a negativity that is not fully included in teleological logic.

Thus, the thesis of the "end of history" understood as the moment at which all contradictions are resolved (and which Kojève personified in the figure of Stalin[8]), for Bataille is not sustainable, since there always remain unused reverberating negativities, which fissure and put the totality back into crisis. Therefore, Bataille's dialectical scheme, unlike the Marxist one, is sustained by a polarisation without resolution, not synthesising. That is to say, for him there would be no ultimate and unifying order achieved or to be achieved.

In this framework, thinking about revolution becomes relevant. For if, for Bataille, the dialectic is no longer thought of teleologically and, therefore, the proletariat as a revolutionary subject does not definitively resolve the history of domination and the exploitation of man by man, what does the revolution consist of for him? Certainly, Bataille inscribes revolutionary praxis in the dimension of negativity without employment insofar as it does not pursue a predetermined aim of unification. That is to say, the revolution would not be employed in function of the coming emancipation of humanity, but would be unproductive if what it seeks to do is to establish a new order. Bataille put it succinctly in an article written in the same years: "to use the word Revolution entirely stripped of its utilitarian content" (1974a, p. 259). How then to give a practical function to that which is unproductive or which has no purpose, what will be the revolutionary objective if it is no longer part of a teleological dynamic or of a new order to be established?

In another text from the 1930s Bataille offers some decoys for thinking of revolution in terms of unproductivity. This is the posthumously published text "The old mole and the prefix suren the words surhomme and surrealiste"[9]. In these lines Bataille opposes a revolution represented under the figure of the "eagle" and a revolution represented under the figure of the "old mole"[10]. The figure of the eagle here appeals to the imperial character of the one who flies over the skies with a dominant prestige, rising above the world and the classes. Bataille will say: "Revolutionary idealism tends to turn the revolution into an eagle above the eagles" (1974b, p.293). Thus, by entering into abstract dimensions of transcendental values, revolution is doomed to failure, for, whether left or right, it will result in a militarised order. Indeed, Bataille finds no great differ-

[8] This position of Kojève's is referred to by Roger Caillois after the lecture given on 4 December 1937 at the Collège de Sociologie. For the Bataille-Kojève exchange see: Hollier D. (1982). El Colegio de Sociología. Madrid: Taurus, p. 109.

[9] This article also contains a strong critique of surrealism. Unlike Benjamin, Bataille had a conflictive relationship of encounters and misunderstandings with André Breton. See: Surya M. (2014) La Muerte Obra. (Georges Bataille, la Mort à l'Œuvre, 1987) Madrid: Arena Libros.

[10] The "old mole" as a revolutionary metaphor was used earlier by Karl Marx in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Apparently he would have drawn the figure from Shakespeare's Hamlet.

ence between Stalinism and fascism, since in both cases the revolution erects from on high an authoritarian and oppressive figure as a guarantee of the conquered order.

The "old mole" revolution, on the contrary, is a revolution from and of the underworld. It is an undisciplined irruption of the depths of society on its surface. It does not seek to resolve contradictions, but to unleash an existence free of the productivist and moral bonds that weave the social order. In other words, the old mole revolution seeks to give free rein to negativity without the intention of integrating it into a new order. For Bataille, the significance of the low is linked here to "the terrifying darkness of tombs or cellars", to "the impurity of the earth where bodies rot", to "the lower parts", or to "matter and vile reality" (1974b, p. 294). In other words, the base is linked to different metaphors of decomposition, thus placing the "oldtopo" revolution at the antipodes of the synthetic and unifying revolutions of the eagle. Bataille will ironically say that this type of revolution "excavates the galleries of a decomposed and repugnant soil for the delicate sense of smell of utopians" (1974b, p. 293). Revolution is thus presented as a plebeian, violent and abject boastfulness, which neither submits nor bows to what is imposed as superior value or authority from above (not even if the latter responds to the honourable project of proletarian revolution). Thus, at a distance from directed and calculated action, this revolutionary form is not subordinated to any political programme because it has no other aim than revolt itself: the rupture of the established order. If the eagle revolution seeks to establish a new power from above, to destroy some institutions and establish others, the old mole revolution only emerges to break the established powers. It is, in short, the flagrant political expression of jobless negativity.

As can be seen, this understanding of Bataille's revolutionary action contains obvious anarchist aspects insofar as the revolution is referred to as an insubordination to any power and a disobedience to all authority. The aim of the old mole revolution is not a new domination, but precisely to pierce all forms of domination from below. Its action is entirely negative and without future projection. Certainly, it is an action comparable to the Benjaminian image of the application of emergency brakes, for what it is about is to interrupt the idealistic inertia of a history thought of in evolutionist and resolute terms. Negativity here emerges and does not synthesise; it is a movement and not a state (much less a state[11]). Thus, for Bataille, revolution is unproductive in terms of a new order, for in the end it consists only of a movement of insubmission as a condition of freedom. Thus, if under the perspective of dialectical materialism negativity was subsumed in totality, with Bataille one could speak of an accursed materialism, insofar as negativity is not overcome and becomes the centre of gravity for thinking a free and sovereign existence.

To the Left of What is Possible

Daniel Bensaïd places Benjamin "to the left of the possible" (2021, p. 34). Certainly, the same could be said of Bataille insofar as, like the Berlin philosopher, he also radicalised his revolutionary stance on the flip side of the Marxist progressivism disseminated from Moscow and hegemonic within the left-wing parties of inter-war Europe. Both thinkers coincided in pointing out that the political paradigm directed from the upper echelons of the Kremlin mistakenly believed it was heading towards the emancipation of humanity by making use of the very tools it sought

[11] In 1933 Bataille wrote a powerful booklet called "El Problema del Estado" (The Problem of the State) in which he criticises the development of the Bolshevik revolution into a totalitarian state.

to abolish: state oppression. Thus, early on, in the 1930s, Benjamin and Bataille point to the striking kinship between Stalinism and fascism, and choose to understand revolutionary action as an interruption of linear, progressive, teleological history. For the fact is that this latter abstract and ideal model has proved in its material concreteness to intensify servitude to an authority. The revolutionary motivation for Benjamin and Bataille thus lies in making room again for what is excluded from history thought of as a totality. Revolution, therefore, is for these thinkers the underside of power and domination that emerges from the material viscera of men (Bataille) or from some recondite place in their memory (Benjamin) to radically interrupt the historical continuity of domination. Thus, revolution is shaped as the action that gives place and time to negativity (to what is repressed both in the social order and in consciousness) and shatters the unified totality. It does not establish any new order with a view to emancipating humanity, but finds freedom precisely in the anarchic rupture of that order.

In his book Resistances, Daniel Bensaïd wrote an introduction entitled "The Mole and the Locomotive". The figure of the locomotive undoubtedly points there to Benjamin's critique of progress; and the figure of the mole, although it does not appeal directly to the Bataillean figure, could in this framework be interpreted as such without any inconvenience. In these lines, Bensaïd unwittingly succeeds in revealing the link between Benjamin and Bataille. He writes graphically:

The stubborn mole survives the fiery locomotive. Its shaggy roundness triumphs over the metallic coldness of the machine, its laborious simplicity over the cadenced hammering of the wheels, its smiling patience over the sardonic laughter of the steel. It goes back and forth between galleries and craters, between excavations and sprouts, between subterranean darkness and sunlight, between politics and history. He builds his hole. It mines and digs. It prepares the coming crisis.

The mole is an unholy messiah.

The messiah is a mole, myopic and obstinate like him.

The crisis is a molehole suddenly open to the light (2006, p. 23).

The abject and dastardly mole is always ready to emerge from its burrow to dismantle the dominant authority of the progressive locomotive. It is clear from what has been said that Benjamin and Bataille were close in their political ideas. Unfortunately, there are no records of their dialogues or exchanges during the long hours they shared in the Bibliothèque Nationale. But it is clear that both the German's Gothic Marxism and the Frenchman's cursed materialism find a common horizon in the criticisms of the evolutionary conceptions of the Marxist left and in the repudiation of any kind of authority or domination. Of course, neither author developed a concrete revolutionary programme. Nevertheless, what is at stake in these lines is to conjecture at what points their thoughts came close to each other, and such a point found them "to the left of the possible": a place where not only the Libro de los Pasajes (Paris, Capital of the 19th Century) managed to survive, but also an anthropological materialism, without god and without master, which disassociates revolutionary and Marxist thought from totalitarian appropriations.

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