

BATAILLE

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**Projections of Discontinuity, Desires of Continuity:
A Contemporized Reading of Bataille and Perec**

*Essay by Luc Trahand.
Illustrations by Sinclair Vicisitud.*

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A Contemporized Reading of Bataille and Perec

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Content Warning: topics of suicide, rape, and capitalism.

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Parable.

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Under the gaze of the red sun, Sir Edmond.
*The Diseases and Pests of Ornamental
Plants*. Flourish, prosper. P melts into a
puddle in a petri dish. B has a finger up his
croissant. He tears away the end and dips it
in warm milk. At a cafe they passed wild
away the time; it is dust.

B for Bob, perhaps. P could not be for P-Orridge?
A certain Gene(t)sis-quoi.

The strip mall empties, vacated but for
vacationing vagrants. Figures loom. It's the
undead Kennedys, they're back—came
wafting in through the back window, sitting
on the eye of a butterfly's wing. They crave,
their organs ooze. They are desiring for you.

Preamble.

“[A]ll things would be visibly connected if one could discover at a single glance and in its totality the tracings of an Ariadne's thread leading thought into its own labyrinth.”

- Bataille, *The Solar Anus*¹

I'll begin with a mental exercise. What would it look like to construct a working theory of desire? Though there is extensive and expanding research that is currently attempting to reverse-engineer this through the observable results, our understanding of the mechanisms of desiring-production, to use the Deleuze-Guattari hyphenated-neologism, is infinitesimal. Only in hindsight can the path from cause to effect be plainly evident, since we don't have a semblance of a formula yet through which to project future desire. To begin, one must recognize a world that is deterministic, unaffected by ontic chance. If a ball rolls down a hill, its destination must be determinable. From there, the crux of the issue arises, as one needs infinitely more data than can be collected. Yet our knowledge of the laws of motion are adequate enough for a result with a minimal error margin. The equivalent laws have not been extrapolated from psychoanalysis or neuropsychology. Though algorithms respond immediately to effects of desire, and are potent exploiters of it, the capability of a formulaic theorem would be ever-more devastating while we haven't (yet?) a sustainable relationship to human natural malice.

¹ “The Solar Anus,” The Anarchist Library, accessed September 2025, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/georges-bataille-the-solar-anus>.

As we observe the degradation of our ecosystems and habitats, and therefore our species, it becomes evident that our fate is correlated with how we view and assess human nature. Anchored in works from 1928 and 1967, yet culturally contemporized to 2025, the case study of Georges Perec's *Un homme qui dort* ("A Man Asleep") and Georges Bataille's *Histoire de l'œil* ("Story of the Eye") yields a prismatic convergence when studied through the lenses of death & *eroticism*, intimacy & *extimacy*, and ennui & *conquérance*. These dichotomies share nuclei through the notions of discontinuity, the Bataillean concept of the chasmic isolation of human beings that occurs from sexual reproduction, and continuity, its counterpart that is sought out as an illusory transcendence of the human condition. This examination of oppositions engenders an analysis of the cultural implications of discontinuity as it presents itself today: through labyrinthial passages are interconnected concepts such as necropolitics, masochism in performance art, meta-ironic humor, early punk culture, and the body without organs.



Context for *Story of the Eye* (1928).

There are largely three readings of *Histoire de l'œil*. They arrive sequentially. Upon the initial flip-through, the writing is fantastically odious, perhaps gratuitously so, as Bataille delivers in copious amounts the obscene. It pushes the sexual limitations of early 20th Century society, situated in the periphery of surrealism, and digs into and excavates your erotic imagination. It counts the narrator and Simone's explorations of desire in excess, obsession, and perversion. Together, they set themselves to debase and rape Marcelle, who consequently hangs herself. With the financial support of a wealthy Englishman, Sir Edmond, the narrator and Simone travel to Spain where they continue their insatiable erotic pursuits, involving a deadly corrida and bull testicles. The final culminant scene describes them raping and murdering a priest on an altar, using his excised eye as a prop for their deviant passions.

The author-narrator implies a symbolic universality to the characters in the last line of the narrative, which provides a reconsideration of everything previous: "each day, as a new character, I raped a likewise transformed Simone."² Referring to the French (4th edition) it was written in, there lay a lot more insinuation: "*chaque jour, nouveau personnage, je violais une nouvelle Simone.*"³ The direct translation would be such that the narrator, taking on a new character or disguise, "raped a *new* Simone"—leading the reader to decide whether that means: Simone in a disguise; or, each day, an entirely new

² Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (1928; repr., San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), 85.

³ Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, Collection L'Imaginaire (1928; repr., Gallimard, 1967), 93.

person playing the role of Simone for the narrator; or, more poignantly, that both characters are archetypes that are being played, realised by people, each day, in every town, around the world. This twist engenders a reinterpretation, letting the reader scour the book for how many different Simones there may be.

As an addendum, the supposed writer of the story, sitting at a cafe, finds himself compelled to give psychological context, and writes about his corollary life experiences. He recalls: his blind syphilitic father who became paralysed and would urinate in his chair, whom he loved early on and then hated henceforth; his mother, who attempted suicide more than once; and the story of a venture to nearby castle ruins at night. A psychoanalytical reading then unfolds, as it opens the valves for interpretations within ambiguities—of which there are many.

Context for *A Man Asleep* (1967).

A composition with less modality, more tonality, *Un homme qui dort* harps on a blue note. Written in second person in the present tense, the story follows a twenty-five year-old student who becomes increasingly lassitudinous, whose desires wilt as he goes through the motions of life. In the smallest shoebox apartment, he's moved to Paris from a nowhere town for sociology studies, and it is exam day. But he doesn't go. He progressively alienates himself from his friends, his ambitions, even from his own self. His character's outlook on people is initially one of superciliousness—wherein he looks down on “staying power, initiative, strokes of brilliance, success,” the things that modernity holds as “sacrosanct images of the struggle for life.”⁴ He thinks himself transparent, immovable, unattainable.

By the very end, he pierces his stupor, his metaphorical sleep, reconciling himself with the “thousands upon thousands” of “silent sentinels by the river.” It is at this convergence that Perec's language subtly implicates the leitmotif of stones, “along the embankments, all over the rain-washed pavements of Place Clichy, ... waiting for the sea-spray, for the breaking waves.”⁵ Taken out of his self-centered rêverie, the narrator blends back into the crowd. The book is bracketed by imagery around sight and slumber, encapsulated by this statement: “even if you were to fall into a sleep so deep

⁴ Georges Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties and A Man Asleep*, trans. Andrew Leak and David Bellos (Verba Mundi, 2002), 143.

⁵ Perec, *Things*, 221.

that no shock, no shout, no burning pain could rouse you, there would still be this eye, your eye, that will never close, that will never sleep.”⁶

⁶ Perec, *Things*, 194.



Death and *Érotisme*.

“To include all life within oneself and yet to be excluded from all life—, was this the voice of death, was it here already?”⁷

- Hermann Broch, *The Death of Virgil*

In Bataille’s *L’Érotisme* (1957), the barycentre of the human condition lies within a loss and its repercussions. There lies an abyss between us as isolated beings, stemming from sexual reproduction as the making of a distinct new entity: two form a third, discontinuous being. In our *discontinuity*, we hold on to the nostalgia of a lost *continuity*, the effect of which underpins our experiences of eroticism, violence, transgression, and a fascination for death. Both books in this study, as interpreted through these themes, are exemplars of this chasm that we desire to bridge. From the illusion of discontinuity, *Story of the Eye* illustrates an exuberant desperation, while *A Man Asleep* performs an unavailing retreat.

Before being immersed in insular analysis, it should be noted that the idea of discontinuity/continuity is an illusion in that it is immaterial. There exists material continuity, that of the domain of classical physics, wherein nothing is created nor destroyed, simply transformed—but even that is an incomplete view of physics. The grief, the nostalgia (Greek: *nostos* + *algos*, returning home + pain) of continuity appears in our experience of self, in all its

⁷ Hermann Broch, *The Death of Virgil*, trans. Jean Starr Untermyer (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 187.

sovereignty. It manifests in the conciliation of opposites, present for instance in Jean Genet's writing, wherein "there is a close relationship between flowers and convicts. The fragility and delicacy of the former are of the same nature as the brutal insensitivity of the latter."⁸ Expressed within Genet is the notion of delicacy and violence, a portrayal of beauty being something on which we can project our grief of a lost continuity. In effect, this could pertain to all that one finds beautiful: a projection of continuity upon an object, an idea, an other. The qualifiers "loss" and "grief" are illusory, themselves being a product of *reaching* to pierce the strata of elements that form our discontinuity. In this *loss-as-reaching*, we are driven by an empty nostalgia.

Eroticism forms intrinsically through our impulse to attempt the stitching of ruptures in continuity that pervade our psyche, including the reproductive discontinuity, as well as other imposing griefs or even minute losses experienced within someone. There is a bidirectional dynamic: the rupture makes the connection meaningful, and the connection makes the rupture bearable. In Bataille's narrative, the storyteller's relationship with his syphilitic father is embodied in Simone. His aversion to—and contrarian attitude towards—his father, whom he adored as a child, possibly due to a resentment for unfulfilled expectations in fatherly care, is precisely what creates the unquenchable, violent passion between the narrator and Simone. She mirrors the father: imagery of eggs, eyes, and testicles relates to the father's clouded white irises and the nudity he'd often inadvertently expose; urine frequently shows up in the erotic acts, paralleling the father's bladder dysfunction; and Simone is commanding, ordering "I don't want you to jerk off anymore without me,"⁹ which perhaps recalls his "strict upbringing."¹⁰

⁸ Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 3.

⁹ Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 5.

¹⁰ Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 94.

Furthermore, parental figures, from whom we hold fifty percent of genetic material, are the closest ties to—and most vivid reminders of—an impossible continuity.

Though sexual eroticism is muted in *A Man Asleep*, the attraction to death is present in a yearning for cessation of being. In his unrestful slumber, the narrator seeks refuge in a will to dematerialize, all the while conscious that “you are not dead and even death could never set you free.”¹¹ By this, Perec conveys the same gripes with discontinuity as Radiohead’s self-alienating song “How To Disappear Completely,” in which is professed “I’m not here, this isn’t happening.”¹² The tie-pulling, belt-cuffing attraction of melancholia that permeates Western culture often fails to be conscientious of the circumstances that make it so potent (See “Ennui & *Conquérance*”). In this novella, the main character lives “without desire, or resentment, or revolt,”¹³ and yet, through the illusion of discontinuity, experiences a sexless eroticism for his refuge—wherein his sole desire is a form of ego death.

In contrast, Bataille’s narrator combats discontinuity with extreme ritualistic acts. His definition of eroticism is “assenting to life up to the point of death,”¹⁴ as evidenced through the deaths of Marcelle the young girl, Granero the matador, and Don Aminado the priest, all concurrent with sexual events. A direct implementation can be found in the artist Bob Flanagan’s life and work. His cystic fibrosis promised him a short life, and he turned to fight sickness with sickness. The immanent notion of death within sex is exemplified in the term “petite mort” (little death) to qualify an orgasm. Flanagan would practice

¹¹ Perec, *A Man Asleep*, 194.

¹² Radiohead, *How To Disappear Completely*.

¹³ Perec, *A Man Asleep*, 161.

¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *Erotism : Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 11.

masochism in the ritual of performance art, affirming Bataille's notion that eroticism is a rehearsal for death.

The three deaths in *Story of the Eye* provide the different facets of the narrator's relationship with death. When the matador's eye gets impaled by the bull's horn, the author is drawn to the illusion of continuity in mortality—precisely at the very definite and defining limit of life, at the moment of death. Granero's death “coincided with a brief orgasm for Simone,”¹⁵ which illustrates Bataille's reflection that “the nearness of continuity, the intoxication of continuity, dominates the consideration of death” (my translation).¹⁶ The narrator does not, however, witness Marcelle's passing, discovering her hanging body inside the wardrobe. Him and Simone are thrown, stunned by the corpse, evoking the sign of violence and its seeming threat of contagion. Here, death transmits a sort of anxiety, “a danger for those left behind.”¹⁷ Upon the priest's death, a transgressive quality arises. The altar scene deals with the religious taboos that enframe our culture of death, recalling Bataille's refutation of categorical imperatives: “There exists no prohibition that cannot be transgressed. Often the transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed.”¹⁸ The characters' confrontation of taboos is legitimized through the context, wherein Simone masturbates in confession, and Sir Edmond pulls out the priest, Don Aminado, to the altar. Under these pious eyes, they ritually sacrifice him in festive intemperance. When the eyeball gets excised and cut from the body, it ceases to represent Don Aminado's gaze, becoming then an agent of discontinuity, embodied, rendered tangent, that Simone and the narrator can exercise their power upon.

¹⁵ Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 64.

¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Les Éditions De Minuit, 2011), 28.

¹⁷ Bataille, *Erotism*, 46.

¹⁸ Bataille, *Erotism*, 63.

To affirm this newly extended power, they use it for play, holding it close between their bodies, then inside their bodies—and for a few moments they feel larger than life.



Intimacy and *Extimité*.

“Can we, without renouncing our individuality, satisfy our aspirations to universality? Or is it only by the sacrifice of our individual differences that we can integrate ourselves into the community?”¹⁹

- Simone de Beauvoir, “Must We Burn Sade?”

Extimité, or *extimacy*, is a Lacanian neologism signifying “this intimate that is radically Other.”²⁰ We live in a world where extimacy is the only kind of intimacy that is utilious, so intimacy grows scarce, perhaps disappearing entirely. Exercising intimacy has become transgressive, not simply to the circumscribed limitations of the established system, but to the entire system’s functioning, in an action of revolt. The problem arises when one tries to conceive of intimacy as an individual in an extimate society, since, as Bataille put it (before Lacan coined his term): “Intimacy is never separated from external elements, without which it could not be *signified*.”²¹ In introspective reflection, all forms of self-intimacy manifest in interiorised exteriority, presenting the Other that precisely defines extimacy. It is only in piercing the shield of discontinuity that the individual subsides for an instant.

¹⁹ Le Marquis de Sade, Simone de Beauvoir, and Pierre Klossowski, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 9.

²⁰ Jacques-Alain Miller, *Lacanian Discourse: Éxtimité*, trans. Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1988), 124.

²¹ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 129–130.

There is an othering present in both Perec's and Bataille's novellas that presents as diametrically opposed, and must be contextualized first within the overarching system's mechanics of sovereignty. As taken up by Agamben in *Homo Sacer*, Carl Schmitt defines the sovereign as "he who decides on the state of exception"²²—that is, the one who determines when the normal order no longer applies. This definition remains peripheral in that it is depicting a single symptom of sovereignty, and is perhaps non-exhaustive to its applications. However, it is conducive to elaborations on alienation, both at a political and personal scale. Both narrators in the stories at hand exercise personal sovereignty by suspending the normal order of their lives. But an extimate society cedes sovereign power to those in control of *things*. As developed by Foucault, science is a device through which sovereignty exercises its biopower.²³ Additionally, Bataille writes that science "can know the subject only by taking it for an object, for a thing."²⁴ These observations on science are concentric to the larger statement that "a capitalist society reduces what is human to the condition of a thing."²⁵ The context of the two narrators is indeed capitalist, but differs from our current one in that the sovereignty bared through extimacy, ceded to things, has the capacity of being manipulated through technological means that are far superior and more potent than those of Bataille's and Perec's times.

In *Story of the Eye*, intimacy is externalized through objectification that is produced through Simone and Marcelle. What characterizes this extimacy most, however, is the egg play that is symbolically associated with eyes

²² Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus: Homo Sacer* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 11.

²³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), 140–145.

²⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 134.

²⁵ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 129.

(recalling the white, blind eyes of the father). As part of the reproductive process, eggs here come to connote the Other, the New, and the incurring lack of knowledge of that New—the latter of which forms the basis for ostracization. As they are recurrently inserted, the inference could be drawn that Simone is performing a transgression against the pressure of the discontinuity illusion—and equally so against the extimate society at hand—by attempting to symbolically consolidate the Other. Acknowledging another, more psychoanalytical interpretation, the narrator in these scenes could metaphorically be assisting his mother, as represented by the eggs, who must fulfill the fatherly role, here signified by the insertion into Simone (the character as a projection of his father), due to his father's inability to tend to him. This would enact an opposite to sexual reproduction, with the egg going into the male figure, as a transgressive action against the narrator's birth, the harbinger of his illusion of discontinuity. In both assessments, Bataille seems to pull focus on external projections and outward actions, a form of personal sovereignty enacted through excess. With Perec, extimacy is not found in the narrator's surroundings, rather it is being rejected. He finds himself learning "how to be a shadow and how to look at men as if they were stones."²⁶ He severs ties with extimacy, viewing the world as cold and impenetrable. It is in his internal lament that he others himself, as he proclaims to be "as free as a cow, as a mollusc, as a rat!"²⁷ This language of alienation creates a sort of interiorized extimacy, wherein instead of the Other reflecting an image of himself, it is himself that reflects an image of Other. Effectually, Perec illustrates how when one refuses the system to which they belong, herein a capitalist *thing*-culture, one sees that they are mimetic to the system.

²⁶ Perec, *Things*, 163.

²⁷ Perec, *Things*, 195.

The passages of *A Man Asleep* that describe the drowsiness of the narrator on the edge of sleep are almost meditative, shutting out all but certain precise sensations, such as an eye against a pillow, a knee against the other. In his sleepless doze, his body starts folding into and occupying his head as he eventually becomes “nothing more than an eye.”²⁸ His retreat into himself and his sensorial awarenesses, as an attempt to diffuse the tension brought by discontinuity, parallels the uptrending practice of mindfulness (very eminent in California), which aims to recenter the mind’s focus on the “now” to provide relief from suffering. The phenomenon in the United States is a rebranding and commercialization of *sati*, a Buddhist practice from India. The deeper question I mean to raise through this: is intimacy ever free from extimacy? Thwarting externally anchored suffering and treating memory and reflection, mindfulness seems—at least in theory—to be countering the Other within, i.e. *extimacy*. In doing so, it achieves an alienation of the individual, as understood as a societal being. The “now,” which stands outside of time, belongs to the notion of continuity, on which Bataille notes that “the supreme moment is indeed a silent one, and in the silence our consciousness fails us.”²⁹ The consciousness that provides our sense of self dissipates, and along with it, the presence of both extimacy and intimacy. Conversely to a mindfulness practice, Perec’s protagonist does not want to relinquish his grasp on his melancholia, which here exemplifies his subordination to his illusion of discontinuity. Though the parallel is worth drawing, Bataille’s philosophy upholds a Dionysian approach, seeking continuity through excess, violence, and transgression, rather than the practice of *sati*—which one might qualify majoritarially as Apollonian.

²⁸ Perec, *Things*, 193.

²⁹ Bataille, *Erotism*, 276.

Bataille's Dionysian, secular idea of the sacred is found in a violent tearing of the cloth of discontinuity. An exceptional example can be found in Genesis P-Orridge's "Pandrogyné" project with their partner, Lady Jaye. Beginning at their meeting in 1993, the aim was for both individuals to become one another through dress, makeup, and cosmetic surgery; they adopted the pronoun 'we' in reference to themselves (weself?). Perhaps the ultimate expression of extimacy, this project depicts, through the transgression of body modification, a height of the struggle for continuity. This relates to matters in *The Accursed Share* (1949), such that "in his strange myths, in his cruel rites, man is in search of a lost intimacy."³⁰ Through the shared lexicon, Bataille suggests a treatment of continuity and intimacy as isomorphic, yet they are distinct insofar as intimacy is an experience of continuity, just as the sacred is a means to break the threshold of discontinuity.

The narrator and Simone access the sacred through ritual. Indeed, there is a progression in their erotic acts that shifts from freeform experimentation to intentional ritual. The corrida that they attended was a turning point in this progression; as a societal ritual, it brought structure to their obscene games. By the end, the acts of rape were structured as quotidian, "towards noon, on the ground and in the blazing sun, under the reddish eyes of Sir Edmond."³¹ The ritualistic violence serves as a vessel to the sacred, and a transgression against *profanity*—the utilitarian, everyday conformity.

Nearly a century beyond *Story of the Eye*'s conception, everything has been rendered profane. Bataille writes of festivals being host to rituals and an invitation to the sacred, but festivals have lost their transgressive qualities. It

³⁰ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 57.

³¹ Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 85.

is no longer the case that one even has to act to be utilious to the system; a passive existence is a profane one. While an individual's waking, sleeping, private, and public hours are mined for the benefit of Capital, it takes increasingly more energy to reach for the sacred through transgression. In the othering of the self, extimacy is what allows for all to be subsumed into utility—and what allows the ceding of centralized sovereignty. The main character of *A Man Asleep* attempts to retire from extimacy only to be stopped by his own gaze. In 2025, this venture would be halted before even beginning, as the ineluctability of his situation would cast a spoke in his wheel, and pursuing his inward retreat would simply equate to laboring for the benefit of the system.

Every sacred act having been profaned, it is paradoxically the very profanity of what is made out to be sacred that is the sole real instance of the sacred left to exploit. Gen-Z has been brought up with this actuality, leading to an understanding of the necessity to incorporate paradox: an accepted hypocrisy. For instance, meta-ironic humor blurs the lines of irony, assuming two opposite meanings at once. It requires a cultural awareness and literacy and, through this, promotes critical thinking. Although Byung-Chul Han, echoing Bataille through his social criticisms in *The Disappearance of Rituals* (2019), claims that “the age of production is accordingly a time without festival,”³² in each fragment of meta-irony lies an *intimate*, sacred festival.

However, in extimacy we are vulnerable to being no more than political agents. From the claim that “the first labor established the world of *things*,” Bataille elaborates that “once the world of things was posited, man himself

³² Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals : A Topology of the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), 51.

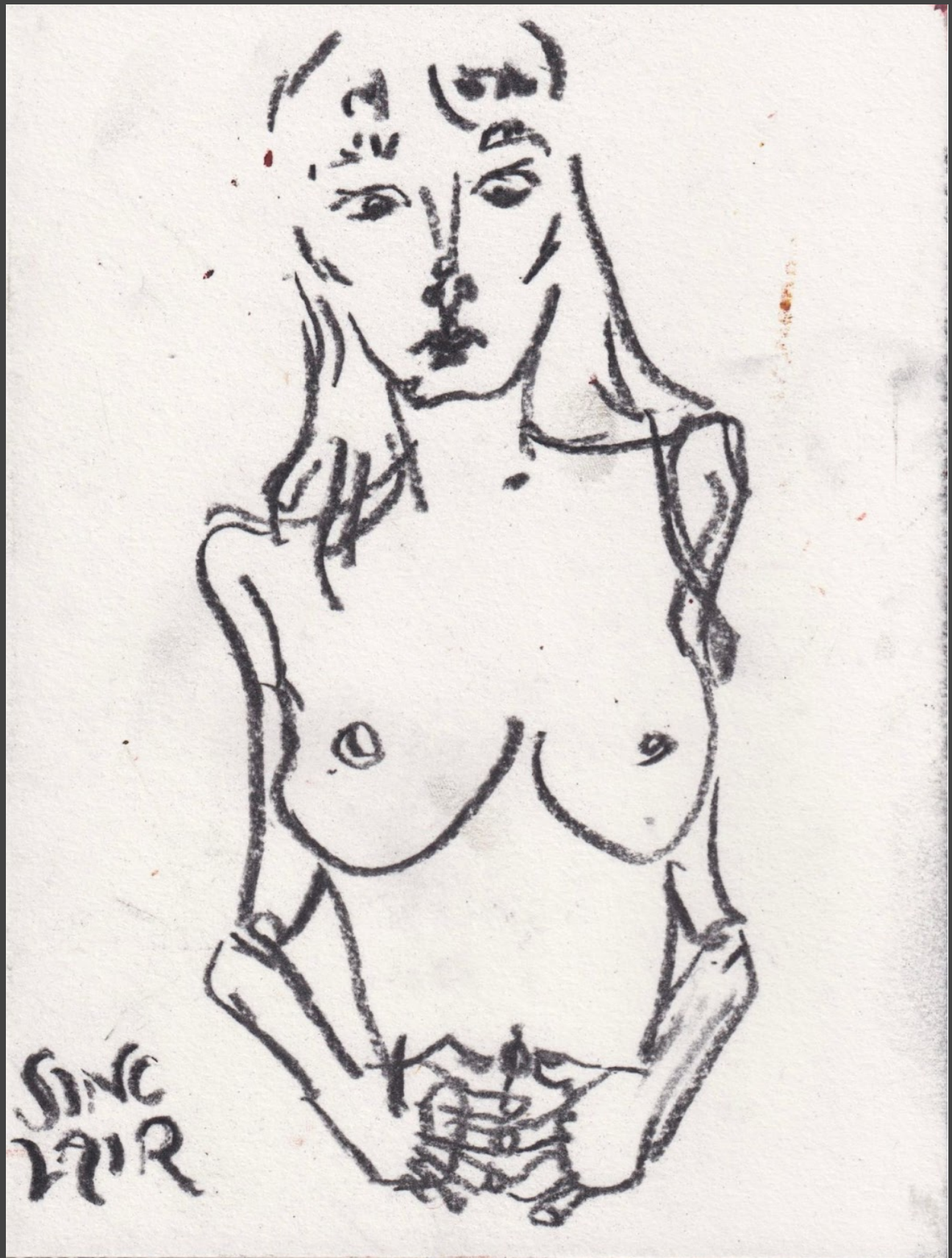
became one of the things of this world, at least for the time in which he labored.”³³ Through technology, one’s attention, one’s emotions, one’s desires, all become exploited for profit, thus turning extimacy into labor. That is the key difference between the current time and those of Perec and Bataille. The stories are placed in an environment that does not profit from their searches for continuity. Perec’s character recedes from being a utilious member of society, which proves effective since his world is void of the exploitative technologies (such as algorithmic data sorting, social media, artificial intelligence, rampant gamification, etc.) that thrive on the alienation he experiences, and could co-opt his personal sovereignty. *Story of the Eye* utilizes extimacy to seek the sacred in violent transgression, in a setting that does not have the capability of turning the characters’ *obscene* and *violent* acts into profit. They are left unchecked by simply moving to a new town every day. Today, it is the affairs of biopolitics and necropolitics, as developed by Foucault and Mbembe, respectively, to provide utility to the *violence*, herein an exploitation of bodies, even in extreme forms. The *obscene* equally becomes profane as co-opted by the entertainment industry.

As technologies of control—all technology has a function of control—rise to astronomical heights, every event becomes a choice. Hypothetically displaced from 1928 to 2025, Bataille’s story would turn into a commentary on the ubiquity of violence and pornography, as well as their utilitarian nature. Insofar as the narrator is exposed to writing the story at a cafe and presenting it as metafiction, it would also serve as a poignant example of how what is real somewhere else (such as Mbembe’s death-worlds) is presented through a screen, shielding from the sense of its reality. If, as Agamben explains, the sovereign chooses whose lives are worth anything, thus creating what he calls

³³ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 57.

“bare life,” it could be drawn that those who handle the technologies of control have sovereignty. Furthermore, through the mechanics of bare life and death-worlds, many are not afforded the privilege of extimacy, where the exteriorized intimate can only be silenced, erased, or weaponized.

Though the opposite forms of alienation in both Perec and Bataille’s novellas provide instances of the search for lost continuity that excavate and invoke extimate relations, matters have taken on a different dimension since the time of those writings. Intimacy, as a form of Apollonian continuity, is virtually inaccessible. Though passivity has become profane, so has transgression, which must be employed hypocritically to have any effect—as is the case in meta-irony. And in the vulnerability of extimate *things*, the word that seems to encapsulate it best is *stranger*. With the growing de-localization and consequent fragmentation of individuals and their culture, anchors and home-points seem to grow weaker. Kristeva, in *Intimate Revolt* (1998), raises the pertinent question of whether we all are strangers. In extimacy, it certainly is the case, and is an imperative assumption in how we choose to carry on.



Ennui and *Conquérance*.

“It’s the Suede Denim Secret Police, they have come for your uncool niece!”³⁴

- Dead Kennedys, “California Über Alles”

A Man Asleep and *Story of the Eye* are deeply concerned—though it is not explicitly treated—with the causes and effects of *ennui*. Ennui goes beyond mere boredom, as it sinks its teeth deep into the flesh of our existence. Examined through a lens of Bataillean desire and excess, Schopenhauer’s pendulum simile would have human life swing between suffering and ennui like a battering ram swings transgressively from the profane to breach the sacred. Both of these polarities find inertia through *conquérance*, the desire to conquer / be conquered, not for greed, but evolving from survival conditions. It is equally in the spirit of revolt as in the scrounge for power. The emerging ponderance: which way am I swinging?

A key part to both Bataille and Perec’s protagonists’ (henceforth B and P respectively) ennui rests in their social and familial environments. Excluding the metanarrative and considering *The Eye*’s narrator only within the story, one finds similarities: both young men from average nowhere towns in France (both coincidentally near castle ruins), they grow up without notable financial padding or class status. From this, B experiences an outpouring zest for the sacred (a *conquérance*, developed further below), while P is subjected to a

³⁴ Dead Kennedys, *California Über Alles* (Optional Music, 1979).

debilitating ennui. There is no festival, revolt, nor excess in P's trajectory, the graph of which is a steady bulldozing of the vicissitudes of life. He counts his income, regulating his life, acting "as if the best means of saving yourself, of avoiding going under altogether, were to set yourself derisory tasks, to decide everything in advance, to leave nothing to chance."³⁵ B and P are here differentiated through their attitudes towards themselves, though they do share a disregard and lack of care towards other humans.

It is this self-referent focus, in centripetal motion, that would have P's experience, and ennui in general, fall under narcissistic melancholia. Firstly, the narcissistic element is the hidden facet of ennui. More than being self-isolating, P is poetically captivated by his sense of discontinuity, such that he becomes unable to bear it. He seeks continuity with his inner mirror, that is, the death of the Other, hereby reduced to the eye, the gaze that he cannot escape. And when he cannot reconcile the two, he becomes embarrassed at the "discourteous"³⁶ action of lowering his eyes before his reflection in the mirror. It is ennui that is intoxicated by its own idea of self, one that cannot look back at him. Secondly, it is concurrently a form of melancholia. Freud qualifies it as the suffering of an abstract loss, a depression, a grief without focus. P is responding to a reinvigorated sense of discontinuity, which recalls the original *loss-as-reaching* of continuity that belongs to the human psyche. Furthermore, Kristeva in *Soleil Noir* writes of the depressed that they are radically *atheist* and morose.³⁷ This is coherent with Bataille's ideas, as within narcissistic melancholia there is a letting go of the sacred and a wallowing in the profane, which corresponds to a loss of faith. It is the taboos and limitations, as conscribed by religion, that diffuse, thus making transgression

³⁵ Perec, *Things*, 204.

³⁶ Perec, *Things*, 216.

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Soleil Noir: Dépression et Mélancolie* (Éditions Gallimard, 1987), 15.

mute. Both aspects of ennui as narcissistic melancholia are represented beautifully and succinctly in these two lines from Baudelaire's "Au Lecteur" in *Les Fleurs du Mal*:

*C'est l'Ennui ! — l'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.*³⁸

He is Ennui!—His eye filled with an unwished-for tear,
He dreams of scaffolds while puffing at his hookah.³⁹

(tr. Eli Siegel)

Rather than drowning in ennui and narcissistic melancholia, B (non-metanarrative character) takes a path of *conquérance*, one that is focused in eroticism as a space sequestered from civilization. Indeed, eroticism is a subcategory within the notion of *conquérance*, which itself belongs to the search for lost continuity and the consequent dissolution of the Other. In response to the illusion of discontinuity, B sacrifices the Other—through rape, violence, and murder—and, in doing so, sacrifices himself for a moment. After all, erotic connotations of flag-planting, stabbing, and submitting all point to a parallel with *conquérance*. The sadism and masochism dynamics of sex are the colonial and necropolitical relations of the world stage.

Apropos, let us now shift the scope to the political. As proclaimed by the Dead Kennedys' album title penned by Jello Biafra (vocalist of this punk band): "Give me convenience or give me death." The respective cover features a collage of a 1950s shaving cream advertisement superposed on a photograph of frail bodies strewn across the street with vultures lining the adjacent

³⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (1857; repr., Paris: Belin, 2019), 2.

³⁹ Eli Siegel, *Hail, American Development* (New York: Definition Press, 1968), 3.

wall—the effects of Direct Action Day, Calcutta, 1946. This cover art (and title) is a poignant exposure of necropolitics and a pertinent example of how poorly the system manages consummation, here signifying the completion through loss or destruction, an expenditure without return. In this case, consummation, through its violence and death, is a product of *conquérance*, and an inherent part of the human condition. The convenience of consumption adorns the mistreatment of consummation.

There is a discrimination to be made within all forms of culture through the notion of consummation. Culture must beget its own consummation of excess or it dies. For instance, everything that has been canonized, put into a textbook, or rendered utilious cannot be living culture, for it gets subjected to an erasure, a flattening. Punk, as good an example as any, is one that thrived in terms of inutilious expenditure and consummation. Through publications like *Semiotext(e)*, a lot of French thinkers were brought to an American audience for the first time. Volume II, No. 2 of *Semiotext(e)*, appearing in 1976, was dedicated to Georges Bataille, whose philosophy is indeed pervasive to punk culture in its realisations of expenditure, excess, and ritual. In San Francisco, a major hub for early punk culture, one could pick up a copy at City Lights Bookstore for \$3—but for all the cultural significance that store holds, it currently serves more as a museum gift shop that sells \$30 books. Though some attempt to vivify its original spirit, much of punk has been aestheticized, functionalized, and ossified.

Semiotext(e)'s following edition, Volume II, No. 3, was bringing forth the ways of thinking of Deleuze and Guattari. Though D&G did not speak or write much through an explicitly Bataillean lens, the relation provides a pertinent qualificative to this parallel reading and study of dis/continuity. Their notion

of a Body without Organs (BwO) is present in both *Anti-Œdipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is the *field of immanence* of desire, where desire is in constant production. In a BwO, organs are deterritorialized, that is, their functions are fluid, relational, modular. To a BwO, “the enemy is the organism.”⁴⁰ The illusion of discontinuity is our organism, the “*moi*” that lies above the *field*, or *plane of consistency* specific to desire.⁴¹ It is what gives the body a name and establishes a constitution and a territory. It is continuity that produces, and is the field of immanence of, our *conquérance*—expressed externally by B and internally by P. The contrast remains that Bataille presents a dissolution through excess, death, and eroticism, while D&G focus on a construction that is immanent and continuously produced. Though they arrive from opposite poles, both approaches are useful to excavating the sedimentary strata of the field of desire.

Within cultural phenomena, the BwO has been a tool for restructuring thoughts, both politically and personally. The punk movement grew to be quite a different monster than what it was first conceived to be, but nevertheless maintained a BwO practice through anti-establishment and non-conformity. Bob Flanagan’s SM performance art exemplified publicly what D&G decorticated from the concept of the masochist-BwO, as he worked “to untie the pseudobond between desire and pleasure as an extrinsic measure.”⁴² Additionally, Genesis P-Orridge pushed the boundaries of gender by heightening extimacy to a greater potential, which reshapes the organization of the body, thus practicing a BwO. Unceasingly in movement, it is the defining

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 158.

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 154.

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 155.

purpose of culture to scramble all organizations—lest culture be flattened and erased.

The eye, as Ariadne's thread to follow out of this labyrinth of an essay, is diversely semiological. In *Story of the Eye*, it comes to represent an erotic morbidity that works through extimacy to fulfill a reaching for continuity. It is both a channeling and an extrinsic projection of desire and *conquérance*. In *A Man Asleep*, the eye is the inescapable gaze, Narcissus' reflection that condemns and cages P with a melancholic fixation of his discontinuity. Perec depicts a body whose organs are static in their functions, unadaptable. And when reduced to "nothing more than an eye,"⁴³ the body is unstratified through a perceptual immanence. Furthermore, *Story of the Eye* is a more acute representation of a BwO put in practice. The eye, whether excised, driven through with a bull's horn, or symbolically represented as an egg, is deterritorialized: its purpose is suspended. And whether lodged or not in their sockets, our eyes betray us, consecrate and profane us, transgress and delimitate us, exposing the flows of desiring.

⁴³ Perec, *Things*, 193.



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