

Accursed Anarchism: Five Post-Anarchist Meditations on Bataille

Saint Schmidt

2009

Contents

1: Bataille as a Post-anarchist: Where to Begin	3
2: Beneath the General Economy, the State!	5
3: Nihilist Anarchism and the Principle of No-thing	8
4: The Gift is Voluntary	12
5: To Have Never Begun, To Have Never Finished	14
0: Excrement	15
References	15

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*¹; in any case, this vexing relationship is by now a matter of common knowledge and it proves useless if one is truly interested in the exploratory and transformative practices associated with philosophical meditation.² 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);³ for instance, not long after Bataille’s death *Tel Quel* — an avant-garde literary journal operating out of Paris at the time

¹ I 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 *ressentiment* 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.

² I 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 Cafe (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.

³ For 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).

— had incisively granted Bataille this very appropriate distinction — the irony of which becomes exposed as the occurrence 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 traditional anarchism and how might this reading inform contemporary 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 result 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 anarchism (some of which are explored in other meditations) toward the embrace of *sovereignty* and, in the face of a metaphysical 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 determination of *heterogeneity* defined as *non-homogeneous* supposes 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 defined, nevertheless 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 *an-archy* is itself a commitment to the discovery of that excess-ive and ill-defined portion of matter that shatters the short-sightedness of the *idea(l)* 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, of becoming conscious of the decisive meaning of an instant in which increase (the acquisition of *something*) will resolve into expenditure; and this will be precisely *self-consciousness*, that is, a consciousness that henceforth has *nothing as its object*” (1980: 190); it is not a wonder that money has no value in the jungle, but that it requires the power of ritual and the placement of an impermanent some-thing into successive intervals: the economy of utility, therefore, is still nothing but an economy of *play* without the imposition of the restrictive State, a single instant of the State-form.

I am under no illusion when I confess the following: the announcement of this small project is the mark its betrayal⁴ (as we will see, this is primarily a work of *an-archism* rather than *an-archy*, a work which embodies the illusionary mark of the sign and its concomitant gesture toward the domain of utility; however, and quite paradoxically, it does so in the service of the principle of *heterogeneity*, which is, in turn, put to the service of *an-archy*). What I wish to gain from this study are the fragments of a distinctly Bataillean variant of anarchism which, I would like to argue, proves itself to be more anarchistic (more in tune with the subject of anarchism, that is, with *an-archy*) than anarchism proves itself to be. However, before proceeding I must provide some-thing about the logic of the general State in the work of Bataille — an idea that is never given the label “general State” but which is sufficiently hinted at to provide us with a movement toward Bataillean anarchism — if I am to continue to advance the case for anarchist theory.⁵

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 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.⁶ 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

⁴ 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 *an-archy*. For an interesting post-anarchist discussion on the paradoxical use of *strategy* see *Separating The Sands* (2009).

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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).

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 foundation for its critique of representation. The state is the object of critique because it is the *ultimate form* of political representation, not because it is founding for it” (emphasis are mine; 1994: 47). If I may be permitted the minor inconvenience of this reduction, as all writers inevitably are, then I may say that it appears to me that the traditional anarchists ultimately believed that the State emerged as a foreign body and imposed itself entirely against the will of the people (ignoring, for the moment, the role of ideology as one of the vehicles for its self-perpetuation), therefore logically precluding the possibility for free, spontaneous, action on the part of the people in all instances thereafter:

They [the Marxists] maintain that only a dictatorship — their dictatorship, of course — can create the will of the people, while our answer to this is: No dictatorship can have any other aim but that of self-perpetuation, and it can beget only slavery in the people tolerating it; *freedom can be created only by freedom, that is, by a universal rebellion on the part of the people and free organization of the toiling masses from the bottom up* (emphasis are mine; Bakunin, 1873 [1953]: 288).

While the anarchists pressed for the *means* of political revolution to match their *ends* (in other words, for political revolution to cease to use the State/power), the probability of life free from the contaminating effects of the State (the point of departure for spontaneous political revolution) does not appear to be present and this renders the prospects for revolution highly unlikely without the sacrifice of *means* (this is the hegemonic logic of reform/revolution; c.f. Day, 2005). Despite this, the incompatibility between the means of political revolution and the *ends* (ends: in the traditional anarchist conception is a world free from power; a “universal brotherhood”) therefore marked the harshest critique leveled against the Marxists, 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,

⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of traditional anarchism’s Manichean logic see Saul Newman, 2004b.

⁸ Bakunin, 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).

⁹ This 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)

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 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 offered and precluded by these conceptions?” My criticism begins with the assumption that traditionalists continue to invoke the problematic assumption that power derives primarily from the (political) State¹⁰, flowing outward/downward to repress an otherwise creative and “good” human essence;¹¹ my concern has been that this theory, positioned as it is within the hopelessly restrictive economy of *utility* and *form*, does not offer 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 transformation of the traditional anarchist discourse (re-writing it, as we all have done in our own way) invites the occasion for an interesting second reading, beginning with the following simple metaphor: if, for the traditional Marxists, the domain of class referred also to the domain of utility¹² then, for the anarchists, we may properly deduce that the domain of the State referred also 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!¹³ 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

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?

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).

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 expenditure, waste, sacrifice, and destruction were claimed to be more fundamental to human life than economies of production and utility” (2003: 317).

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.

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 of a growing body of literature in *nihilist anarchism* that no post-anarchist can do without studying.

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 *ressentiment*).

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 product (*an-archy; Stirner's un-man*) without employing the “stubborn determination to treat as a disposable and usable *thing* that whose essence is sacred, that which is completely removed from the profane utilitarian sphere” (Bataille, 1988: 73). Hakim Bey laments:

Anarchists have been claiming for years that “anarchy is not chaos.” Even anarchism seems to want a *natural law*, an inner and innate morality in matter, an entelechy or purpose-of-being. [...] Anarchism says that “the state should be abolished” only to institute a new more radical form of order in its place. Ontological Anarchy however replies that no “state” can “exist,” in chaos, that all ontological claims are spurious except the claim of chaos (which however is undetermined), and therefore that governance of any sort is impossible. Chaos never died (1993).

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).

¹⁴ I 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.

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, Bataille an anarchist affinity groups. Moreover, what Bataille teaches us as an 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 heretofore 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:¹⁶

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).

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).

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 constitute *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).

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 primitives 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, as I already have, that “Bataille’s theory contains radically antistatist 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 useful. It is only a matter of an acceptable loss, preferable to another that is regarded as unacceptable: a question of *acceptability*, 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 intervention 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

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.

finally achieve in the lucid vision of its linked historical forms” (ibid., 41). It is clear that the gift of sacrifice implies one to *voluntarily* submit to the inevitable — one forms a community with another only by masochistically sacrificing elements of oneself;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 because — 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 relation to each other, that of *usableness*, of utility, of use (Stirner, 1907: 394).

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 community was made possible by its underlying utilitarian valuation:

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,

¹⁹ For Bataille, “two beings [...] only communicate when losing a part of themselves. Communication ties them together with wounds, where their unity and integrity dissipates in fever” (1985: 250).

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-archy*.

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 stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster.

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 *an-archy* 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 configurations 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 *an-archy* 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).

References

- de Acosta, Alejandro. (2009) “How the Stirner eats gods,” in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* (#67).
- Auslander, Philip. (2007) *Theory for performance studies: A student’s guide (Theory 4)*. Routledge.
- Bakunin, Mikhail. (1984) *Political philosophy: Scientific anarchism* (G.P. Maximoff, Ed.) London: Free Press of Glencoe.
- — . (1971) *Bakunin on anarchism* (Sam Dolgoff, Ed., Trans.) Vintage Books.
- — . (1873) [1953] “Statism and anarchy,” in *The political philosophy of Bakunin* (G.P. Maximoff, Ed.). New York: The New York Free Press.
- Bataille, Georges. (1993) *The accursed share: Volume 3: The history of eroticism and sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.
- — . (1992) *Theory of religion* (Robert Hurley, Trans.) New York: Zone Books.
- — . (1988) *The accursed share: An essay on general economy (Volume 1: Consumption)*. New York: Zone Books.
- — . (1985a) “Nietzschean chronicle.” in *Visions of excess*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 202–212.
- — . (1985b) “The psychological structure of fascism,” in *Visions of excess*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 137–160.
- Berkman, Alexander. [2003] *What is anarchism?* Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Bey, Hakim. (1993) [2009] *Ontological anarchy in a nutshell*. Retrieved on July 16th, 2009 from deoxy.org

- Biles, Jeremy. (2007) *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the sacrifice of form*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Botting, Fred., & Scott Wilson (Eds.) (1991) *Bataille: A critical reader*. Wiley-Blackwell
- Call, Lewis. (2002) *Postmodern Anarchism*. Lexington Books.
- Davis, Kathy. (2008) Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist Theory*. 9(67)
- Day, Richard. J. F. (2005) *Gramsci is dead: Anarchist currents in the newest social movements*. London: Pluto Press.
- Dorfman, Ben. (2002) *The accursed share: Bataille as historical thinker*. Critical Horizons, 3(1): 37–71.
- Dupont, Frère. (2008) *Species being and other stories*. CA: Ardent Press.
- Fink, Bruce. (1996) *The Lacanian subject: Between language and jouissance*. (Edition 3) Princeton University Press.
- Goldhammer, Jesse. (2007) “Dare to know, dare to sacrifice: Georges Bataille and the crisis of the Left,” in *Reading Bataille now* (Shannon Winnubst., Ed.). Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- — . (2005) *The headless republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hadot, Pierre. (2002) *What is ancient philosophy?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Knabb, Ken. (2003) *Guy Debord: Complete cinematic works: Scripts, stills, documents*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Koch, Andrew M. (1993) Poststructuralism and the epistemological basis of anarchism, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 23(3)
- Kropotkin, Pyotr. [2005] “Modern science and anarchism,” *The anarchists* (Irving Louis Horowitz, Ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.
- — . (1902) *Mutual aid: A factor in evolution*. Porter Sargent Publishers, New edition.
- Marx, Karl. (1867) *Capital* (Vol. 1) as Retrieved on July 15th, 2009 from www.marxists.org
- May, Todd. (1994). *The political philosophy of post-structuralist anarchism*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Newman, Saul. (2004a) “Interrogating the master: Lacan and radical politics,” *Psychoanalysis, culture & society*. 9(3): 298. Also online at nosubject.com (Retrieved on July 14th, 2009).
- — . (2004b) “Anarchism and the politics of resentment,” in *I am not a man, I am dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the anarchist tradition* (John Moore, Ed., with Spencer Sunshine). New York: Autonomedia.

- — . (2001) *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the dislocation of power*. Toronto: Lexington Books.
- Not Bored! n.d. [2009] *Bataille: Accursed Stalinist*. Retrieved on July 16th, 2009 from www.notbored.org
- Ritzer, George. (2003) *The Blackwell companion to major contemporary social theorists* (2nd Edition). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rousselle, Duane., Ed. (2009/forthcoming) *Anarchy at the brink: The post-anarchism anthology. [in negotiation]*
- Separating the Sands. [2009] *Against strategic anarchism*. As retrieved on July 16th, 2009 from www.anarchistnews.org
- Simmel, Georg. (1971) *Georg Simmel on individuality and social forms* (Donald N. Levine, Ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- — . (1950) *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (Kurt Wolff, Trans., Ed.) Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Stirner, Max. (1907) *The ego and his own* (Steven T. Byington, Ed.). New York: Benjamin Tucker Publishing.
- Tomasi, Alessandro. (2008) “The role of intimacy in the evolution of technology,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology*. 17(1): 1–12.
- Tudor, David. (2006) [2009] John Cage — 4’33” by David Tudor (video), Retrieved on July 16th, 2009 from www.youtube.com

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Saint Schmidt
Accursed Anarchism: Five Post-Anarchist Meditations on Bataille
2009

theanarchistlibrary.org