Accursed Anarchism: Five Post-Anarchist Meditations on Bataille

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"I am myself a war" — Georges Bataille

1: Bataille as a Post-anarchist: Where to Begin

Any inquiry into the nature of Georges Bataille’s troublesome relationship with Marxism appears to me to be a matter of banality expressed through the hysterical (or worse, university) discourses inhabited by those who would not dare probe the traumatic nature of Bataille’s commitment to sovereignty; in any case, this vexing relationship is by now a matter of common knowledge and it proves useless if one is truly in-

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1I am referring here, if only tangentially, to Lacan’s four discourses (for an excellent study on the use of Lacan’s four discourses in anarchist political philosophy see Newman, 2004a) in which Bataille’s “discourse” figures most fittingly within the “analyst’s discourse” while the traditional anarchist discourse can be said to fit somewhere at the outermost edge of the “hysteric’s discourse”. In any case, the hysteric’s discourse tends to exemplify the attitude of Nietzschean renciment in that s(he) “pushes the master — incarnated in a partner, teacher, or whomever — to the point where he or she can find the master’s knowledge lacking [...] In addressing the master, the hysteric demands that he or she produce knowledge and then goes on to disprove his or her theories” (Fink, 1996: 134). The analyst much more radically “puts the subject as divided, as self-contradictory [...] Thus the analyst, by pointing to the fact that the analysand is not the master of his or her own discourse, instates the analysand as divided between conscious speaking subject and some other (subject) speaking at the same time through the same mouthpiece” (ibid., 136). The truth of Bataille’s work is to be found in the discourse of the analyst against, but hopelessly through (as countless Lacanians by now have been forced to admit), the discourse of the hysteric. However, by advancing the epistemological claim against the ontological claim (although I agree with the results, this is the overall approach of Andrew Koch in his essay “Post-structuralism and the epistemological basis of anarchism,” 1993) one contradicts the underlying force of base matter by putting it to the service of the idea, and one therefore misrepresents, in the most unconvincing of ways, the entire movement of thought emerging from the work of Bataille.
terested in the exploratory and transformative practices associated with philosophical meditation. Likewise, recent attempts to situate Bataille as the to-finally-be-discovered father-figure of a distinctly post-structuralist/post-modernist lineage have not been met by deaf ears nor by idle pens (c.f. Dorfman, 2002); for instance, not long after Bataille’s death Tel Quel —

1I have in mind the necessity of linking the outcome of sovereignty with the means of philosophical meditation, where meditation refers to “practices […] intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practices them. The philosophy teacher’s discourse could be presented in such a way that the disciple, as auditor, reader, or interlocutor, could make spiritual progress and transform himself [sic] within” (2002: 6). Bataille would not have had much faith in the ability of the ‘world of things’ to offer sober reflection (this approach “invites distrust at the outset” (1988:11); although, it should be at least noted that at times he comes to an opposite conclusion: “To be sure, self-consciousness is also ruled out within the limits of the Soviet sphere” (ibid., 188)); despite this, he nonetheless adopted the strategy of a teacher and writer of educational books, and one can only deduce that he did so because he believed that his book/thing was able to produce sovereign subjects. One possibility for resolving this problem of interpretation may be found in the work of Kathy Davis, who argues that all successful sociological theories — from Marx to Durkheim and Weber — matter not for their appeal to certitude nor for their coherency but for their ambiguity and open-endedness which, in turn, allows the reader flexibility in interpretation (c.f., Davis, 2008). Based on this, I would argue that successful theories are those which offer the same threshold experience found in the films of Guy Debord (c.f., Knabb, 2003) or in the anarchist music of John Café (c.f., Tudor, 2006 [2009]) — the absolute negation of the form but from within rather than without. Successful forms must therefore act as a reflective surface, allowing for the proliferation of a countless radical subjectivities rather than producing the cold affirmation of the single viewpoint, as the subject-supposed-to-know, found in the metaphorical teacher father-figure.

2For example, Dorfman has argued that “[t]ogether with Nietzsche and Heidegger, [Bataille] is often posited as one in a counter-lineage in late-modern thought, willing to explore elements of the human experience that much of positivistic, rationalistic, post-Enlightenment philosophy was not (for example: power, time, transgression and deviance)” (2002: 38).

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an avant-garde literary journal operating out of Paris at the
time — had incisively granted Bataille this very appropriate
distinction — the irony of which becomes exposed as the oc-
currence preceded the popularization of structuralist thought
itself (Botting & Wilson, 1991: 5–7, esp. pg 6). What remains
to be excavated from Bataille’s texts, however, is the nature of
his commitment to that proud adversary of Marxist thought:
anarchism. This venture resolves itself into two interrelated
questions: (1) how might a contemporary anarchist read into
Bataille’s work? and (2) how might Bataille read into tradi-
tional anarchism and how might this reading inform contem-
porary anarchist philosophy? My project embodies the mutual
violence of sacrifice and attraction: it implies that I shamefully
sacrifice Bataille to the cause of anarchism; however, the re-
sult will prove itself quite paradoxical: there may indeed be
room for Bataille within the anarchist canon, alongside Max
Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche. However, this canonization
requires a movement away from the founding principles of anar-
chism (some of which are explored in other meditations) to-
ward the embrace of sovereignty and, in the face of a meta-
physical principle of such magnitude and generalization that
we might only refer to it in the negative form, ontological an-
archism (“without rulers”; or an-archy for short); an-archy is
comprised of the heterogeneous matter resolved through the
negation of an opposing principle: “[heterogeneity] constitutes
the first phase of such a study in the sense that the primary de-
termination of heterogeneity defined as non-homogeneous sup-
poses a knowledge of the homogeneity which delineates it by
exclusion” (Bataille, 1985b: 140). As the ontological anarchist
Hakim Bey (1993 [2009]) has put it: “As we meditate on the
nothing we notice that although it cannot be de-defined, never-
theless paradoxically we can say something about it (even if
only metaphorically);” what we have to say is that it is a no-
thing, equally a no-idea, and in its base materialist and base
political form it is an-archy.
A commitment to anarchy is itself a commitment to the discovery of that excess-ive and ill-defined portion of matter that shatters the short-sightedness of the ide(al) within the restrictive economy of epistemology (what the great Max Stirner has called the "Spook" (c.f., Stirner, 1970: 50–54)), it can rightly be referred to as the general economy; in turn, the general economy, being itself the economy of the base, is bolstered by what I would like to call the general State. The analytical distinction that I employ between economy and State is important in the following respect: where the general economy refers to the excess-ive energy that transcends the particular uses to which it is put (which, in turn, implies the fundamental impermanence of the current conception of the restrictive State and restrictive economy), the general State refers to the no-thing upon which the general economy founds its logic and enforcement outside of logical time (if the economy is the mirror of means, then the state is the mirror of ends); on the other hand, the subject of the restrictive (Marxist) State tries to grasp what Bataille has called “some object of acquisition, something, not the no-thing of pure expenditure [found in the general State]. It is a question of arriving at the moment when consciousness will cease to be a consciousness of something; in other words,

With Bataille I will insist the following: “My research aimed at the acquisition of a knowledge; it demanded coldness and calculation, but the knowledge acquired was that of an error, an error implied in the coldness that is inherent in all calculation. In other words, my work tended first of all to increase the sum of human resources, but its findings showed me that this accumulation was only a delay, a shrinking back from the inevitable term, where the accumulated wealth has value only in the instant” (Bataille, 1988: 10–11). However, Bataille was forced to make this confession in light of his strategic and hence political belief that it was truly important to move others to understand what it was that he was able to discover and so he could not fully come to terms with the nature of his desire: a desire which was simultaneously political, utilitarian, and yet also in the service of anarchy. For an interesting post-anarchist discussion on the paradoxical use of strategy see Separating The Sands (2009).

References

figurations within the short-sighted terminologies of class and political economy. It should now be clear that this essay is both dishonest (in its reading of Bataille as a post-anarchist) and honest (in its reading of anarchism in light of Bataille), and that the task that I set before myself is nothing less than direct action against all radical epistemologies: to break apart the already cracked foundations of all -isms, and in doing so, to finally grant anarchy its rightful place within the world of States and forms. Simmel has always been on point in this regard: “although these forms arise out of the life process, because of their unique constellation they do not share the restless rhythm of life, its ascent and descent, its constant renewal, its incessant divisions and reunifications” (1971: 375). If we may say that hope is worth retaining, let it be for a world capable of shedding the authority of the idea and its subsequent form; while we may let a thousand hope blocs bloom, we may still only hope to find the words capable of short-circuiting the routine-consciousness of radicals: hope that these words will at once shock and rewire you: the only thing holding you anarchists back is your anarchism.

0: Excrement

“This last appropriation — the work of philosophy as well as of science or common sense — has included phases of revolt and scandal, but it has always had as its goal the establishment of the homogeneity of the world, and it will only be able to lead to a terminal phase in the sense of excretion when the irreducible waste products of the operation are determined” (Bataille, 1985: 96–97).

2: Beneath the General Economy, the State!

Nevertheless, one detects a peculiar omission in the writings of Georges Bataille which no doubt stem from his desire to

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7 A future study will also require a re-reading/re-writing of the practices of Potlatch and gift-giving in light of their Statist implications.
mythologize the discourse of scarcity and endless productivity pervasive in the work of the political economists of the time; while it was no doubt important to explore the notion of a general economy founded on the metaphysical principles of excess and limitless consumption, Bataille’s work does not outline (at least not explicitly) the metaphysical principles regulating this economy. At the restrictive level, this problem has the analogy best exhibited by the traditional anarchist critique against the political logic of the Marxists. The oft-cited nineteenth century anarchists (here, I will restrict my focus of Mikhail Bakunin and Pyotr Kropotkin) set out to discover a fundamentally new form of political logic which was to be distinguished from the Marxist logic of class inherent in the base/superstructure synthetic pair. What they found was that the Marxist analysis of political oppression neglected the self-perpetuating and independent logic of the State and that, according to Bakunin (and echoed by countless other anarchists to this day), the Marxists “do not know that despotism resides not so much in the form of the State but in the very principle of the State and political power” (1984: 220). For the traditional anarchists, the State — as the fundamental apparatus of power in society — represented the barbarity of the transfer of power from the people to the tyrannical group; however, these anarchists held a particularly narrow analysis of what precisely constituted this tyrannical group and an even narrower understanding of the nature of this influence on the multitude of workers and peasants. Todd May, the post-anarchist, put the matter nicely: “It is a mistake to view the anarchist diatribes against the state as the found-

5: To Have Never Begun, To Have Never Finished

If it can be said that Bataille’s post-structuralist fabric has been weaved from the materials of a largely (post-)Marxist genealogy, it might also occasion the immediate and subsequent declaration: the potentiality of Bataille’s resurgence is concomitant with the reemergence of the residues of a problematic and ultimately flawed tradition which fixates upon the the level of the economy and envisions a future golden age of freedom and universal brotherhood. Conversely, while the anarchist tradition is no doubt faulted by the logical exclusion of the forces of anarchy from their version of anarchism (this is the very problem of creating a doctrine of forms in the name of that which it disobeys), it nonetheless offers an interesting point of departure for a new meditation on Bataille’s oeuvre which, one might only hope, offers itself up for interesting lines of flight (post-anarchisms, post-left, nihilist anarchisms, and anti-civilization anarchisms to name only three). In suggesting this I have been met with a second problem: the anarchist tradition has also emerged as a cultural phenomenon immersed in the residues of the humanist enlightenment paradigm. This problem is at least partially resolved by focusing on the attitude which, I am ready to insist, lends itself more readily to a critical investigation into some of these paradigms of thought: singularly, the anarchist attitude is one of examining the logic of the State/power in its own right — while post-anarchism advances upon this by analyzing the multiplicitous configurations of power/mediation through the metaphor of the State-assemblages — and it has done so without shrouding these con-

For review: in Marxist dialectics, the Base, which comprises all relations of production, determines, in the final instance, the superstructure (which is, roughly, the subjective dimension). As Marx put it: “[T]he economic structure [...] is the real basis on which the [...] superstructure is raised, and to which definite social forms of thought correspond; that the mode of production determines the character of the social, political and intellectual life” (Marx, 1867).
Often, when we try to think about or practice mutual aid, we drag into our activities an entire alien morality, thinking and living in terms of what Stirner calls the police care, in short making the community another Cause. As Cause, the Community is already a micro-State [...] It is all too common for people to feel a horrible obligation to the Community and therefore to feel guilty when they fail, which of course they inevitably do. [...] The State, or the States [...] that so many Communities manifest, are gatherings of people that take good police care of each other. [...] What I am asked to do is to sacrifice myself for the sake of belonging in exchange for the gift of meaning, of words and organs. [...] What is outside Community, since coexistence is in some sense inevitable? I learned this lesson in reflecting on something I do constantly: public speaking. Of this activity Stirner writes that it is to ask others to consume me. Enjoy me, the Unique invites you, consume me. (To this I am tempted to add the masochist’s erotic whisper: “use me.”) (2009: 34)

Stirner’s union of egoists sufficiently reflects the ethos of the Bataillean headless community/ies: the headless community, like the union of egoists, opens itself up to the radicality of violence and madness found within pure external space: an-anarchy.

Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption birth and death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but is more than me; his
but it also signaled an implicit, if only unconscious, solidarity between the anarchists and the Marxists which remains apparent in the naïve discourses of traditionalists until this day: precisely, what the traditional anarchists have been unable to put to proper disposal is, as the post-anarchist Saul Newman rightfully contends, the crude Manichean separation between the “good” people (understood to be the embodiment of the essentially “human” identity) and the “bad” State (understood to be the sole possessor of power and the central location from which it emanated, in a unidirectional flow): 789 “Has [anarchism] not merely replaced the economy with the state as the essential evil in society, from which other evils are derived?” (Newman, 2001: 47). We have therefore discovered the ability to understand to some degree the questions which continue to plague the minds of subjects becoming-sovereign today: we ask

3For a more in-depth discussion of traditional anarchism’s Manichean logic see Saul Newman, 2004b.

4Bakunin, for instance, argues that: “[the State] is essentially founded upon the principle of authority, that is the eminently theological, metaphysical, and political idea that the masses, always incapable of governing themselves, must at all times submit to the beneficent yoke of wisdom and a justice imposed upon them, in some way or other, from above” (1971: 142) and Kropotkin, likewise, argues that “[the] origin [of the State arises from] the desire of the ruling class to give permanence to customs imposed by themselves for their own advantage […] customs useful only to rulers, injurious to the mass of the people, and maintained only by the fear of punishment” ([2005]: 205–6); the most striking example that I could find at the time of writing this follows: “The State […] is the most flagrant, the most cynical, and the most complete negation of humanity. It shatters the universal solidarity of all men [sic] on the earth, and brings them into association only for the purpose of destroying, conquering, and enslaving all the rest” (Bakunin, 1971: 133–4). Kropotkin is also notable in this regard for his insistence that “mutual aid” constitutes itself as a law of human nature: “Mutual Aid would be considered, not only as an argument in favour of pre-human origin of moral instincts, but also as a law of Nature and a factor of evolution” (1902 [1976]: 4).

5This problem is best articulated by the range of “post-anarchists” (c.f., May, 1994; Newman, 2001; Call, 2002; and my forthcoming book “Anarchy at the Brink: The Post-anarchism Anthology” 2009).

According to Bataille, as according to Stirner, what brings humans into communion is their use-value to one another; at every turn one is confronted by ghostly authoritative apparitions: “Look out near or far, a ghostly world surrounds you everywhere; you are always having ‘apparitions’ or visions. Everything that appears to you is only the phantasm of an indwelling spirit, is a ghostly ‘apparition’” (1907: 44), “’Spirits exist!’ Look about in the world, and say for yourself whether a spirit does not gaze upon you out of everything. […] Yes, the whole world is haunted!” (ibid., 43). If it is true that the entire world is haunted then it should equally be true that the space transcending this world radiates from the power of the no-thing, the grounding principle of the general economy, contrary to the notion that it stands above the purposes of the egoist, reigning like so many gods and demanding servitude, it emanates from the excess-ive portion of this egoist essence itself as the intimate-within of subjectivity: “You are yourself a higher being than you are, and surpass yourself. But that you are the one who is higher than you, i.e., that you are not only creature, but likewise your creator — just this, as an involuntary egoist, you fail to recognize; and therefore the ‘higher essence’ is to you — an alien essence. Every higher essence, e.g. truth, mankind, etc., is an essence over us” (ibid., 47); this essence imposes itself over us as unique ones, as fragmented and radiating egoists, not because we are fully within ourselves as coherent egos (essential egos) but because we have consumed the world and have taken with it the no-thing.

On this note, Alejandro de Acosta is making great headway with his research into the work of Stirner (the anarchist), arguing, in effect, that Stirner’s reluctance to embrace the notion of comm-unity was made possible by its underlying utilitarian valuation:
as I already have, that “Bataille’s theory contains radically an-
tistatist implications” (ibid., 96), and that the notion of the Gift
is opposed to any strategic endeavor which may be put to its
name: “[..] in no way can this inevitable loss be accounted use-
ful. It is only a matter of an acceptable loss, preferable to an-
other that is regarded as unacceptable: a question of acceptabil-
ity, not utility” (Bataille, 1988: 31). It is as if Bataille should have
emphasized this point beyond remorse, to have finally stressed
that strategy or tactics are less important than self-reflection,
consciousness and sovereignty; and yet this is precisely what
we find repeated and emphasized throughout the entirety of
in his work: “the exposition of a general economy implies inter-
vention in public affairs, certainly; but first of all and more
profoundly, what it aims at is consciousness, what it looks to
from the outset is the self-consciousness that man would finally
achieve in the lucid vision of its linked historical forms” (ibid.,
41). It is clear that the gift of sacrifice implies one to volunta-
arily submit to the inevitable — one forms a community with an-
other only by masochistically sacrificing elements of oneself;\textsuperscript{19}
truly, there is nothing that profoundly separates the legacy of
the great egoist anarchist Max Stirner from that of the great
meta-physicist Georges Bataille:

But not only not for your sake, not even for truth’s sake either do I speak out what I think. [...] I sing be-
cause — I am a singer. But I use you for it because I — need ears. Where the world comes in my way —
and it comes in my way everywhere — I consume it to quiet the hunger of my egoism. For you are
nothing but — my food, even as I too am fed upon and turned to use by you. We have only one rela-
the following questions to all ranges of political actors: “What
is your understanding of the nature of power and what is the
nature of resistance?”, “Where can each of these precise energy-
flows be found to reside and how might they be described to
function and in which direction(s)?”, “What possibilities are of-
fered and precluded by these conceptions?” My criticism be-
gins with the assumption that traditionalists continue to in-
voke the problematic assumption that power derives primarily
from the (political) State\textsuperscript{10}, flowing outward/downward to re-
press an otherwise creative and “good” human essence;\textsuperscript{11} my
concern has been that this theory, positioned as it is within the
hopelessly restrictive economy of utility and form, does not of-
fer the reflective surface required for properly philosophical
meditations which, in turn, may actually lead one to become a
sovereign subject capable of the type of spontaneous action
called for within traditional anarchist doctrine.

I must bring this discussion back on point. The transforma-
tion of the traditional anarchist discourse (re-writing it, as we
all have done in our own way) invites the occasion for an in-
teresting second reading, beginning with the following simple
metaphor: if, for the traditional Marxists, the domain of class re-
ferred also to the domain of utility\textsuperscript{12} then, for the anarchists, we
may properly deduce that the domain of the State referred also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10}Sometimes they will expand upon this single-item list to include Class and Patriarchy, and even at times religion. However, as we witness today the proliferation of these identities of resistance, we begin to feel a bit schizophrenic; one might wonder how many categories of resistance a given political subject might apprehend before exploding from all of the pressure?
\item \textsuperscript{11}Without any doubt there are exceptions to this rule; however, the exception proves the rule, as many of these exceptions have not been easily integrated within the anarchist canon (i.e., Max Stirner, Nietzsche, Gustav Landauer and, fragments of found at margin of texts from Bakunin and Kropotkin themselves).
\item \textsuperscript{12}The domain of utility is to be analytically dissociation from the domain of the “general economy”, as the prominent sociologist George Ritzer puts it: “Georges Bataille’s notion of a ‘general economy’, [is] where expendi-
\end{itemize}
to the domain of routine (utility set in time) whereby our gestures are reduced to the least traumatic movements (whereby our bodily motions are rendered docile) associated with what has already been; indeed, after playing guitar for most of his life, my father now confesses it to be more challenging to make a mistake than to actually play on key! With this interpretation we might understand anew the connection Kropotkin envisioned between capitalism and the State when he proclaimed that “the State [...] and Capitalism are facts and conceptions which we cannot separate from each other [...] [i]n the course of history these institutions have developed, supporting and reinforcing each other” (Kropotkin, [2005]: 159). And, as Alexander Berkman more concisely put it: “[the capitalists are in] need [of] the state to legalise their methods [...] to protect the capitalist system” ([2003]: 16). The State therefore instituted into logical time what was previously cast to the instant, outside of the authority of time: the instant or movement as the means without end; thus we have found that it is not the general economy that poses the greatest threat to sovereignty, but the general State: “what is sovereign in fact is to enjoy [enjoyment being what play is to work at the level of the economy] the present time without having anything else in view but this present time [time being the regulation of successive intervals of production]” (Bataille, 1993: 199). It is therefore a matter of separating, analytically, what manifests itself mutually in the restrictive economy and State, where the logic of each occur or are the seeds for the other. This will be point of departure for a ferociously religious post-anarchist meditation with Bataille as its benefactor. However, this study invites the consideration 

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13 By removing the political wrapping from the traditional anarchist notion of the State (in other words, by extracting the notion from the remnants of the restrictive economy), we are freed to reinterpret the State as the fundamental problematic.

14 tive and in dreams: it is identical to the structure of the unconscious” (ibid., 143). Although Bataille alludes, many times quite explicitly, to the transgressive character of this revolting heterogeneity — "violence, excess, delirium, madness characterize heterogeneous elements to varying degrees: active, as persons or mobs, they result from breaking the laws of social homogeneity" (1985b) — I believe that, given the circumstances (for whatever reason, he was attracted to a curious community of Surrealists and Soviets), it is quite possible that this moved him to transform his more mystical meditations into a more grounded defense of revolt arising as a vehicle of a solution.17

Thus, we arrive at a particularly critical re-reading of the anarchist tradition which is by no means complete. I may say (in a way that is quite popular to the anarchists) that ‘this is only a beginning’ and that the end should not come into fruition, indeed the beginning, itself, is the mark of distrust; I am a strategist of strategists, and I am prepared to be crucified for it!

4: The Gift is Voluntary

The common anarchist18 notion of ‘voluntary association’ finds its philosophical equivalent in Bataille’s notion of the Gift (which he appropriated from Marcel Mauss). Without entirely rehashing the links already made by the post-anarchist Lewis Call (c.f., 2002: 94–99, esp. pg. 96–97), I would like to suggest,

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17 The Situationist group Not Bored! argued, in an essay titled “Bataille: ‘Accursed’ Stalinist” that “Bataille finished the book because, like Breton, Aragon, Eluard and others in the Surrealist movement, he’d become a Stalinist (15 years after the others!), and because Stalin — the whole Soviet Union, even — really needed people like Georges to come to its defense” [2009]. While the proposition that Bataille was a Stalinist is absurd, there is no doubt that he was moved to sacrifice some of himself for the communication and companionship of his friends.

18 Admittedly, “anarchism” is a broad and contestable assemblage of often conflicting interests and attitudes, but this does not diverge from my main point.
I would like to suggest that Bataille’s commitment to heterogeneity marks his appreciation for contemporary nihilist forms of meditation and resistance which can not be fully contained within the Leftist (or, of course, Rightist) political imaginations. Moreover, coupled with our newly acquired notion of the “general State”, we are able to construct an object worthy of investigation: nihilist anarchism. His negative revolt maintains that “[p]ower […] expends itself, [it] seeks not to found but to destabilize that which has been founded, [and it] is the essence of Bataille’s anarchism” (Goldhammer, 2007: 31). Dupont’s insistence that revolt happens without offering political subjects any insight (the break from epistemology), without promising the positive assurance of structure, also implies an allegiance with Bataille’s psychological account of the “revolting” heterogeneous elements which occur in unconscious thought:

The exclusion of heterogeneous elements from the homogeneous realm of consciousness formally recalls the exclusion of the elements, described (by psychoanalysis) as unconscious, which censorship excludes from the conscious ego. The difficulties opposing the revelation of unconscious forms of existence are of the same order as those opposing the knowledge of heterogeneous forms. […] If this conception is granted, given what we know about repression, it is that much easier to understand the incursions occasionally made into the heterogeneous realm have not been sufficiently coordinated to yield even the simple revelation of its positive and clearly separate existence” (Bataille, 1985b: 141).

Furthermore, Bataille makes it a point to repeat and concisely solidify this thought: “the knowledge of a heterogeneous reality as such is to be found in the mystical thinking of prim-

3: Nihilist Anarchism and the Principle of No-thing

“[…] without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.” (Bataille, 1985: 97).

For his part, Bataille thought the State to be one of the emergent properties of homogeneous society:

The state […] is distinct from kings, heads of the army, or of nations, but it is the result of the modifications undergone by a part of homogeneous society as it comes into contact with such elements. […] In practical terms, the function of the state consists of an interplay of authority and adaptation. The reduction of differences through compromise in parliamentary practice indicates all the possible complexity of the internal activity of adaptation required by homogeneity. But against forces that cannot be assimilated, the State cuts matters short with strict authority (1985b: 139).

Thus, contrary to the case advanced by the Marxists, the economy bares more the resemblance of the State than the State does of the economy: the connecting force, here, is of power. Georg Simmel puts this matter to rest: “Money is concerned with what is common to all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality to the question: How much?” (Simmel, 1950: 411); in other words, the problem of the restrictive economy is not to be found in the logic of an
interplay of money to be resolved through the imposition of a new restrictive regulatory form founded in the Marxist conception of the transitional State (the dictatorship of the proletariat), rather, it is to be found in the very establishment of the illusionary form of life anew (money, itself, existing as form), cementing its place in the imagination as the once-and-for-all authority of form throughout time. In any case, there are at least two fragments of the anarchist logic which are worth retaining, albeit in a reconstructed form: the attitude of means-to-ends connection (means-to-ends must now itself forego the movement toward connection/synthesis and be proclaimed as ‘means without ends’, or, more radically, ‘without means and without ends’: hereafter referred to as spontaneity) and the attitude of hostility in the face of representation (the State, now, is thought through metaphor without the shroud of ‘politics’; this attitude now becomes hostility in the face of utility and time). Conversely, the important fragment of anarchist thought that absolutely must be disposed is the grounding myth of intimacy as a response to the narrow and problematic conceptions of power and politics (as an attitude, this is the attitude of Nietzschean resentment).

Bataille’s notion of the “general economy”, distinguished from the “restricted economy”, may invoke a similar conclusion with regard to the impasse of the restricted logic of the traditional anarchists: the anarchists — concerned only with the domain of the particular economy and, what is more, with the domain of political utility rather than the self-consciousness entailed in the acceptance and understanding of the truth of general economy — have teetered on the edge of political change, always narrowly avoiding the truth of the general economy by offering positive prescriptions of revolt, blueprints of a society to come or a society that has passed: in short, a sacred community grounded in precisely the same homogeneous logic of the State-form. If anarchism is to pass beyond itself it will need to be put to the service of its own wasted prod-

stitute heterogeneous forces and becomes indistinguishable from them. [...] Furthermore, social heterogeneity does not exist in a formless and disoriented state: on the contrary, it constantly tends to a split-off structure; and when social elements pass over to the heterogeneous side, their action still finds itself conditioned by the actual structure of that side (ibid., 140).

To read Bataille’s psychological notion of heterogeneity in this way (namely, akin to Lacan’s notion of the traumatic Real and of subjective and objective Lack) presumes a re-reading of the following passage: “[heterogeneity] constitutes the first phase of such a study in the sense that the primary determination of heterogeneity defined as non-homogeneous supposes a knowledge of the homogeneity which delineates it by exclusion” (ibid.). In the very least, this explains itself as the correct response to Bataille’s keen remark that the heterogeneous dimension concerns itself with “elements which are impossible to assimilate” (ibid.). Indeed, one may be tempted, as I am, to describe the heterogeneous elements of society, not in terms of the oft-quoted “multitude”, but in terms of the nihilist conception of revolt; as the nihilist-communist writer Frere Dupont puts it:

Revolt, and thus the critique of revolt, is derived from a heightened state of wretchedness. Revolt is never a positive move. It is never a matter of revolt becoming the vehicle of a solution. And if it were, how much more simple would that be. If my revolt guaranteed me insight, and if my knowledge were realisable in structure — causing more effective, more organised revolt — then revolt itself would define the character of our world, and not be merely provoked by it (2008: 75).
fore reigned as the dominant principles of life — for evidence look to the Hobbesian notion of scarcity and its influence in traditional and contemporary economic forms — provide the logical, and therefore discursive, framework for the production of a need which manifests itself as the political State-form.

If I might escape from the Marxist reading of the passage which follows, I may be able to imagine the heterogeneous force which results less from the homogeneous model, and less from the State-form, than from, paradoxically, the intimate within of the lack which is at the very heart of these models:  

Social homogeneity fundamentally depends upon the homogeneity [...] of the productive system. Every contradiction arising from the development of economic life thus entails a tendential dissociation of homogeneous social existence. This tendency towards dissociation exerts itself in the most complex manner, on all levels and in every direction. But it only reaches acute and dangerous forms to the extent that an appreciable segment of the mass of homogeneous individuals ceases to have an interest in the conservation of the existing form of homogeneity [...] This fraction of society then spontaneously affiliates itself with the previously const-

16 Saul Newman takes this position with respect to his Lacanian Anarchism, arguing that there exists an uncontaminated point of departure for radical politics paradoxically at the “inside” of power: “The notion of the excluded interior or intimate exterior may be used to redefine [this] outside. Because it is an outside produced by the failed and incomplete ‘structure’, it is not an essence or metaphysical presence. It does not transcend the world of the symbolic (or discourse or power) because it ‘exists’ within this order. It is not a spatial outside, but rather a radical outside — an outside, paradoxically on the ‘inside.’ Therefore the gap between meaning and symbolization can be constituted as a radical outside, not because it is from a world outside the symbolic structure, not because it is a transcendental essence, but because it is a void which cannot be filled, a lack which cannot be represented” (2001: 142).

Bataille would have certainly found trouble with this grounding myth on the part of the anarchists: “no one thinks any longer that the reality of communal life — which is to say, human existence — depends upon the sharing of nocturnal terrors and on the kind of ecstatic spasms that spread death” (1985a: 208). This is a resolutely egoist thing to say (Egoist, in the Stirnerian sense), community, itself founded on madness and death, must be “owned” by the unique one (crudely speaking, the sovereign one), rather than abandoned; this is not a move to break the unique one into offering service to community, but precisely the opposite: to have the unique one recognize the reality principle and to hold it in the palm of her hand. The anarchist Left would find Bataillean communities horrific, as one writer puts it: “Since the age of revolutions began, the left has only challenged concentrations of power with its own alternative distillations. Rather than anticipate the
‘right’ revolution — the one that actually liberates human beings from their modern chains — Bataille calls for ongoing sacrificial fragmentation of the modern self” (Goldhammer, 2007: 32). Rather than embrace the myth of a brotherhood lost since the emergence of the State, one must embrace madness, death, and the heterogeneous elements that make possible communal life (Biles, 2007: 55):14

Life demands that men gather together, and men are gathered together by a leader or by a tragedy. To look for a HEADLESS human community is to look for tragedy: putting the leader to death is itself tragedy, it remains a requirement of tragedy (Bataille, 1985a: 210).

The death of the State, and its consequential feelings of guilt, make possible the consecration of “friendship” and “community”: totalities which are negatively defined, headless, and explosive. Our task must not be one of social suicide, but nothing less than the construction of headless, ferociously religious, Bataillean anarchist affinity groups. Moreover, what Bataille teaches us as anarchists is that the State-form, through the violent enforcement of “utility” (in the final instance), resides at a place that is much more local, much more psychological, to all political subjects and that, while the domain of utility appears pervasive it is met at every turn by its obverse traumatic kernel of madness and death: it is at the level of consciousness that fascism resides.

This logic appears most strikingly in Bataille’s “The psychological structure of fascism” where he describes and contrasts the logic of homogeneity and heterogeneity: homogeneity, he explains, “signifies [...] the commensurability of elements and the awareness of this commensurability [note that he describes both the objective and subjective components of this dyad]: human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations; in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence” (1985b: 137–8); Bataille goes on to define homogeneity primarily as the sphere of production and utility15, namely the economic sphere; however, the omission that results from the homogeneous logic is founded in the mental and political regulation of its obverse trauma: the heterogeneous component which always returns to contaminate the homogeneous element in the form of repulsion and compulsion (Goldhammer, 2005: 169). The homogeneous portion can not sustain itself without the admittance of a new mental and political logic that is founded in the anarchist conception of the State: “[e]ven in difficult circumstances, the State is able to neutralize those heterogeneous forces that will yield only to its constraints” (Bataille, 1985b: 139) — the political State-form is to be regarded as a particular embodiment of the homogeneous form, but not the form it must necessarily take: the restrictive economy of utility absorbs only partial energy from an excessive flow. The classical economic principles which have hereto-

14I am aware that Bataille thought that productive society was progressively pursuing a path away from the myth of lost intimacy: “The millennial quest for lost intimacy was abandoned by productive mankind, aware of the futility of the operative ways, but unable to continue searching for that which could not be sought merely by the means it had” (1992: 92). Bataille believed that the disposal of this myth (the myth of pre-reflective consciousness) resulted in ‘acute self-alienation’, however the anarchist myth is not similar to the heterogeneous myth offered by Bataille — indeed, it may be said to be homogeneous and marked by the restrictive logic of scarcity. Bataille was imagining a pre-reflective myth founded in animality rather than within the ‘order of things’ (Auslander, 2007: 53). Also see, Tomasi, 2008.

15“Production is the basis of social homogeneity [...] In this part, each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity valid in itself. A useful activity has a common measure with another useful activity, but not with activity for itself” (Bataille, 1985b: 138).