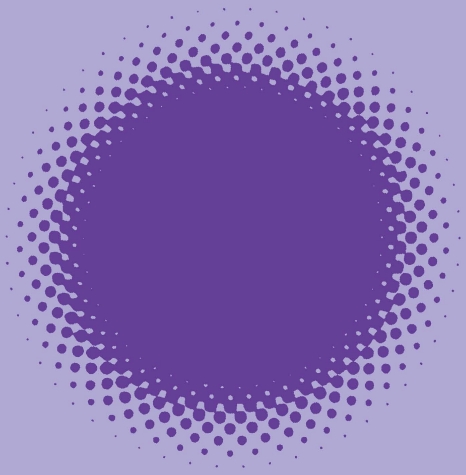
INNER EXPERIENCE



GEORGES BATAILLE

Translated, with an Introduction, by Leslie Anne Boldt

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Inner Experience

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Georges Bataille

Translated
and with an Introduction by

Leslie Anne Boldt

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Translator's Introduction

Inner Experience was written in 1943 as the first of three volumes which together appear under the title *La Somme athéologique*. As one of the volumes of the *Somme, Inner Experience* is ostensibly a comprehensive treatise, a work which "resumes all knowledge relative to its subject". Its subject, as the title suggests, is atheological—*Inner Experience* is a treatise which resonates with the absence of God. The trace of God's presence is evoked by the very title, for the prefix of *"a-théologique"* suggests privation or absence (the state of "not being present").

The title also evokes the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas. Bataille's texts may be said to operate in relation to Judeo-Christian doctrine, to the extent that they set out from its basic tenets in order to displace them. Given that the Judeo-Christian tradition situates the realization or the completion of Spirit in what is "beyond"—the infinite Being of God—the parameters of its experience are defined in relation to the Unlimited which transcends them. Bataille's texts, however, operate within a space which is no longer incomplete vis-à-vis a transcendent unlimited "beyond", but within one which is "made and unmade" by the transgression of its own limits—in particular as sexual experience reveals the absence of God.[1] It is a space which is *interior* and *sovereign*[2], locked by the Unspeakable which exists at its margins, an impossible abyss glimpsed at the moment of transgression.

Bataille's texts also constitute a displacement of the premises put forward in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Whereas Judeo-Christian doctrine situates the realization of Spirit in a transcendent "beyond", Hegel locates such a realization within Discourse, which alone is capable of revealing the totality of "what is". It is the Sage at the end of history who arrives at absolute knowledge. The Sage is fulfilled in an *identity with* the totality of "what is", not in *relation to* a transcendent "beyond".

Within Hegel's system, the Sage replaces God, and God is rendered finite.[3] For the Sage, ". . . the idea of an eternal and immutable God . . . is only a provisional completion [of history], one which survives while one waits for something better. Only completed history and the mind of the Sage (of Hegel) in which history revealed . . . the full development of being . . . occupies a sovereign position, which God occupies only temporarily as a regent".[4]

It is here that *Inner Experience* displaces the premises of Hegel's system: it illuminates a space which is *interior* and *sovereign,* but which in no way "works toward" a sovereignty completed and revealed either for or by consciousness. The sovereignty described in *Inner Experience* is in no way *subordinate to* or *revealed through* discourse, but rather arises at the moment of its rupture. Such sovereignty exists only to the extent that consciousness of it (a renewed subordination to discourse) is impossible. In this sense, the *Somme athéologique* is a "comprehensive treatise" which records the impotence of discourse—access to the moment of sovereignty is gained through intoxication, eroticism and love.[5]

A "voyage to the end of the possible of man", *Inner Experience* is a text which inscribes the notions of a "transcendent beyond" and of the "totality of what is" in order to submit them to interrogation. Both are abandoned at the moment of sovereignty—impotent before the "impossible depth of things."

*

To ask oneself before another: by what means does he calm within himself the desire to be everything? Sacrifice, conformity, trickery, poetry, morality, snobbery, heroism, religion, revolt, vanity, money? or by

several means together? or all together? A wink of an eye in which glimmers a deceitfulness, a melancholy smile, a grimace of fatigue together betray the disguised suffering which the astonishment at not being everything, at even having concise limits, gives us.

(Inner Experience, p. xxxii)

With this passage, Bataille opens the wound of insufficiency felt by each individual who wishes to surpass his limited existence. In *Inner Experience,* he states categorically: we cannot escape our desire to be everything, to identify with the entirety of universe. The wish to surpass our limited existence may be satisfied in numerous ways—among them, there is the illusion of never dying, or the wish to be read and esteemed as an author. An author may seek a glory, may seek an immortality which is inscribed in text; however, those who do not have this power to inscribe their existence leave, as a record of their lives, nothing but an inscription on a tombstone—the site to which we are all called in the end[6]—but an inscription which will be forgotten, unknown.

Just as inevitable as the desire to be everything is the knowledge that we will die, that our individual existence is not commensurate to the universe with which we seek identification. This uneasiness which we experience before the inevitability of our disappearance pervades our being, inspires an anguish. We avoid this suffering by suppressing the thought of our death, or by postponing our existence in a frenzied yet essentially absent devotion to the world of work, of project. These illusions, this evasion of anxiety through project, are what Bataille calls "narcotics" necessary for us to suppress the pain of our limited existence. Yet just as we can never be commensurate to the universe with which we seek identification, so the narcotics to which we turn can never totally appease our suffering, our uneasiness. Bataille indicates the direction which *Inner Experience* will take when he writes: *"But what happens to us when, disintoxicated, we learn what we are? Lost among babblers in a night in which we can only hate the appearance of light which comes from babbling. The self-acknowledged suffering of the disintoxicated is the subject of this book"* (IE, p. xxxii).

We are babblers, when we limit our use of language to utilitarian ends, when we make it serviceable to the projects through which we sidestep our anxiety. This abuse of language mirrors the abuse which we make of our existence: we have denatured it in removing from it the trace of the sacred, in our blind observance of the dictums of project and work. In *Inner Experience,* Bataille suggests that this devotion to the

secular world of production and postponement could constitute a manifestation of the "Death of God" which makes its famous appearance in Nietzsche's texts. "If one says that 'God is dead' . . . [some] think of the abuse . . . which allows no value to subsist—the mind reduced, in accordance with Descartes' formula, to the 'clear and assured consciousness of that which is useful to life' " (IE, p. 133). Yet our desire to communicate with what exceeds us, our nostalgia for immediacy, our outrage that existence should be reduced to the realm of project, continue to resurface, continue to provoke a dissatisfaction with our attempts to evade what we are. In many of Bataille's works, one finds echoed a key notion which he develops in *Inner Experience*: it is through a suppression of discursive activity and through a reintroduction of the sacred that we cease to make an abuse of our existence. And it is through sacrifice that the sacred is reintroduced.

In the acknowledgement of our suffering and of our limits, in our refusal to flee the anguish inspired by the inevitability of our death, we engage in sacrifice: we sacrifice our will to be everything, we sacrifice the hazy illusions which were middle terms distancing us from the experience of our limits and our eventual loss of self, and we sacrifice the belief in a God which, like the other narcotics, was to ensure that our presence be recuperated. Strange hypocrisy! We kill God in our neglect of the sacred, in our devotion to project, yet we sustain our belief in Him in our fear of oblivion. In an important article on Bataille entitled "Préface à la transgression", Michel Foucault alludes to this contradiction when he writes that one must kill God in order to summon his presence, so that it might be extinguished in a world from which he has long since been absent. "What, indeed, is the meaning of the death of God, if not a strange solidarity between the stunning realization of his nonexistence and the act that kills him? But what does it mean to kill God if he does not exist . . . ? Perhaps it means to kill God both because he does not exist and to guarantee that he does not exist . . . to kill God to liberate life from this existence that limits it, but also to bring it back to those limits that are annulled by this limitless existence—as a sacrifice . . ."[7] Such sacrifice is necessary in order that existence be rendered immediate, that it no longer be postponed—that it no longer be limited by our evasion of limits through the limitless existence which is God.

Bataille lends a slightly different expression to the importance of sacrifice when he refers in his *Death and Sensuality,* to the nostalgia felt by discontinuous beings for the continuity lost at birth. He writes that, while we desire a return to the continuity of being which death promises,

our fear of the loss, of the disappearance of our discontinuous self, is embodied by the anguish and fascination felt before the spectacle of death in sacrifice, which permits us to identify with the victim's return to continuity without having actually to undergo our own dissolution. "The victim dies, thus the witnesses participate in an element which his death reveals. This element is what it is possible for us, along with religious historians, to call the *sacred.* The sacred is precisely the continuity of being revealed to those who fix their attention, in a solemn rite, on the death of a discontinuous being" (DS, p. 27).

In this context, it is possible to argue that only a sacrifice of God which is complete truly reintroduces the sacred. In *Inner Experience,* Bataille writes that the sacrifice of Christ is necessary for Christians to emerge from their isolated state, from their discontinuity, in order to communicate with their God; yet Christians stop short of a more radical sacrifice. The presence of Christ is recuperated by a God who survives the sacrifice. In his discontinuous form, the Christian God constitutes a limit to a more profound experience of the sacred: the putting to death of God. In this case, no spirit would survive the act; this putting to death opens an unfathomable wound in the experience of the one who sacrifices. This is a sacrifice which must be renewable; the wound must be deepened: ". . . *Experience* thus opens a bit more every time the horizon of God (the wound); extends a bit more the limits of the heart, the limits of being . . ."(IE, pp. 103–4). The radical sacrifice of God alone prevents his death in discontinuous being (Christian worship) or in the suppression of the sacred (abuse of existence in project). The importance of sacrifice is also made clear in *La Part maudite,* where the non-productive expenditure of energy in eroticism, intoxication and poetic effusion is seen as inevitable, once limits to accumulation are encountered. These notions imply that the postponement of existence in project (the accumulation of energy for future purposes) cannot be maintained without its counterpart of expenditure. Sacrifice is, in this context, expenditure of energy (the loss of self in the sacred)—energy which had been channeled into project in order that it not be spent in an experience of existence without delay.

In *La Part maudite,* Bataille also notes that sacrifice, in Aztec society, was committed in order to redress the abuse made of objects whose function had been reduced to the utilitarian. Slaves were sacrificed in order to return them to the sacred in atonement for their having been used as things. "Sacrifice restored to the sacred world that which servile use had degraded, rendered profane" (PM, p. 113). One can extrapolate

from this in order to discover another repercussion of the radical sacrifice of God: God as a discontinuous being had become the "object" of worship—"a dead object and the thing of the theologian" (IE, p. 4). The Christian, with salvation in mind, had abused (had made servile) a God whose discontinuous presence would guarantee his own (thus satisfying the desire that energy not ultimately be expended). The Christian who stops short of this sacrifice is also servile; he is the "thing" of his God, his religion. God must be sacrificed in order that He be removed from the servile order and returned to the divine (the experience of his absence). The one who sacrifices in this way consumes this energy with no profit (no salvation) in view, is sacrificed as a discontinuous being in his turn, and yields to his essential nature, which is that of expenditure. "The subject is consommation to the extent that he is not compelled to work" (PM, p. 116).

The individual's struggle between, on the one hand, the desire for continuity (which implies a loss of his discontinuous being) and, on the other, his desire to embrace the whole (all the while maintaining his discontinuity, a "narcotic" necessary to suppress the pain of his insufficiency)—this struggle is given concise expression in an important passage of *Inner Experience.* There Bataille sets out the inevitable tension which arises between any particular, isolated element of being and the whole which transcends it. The isolated element seeks autonomy, yet wishes to embrace the entirety of the whole: on its own, in isolation, it cannot fulfill this second wish. To identify with the entirety of the whole, it must forego its desire for autonomy. It enters the transcendent whole, losing a good measure of its sense of discontinuity, only to find reawakened the frustrated desire for autonomy. The cycle is in this way renewed. "The uncertain opposition of autonomy to transcendence puts being into a position which slips: each being *ipse*[8]—at the same time that it encloses itself in autonomy, and for this very reason—wants to become the whole of the transcendence . . . Its will for autonomy opposes it at first to the whole, but it withers—is reduced to nothing—to the extent that it refuses to enter into it. It then renounces autonomy for the sake of the whole, but temporarily: the will for autonomy is only abated for a time . . ." (IE, p. 85).

In another passage of *Inner Experience,* Bataille expresses the problem differently: the isolated individual wishes to identify with the entirety of being, but can never satisfy this desire, given that this being is not centralized, is nowhere. Rather, there is nothing but a movement of energy passing from one temporary point of inertia to another: "Life is

never situated at a particular point: it passes rapidly from one point to another (or from multiple points to other points), like a current or like a sort of streaming of electricity. Thus, there where you would like to grasp your timeless substance, you encounter only a slipping, only the poorly coordinated play of your perishable elements" (IE, p. 94). Once again, the proximity to *La Part maudite* is evident. In that text, life is depicted as consisting of unending and ever-changing patterns of the accumulation and loss of energy. In these conditions, how can the isolated individual realize the desire to be everything?

In *Inner Experience,* Bataille is unequivocal: we can neither escape the feeling of insufficiency which leads us to desire identification with the entirety of "being", nor can we renounce our ambition to realize this desire. We are among other beings, in quest of the totality of being, lost in a labyrinth in which Ariadne's thread is broken. In *"La prise de la Concorde",* Denis Hollier expands upon Bataille's metaphor of the labyrinth and its relevance to the search for being. Those who are engaged in this search for the center of being find themselves in a maze which has no architect. Passage cannot be negotiated through it with the assistance of a map; like a trajectory, it is defined as one moves through it. Although it has a center, the labyrinth does not enclose being. In Hollier's terms, it is a place of conflict between the "copula" and "substance"—substance escapes and erects itself as a pyramid, the summit of which is "being" (PC, p. 127).

If, as Bataille's works suggest, there is nothing but a movement of energy which flows from one point to another (allowing in place of a graspable "being" only temporary points of inertia), then the individual who seeks to identify with "being" believes himself to be capable of ascending the pyramid, the summit, when, in fact, he is unaware that he is lost in the labyrinth.[9] In Bataille's words, one follows several paths which ostensibly lead to the summit—among them there is the pursuit of knowledge, or the pursuit of transcendent solitude. Both are misleading enticements which cannot lead to the desired summit. In *Inner Experience,* he writes: "This flight headed towards the summit (which is the constitution of knowledge—dominating the realms themselves) is only one of the paths of the "labyrinth". But we can in no way avoid this path which we must follow from attraction to attraction in search of "being". Solitude, in which we attempt to seek refuge, is a new attraction. No one escapes the constitution of society: in this constitution, each path leads to the summit, leads to the desire for an absolute knowledge, is necessity for limitless power" (IE, p. 86).

In a sense, one can speak of a mirroring of the summit. In *Inner Experience,* one also finds the image of the pinnacle upon which each individual finds himself perched: around him extends the abyss from which he has emerged, the mad improbability of his existence. An individual, perched upon a pinnacle, is but the outcome of a series of improbable coincidences. "Were there the smallest difference in the continuity of which I am the end point: instead of *me* eager to be me, there would be with respect *to me* only nothingness, as if I were dead" (IE, p. 69). At the same time, the anguish inspired by the abyss which surrounds him leads this individual to want to solidify his position by "carrying his person" to the height of a new pinnacle—this one firmly transcending the "pyramid" of "being". But this quest, as Bataille has shown, engages one, through the pursuit of knowledge or solitude, in endless passage through a labyrinth.

The Christian experience is slightly different and somewhat ambiguous: one projects God at the summit of the pyramid, yet cannot, within the parameters of Christianity, desire to take the place at the summit. *Ipse,* perched above the abyss, continues to hold a position which is at opposite ends of the spectrum from the whole which it desires. As a servile "I", the Christian remains beneath the summit which his God occupies. Once again, the struggle between the will for autonomy and a desire to enter the transcendent whole is at work. In *Inner Experience,* Bataille expresses this struggle in the following manner: God and the "I" are like beings (both are discontinuous entities—the 'I' projects God at the summit of the pyramid) while *ipse* and the whole are opposites, in conflict. The Christian feels tension between the desire to experience transcendence (as *ipse*)—though this attitude must be rendered subservient in its turn—and servile humility (as "I") before a transcendent God: "The 'I' is . . . the expression of the universal. It loses the wildness of *ipse* in order to give a domesticated appearance to the universal . . . In Christian experience, rebellious anger opposed to the 'I' is still ambiguous. . . . It is often the wild *ipse* (the proud master) who is humiliated; but sometimes it is the servile 'I'. And in the humiliation of the servile 'I', the universal (God) is restored to pride . . . (for *ipse* and the whole are opposites, while the 'I' and God are like beings)" (IE, pp. 115, 116).

To circumvent the untenable position in which it finds itself (wanting to possess the ungraspable whole, its opposite) *ipse* can only "attain" the whole in a sudden negation of itself—this is expenditure of energy without profit, which is realized when *ipse* is lost in various forms of sacrifice. However, *ipse* "grasps" the whole only for a moment, for it too slips

into darkness, *ipse* having no means of identifying the whole as an entity to be possessed. At this moment, there is communication, an opening of the sacred: "But in its irrationality, proud *ipse,* without having to humiliate itself, can, casting the middle terms into darkness, in a single and abrupt renunciation of itself (as *ipse*) attain the irrationality of the whole (in this case knowledge is still mediation—between me and the world—but negative: it is rejection of knowledge, night, the annihilation of all middle terms, which constitute this negative mediation). But the whole, in this case, is only called the whole temporarily; *ipse,* losing itself in it, moves toward it as towards an opposite (a contrary thing) but it in no less way moves from the unknown to the unknown, and, no doubt, there is still knowlege, strictly speaking, as long as *ipse* can be distinguished from the whole, but in *ipse's* renunciation of itself, there is fusion: in fusion neither *ipse* nor the whole subsist. It is the annihilation of everything which is not the ultimate 'unknown', the abyss into which one has sunk" (IE, pp. 115–16).

One finds in *Inner Experience* a prayer which inverts the positions normally occupied by the subservient "I" at the bottom of the pyramid and the God at its summit. In this inversion, God prays to *ipse,* who also occupies a summit, but an inverted one: the Christian pyramid is overturned, its contents emptied into the abyss. God and the "I" are sacrificed when *ipse* answers the prayer. At the same time, God incites the loss of *ipse* and an upsetting of the inverted pyramid (with *ipse* at its summit) by tempting *ipse's* fall into the abyss. Nothing remains of the reflected pyramids but a reverberation which flows in opposite directions, as the base in each case upsets the summit in a movement of vertigo: "I sleep. Although mute, God addresses himself to me, insinuating, as in love, in a low voice:

—O my father, you, on earth, the evil which is in you delivers me. I am the temptation of which you are the fall. Insult me as I insult those who love me. Give me each day my bread of bitterness. My will is absent in the heavens as on earth. Impotence binds me. My name is lackluster.

Hesitant, troubled, I reply:

—So be it (IE, p. 131).

In this instance, it is *ipse,* not the servile "I", who has *projected* God at the "summit" of the pyramid in order that both God and itself, as *ipse,* might be lost in a vertiginous reversal of their positions, in sacrifice.

In *Inner Experience,* the act of projection occupies a privileged place. In the first instance, this text depicts the tendency to abandon ourselves in project in order to flee the anxiety which surrounds us like an abyss. This is the projection of our existence, but a postponement which constitutes *absent* existence. To free ourselves from this project, from the discursive activity which ensures its reign, we must (through dramatization) project the end of project—and, at the same time, our return to the continuity from which discursive activity distances us. The subject in this exercise (the subject "dramatizes" its loss of self) is a discontinuous entity which must project an object with which it may enter into communication. In its desire to surpass limited existence, the subject is *ipse*—wild and eager to escape its limits. This object, which the subject needs in order to enter into communication, is the whole, its opposite; but not being objectifiable, or graspable, its projection can only be precarious: "The subject (me, *ipse*) and the object (in part undefined, as long as it is not entirely grasped) are presented for communication, before it takes place" (IE, p. 53).

Should it desire to possess the whole, (to appropriate knowledge of the projected object), *ipse,* as we have seen, can only negate itself as *ipse.* Any attempt to "possess" the object must fail: the object, being the whole, cannot be grasped. As long as *ipse* is enclosed in discontinuity, it is doomed to passage through the labyrinth. It is only when the will to know, to possess, appears as a non-sense that *ipse* and the object with it may dissolve. In this renunciation of itself and of the "sense" of the whole, the subject becomes non-knowlege, the object the unknown. *Ipse,* as subject, can only "experience" the whole, as object, when the two are no longer distinct—when possession is impossible: "There is no longer subject-object, but the 'yawning gap' between the one and the other and, in the gap, the subject, the object are dissolved; there is passage, communication, but not from one to the other: *the one* and *the other* have lost their separate existence. The questions of the subject, its will to know are suppressed: the subject is no longer there; its interrogation no longer has either meaning or a principle which introduces it. In the same way no answer remains possible. The answer should be 'such is the object,' when there is no longer a distinct object" (IE, pp. 59–60).

In fusion, the subject is absent, the object is dissolved in continuity, yet this continuity is radically outside of any continuity which a discontinuous being might envisage. It is NIGHT, but a night which "is" not—a night which can only be apprehended by a vision which has been decentered, rendered "ex-orbitant" by the emptying of its contents into

the abyss of non-knowledge. The eye is a privileged image in Bataille's texts. In the appropriation of an image during the course of normal vision, the blind spot where the rays of light intersect is of little consequence. It is both a place of non-being (on its own, it can generate no image) and the site where the power of vision is consolidated (where the elements of image are condensed). It is of great consequence, however, at the moment of fusion: when the stores of knowledge are released, the blind spot of the eye is dilated. In it, knowledge is absorbed into the NIGHT of non-knowlege—the intersection of rays opens violently in a movement of catastrophe.

This opening of the rays of light, this dilation of the blind spot, is the dissolution of image into the abyss of the unknown. It is the sacrifice of a particular, discontinuous knowledge and its return to a radical continuity. Vision, as the sense traditionally favored in the acquisition of truth and knowledge, is operative when the eye collects and appropriates light, removing certain rays from the waves of light which surround them. The organ of sight collects this light in order that the mind might make of it images which can be appropriated by the subject in their discontinuous form. At the moment of fusion, these images are undone, are returned to a "whole" which escapes possession.

Whereas one who appropriates chooses to recuperate the particular (in vision, in the desire to affix to being a center), Bataille repeatedly depicts a return of discontinuity to the "waves of a homogeneous element" of which he writes in the following passage: "From one single particle to another, there is no difference in nature, neither is there any difference between this one and that one. There is *some of* this which is produced here or there, each time in the form of a unity, but this unity does not persevere in itself. Waves, undulations, single particles are perhaps only the multiple movements of a homogeneous element; they only possess fleeting unity and do not break the homogeneity of the whole" (IE, p. 93).

Whereas an isolated individual reinforces his removal from radical continuity, the communicant becomes lost in waves of eroticism, laughter and intoxication—this is a loss which at the same time constitutes a return to *what is there,* a return to that which one evades in discursive activity and work: "Feeling of complicity in: despair, madness, love, supplication. Inhuman, disheveled joy of *communication*—for, despair, madness, love . . . not a point in empty space which is not despair,

madness, love and even more: laughter, dizziness, vertigo, nausea, loss of self to the point of death" (IE, p. 37).

In this context, the significance of the eroticism depicted in *L'Histoire de l'oeil, Blue of Noon, Mme Edwarda* becomes clear: it is the *embodiment* of the "cursed share" which engages the protagonists and the reader on a voyage to the impossible, to the divine. Eros reintroduces the sacred into existence, reveals *what is there* when the subject is "there" no longer. Reading is eroticized when the images of loss enclosed in these tales are released into the reader's experience, inviting his loss in return: ". . . the mirrors which covered the walls, and of which the ceiling itself was made, multiplied the animal image of a coupling: at the slightest movement, our broken hearts opened up to the void into which the infinity of our reflections finished losing us" (ME, p. 22).

The movement from enclosure and appropriation to outpouring and loss found in such scenes is echoed by many images which appear in *Inner Experience.* There is the upturned eye which is emptied of all image and the pineal eye which is situated at the "summit" of the skull—opening the latter to the blinding light of the noonday sun: "This eye which, to contemplate the sun, face to face in its nudity, opens up to it in all its glory, does not arise from my reason: it is a cry which escapes me. For at the moment when the lightning stroke blinds me, I am the flash of a broken life, and this life—anguish and vertigo—opening itself up to an infinite void, is ruptured and spends itself all at once in this void" (IE, p. 77). There is the umbrella which appears to enclose Bataille in a shroud and which he negates in a movement of wild transport: "I laughed divinely: the umbrella, having descended upon my head, covered me (I expressly covered myself with this black shroud). I laughed as perhaps one had never laughed; the extreme depth of each thing opened itself up—laid bare, as if I were dead" (IE, p. 34). There is the basin over which he holds his feverish head in nausea and vertigo, and which becomes the starry sky: "I know 'nothing'—I moan this like a sick child, whose attentive mother holds his forehead (mouth open over the basin). But I don't have a mother, the basin is the starry sky (in my poor nausea, it is thus)" (IE, p. 48). There are words and names which enclose notions and beings—Bataille wishes that they be forgotten or that they be washed by silence: "I escape from myself and my book escapes from me; it becomes almost completely like a forgotten name . . ." (IE, p. 57). There is the title, *Inner Experience,* which, as Derrida has written, promises something which is neither an "experience" nor "inner". The text itself—Bataille writes that it imitates his life—is full of lacunae and

incomplete passages. The introduction is interrupted and project is undone. Bataille writes that he has hatred for continuity—the continuity which the harmony of art and architecture represents. His works open the fissure which such continuity dissimulates, opens the "folds" of words and notions to the radical continuity in which they are lost. He writes for those readers who would fall into his book as into an abyss, never to reemerge: "I write for one who, entering into my book, would fall into it as into a hole, who would never again get out" (IE, p. 116).

Bataille also writes of the "folds of consciousness" which are opened by the consciousness of a heart-rending reality: "The consciousnes of an external reality—tumultuous and heart-rending—which arises in the recesses of the consciousness of self—asks man to perceive the vanity of these recesses—to 'know' them, in a presentiment to be already destroyed . . ." (IE, p. 97). Sacrifice opens the folds which enclose image, being, discursive notions and text. It celebrates the ex-orbitant, upturned eye, the absent subject, the poetic catastrophic image, the fissured book—discontinuous being returned to NIGHT and radical continuity.

The folds which are harbored within a community are opened in their turn when individuals engage in laughter and other forms of sacrifice—waves lost among waves, individuals are lost in communication and death: *"[Neitzsche] said: 'But where do those waves of everything which is great and sublime in man finally flow out? Isn't there an ocean for these torrents?*—Be *this ocean: there will be one' . . . Better than the image of* Dionysos philosophos, *the being lost of this ocean and this bare requirement: 'be that ocean,' designate experience and the extreme limit to which it leads"* (IE, p. 27).

To the extent that individuals oppose themselves to eventual dissolution in the waves of Nietzsche's ocean, they become enmired in labyrinthine paths in their quest for the summit. They seek the summit long after they have been content to relegate authority to those who occupy the center "where life converges and is consolidated" (IE, p. 87). The center (or summit) constantly throws off to the periphery (or base) the weaker, dependent elements of the social structure. In counterpart to the relatively stable appearance of the social pyramid (symbolized by monuments, architecture—the concrete manifestation of the folds in which "being" is harbored), Bataille depicts in *Inner Experience* a levelling of the pyramid. In the space of this fleeting moment, individual existences are rendered interpenetrable. He writes: "I find in myself nothing, which

is not even more than myself, at the disposal of my fellow being . . . everything in me gives itself to others" (IE, pp. 128–29).

However the pyramid is resurrected and regains its solidity when laughter ceases, when the "sense" of sacrifice emerges. Radical continuity slips into a continuity which is identifiable at the horizon of discontinuous being. Individuals retreat from communication and the inevitable quest for the summit, for transcendence, for identification with the whole recommences. Knowledge becomes positive; the middle terms re-emerge as the subject re-presents to itself its absence in fusion. Where there was fusion of non-knowledge and the unknown, the limit of knowledge descends, is discernable. Of the repeated slipping of non-knowlege into knowledge (and vice-versa), Bataille writes: "[it] lays bare: therefore *I see* what knowlege was hiding up to that point, but if I see, *I know.* Indeed, I know, but non-knowledge again lays bare what I have known. If non-sense is sense, the sense which is nonsense is lost, becomes non-sense once again (without possible end)" (IE, p. 52).

When fusion ceases, the waves of the ocean retreat, leaving in their wake isolated grains of sand. In *Inner Experience,* Bataille speaks often of the sand of the desert. There is the desert of discourse and the "chirping of ideas"—a sand into which the ostrich buries its head. Its grains are those of a ". . . *thousand cacaphonic idiocies (almost scientific, ideology, blissful joking, progress, touching sentimentality, belief in machines, in big words and, to conclude, discordance and total ignorance of the unknown)* . . ." (IE, p. 28). There is the desert of words in which the author is enmired—each grain of sand is a "fold" harboring notions which poetry alone can release: "That sand into which we bury ourselves in order not to see, is formed of words, and contestation, having to make use of them, causes one to think . . . of the stuck, struggling man whose efforts sink him for certain: and it is true that words, their labyrinths, the exhausting immensity of their 'possibles', in short their treachery, have something of quicksand about them" (IE, p. 14).

Finally there is the desert which refuses all other deserts—where the blinding sun obliterates the discontinuous grains of sand, a desert which cleanses one of discourse and ideologies. It is the desert to which Bataille aspires when he seeks it as the "site (the condition) which was necessary for a clear and indeterminable death" (IE, p. 49). It is a solar desert which empties God, the self and words of their sense—the word "God" becomes a signpost for dissolution into the abyss: "The word *God,* to have used it in order to reach the depth of solitude, but to no longer

know, hear his voice. To know nothing of Him. God final word meaning that all words will fail further on . . ." (IE, p. 36).

Inner Experience, as a volume of *La Somme athéologique* is a work in which the Judeo-Christian notions of God, of a transcendent, unlimited "beyond" are sacrificed. These discursive notions are violated in a catastrophic opening of the sacred into which the communicant is lost as into the continuity of NIGHT.

The summit of discourse for Hegel—identity with the totality of "what is" and the culmination of the Sage's voyage to the possible of man—is itself a discursive notion which, like all others, is sacrificed in this text. *Inner Experience* is, then, a "comprehensive treatise" to the extent that it records the exhaustion of the Speakable as consciousness fails. Chirping, babbling, discontinuous notions are silenced—the pyramid of discourse is overturned in a capitulation to the Unspeakable.

The site of a "clear and indeterminable death", the solar desert—the dissolution of knowledge into the blind spot, where *ipse* is lost in an unknown "whole"—is the culmination of Bataille's voyage to the extreme limit. Fleeting and precarious, it is divine impossibility, blind absence n communication and powerlessness of the communicant, lost as a wave in the ocean.

Brock University, 1987.

[1]M. Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression", *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault.* Ed. D. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 30.

[2]*ibid.,* p. 32.

[3]G. Bataille, "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice", *Deucalion,* No. 5, Oct. 1955, p. 24.

[4]*ibid.,* p. 25.

[5]For a discussion of Bataille's notion of sovereignty, see Jacques Derrida's "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 369–409. In this text, Derrida describes such sovereignty "as having no identity, as expanding itself without reserve, as losing itself, its memory of self, its interiority" (p. 389).

[6]Philippe Sollers, "Le toit", *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 105.

[7]M. Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression", *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault,* Ed. D. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 32.

[8]Hollier defines *ipseity* as "the differential quality of an individual who is irreplacable and incomparable, which is *itself (ipse)* and not another. *Ipseity* . . . likewise implies an *identity* to one's self as conservation of this individual differential beyond the changes that affect it. *La prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 130.

[9]Hollier refers to inevitable pairing of the labyrinth and the pyramid when he writes that the pyramid is produced by the labyrinth and belongs to it thoroughly: ". . . the pyramid is in fact inevitable but unrealizable (interminable), whereas the labyrinth is ungraspable but *incontournable. (ibid.),* p. 129.

Appendix to Translator's Introduction

Georges Bataille was born in 1897 in Billom, Puy-de-Dôme. He attended a seminary at Saint-Flour and in 1922 graduated from *l'Ecole des Chartes* as a medievalist librarian. During this year, he also went through a period of profound mysticism and consequently spent some days at a Benedictine abbey on the Isle of Wight (he refers to this in *Inner Experience*). The attraction to monastic life was strong enough to make him think of becoming a priest; at the end of his sojourn, however, he abandoned his faith. In 1924, he took a position at the Bibliothèque Nationale and began to contribute articles to a review, *Aréthuse,* of which he was a collaborator. *L'Histoire de l'oeil,* Bataille's first work of fiction, was published under the pseudonym of Lord Auch four years later. It is a tale in which the interrogation of erotic experience leads to the discovery of limits. This quest for an experience which carries its protagonists to the limits of the "possible", and in which the eye and vision are rendered "ex-orbitant" in the face of the impossible, foreshadows the development of this theme in *Inner Experience.*

In 1929–30, Bataille co-founded and became the director of *Documents,* a review in which his articles often exposed elements of the "ignoble", which had been "repressed by centuries of reassuring idealization".[1] Accordingly, his articles for this review[2] discussed, among other things, architecture (which he described as expressing only the ideal being of society while prohibiting the troubling elements which lie beneath its facades), the eye (as object of seduction and, conversely, of

horror—one watches with difficulty the opening scenes from *Un chien andalou*) and base materialism and gnosticism (wherein "[b]ase matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and . . . refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations" (VE, p. 51)). Bataille ceased his collaboration on *Documents* and participated in another review, *la Critique Sociale,* in 1931.

One year later, he attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel (these lectures are summarized in the text *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*). His thoughts on Hegel later surface in Part IV of *Inner Experience.* Bataille's philosophy also draws from his reading of Marcel Mauss' "Essai sur le don". In "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933) he develops an idea which has importance for *Inner Experience*—that of sacrifice, in which energy is expended without profit. This generous and exuberant loss of energy opens the realm of the sacred and is diametrically opposed to the realm of work and project, in which energy is accumulated for future purposes.

Bataille became quite ill in 1934 (he had been suffering for years from tuberculosis). His illness led him to an experience of rapture, an experience which figured later in the development of *Inner Experience. Blue of Noon,* a tale which once again links eroticism to the experience of limits, to illness, and to a state of *désoeuvrement,* appeared two years later. It has ties to *Inner Experience,* (a section of the latter bears this title), in its depiction of vertigo and nausea in the face of the impossible—existence is brought to its limits, a voyage renewed to the point of exhaustion. In this same year, Bataille founded another review, *Acéphale.* His interest in sacrifice and in the non-productive expenditure of energy continued.

Madame Edwarda appeared in 1937. It is a tale published under a new pseudonym—that of Pierre Angélique. In it, eroticism leads to rapture, to an experience of the divine. The divine in this tale is not revealed through communication with God—"God is nothing if not the surpassing of God in every sense"—but through "an *intolerable* surpassing of being, no less intolerable than death" (ME, pp. 11–12).

The first lengthy treatise on Bataille's philosophical concerns, *Inner Experience* relates the voyage of one who wishes to bring existence to its limits. "I call experience a voyage to the end of the possible of man" (IE, p. 7). The first volume of *La Somme athéologique, Inner Experience* is followed by a short text, *Méthode de méditation,* which did not originally appear until 1947. In this text, Bataille attempts to clarify the confusion and misunderstanding which "the disorder of [his] books" had caused. He acknowledges that this "methodological" attempt to clarify constitutes a subordination of the impossible to the possible, of the spirit of poetry to logic, but the sovereignty which the corpus of his words and

texts evoke cannot become an alternative until "subordinate operations" have been exhausted. *Méthode de méditation* also refers to the means by which one reduces the transcendence of things which surround one to an immanence which refuses subordination; this is achieved in moments of intoxication, eroticism, laughter, sacrifice in its various forms, and poetic outpouring.

Le Coupable—the second major text of the *Somme athéologique*—was begun in 1939 and appeared in 1944. Bataille continued to develop many of the themes which had inspired *Inner Experience,* but in a tone of heightened anguish. The same terror before the absence of God is evinced, as are the obsession for exhaustion before the impossible, and the desire for sovereignty in communication, intoxication—when existence is no longer postponed and the limits of the subject are suspended (the subject is no longer there). The third part of *La Somme athéologique, Sur Nietzsche,* followed one year later. It expresses Bataille's desire that inner experience not be subordinate to any goal, moral or religious. "To burn without answering to any moral obligation . . . is no doubt a paradox. It is impossible from that point on to preach or to act" (SN, p. 12). In *Sur Nietzsche,* Bataille opposes a morality of the summit (an experience which is not appropriated, which is exuberant in its expenditure) to a morality of decline (one which resists temptation, in a fear of immediacy or of loss without profit).

In 1946, Bataille founded the review *Critique.* In addition to the many articles which were published in this journal, he continued to produce theoretical texts and works of fiction, among them *Théorie de la Religion* (1948); *L'Abbé C* (1950); *La Peinture préhistorique: Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* (1955).

Several other texts bear mentioning, since they carry themes which are of particular relevance to *Inner Experience. La Part maudite* (1949) is significant in its depiction of a global energy. In this work, Bataille develops his theory of a general economy, in which all earthly change is seen in terms of the accumulation and expenditure of energy. Intoxication, poetry, love, and eroticism are examples of *non-productive* expenditure of surplus energy, a surplus which arises inevitably once limits to growth are encountered. These notions are connected to Bataille's opposition, in *Inner Experience,* of the realm of the sacred to the world of project and work.

In *Death and Sensuality* (1957) Bataille links eroticism, religous worship and the tragic representation of death; all three are seen as an occasion for dramatization—an activity which is needed in order to evoke the sacred and to initiate communication and the ecstatic loss of self described in *Inner Experience.*

Finally, in *La Littérature et le mal* (1957) one finds echoed many thoughts first developed in *Inner Experience*. In both texts, poetry is seen as the "sacrifice in which words are victim" and as putting both the author and the reader into play. Their limits suspended by catastrophic images, by a work of which silence is a large measure, they enter into communication until neither subject nor object—nor image (the middle term)—"are there".

1. Jean Houdebine, "L'ennemi du dedans" *Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, Vers une révolution culturelle—Bataille*. Ed. P. Sollers (Paris: 10/18, 1973), pp. 165–66.

2. Many of these articles may be found in the first volume of the *Oeuvres Complètes* published by Gallimard. Some of them have been translated by Alan Stoekl in *Visions of Excess* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

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Night is also a sun.

Zarathustra.

Preface

How much I would like to say the same thing of my book that Nietzche said of the Gay Science: *"Almost no phrase wherein profundity and playfulness do not tenderly hold hands".*

Nietzsche wrote in Ecce Homo: *Another ideal*[1] *runs ahead of us, a strange, tempting, dangerous ideal to which we should not wish to persuade anybody because we do not readily concede* the right to it *to anyone: the ideal of a spirit who plays naively—that is, not deliberately but from overflowing power and abundance—with all that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine; for whom those supreme things that the people naturally accept as their value standards, signify danger, decay, debasement, or at least recreation, blindness, and temporary self-oblivion; the ideal of a human, superhuman well-being and benevolence that will often appear* inhuman*—for example, when it confronts all earthly seriousness so far, all solemnity in gesture, word, tone, eye, morality, and task so far, as if it were their most incarnate and involuntary parody—and in spite of all this, it is perhaps only with him that* great seriousness *really begins, that the real question mark is posed for the first time, that the destiny of the soul changes, the hand moves forward, the tragedy begins.*

I cite yet these few words: "To see tragic natures sink and to be able to laugh at them, *despite the profound understanding, the emotion and the sympathy which one feels—that is divine." (note dating from 82–84.)*

The only parts of this book written with necessity—in accord with my life—are the second, The Torment, *and the last. The others I wrote with the laudable concern of creating a book.*

To ask oneself before another: by what means does he calm within himself the desire to be everything? Sacrifice, conformity, trickery, poetry, morality, snobbery, heroism, religion, revolt, vanity, money? or by several means together? or all together? A wink of an eye in which glimmers a deceitfulness, a melancholy smile, a grimace of fatigue together betray the disguised suffering which the astonishment at not being everything, at even having concise limits, gives us. A suffering so difficult to acknowledge leads to inner hypocrisy, to solemn distant exigencies (such as the morality of Kant).

On the other hand, to no longer wish oneself to be everything is to put everything into question. Anyone wanting slyly to avoid suffering, identifies with the entirety of the universe, judges each thing as if he were it. In the same way, he imagines, at bottom, that he will never die. We receive these hazy illusions like a narcotic necessary to bear life. But what happens to us when, disintoxicated, we learn what we are? Lost among babblers in a night in which we can only hate the appearance of light which comes from babbling. The self-acknowledged suffering of the disintoxicated is the subject of this book.

We have in fact only two certainties in this world—that we are not everything and that we will die. To be conscious of not being everything, as one is of being mortal, is nothing. But if we are without a narcotic, an unbreathable void reveals itself. I wanted to be everything, so that falling into this void, I might summon my courage and say to myself: "I am ashamed of having wanted to be everything, for I see now that it was to sleep." From that moment begins a singular experience. The mind moves in a strange world where anguish and ecstasy coexist.

Such an experience is not beyond expression; I communicate it to whoever is unaware of it. Its tradition is difficult; the introduction of its oral form is really only barely written.

What characterizes such an experience, which does not proceed from a revelation—where nothing is revealed either, if not the unknown—is that it never announces anything reassuring. My book finished, I see its detestable sides, its inadequacy. Worse yet, I see in me the concern for adequacy which I have brought to it, which I still bring to it, and of which I hate at the same time its powerlessness and a measure of intention.

[2]*This book is a tale of despair. The world is given to man as if it were a puzzle to solve. My entire life—with its bizarre dissolute moments as well as deep meditations—has been spent solving this puzzle. Indeed I surmounted problems whose novelty and dimensions exalted me. Having entered into unsuspected regions, I saw that which eyes had never seen. Nothing more intoxicating: laughter and reason, horror and light became penetrable; to my knowledge there was nothing not accessible to my fever. Like a marvelous madwoman, death unceasingly opened or closed the gates of the possible. In this maze, I could lose myself at will, give myself over to rapture, but I could also at will discern the paths, provide a precise passage for intellectual steps. The analysis of laughter had opened to me points of contact between the fundamentals of a* communal and disciplined *emotional knowledge and those of discursive knowledge.* Flowing into one another, *the contents of various forms of expenditure (laughter, heroism, ecstasy, sacrifice, poetry, eroticism or others) defined of themselves a law of* communication *regulating the play of the isolation and the dissolution of beings. The possibility of uniting* at a precise point *two types of knowledge which up to now had either been unknown to one another or only roughly brought together, gave this ontology its unhoped-for consistency: thought dissolved in its entirety but was rediscovered again at a point where laughs the unanimous throng. I felt a sensation of triumph: perhaps illegitimate, premature? . . . I don't believe so. I rapidly felt what was happening to me to be a burden. What frayed my nerves was to have accomplished my task: my ignorance turned on insignificant points—no more puzzles to solve! Everything was giving way. I awakened before a new enigma, one I knew at once to be unsolvable. That enigma was so bitter; it kept me in an impotence so overwhelming, that I experienced it as God, if he were to exist, would experience it.*

Three quarters finished, I abandoned the work[3] *in which the solved puzzle was to be found. I wrote* The Torment, *where man attains the extreme limit (l'extrême) of the possible.*[4]*

Georges Bataille

*Throughout this text, I have consistently translated the term "l'extrême" as "extreme limit." This decision is principally due to the awkwardness and particular connotations of "extreme" used as a noun in English. For a discussion of the play of the "limit" which is both lifted and reified in transgression, see Michel Foucault's "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* trans. D. Bouchard and S. Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 29–52.

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Part One

SKETCH OF AN INTRODUCTION TO *INNER EXPERIENCE*

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I

CRITIQUE OF DOGMATIC SERVITUDE (AND OF MYSTICISM)

By *inner experience* I understand that which one usually calls *mystical experience*: the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of meditated emotion. But I am thinking less of *confessional* experience, to which one has had to adhere up to now, than of an experience laid bare, free of ties, even of an origin, of any confession whatever. This is why I don't like the word *mystical*.[1]

Nor do I like narrow definitions. Inner experience responds to the necessity in which I find myself—human existence with me—of challenging everything (of putting everything into question) without permissable rest. This necessity was at work despite religious beliefs, but it has even more far-reaching consequences if one does not have these beliefs. Dogmatic presuppositions have provided experience with undue limits: he who already knows cannot go beyond a known horizon.

I wanted experience to lead where it would, not to lead it to some end point given in advance. And I say at once that it leads to no harbor (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense). I wanted non-knowledge to be its principle—for this reason I have followed with a keener discipline a method in which Christians excelled (they engaged themselves as far along this route as dogma would permit). But this experience born of non-knowledge remains there decidedly. It is not beyond expression—one doesn't betray it if one speaks of it—but it steals from the mind the

answers it still had to the questions of knowledge. Experience reveals nothing and cannot found belief nor set out from it.

Experience is, in fever and anguish, the putting into question (to the test) of that which a man knows of being. Should he in this fever have any apprehension whatsoever, he cannot say: "I have seen God, the absolute, or the depths of the universe"; he can only say "that which I have seen eludes understanding"—and God, the absolute, the depths of the universe, are nothing if they are not categories of understanding.[2]

If I said decisively: "I have seen God", that which I see would change. Instead of the inconceivable unknown—wildly free before me, leaving me wild and free before it—there would be a dead object and the thing of the theologian—to which the unknown would be subjugated, for, in the form of God, the obscure unknown which ecstasy reveals *is obliged to subjugate me* (the fact that a theologian bursts the established framework after the fact simply means that the framework is useless; for experience, it is only a presupposition to be rejected).

In any case, God is tied to the salvation of the soul—at the same time as to the other *relations on the imperfect to the perfect.* Now, in experience, the feeling that I have of the unknown about which I spoke is distrustfully hostile towards the idea of perfection (servitude itself, the "must be"[3]).

I read in Denys l'Aréopagite: "Those who by an inward cessation of all intellectual functioning enter into an intimate union with ineffable light . . . only speak of God by negation" (*Noms divins*, 1, 5). So is it from the moment that it is experience and not presupposition which reveals (to such an extent that, in the eyes of the latter, light is "a ray of darkness"; he would go so far as to say, in the tradition of Eckhart: "God is Nothingness [néant]*"). But positive theology—founded on the revelation of the scriptures—is not in accord with this negative experience. Several pages after having evoked this God whom discourse only apprehends by negating, Denys writes, "He possesses absolute dominion over creation . . . , all things are linked to him as to their center, recognizing him as their cause, their principle and their end . . ." (*ibid.*, 1, 7).

On the subject of "visions", of "words" and of other "consolations", common in ecstasy, Saint John of the Cross evinces if not hostility, at least reserve. Experience has meaning for him only in the apprehension

*From this point on, the French *néant* is translated as "Nothingness"; *abîme* is translated as "abyss"; and the term *vide* is translated as "void."

of a God without form and without mode. Saint Theresa in the end only valued "intellectual vision". In the same way, I hold the apprehension of God—be he without form and without mode (the "intellectual" and not the sensuous vision of him), to be an obstacle in the movement which carries us to the more obscure apprehension of the *unknown*: of a presence which is no longer in any way distinct from an absence.

God differs from the unknown, in that a profound emotion, coming from the depths of childhood, is in us bound to the evocation of Him. The unknown on the contrary leaves one cold, does not elicit our love until it overturns everything within us like a violent wind. In the same way, the unsettling images and the middle terms to which poetic emotion has recourse touch us easily. If poetry introduces the strange, it does so by means of the familiar. The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the strange, and ourselves with it. It never dispossesses us entirely, for the words, the images (once dissolved) are charged with emotions already experienced, attached to objects which link them to the known.

Divine or poetic apprehension is on the same level as the empty apparitions of the saints, in that we can, through it, still appropriate to ourselves that which exceeds us, and, without grasping it as our own possession, at least link it to us, to that which had touched us. In this way we do not die entirely: a thread—no doubt tenuous—but a thread links the apprehended to me (had I destroyed the naive notion of him, God remains the being whose role the church has determined).

We are only totally laid bare by proceeding without trickery to the unknown. It is the measure of the unknown which lends to the experience of God—or of the poetic—their great authority. But the unknown demands in the end sovereignty without partition.[4]

II

EXPERIENCE, SOLE AUTHORITY, SOLE VALUE

The opposition to the idea of project—which takes up an essential part of this book—is so necessary within me that having written the detailed plan for this introduction, I can no longer hold myself to it. Having abandoned for a time its realization, having passed to the post-scriptum (which was not foreseen), I can only change it. I keep to project in secondary things: in what counts for me, it quickly appears to be what it is: contrary to myself being project.

I am anxious to explain myself on this matter, thus interrupting the exposé: I must do it, not being able to guarantee the homogeneity of the whole. Perhaps this is negligence. Nevertheless, I wish to say that I in no way oppose to project a negative mood (an ailing listlessness), but the spirit of decision.

The expression of inner experience must in some way respond to its movement—cannot be a dry verbal tradition to be executed on command.[1]

I will give the chapter titles of the plan which I had stopped, which were:

—critique of dogmatic servitude (alone written)

—critique of the scientific attitude

—critique of an experimental attitude

—position of experience itself as value and authority

—principle of a method

—principle of a community

I will now try to set in motion that which was to arise from the whole.

Inner experience not being able to have principles either in a dogma (a moral attitude), or in science (knowledge can be neither its goal nor its origin), or in a search for enriching states (an experimental, aesthetic attitude), it cannot have any other concern nor other goal than itself. Opening myself to inner experience, I have placed in it all value and authority. Henceforth I can have no other value, no other authority*. Value and authority imply the discipline of a method, the existence of a community.

I call experience a voyage to the end of the possible of man. Anyone may not embark on this voyage, but if he does embark on it, this supposes the negation of the authorities, the existing values which limit the possible. By virtue of the fact that it is negation of other values, other authorities, experience, having a positive existence, becomes itself positively value *and authority***.

Inner experience has always had objectives other than itself wherein one placed value and authority—God in Islam or in the Christian Church; in the Buddhist Church this negative goal: the suppression of pain (it was also possible to subordinate it to knowledge as does the ontology of Heidegger***). But were God, knowledge, the suppression of pain to cease to be in my eyes convincing objectives, if the pleasure to be drawn from a rapture were to annoy me, even shock me, must inner experience from that moment seem empty to me, henceforth impossible, without justification?

The question is in no way idle. The absence of a formal response (which up to that point I had gone without) finished by leaving me with a great uneasiness. Experience itself had torn me to shreds, and my powerlessness to respond finished tearing them. I received the answer of others: it requires a solidity which at that moment I had lost. I asked the question of several friends, letting them see part of my disarray: one of them**** stated simply this principle, that experience itself is authority (but that authority expiates itself).

*To be understood in the realm of the mind, as one says the authority of science, of the Church, of the Scriptures.

**The paradox in the authority of experience: based on challenge, it is the challenging of authority; positive challenge, man's authority defined as the challenging of himself.

***At least the manner in which he has exposed his thought, before a community of men, of knowledge.

****Maurice Blanchot. Later I refer on two occasions to this conversation.

From that moment, this answer calmed me, barely leaving me (like the scar of a wound long in closing) a residue of anguish. I measured the extent of it the day that I worked out the plan for an introduction. I then saw that it put an end to the entire debate on religious existence, that it even had the galilean effect of a reversal in the exercise of thought, that it substituted itself—for philosophies as well as for the tradition of the Churches.

For some time now, the only philosophy which lives—that of the German school—tended to make of the highest knowledge an extension of inner experience. But this *phenomenology* lends to knowledge the value of a goal which one attains through experience. This is an ill-assorted match: the measure given to experience is at once too much and not great enough. Those who provide this place for it must feel that it overflows, by an immense "possible", the use to which they limit themselves. What appears to preserve philosophy is the little acuity of the experience from which the phenomenologists set out. This lack of balance does not weather the putting into play of experience proceeding to the end the possible, when going to the end means at least this: that the limit, which is knowledge as a goal, be crossed.

On the philosophical side, it is a matter of putting to rest the analytic division of operations, of escaping by this from the feeling of the emptiness of intelligent questions. On the religious side, the solved problem is weightier. Traditional authorities and values have for a long time no longer had meaning for a good many. And those whose interest is the extreme limit of the possible cannot be indifferent to the criticism to which tradition has succumbed. It is tied to movements of intelligence wanting to extend its limits. But—it is undeniable—the advance of intelligence diminished, as a secondary consequence, the "possible" in a realm which appeared foreign to intelligence: *that of inner experience.*

To say "diminished" is even to say too little. The development of intelligence leads to a drying up of life which, in return, has narrowed intelligence. It is only if I state this principle: "inner experience itself is authority", that I emerge from this impotence. Intelligence had destroyed the authority necessary for experience: by deciding the issue in this way, man has once again at his disposal his "possible" and what is no longer the old, the limited, but the extreme limit of the possible.

These statements have an obscure theoretical appearance, and I see no remedy for this other than to say: "One must grasp the meaning from the inside." They are not logically demonstrable. One must *live* experience.

It is not easily accessible and, viewed from the outside by intelligence, it would even be necessary to see in it a sum of distinct operations, some intellectual, others aesthetic, yet others moral, and the whole problem must be taken up again. It is only from within, lived to the point of terror, that it appears to unify that which discursive thought must separate. But it does not unite any less than do those forms—aesthetic, intellectual, moral—the various contents of past experience (like God and his passion) into a fusion leaving outside only the discourse by which one tried to separate these objects (making of them answers to the difficulties of morality).

Experience attains in the end the fusion of object and subject, being as subject non-knowledge, as object the unknown. It can let the agitation of intelligence break up on that account: repeated failures don't serve it any less than the final docility which one can expect.

This attained as an extremity of the possible, it stands to reason that philosophy properly speaking is absorbed—that being already separated from the simple attempt at the cohesion of knowledge that is the philosophy of sciences, it is dissolved. And being dissolved into this new way of thinking, it finds itself to be no longer anything but the heir to a fabulous mystical theology, but missing a God and wiping the slate clean.

It is the separation of terror from the realms of knowledge, of feeling, of moral life, which obliges one to *construct* values uniting *on the outside* the elements of these realms in the forms of authoritative entities, when it was necessary not to look afar; on the contrary, to reenter oneself in order to find there what was missing from the day when one contested the constructions. "Oneself" is not the subject isolating itself from the world, but a place of communication, of fusion of the subject and the object.

III

PRINCIPLES OF A METHOD AND A COMMUNITY

When the ravages of intelligence had dismantled the edifices of which I had spoken,[1] human life felt a lack (but not right away a total failure). It seemed that one could no longer attain this far-reaching communication, this fusion which up to then it had brought about by a meditation on objects having a history (pathetic and dramatic) like God. It was necessary therefore to choose—either to remain faithful, obstinately, to the dogmas fallen into a realm of criticism—or to renounce fusion, the only form of passionate life.

Love, poetry, in a romantic form, were the ways in which we attempted to escape isolation, the "turning in on itself" of a life deprived in a short time of its most visible outlet. But when these new outlets were of the sort to create no regrets for the old ones, the old ones became inaccessible, or believed to be so, to those whom the criticism affected: by this means their life was deprived of a measure of its possible.

In other words, one reaches the states of ecstasy or of rapture only by *dramatizing* existence in general. The belief in a God betrayed, who loves us (to the extent that he dies for us), redeems us and saves us, played this role for a long time. But one cannot say that, failing this belief, dramatization is impossible: as a matter of fact, other peoples have known it—and through it, ecstasy—not being informed of the Gospel.

One can only say this: that dramatization necessarily has a key, in the form of an uncontested (deciding) element, of a value such that without it there can exist no drama, but indifference. Thus, from the moment that the drama reaches us and at least if it is felt as affecting in us man in general, we attain authority, which causes the drama. (In the same way, if there exists in us an authority, a value, there is drama; for if it is so, one must take it seriously—totally).

In all religion dramatization is essential, but if it is purely external and mythical, it can have several independent forms at the same time. Sacrifices of differing sources and intent become combined. But each of them, at the moment when the victim is sacrificed, marks the point of intensity of a dramatization. If we didn't know how to dramatize, we wouldn't be able to leave ourselves. We would live isolated and turned in on ourselves. But a sort of rupture—in anguish—leaves us at the limit of tears: in such a case we lose ourselves, we forget ourselves and communicate with an elusive beyond.

From this way of dramatizing—often forced—emerges an element of comedy, of foolishness which turns to laughter. If we hadn't known how to dramatize, we wouldn't know how to laugh, but in us laughter is always ready which makes us stream forth into a renewed fusion, breaking us again at the mercy of errors committed in wanting to break ourselves, but without authority this time.[2]

Dramatization only became completely general by making itself inner, but it cannot develop without means which are commensurate to naive aspirations—like that of never dying. When it thus became inner and general, it fell into an exclusive, jealous authority (it was out of the question to laugh from that moment—dramatization became all the more forced). All this in order that being not turn in on itself too much, not finish as a miserly shop-keeper, as a debauched old man.

Between the shopkeeper, the rich debauchee and the devout individual, snug in the anticipation of salvation, there were as well many affinities, even the possibility of being united in a single person.

Another equivocation: resulting from the compromise between the positive authority of God and that, negative, of the suppression of pain. In the will to suppress pain, we are led to action, instead of limiting ourselves to dramatization. Action led in order to suppress pain moves finally in the opposite direction from the possibility of dramatizing in its name: we no longer tend towards the extreme limit of the possible—we remedy pain (without great effect), but the possible in the meantime no longer has any meaning; we live on projects, forming (despite the pretence of irreducible hostilities) a world quite united with the debauchee, the shop-keeper, the egotistical devout individual.

In these ways of dramatizing at the extreme limit, we can, within traditions, distance ourselves from them. The recourse to the desire not

to die and, except for the humiliation before God, even habitual means are together almost missing in the writings of Saint John of the Cross who, falling into the night of non-knowledge, touches upon the extreme limit of the possible: in the writings of several others this occurs in a less striking, though perhaps not in a less profound way.

Kierkegaard, by dint of going to the end of the possible, and in a certain way to the point of the absurd, having received the authority of each element of the drama by tradition, moves about in a world where it becomes impossible to rely on anything, where irony is free.

I come to the most important point:[3] *it is necessary to reject external means*. The dramatic is not being in these or those conditions, all of which are positive conditions (like being half-lost, being able to be saved). It is simply to be. To perceive this is, without anything else, to contest with enough persistance the evasions by which we usually escape. It is no longer a question of salvation: this is the most odious of evasions. The difficulty—that contestation must be done in the name of an authority—is resolved thus: I contest in the name of contestation what experience itself is (the will to proceed to the end of the possible). Experience, its authority, its method, do not distinguish themselves from the contestation.*

I could have told myself: value, authority—this is ecstasy; inner experience is ecstasy; ecstasy is, it seems, communication, which is opposed to the "turning in on oneself" of which I have spoken. I would have in this way *known* and *found* (there was a time when I thought myself to know, to have found). But we reach ecstasy by a contestation of knowledge. Were I to stop at ecstasy and grasp it, in the end I would define it. But nothing resists the contestation of knowledge and I have seen at the end that the idea of communication itself leaves naked—not knowing anything. Whatever it may be—failing a positive revelation within me, present at the extreme—I can provide it with neither a justification nor an end. I remain in intolerable non-knowledge, which has no other way out than ecstasy itself.

State of nudity, of supplication without response, wherein I nevertheless perceive this: that it depends on the flight from excuses. So that—precise knowledge remaining as such, with only the ground, its

*As I write in Part 4, the principle of contestation is one of those upon which Maurice Blanchot insists as on a foundation.

foundation, giving way—I grasp while sinking that the sole truth of man, glimpsed at last, is to be a supplication without response.

Taken with belated simplicity, the ostrich, in the end, leaves an eye, free from the sand, bizarrely open . . . But that one should come to read me—should one have the good will, the greatest attention, should one arrive at the ultimate degree of conviction—one will not be laid bare for all that. For nudity, to sink, supplication are at first notions added to others. Although linked to the flight from evasions, in that they themselves extend the realm of knowledge, they are themselves reduced to the state of evasions; such is the work of discourse in us. And this difficulty is expressed in this way: *the word silence is still a sound*, to speak is in itself to imagine knowing; and to no longer know, it would be necessary to no longer speak. Were the sand to permit my eyes to open—I have spoken: the words *which serve only to flee*, when I have ceased to flee, bring me back to flight. My eyes are open, it is true, but it would have been necessary not to say it, to remain frozen like an animal. I wanted to speak, and, as if the words bore the weight of a thousand slumbers, gently, as if appearing not to see, my eyes closed.[4]

It is through an "intimate cessation of all intellectual operations" that the mind is laid bare. If not, *discourse* maintains it in its little complacency. Discourse, if it wishes to, can blow like a gale wind—whatever effort I make, the wind cannot chill by the fireside. The difference between inner experience and philosophy resides principally in this: that in experience, what is stated is nothing, if not a means and even, as much as a means, an obstacle; what counts is no longer the statement of wind, but the wind.

At this point we see the second meaning of the word dramatize: it is the will, adding itself to discourse, not to be content with what is stated, to oblige one to feel the chill of the wind, to be laid bare. Hence we have dramatic art, using non-discursive sensation, making every effort to strike, for that reason imitating the sound of the wind and attempting to chill—as by contagion: it makes a character tremble on stage (rather than resorting to these coarse means, the philosopher surrounds himself with narcotic signs). With respect to this, it is a classic error to assign St. Ignacious' *Exercises* to discursive method: they rely on discourse which regulates everything, but in the dramatic mode. Discourse exhorts: imagine the place, the characters of the drama, and remain there as one among them; dissipate—extend for that reason your will—the absence, the dazed state, to which words are inclined. The truth is that the *Exer-*

cises, in absolute horror of discourse (of absence), try to cope with it through the tension of discourse, and this artifice often fails. (On the other hand, the object of contemplation which they propose is no doubt drama, but engaged in the historical categories of discourse—far from the God without form and without mode of the Carmelites, more eager than the Jesuits for inner experience.)

The weakness of the dramatic method is that it forces one to always go beyond what is naturally felt. But the weakness is less that of the method than it is ours. And it is the powerlessness, not the voluntary side of the process which stops me (to which here is added sarcasm: the comical appearing to be not authority, but one who, though desiring it, does not manage in his efforts to submit to it).

As a matter of fact, contestation would remain powerless within us if it limited itself to discourse and to dramatic exhortation. That sand into which we bury ourselves in order not to see, is formed of words, and contestation, having to make use of them, causes one to think—if I pass from one image to another different one—of the stuck, struggling man whose efforts sink him for certain: and it is true that words, their labyrinths, the exhausting immensity of their "possibles", in short their treachery, have something of quicksand about them.

We would not get out of this sand, without some sort of cord which is extended to us. Although words drain almost all life from within us—there is almost not a single sprig of this life which the bustling host of these ants (words) hasn't seized, dragged, accumulated without respite—there subsists in us a silent, elusive, ungraspable part. In the region of words, of discourse, this part is neglected. Thus it usually escapes us. We can only attain it or have it at our disposal on certain terms. They are the vague inner movements, which depend on no object and have no intent—states which, similar to others linked to the purety of the sky, to the fragrance of a room, are not warranted by anything definable, so that language which, with respect to the others, has the sky, the room, to which it can refer—and which directs attention towards what it grasps—is dispossessed, can say nothing, is limited to stealing these states from attention (profiting from their lack of precision, it right away draws attention elsewhere).

If we live under the law of language without contesting it, these states are within us as if they didn't exist. But if we run up against this law, we can in passing fix our awareness upon one of them and, quieting dis-

course within us, linger over the surprise which it provides us. It is better then to shut oneself in, make as if it were night, remain in this suspended silence wherein we come unexpectedly upon the sleep of a child. With a bit of chance, we perceive from such a state what favors the return, increases the intensity. And no doubt the slumber of the child is not the main reason why a mother is passionately retained, for a long spell, next to a cradle.

But the difficulty is that one manages neither easily nor completely to silence oneself, that one must fight against oneself, with precisely a mother's patience: we seek to grasp within us what subsists safe from verbal servilities and what we grasp is ourselves fighting the battle, stringing sentences together—perhaps about our effort (then about its failure)—but sentences all the same, powerless to grasp anything else. It is necessary to persist—making ourselves familiar, cruelly so, with a helpless foolishness, usually concealed, but falling under full light: the intensity of the states builds quite quickly and from that moment they absorb—they even enrapture. The moment comes when we can reflect, link words together, once again no longer silence ourselves: this time it is off in the wings (in the background) and, without worrying any longer, we let their sound fade away.[5]

This mastery of our innermost movements, which in the long run we can acquire, is well known: it is *yoga*. But *yoga* is given in the form of coarse recipes, embellished with pedantism and with bizarre statements. And *yoga*, practiced for its own sake, advances no further than an aesthetics or a hygiene, whereas I have recourse to the same means (laid bare), *in despair.*

Christians dispensed with these means, but experience was for them only the last stage of a long ascesis (Hindus give themselves up to aesceticism, which procures for their experience an equivalent of religious drama which they are lacking). But not being able and not wanting to resort to aescesis, I must link contestation to the *liberation of the power of words* which is mastery. And if, as opposed to the Hindus, I have reduced these means to what they are, then affirmed that one must take into consideration the inspiration which resides in them, I can also not fail to say that one cannot reinvent them. Their practice heavy with tradition is the counterpart of common culture, which the freest of the poets have not been able to do without (no great poet who hasn't had a secondary education).

What I have taken on is as far removed as I can make it from the scholastic atmosphere of *yoga*. The means of which it is a question are double; one must find *words* which serve as sustenance for practice, but which turn us away from those objects the whole group of which keeps us hemmed in; *objects* which cause us to slip from the external (objective) plane to the interiority of the subject.

I will give only one example of a "slipping" *word*. I say *word*: it could just as well be the sentence into which one inserts the word, but I limit myself to the word *silence*. It is already, as I have said, the abolition of the sound which the word is; among all words it is the most perverse, or the most poetic: it is the token of its own death.

Silence is given in the sick delectation of the heart. When the fragrance of a flower is charged with reminiscences, we linger alone over breathing it in, questioning it, in the anguish of the secret which its sweetness will in an instant deliver up to us: this secret is only the inner presence, silent, unfathomable and naked, which an attention forever given to words (to objects) steals from us, and which it ultimately gives back if we give it to those most transparent among objects. But this attention does not fully give it up unless we know how to detach it, in the end, even from its discontinuous objects, which we can do by choosing for them as a sort of resting place where they will finally disappear, the silence which is no longer anything.

The resting place which the Hindus chose is no less inner: it is breath. And just as a "slipping" word has the property of capturing the attention given in advance to words, so breath captures the attention which gestures have at their command, the movements directed towards objects: but of these movements breath alone leads to interiority. So that Hindus, breathing gently, deliberately—and perhaps in silence—have not wrongly given to breath a power which is not the one which they had thought, but which opens no less the secrets of the heart.[6]

Silence is a word which is not a word and breath an object which is not an object . . .

I interrupt once again the course of the account. I do not give the reasons for this (which are several, coinciding). I limit myself now to notes from which the essential emerges and in a form answering better to intention than to continuity.

Hindus have other means, which have in my eyes only one value, to show that poor means (the poorest) have alone the property of effecting rupture (rich means have too much meaning, come between us and the unknown, like objects sought for themselves). Intensity alone matters. Now—

Barely have we directed our attention towards an inner presence: what was concealed up to then takes on the fullness not of a storm—it is a question of slow movements—but of an invading flood. Now sensibility is exalted: it suffices that we detach it from the neutral objects to which we usually attach it.

A sensibility having become, by detachment of what attains the senses, so inner that all returns from the outside, a fall of a needle, a cracking, have an immense and distant resonance . . . The Hindus have noticed this peculiarity. I imagine that it is as in vision, which is rendered sharp in darkness by the dilation of a pupil.[7] *Here darkness is not the absence of light (or of sound) but absorption into the outside. In simple night, our attention is given entirely to the world of objects by way of words, which still persist. True silence takes place in the absence of words: that a pin should then drop: at the stroke of a hammer, I jump involuntarily . . . In this silence made of the inside, it is no longer an organ, it is entire sensibility, it is the heart which has dilated.*

Various means of the Hindus.

They pronounce in a cavernous way, prolonged as in the resonance of a cathedral, the syllable OM. They take this syllable to be sacred. They thus create for themselves a religious torpor, full of uneasy, even majestic divinity, and whose prolonging is purely inner. But one needs there either the naivete—the purity—of the Hindu, or the European's sickly taste for an exotic color.

Others, if need be, use drugs.

The Tantric Buddhists *have recourse to sexual pleasure: they don't ruin themselves in it, but use it as a springboard.*

Games of virtuoso, of deliquescence intermingle and nothing is further from the will for laying bare.

But I know little, at bottom about India . . . The few judgments which I abide by—more in antipathy than in receptivity—are linked to my ignorance. I have no hesitation about two points: the Hindus' books are, if not unwieldy, then uneven; these Hindus have friends in Europe whom I don't like.

Tendency of the Hindus—mixed with contempt—to flatter the Occidental man, his religion, his science, his morality, to clear himself of an appearance of backwardness; one is in the presence of a system remarkable in itself, which takes stock of itself, and does not gain from this start of a bad conscience; intellectual pretension sets off naiveties which are touching or inconsequential without it; as for morality, modern Hindus attenuate to their detriment an audacity which they have perhaps kept (tradition of the advaita Vedanta *in which Nietzsche saw precursors), do not rid themselves of a concern borrowed with reverence from principles. They are what they are and I hardly doubt that in all respects they raise themselves high enough to see* from above, *but they explain themselves in an Occidental fashion—hence the reduction to the common measure.*

I don't doubt that Hindus advance far into the impossible, but to the greatest degree *they are lacking—and this I find important—the faculty of expression. From the little that I know, I think I can gather that ascesis plays a decisive role among them. (The opposite excesses—eroticism, drugs—seem rare, are rejected by a great many. The excesses themselves do not exclude asceticism, even require it by virtue of a principle of equilibrium.) The key is the search for salvation.*

The misery of these people is that they have concern for a salvation, moreover different from that of the Christian. We know that they imagine a succession of rebirths—up to the deliverance: to be born again no longer.[8]

What strikes me in this regard, what seems convincing to me (although conviction does not arise from reasoning, but only from the feelings which it defines):

Assume the following: x *dead, that I was (in another life)* a living *and* z, what I will be. *I can in* a living *discern* ay *which I was yesterday,* at *which I will be tomorrow (in that life).* A *knows that* ay *was yesterday himself, whom no one else was. He can in the same way isolate* at *from all the men who will be tomorrow. But* a *cannot do this of* x dead. *He knows not who he was, has no memory of him. In the same way* x *could not imagine anything of* a. *In the same way,* a *could imagine nothing of* z *who has no memory of* a. *If between* x, a *and* z *there exist none of the relationships which I perceive between* ay, a *and* at, *one can only introduce between them inconceivable relationships which are as if they didn't exist. Even if it is true from some unintelligible point of view that* x, a *and* z *are but one, I can only feel indifferent about this truth in that,*

by definition, x, a *and* z *are necessarily indifferent about one another. It is comical on the part of* a *to be concerned about* z *forever unknown to him, for whom he will be forever unknown, as comical to be concerned as an individual about what tomorrow could happen to any stranger whatsoever. Assume* k *to be this stranger: between* a, x *and* z *there are, there will always be the same absence of relationships of the* ay, a, at *type (that is of graspable relationships) as between* a *and* k.

From that point on: if one proves that I have a soul, that it is immortal, I can assume relationships of the a, ay *type between this soul after my death and me (my soul remembering me as* a *remembers* ay). *Nothing easier, but if I introduce between the same entities relationships of the* a, at *type, these relationships remain arbitrary; they will not have the clear consistency of those which characterize* a, at. *Assume* ad *to be my soul after death. I can have with respect to this* ad *the same indifference as with respect to* at *(if I say* I can, impossible, *I speak strictly of myself, but the same reaction would be obtained from each straightforward and lucid man).*

The truth—of the most comic type—is that one never gives thought to these problems. We were discussing the strong or weak foundation of beliefs without noticing an insignificance which renders the discussion useless. Nevertheless I do nothing but give a precise form to the feeling of each person of some intellect, believer or not. There was a time when the relationships of a *to* ad *of the* a, at *type actually existed (in unsophisticated minds) where one had a true, inevitable concern for the after-life: men at first imagined a terrifying after-life—not necessarily long, but charged with the nefarious and with the cruelty of death. At that time, the bonds of the self to the soul were unreasoned, (as are the bonds of* a *to* at). *But these relationships of* a, ad—*still unreasoned—were in the end dissolved by the exercise of reason (in which way they were different all the same from the relationship of* a *to* at, *sometimes fragile in appearance, yet resisting well when put to the test). To these relationships stemming from dream were substituted in the end reasoned relationships linked to moral ideas which were more and more elevated. In confusion, men can continue to tell themselves: "I am concerned about* ad *(elsewhere about* z*) as much as about* at*"; can continue to tell themselves—but not to concern themselves, really. Once the unsophisticated ideas are dissipated, the comical truth slowly emerges; no matter what he says about it,* a *is interested in* ad *hardly any more than he is in* k; *he lives blithely before the prospect of hell. A sophisticated Christian is,* at bottom, *no longer unaware of the fact that* ad *is another, and mocks this as he does* k *only with, superimposed, the principle: "I must be concerned with* ad *not* at*". There is added to this, at the moment of death, the*

pious wish of his loved-ones, the terror of the dying man who is no more able to imagine himself dead, and mute, than as ad *continuing to live.*

"What makes me shudder with love is not the heaven which you have promised me; horrible hell doesn't make me shudder . . . if there weren't a heaven I would love you and if there weren't a hell I would fear you" (Saint Theresa of Avila). *In Christian faith, the rest is pure convenience.*

When I was a Christian, I was so little concerned with ad, *it seemed to me so vain to be more concerned about it than about* k *that, in the scriptures, no sentence pleased me more than these words from Psalm XXXVIII:* ". . . ut refrigerer pruisquam abaem et amplius non ero" *(. . . that I may be refreshed, before I die, and be no more.) Today would one by some absurd means prove to me that* ad *will boil in hell, I wouldn't be concerned about it, saying: "it matters little, him or some other". What would affect me—and of what I would boil while alive—would be that hell exists. But one never did believe it. One day Christ spoke of the grinding of teeth of the damned; he was God and* required them, *was himself required for their damnation, nevertheless he didn't break in two and his miserable pieces were not thrown against one another: he didn't think about what he was saying but about the impression he wanted to make.*

On this point many Christians resemble me (but there remains the convenience of a project which one is not really forced to believe in). A good deal of artifice already enters into the concern of a *for* at *(the identity of* a, ay, at *is reduced to the thread uniting the moments of a changing being, estranged from itself from one hour to the next). Death breaks the thread: we can only grasp a continuity* if a threshhold which interrupts it is lacking. *But a movement of liberty, moving abruptly, suffices;* ad *and* k *appear to be equivalent.*[9]

This immense interest in k *throughout the ages is moreover neither purely comical nor purely sordid. To be interested so much in* k, *without knowing that it was* him!

"All of my hard-working fervour and all of my nonchalance, all of my mastery of self and my natural inclination, all of my bravery and all of my trembling, my sun and my lightning soaring out of a black sky, all of my soul and all of my mind, all of the solemn and heavy granite of my "Self", all of this has the right to repeat to itself without end: "What does it matter what I am?" (Nietzsche, fragment of 80–81).

To imagine oneself effaced, abolished by death, that there would be missing in the universe . . . Quite to the contrary, if I continued to exist, and with me the throng of other dead beings, the universe would grow old, all these dead beings would leave a bad taste in its mouth.

I can bear the weight of the future only on one condition: that others, always others, live in it—and that death washes us, then washes these others without end.[10]

The most off-putting element in the morality of salvation: it assumes a truth and a multitude who, for want of seeing it, live in error. To be juvenile, generous, fond of laughter and—what goes hand in hand with this—loving that which seduces, girls, dancing, flowers, is to err: if she weren't foolish, the pretty girl would wish to be repulsive (salvation alone matters). What no doubt is the worst: the happy defiance of death, the feeling of glory which intoxicates and makes breathed in air invigorating, so many vanities which cause the sage to mutter under his breath: "if they knew . . ."

There exists on the contrary an affinity between on the one hand, the absence of worry, generosity, the need to defy death, tumultuous love, sensitive naivete; on the other hand, the will to become the prey of the unknown. In both cases, the same need for unlimited *adventure, the same horror for calculation, for* project *(the withered, prematurely old faces of the "bourgeois" and their cautiousness).*

Against ascesis.

That an anaemic, taciturn particle of life, showing reluctance before the excesses of joy, lacking freedom, *should attain—or should claim to have attained—the extreme limit, is an illusion. One attains the extreme limit in the fullness of means: it demands fulfilled beings, ignoring no audacity. My principle against ascesis is that the extreme limit is accessible through excess, not through want.*

Even the ascesis of those who succeed in it takes on in my eyes the sense of a sin, of an impotent poverty.

I don't deny that ascesis is conducive to experience. I even insist on it. Ascesis is a sure means of separating oneself from objects: it kills the desire which binds one to the object. But at the same time it makes an object of experience (one only killed the desire for objects by proposing a new object for desire).

Through ascesis, experience is condemned to take on the value of a positive object. Ascesis asks for deliverance, salvation, the possession of the most desirable object. In ascesis, value is not that of experience alone, independent of pleasure or of suffering; it is always a beatitude, a deliverance, which we strive to procure for ourselves.

Experience at the extreme limit of the possible nevertheless requires a renouncement: to cease wanting to be everything. While ascesis understood in the ordinary sense is precisely the sign of the pretense of becoming everything, by the possession of God, etc. Saint John of the Cross himself wrote: :"Para venir a serlo todo . . ." *(to come to be everything).*

It is doubtful in each case if salvation is the object of a true faith or if it is only a convenience permitting one to give the shape of a project to spiritual life (ecstasy is not sought for its own sake, it is the path of a deliverance, a means). Salvation is not necessarily the value which, for the Buddhist, equals the end of suffering, which for Christians, Muslims, non Buddhist Hindus equals God. It is the perspective of value perceived from the point of view of personal life. Moreover, in both cases, value is totality, completion, and salvation for the faithful is "becoming everything": divinity directly for the majority, non-individuality for the Buddhists (suffering is, according to Buddha, what is individual). The project of salvation formed, ascesis is possible.

Let one imagine now a different and even opposite will where the will to "become everything" would be regarded as an obstacle to that of losing oneself (of escaping isolation, the individual's turning in on himself). Where "becoming everything" would be considered not only as the sin of man but of all that is possible and even of God!

To lose oneself in this case would be to lose oneself and in no way to save oneself. *(One will see further on the passion which man brings to the contesting of each slip in the direction of the whole, of salvation, of the possibility of a project). But then the possibility for ascesis disappears!*

Nevertheless inner experience is project, no matter what.

It is such—man being entirely so through language which, in essence, with the exception of its poetic perversion, is project. But project is no longer in this case that, positive, of salvation, but that, negative, of abolishing the power of words, hence of project.

The problem is then the following. Ascesis is beside the point, without support, without a reason for being which makes it possible. If ascesis is a sacrifice, it is only so in a part *of itself which one loses with an eye to saving the other. But should one desire to lose oneself completely: that is possible starting from a movement of drunken revelry; in no way is it possible without emotion. Being without emotions is on the contrary necessary for ascesis. One must choose.*

Roughly, I can show that in principle the means are always double. On the one hand, one appeals to the excess of forces, to movements of intoxication, of desire. And on the other hand, in order to have at one's disposal a quantity of forces, one mutilates oneself (through ascesis, like a plant, without seeing that experience is thus domesticated*—like the flower—through this it ceases to answer to hidden demands. If it is a question of salvation, let one mutilate . . . But the voyage to the end of the possible demands freedom of temperament—that of a horse which has never been mounted).*

Ascesis in itself has, for many, something attractive, something satisfying; like an attained mastery, but the most difficult—the domination of oneself, of all of one's instincts. The ascetic can look from on high at what is below (in any case at human nature, through the contempt he has for his own). He imagines no way of living outside of the form of a project. (I don't look at anyone from on high, but laughingly, like the child, at ascetics and pleasure-seekers).

One says naturally: no other way out. All agree on one point: no sexual excesses. And almost all of them agree: absolute chastity. I would venture to dismiss these pretensions. And if chastity, like all ascesis, is in a sense facile, then wildness, accumulating opposite circumstances, is more favorable than ascesis to experience in that it sends an old maid—and whoever resembles her—to their domestic *poverty.*

The man knowing nothing of eroticism is no less a stranger to the end of the possible than is the man without inner experience. One must choose the arduous, turbulent path—that of the non-mutilated "whole man".

I have come to the point of saying with precision: the Hindu is a stranger to drama, the Christian cannot attain it in naked silence. The one and the other resort to ascesis. The first two means alone consume

(don't require any project): no one yet has brought them together into play, but only one or the other together with ascesis. If I had had at my disposal a single one of the two, for want of a strained exercise, like ascesis, I would not have had any inner experience, but only that of everyone, linked to the exteriority of objects (in a calm exercise of inner movements, one makes an object even of interiority, one seeks a "result".) But access to the world of the inside, of silence, having been linked within me to extreme interrogation, I escaped verbal flight at the same time as the empty and peaceful curiosity of states. Interrogation would encounter the answer which changed it from logical operation to vertigo (like an excitement takes shape in the apprehension of nudity).[11]

Something sovereignly attractive in being, as much as the driest Occidental man, discourse itself, and yet having at one's disposal a brief means for silence: it is a tomb-like silence and existence ruins itself in the full movement of its force.

A sentence from What is Metaphysics? *struck me: "Our Dasein,* (unseres Dasein)" *says Heidegger,—"in our community of seekers, professors and students—is determined by knowledge." No doubt in this way stumbles a philosophy whose meaning should be linked to a Dasein determined by inner experience (life in play beyond the separate operations). This less to indicate the limits of my interest in Heidegger than to introduce a principle: there cannot be knowledge without a community of seekers, nor inner experience without a community of those who live it. Community is to be understood in a different sense from Church or from order. The* sanyasin *of India have among them fewer formal bonds than do Heidegger's "seekers". The human reality which* yoga *determines in them is no less that of a community; communication is a phenomenon which is in no way added on to Dasein, but constitutes it.*

I must now shift direction. The communication of a given "Dasein" assumes among those who communicate not formal bonds but general conditions. Historical, actual conditions, but moving in a certain direction. I speak of them here, anxious to reach what is crucial. While elsewhere I have wounded, then opened the wound.

At the extreme limit of knowledge, what is forever missing is what revelation alone provided:

an arbitrary answer, saying: "You know now what you must know, what you don't know is what you have no need to know: it suffices that

another know it and that you depend on him—you can join forces with him."

Without this answer, man is dispossessed of the means for being everything, he is a bewildered madman, a question without a way out.[12]

What one didn't grasp in doubting revelation is that no one having ever spoken to us, no one would speak to us any longer: we are henceforth alone, the sun forever set.

One believed in the answers of reason without seeing that they only hold water by according themselves a divine-like authority, by mimicing revelation (through a foolish claim to say everything*).*

What one couldn't know: that only revelation permits man to be everything, something which reason is not; but one was in the habit of being everything, hence reason's vain effort to answer as God did, and to give satisfaction. Now the die is cast, the game a thousand times lost, man definitively alone—not being able to say anything (unless he acts: decides*).*

The great derision: a multitude of little contradicting "everythings", intelligence surpassing itself, culminating in multivocal, discordant, indiscrete idiocy.

What is strangest: no longer to wish oneself to be everything is for man the highest ambition, it is to want to be man (or, if one likes, to rise above man—to be what he would be, released from the need to cast longing eyes at the perfect, by acting in the opposite fashion).

And now: before a declaration of Kantian morality (act as though . . .), before a reproach formulated in the name of the declaration, before even an act, or failing an act, a desire, a bad conscience, we can, far from venerating, look at the mouse in the cat's paws: "You wanted to be everything, the fraud discovered, you will serve as a toy for us."

In my eyes, the night of non-knowledge after which comes the decision: "No longer to wish oneself to be everything, therefore to be man rising above the need he had to turn away from himself", neither adds nor takes anything away from the teaching of Nietzsche. The entire morality of laughter, of risk, of the exaltation of virtues and of strengths is spirit of decision.

Man ceasing—at the limit of laughter—to wish himself to be everything and wishing himself in the end to be what he is, imperfect, incomplete, good—if possible, right to moments of cruelty; and lucid . . . to the point of dying blind.

A paradoxical progression demands that I introduce in the conditions of a community what I refused in the very principles of inner experience. But in the principles, I put aside the possible dogmas *and I have done now nothing but articulate the fundamental givens, those at least that I see.*

Without night, no one would have to decide, but in a false light—undergo. Decision is what is born before the worst and rises above. It is the essence of courage, of the heart, of being itself. And it is the inverse of project (it demands that one reject delay, that one decide on the spot, with everything at stake: what follows matters second).

There is a secret in decision—the most intimate—which, in the end, is found in night, in anguish (to which decision puts an end). But neither night nor decision are means*; in no way is night* a means *for decision: night exists for itself, or does not exist.*

What I say about decision or about the fate of the man to come is at stake, is included in each true decision, each time a tragic disorder demands a decision without delay.

*This commits me to the maximum of effacement (without worry), as opposed to comical romanticism (and the extent to which I distance myself thus—*resolutely*—from romantic appearances—which I must have taken on—is what a laziness engages one to see poorly . . .). The profound meaning of* Ecce homo: *to leave nothing in the shadows, to dismantle pride in light.*

I have spoken of community as existing: Nietzsche related his affirmations to it but remained alone.[13]

In relation to him I am burning, as through a tunic of Nessus, with a feeling of anxious fidelity. That in the path of inner experience, he only advanced inspired, undecided, does not stop me—if it is true that, as a philosopher he had as a goal not knowledge but, without separating its operations, life, its extreme limit, *in a word experience itself,* Dionysos philosophos. *It is from a feeling of community binding me to Nietzsche*

that the desire to communicate arises in me, not from an isolated originality.

No doubt I have tended more than Nietzsche toward the night of non-knowledge.[14] *He doesn't linger in those swamps where I spend time, as if enmired. But I hesitate no longer: Nietzsche himself would be misunderstood if one didn't go to this depth. Up to now, he has in fact only produced superficial consequences, as imposing as they may appear.*

Loyal—but not without the dazed lucidity which causes me, right within myself, to be absent. I imagine that Nietzsche had the experience of the eternal return in a form which is properly speaking mystical, confused with discursive representations. Nietzsche was only a burning solitary man, without relief from too much strength, with a rare balance between intelligence and unreasoned life. The balance is not very conducive to the developed exercise of the intellectual faculties (which require calm, as in the existence of Kant, of Hegel). He proceeded by insights, putting into play forces in all directions, not being linked to anything, starting again, not building stone by stone. Speaking after a catastrophe of the intelligence (if I make myself understood). By being the first to become aware. Heedless of contradictions. Enamored only of freedom. Being the first to gain access to the abyss and succumbing from having dominated it.

"Nietzsche was only a man."
On the other hand.
Not to represent Nietsche exactly like a "man".
He said:
"But where do those waves of everything which is great and sublime in man finally flow out? Isn't there an ocean for these torrents?—Be *this ocean: there will be one"* (fragment from 80–81).

Better than the image of Dionysos philosophos, *the being lost of this ocean and this bare requirement: "be that ocean", designate experience and the extreme limit to which it leads.*

In experience, there is no longer a limited existence. There a man is not distinguished in any way from others: in him what is torrential is lost within others. The so simple commandment: "Be that ocean", linked to the extreme limit, *at the same time makes of a man a multitude, a desert. It is an expression which resumes and makes precise the sense of a community. I know how to respond to the desire of Nietzsche speaking of a community having no object other than that of experience (but designating this community, I speak of a "desert").*

In order to provide the distance of present-day man from the "desert", of the man with the thousand cacaphonic idiocies (almost scientific, ideology, blissful joking, progress, touching sentimentality, belief in machines, in big words and, to conclude, discordance and total ignorance of the unknown), I will say of the "desert" that it is the most complete abandonment of the concerns of the "present-day man", being the continuation of the "ancient man", which the enactment of festivals regulated. He is not a return to the past; he has undergone the corruption of the "present-day man" and nothing has more place within him than the devastation which it leaves—it gives to the "desert" its "desert-like" truth; the memory of Plato, of Christianity and above all—the most hideous—the memory of modern ideas, extend behind him like fields of ashes. But between the unknown and him has been silenced the chirping of ideas, and it is through this that he is similar to "ancient man": of the universe he is no longer the rational (alleged) master, but the dream.

The alacrity of the "desert" and of the dream which the "desert" provokes.

"How wonderful and new and yet how gruesome and ironic I find my position vis-à-vis the whole of existence in the light of my insight! I have discovered for myself that the human and animal past, indeed the whole primal age and past of all sentient being continues in me to invent, to love, to hate, to infer. I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish" (Nietzsche, The Gay Science).

There is between the world and the "desert" a concordance of all instincts, the numerous possibilities of the irrational giving of self, a vitality of dance.

The idea of being the dream of the unknown (of God, of the universe) is, it seems, the extreme point which Nietzsche attained. In it the happiness of being, of affirming, the refusal to be everything, natural cruelty, fecundity are at work: man is a bacchant philosopher.*[15]

It is difficult to imply to what extent the "desert" is far, where my voice would at last carry, with this bit of meaning: a meaning of dream.

A continual challenging of everything deprives one of the power of proceeding by separate operations, obliges one to express oneself through rapid flashes, to free as much as is possible the expression of one's thought from a project, to include everything in a few sentences:

*As Friedrich Würzbach said in the preface to his edition of the *Will to Power.*

anguish, decision and the right to the poetic perversion of words without which it would seem that one was subject to a domination.

Poetry is despite everything the restricted part—linked to the realm of words. The realm of experience is that of the entire possible. And in the end, in the expression which it is of itself, poetry is, necessarily, no less silence than language. Not through impotence. All of language is given to it as is the strength to engage it. But silence intended not to hide, not to express at a higher degree of detachment. Experience cannot be communicated if the bonds of silence, of effacement, of distance, do not change those they put into play.[16]

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Part Two

THE TORMENT

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I

There is in divine things a transparency so great that one slips into the illuminated depths of laughter beginning even with opaque intentions.

I live by tangible experience and not by logical explanation. I have of the divine an experience so mad that one will laugh at me if I speak of it.

I enter into a dead end. There all possibilities are exhausted; the "possible" slips away and the impossible prevails. To face the impossible—exorbitant, indubitable—when nothing is possible any longer is in my eyes to have an experience of the divine; it is analogous to a torment.

There are hours when Ariadne's thread is broken: I am nothing but empty irritation; I no longer know what I am; I am hungry, cold and thirsty. At such moments, to resort to will would make no sense. What counts is the distaste for what I have been able to say, write, which could bind me: I feel my good faith to be insipid. There is no way out from the contradictory impulses which agitate men and it is in this that they satisfy me. I have doubts: I no longer see in me anything but cracks, impotence, useless agitation. I feel corrupt; everything that I touch is corrupt.

A singular courage is necessary in order not to succumb to depression and to continue—in the name of what? Nevertheless I continue, in my darkness: man continues in me, goes through this. When I utter within myself: WHAT IS IT? When I am there without a conceivable reply, I

believe that within me, at last, this *man* should kill what I am, become *himself* to that point that my stupidity ceases to make me laughable. As for . . . (rare and furtive witnesses will perhaps find me out) I ask them to hesitate: for condemned to becoming man (or more), it is necessary for me to die (in my own eyes), to give birth to myself. Things could no longer remain in their state; man's "possible" could not limit itself to this constant distaste for himself, to the dying individual's repeated disavowal. We cannot be without end that which we are: words cancelling each other out, at the same time as resolute non-entities, believing ourselves to be the foundation of the world. Am I awake? I doubt it and I could weep. Would I be the first one in the world to feel human impotence make me mad?

Glances wherein I perceive the path travelled. Fifteen years ago (perhaps a bit more), I returned from I don't know where, late in the night. The rue de Rennes was deserted. Coming from Saint Germain, I crossed the rue du Four (the post office side). I held in my hand an open umbrella and I believe it wasn't raining. (But I hadn't drunk: I tell you, I'm sure of it.) I had this umbrella open without needing to (if not for what I speak of later). I was extremely young then, chaotic and full of empty intoxications: a round of unseemly, vertiginous ideas, but ideas already full of anxieties, rigorous and crucifying, ran through my mind. In this shipwreck of reason, anguish, the solitary fall from grace, cowardice, bad faith profited: the festivity started up again a little further on. What is certain is that this freedom, at the same time as the "impossible" which I had run up against, burst in my head. A space constellated with laughter opened its dark abyss before me. At the crossing of the rue du Four, I became in this "Nothingness" unknown—suddenly . . . I negated these gray walls which enclosed me, I rushed into a sort of rapture. I laughed divinely: the umbrella, having descended upon my head, covered me (I expressly covered myself with this black shroud). I laughed as perhaps one had never laughed; the extreme depth of each thing opened itself up—laid bare, as if I were dead.

I don't know if I stopped, in the middle of the street—concealing my transport under an umbrella. Perhaps I jumped (no doubt that's just an illusion): I was illuminated convulsively; I laughed, I imagine, while running.

Doubt fills me with anguish without respite. What does illumination mean? of whatever nature? even if the brilliance of the sun blinded me inwardly and set me ablaze? A bit more, a bit less light changes nothing; in

any case, solar or not, man is only man: to be nothing but man, not to emerge from this—is suffocation, burdensome ignorance, the intolerable.

"I teach the art of turning anguish to delight", "to glorify": the entire meaning of this book. The bitterness within me, the "unhappiness" is only the condition. But anguish which turns to delight is still anguish: it is not delight, not hope—it is anguish, which is painful and perhaps decomposes. He who does not "die" from being merely a man will never be other than a man.

Anguish, obviously, is not learned. One would provoke it? It is possible: I hardly believe so. One can stir up the dregs of it . . . If someone admits of having anguish, it is necessary to show the inexistence of his reasons. He imagines the way out for his torments: if he had more money, a woman, another life. . . The foolishness of his anguish is infinite. Instead of going to the depths of his anguish, the anxious one pratters, degrades himself and flees. Anguish however was his chance: he was *chosen* in accordance with his *forebodings*. But what a waste if he escapes: he suffers as much and humiliates himself, he becomes stupid, false, superficial. Anguish, once evaded, makes of a man an agitated Jesuit, but agitated to emptiness.

Trembling. To remain immobile, standing, in a solitary darkness, in an attitude without the gesture of a supplicant: supplication, but without gesture and above all without hope. Lost and pleading, blind, half dead. Like Job on the dung heap, in the darkness of night, but imagining nothing—defenseless, knowing that all is lost.

Meaning of supplication. I express it thus, in the form of a prayer: O God our father, You who, in a night of despair, crucified Your son, who, in this night of butchery, as agony became *impossible*—to the point of distraction—became the *Impossible* Yourself and felt *impossibility* right to the point of horror—God of despair, give me that heart, Your heart, which fails, which exceeds all limits and tolerates no longer that You should be!

One does not grasp the way in which one should speak of God. My despair is nothing, but that of God! I can live or know nothing without imagining it lived, known by God. We back away, from "possible" to "possible", in us everything begins again and is never *risked,* but in God: in this "leap" of being which He is, in his "once and for all"? No one

would go to the end of supplication without placing himself within the exhausting solitude of God.

But in me everything begins again; nothing is ever risked. I destroy myself in the infinite possibility of my fellow beings: it annihilates the sense of this *self.* If I attain, an instant, the extreme limit of the "possible", shortly thereafter, I will flee, I will be *elsewhere.* And what sense is there in the ultimate absurdity: to add to God the unlimited repetition of "possibles" and this torment of being forsaken, drop by drop, within the multitude of man's misfortunes? Like a herd chased by an infinite shepherd, the bleating flock which we are would flee, would flee without end the horror of a reduction of Being to totality.

God speaks to me the idiot, face to face: a voice like fire comes from the darkness and speaks—cold flame, burning sadness—to . . . the man with the umbrella. When I collapse, God answers the supplication (what? At whom should I laugh in my room? . . .) *I, myself,* am standing on various summits, so sadly ascended; my different nights of terror collide—they multiply, they intertwine and these summits, these nights . . . unspeakable joy! . . . I stop. I am? a cry—thrown back, I collapse.

Philosophy is never supplication: but without supplication, there is no conceivable reply: no answer ever preceded the question: and what does the question without anguish, without torment mean? At the moment of going mad, the answer springs forth: how would one hear it without that?

The essential is the extreme limit of the "possible", where God himself no longer knows, despairs and kills.

Forgetting of everything. Deep descent into the night of existence. Infinite ignorant pleading, to drown oneself in anguish. To slip over the abyss and in the completed darkness experience the horror of it. To tremble, to despair, in the cold of solitude, in the eternal silence of man (foolishness of all sentences, illusory answers for sentences, only the insane silence of night answers). The word *God,* to have used it in order to reach the depth of solitude, but to no longer know, hear his voice. To know nothing of him. God final word meaning that all words will fail further on: to perceive its own eloquence (it is not avoidable), to laugh at it to the point of unknowing stupor (laughter no longer needs to laugh, nor crying to cry, nor sobbing to sob). Further on one's head bursts: man

is not contemplation (he only has peace by fleeing); he is supplication, war, anguish, madness.

The voice of the good apostles: they have an answer for everything; they indicate limits, discreetly, the steps to follow, as does, at burial, the master of ceremonies.

Feeling of complicity in: despair, madness, love, supplication. Inhuman, disheveled joy of *communication*—for, despair, madness, love . . . not a point in empty space which is not despair, madness, love and even more: laughter, dizziness, vertigo, nausea, loss of self to the point of death.

II

Mockery! that one should call me pantheist, atheist, theist . . . But I cry out to the sky: "I know nothing." And I repeat in a *comical* voice (I cry out to the sky, at times, in this way): "absolutely nothing".

The extreme limit of the "possible"—We are there in the end. But so late? . . . what, without knowing it we reached it? (in truth, nothing is changed) by a detour: one man bursts out laughing, the other is goaded and beats his wife, we become dead drunk, we make others perish in torture.

Absurdity of reading what should tear one apart to the point of dying and, to begin with, of preparing one's lamp, a drink, one's bed, of winding one's watch. I laugh at this, but what to say of "poets" who imagine themselves above calculated attitudes, without admitting to themselves that like me their heads are empty: to show this one day, with discipline—cold—up to the moment where one is broken, pleading, where one ceases to dissimulate, to be absent. Is it a question of exercises? well thought-out? intended? It is a matter, in effect, of exercises, of *constraints*. The joke of wanting to be a man flowing with the current, without ever hemming oneself in, without ever leaving a leg to stand on—this is to become the accomplice of inertia. What is strange is that, in evading experience, one doesn't see the responsibility which one has assumed; none can overwhelm more: it is *inexpiable sin,* the possibility glimpsed for once of abandoning it for the grains of a life without distinction. The possibility is mute, it neither threatens nor condemns, but one who, fearing to die himself, lets it die, is like a cloud disappointing the anticipation of sunlight.

I no longer imagine man to be *laughing,* laughing at the ultimate possibility itself—laughing, turning his back, mute, in order to give himself to the enchantment of life, without ever, be it once, evading experience. But should failure one day take hold of him, should he refuse, in failure, to go to the end (through the route of failure—then the possibility itself claims him, lets him know that it waits for him), he evades the possibility and that's it for his innocence: in him begins the ungraspable play of sin, of remorse, of the pretense of remorse, then total forgetting and the pedestrian.

Should one look at last at the history of men—man by man; in the long run, it appears in its entirety as if it were a flight; at first in the face of life (this is sin), then in the face of sin (this is the long night traversed by foolish laughter), with anguish at an innermost depth only.

Every man, to conclude, has conquered the right to absence, to certainty; each street is the limited face of this conquest.

To experience the slow pleasure, the decisive rigor of firm despair, to be hard, and guarantor of death rather than victim. The difficulty, in despair, is to be whole: however, the words, as I write, fail me . . . Egotism inherent in despair: in it arises the indifference to communication. "Arises" at the very least, for . . . I write. Moreover words designate poorly what the human being experiences; I say "despair"—one must understand me: here I am defeated, in the depths of cold, inhaling an odor of death, at the same time lethargic, committed to my destiny, loving it—like an animal its little ones—no longer desiring anything. The summit of joy is not joy, for, in joy, I sense the moment coming when it will end, while, in despair I sense only death coming: I have of it only an anguished desire, but a desire and no other desire. Despair is simple: it is the absence of hope, of all *enticement.* It is the state of deserted expanses and—I can imagine—of the sun.

I fail, no matter what I write, in this, that I should be linking the infinite—insane—richness of "possibles" to the precision of meaning. To this fruitless task I am compelled—happily? Perhaps, for I can henceforth not conceive of my life, if not pinned to the *extreme limit of the "possible."* (This assumes, to begin with, a superhuman intelligence, while I have often had to resort to the more resourceful intelligence of others . . . But what to do? Forget? immediately, I sense, I would go *mad:* one still understands poorly the misery of a mind *divested.*) No doubt, it suffices that a single individual reach the extreme limit: for all that, between him and the others—who avoid him—he keeps a link.

Without that he would only be an oddity, not the extreme limit of the "possible". Noises of all sorts, cries, chatter, laughter—it is necessary that everything be lost within him, become empty of meaning in his despair. Intelligence, communication, supplicating misery, *sacrifice* (the hardest no doubt is to *open oneself* to an infinite foolishness: in order to escape it—the extreme limit is the only point through which man escapes his limited stupidity—but at the same time in order to sink into it). There is nothing which mustn't go to the appointed place of meeting. The strangest is despair, which paralyzes the rest and absorbs it into itself. And "my everything"? "My everything" is nothing but a naive being, hostile towards joking: when it is there, my night becomes colder, the desert in which I find myself more empty, there is no longer any limit: beyond known possibilities, an anguish so great inhabits the gray of the sky, in the same way that a monk inhabits the darkness of a tomb.

My effort will be in vain if it doesn't compel conviction. But it is dissipated within me every hour! from the *extreme limit* I descend to the most stupified state—assuming that at rare moments I have touched the *extreme limit.* In these conditions, how does one believe that the *extreme limit* should one day be the *possibility* of man, that one day men (be it in an infinitesimal number) should have access to the extreme limit? And yet, without the extreme limit, life is only a long deception, a series of defeats without combat followed by impotent retreat—it is degradation.

By definition, the extreme limit of the "possible" is that point where, despite the unintelligible position which it has for him in being, man, having stripped himself of enticement and fear, advances so far that one cannot conceive of the possibility of going further. Needless to say to what degree it is vain to imagine a pure play of intelligence without anguish (although philosophy closes itself in this impasse). Anguish is no less than intelligence the means for knowing, and the extreme limit of the "possible", in other respects, is no less life than knowledge. Communication still is, like anguish, to live and to know. The extreme limit of the "possible" assumes laughter, ecstasy, terrified approach towards death; assumes error, nausea, unceasing agitation of the "possible" and the impossible and, to conclude—broken, nevertheless, by degrees, slowly desired—the state of supplication, its absorption into despair. Nothing of what man can *know,* to this end, could be evaded without degradation, without sin (I think, by taking a more negative view of the situation, the stakes being ultimate, of the worst of disgraces, of desertion: for one who has felt himself to be called once, there is no further reason, further excuse; he can only remain where he is). Every human

being not going to the extreme limit is the *servant* or the *enemy* of man. To the extent that he does not attend, through some servile task, to communal subsistance, his desertion contributes to giving man a despicable destiny.

Common knowledge or knowledge found in laughter, anguish, or all other analogous experience, are subordinated—this arises from the rules which they follow—to the extreme limit of the "possible". Each bit of knowledge is worth something in its limits, although it is necessary to know what it is worth if the extreme limit is there—to know what an ultimate experience would add to it. At first, at the extreme limit of the "possible", everything gives way: the edifice itself of reason—in an instant of insane courage, its majesty is dissipated; what subsists at the worst, like a piece of shaking wall, increases, does not calm the vertiginous feeling. Useless impudence of recriminations: it was necessary to experience this, nothing resists the necessity of going further. If it had been required, madness would have been the payment.

A despicable destiny . . . Everything has solidarity in man. There was always in some the bitter will—be it diffuse—to go to the furthest point that man could go. But if man ceased to *wish to be himself* with as much bitterness, that would only occur with the collapse of all desire—in whatever way that this desire is exerted (enchantment, combat, quest).

In order to proceed to the end of man, it is necessary, at a certain point, no longer to submit to, but to force destiny. What is contrary: poetic nonchalance, the passive attitude, the distaste for a virile reaction which is decisive—this is literary débâcle (beautiful pessimism). The downfall of Rimbaud who had to turn his back on the "possible" which he attained, in order to find once again a decisive force intact within him. Access to the extreme limit has as a condition the hatred not of poetry, but of poetic femininity (the absence of decision; the poet is woman; invention, words rape him). I oppose to poetry the experience of the possible. It is less a matter of contemplation than of rupture. It is however of "mystic experience" that I speak (Rimbaud practiced it, but without the tenacity which he later exerted in trying his fortune. To his experience, he gave a poetic outlet; in general, he ignored the simplicity which affirms (inclinations not worth pursuing are mentioned in some of his letters). He chose feminine evasiveness; that which is aesthetic; uncertain, involuntary expression).

A feeling of impotence: to the apparent disorder of my ideas, I have the key, but I don't have the time to open. Closed-in, solitary distress, the ambition which I have conceived being so great that . . . I would like, as well, to go to bed, to cry, to fall asleep. I remain there, several moments longer, wanting to force destiny, *and broken.*

Last hope: to forget, to come back to innocence, to the playfulness of despair.

Prayer to put me to bed: "God who sees my efforts, give me the night of your blind man's eyes."

Provoked, God replies; I become strained to the point of collapse and *I see Him*; then I forget. As much disorder as in dreams.

III

Release of tension. Crossed the church of Saint-Roch. Before the giant, golden, hazy image of sun, a movement of gaity, of childish spirits and of rapture. Further on, I looked at a wooden balustrade and I saw that the housekeeping was shoddy. I touched, on a whim, one of the banisters: my finger left a mark in the dust.

Conclusion of a discussion on the train.—Those who don't know that the foundation is lacking, who are satisfied with wise maxims, while they would be reduced, if they suddenly knew, to the absurd, to pleading. I waste my time in wanting to warn. Tranquility, good-naturedness, genteel discussion as if war . . . and when I say war. Decidedly, no one looks squarely at the sun, the human eye evades it . . . the skull of God bursts . . . and no one hears.

My friends avoid me. I frighten, not because of my cries, but because I cannot leave anyone in peace. I simplify: haven't I often given good pretexts?

To grasp the extent of knowledge, I go back to the source. First a small child, in every way similar to the madmen (the absent ones) I play with today. The miniature "absent ones" are not in contact with the world, *if not through the channel of grown-ups*: the result of an intervention on the part of grown-ups is *childishness,* a fabrication. Grown-ups *clearly* reduce being coming into the world, which we are at first, to the level of trinkets. This seems to me to be important: that the passage to

the state of nature (from birth) to our state of reason should necessarily take place through the route of *childishness*. It is strange on our part to attribute to the child itself the responsibility for childishness, which would be the character proper of children. Childishness is the state into which *we put* naive being, by virtue of the fact that, even without precisely willing this, we direct it towards the point at which we find ourselves. When we laugh at infantile absurdity, laughter disguises our shame, seeing to what we reduce life emerging from Nothingness.

Suppose that the universe engenders the stars, the stars the earth . . . the earth the animals and children, and children adults. The error of children: to derive truth from grown-ups. Each truth possesses a convincing force (and why put it into doubt?) but it has as a consequence its counterpart of errors. It is a fact that our truths, at first, introduce the child into a series of errors which constitute childishness. But one speaks of childishness when it is *visible* to all: no one laughs at a scholar, for to see in him childishness would demand that one surpass him, as much as the grown-up surpasses the child (this is never completely true—if he is not inherently ridiculous—and, in a word, it almost never happens).

My conduct with my friends is motivated: each being is, I believe, incapable on his own, of going to the end of being. If he tries, he is submerged within a "private being" which has meaning only for himself. Now there is no meaning for a lone individual: being alone would of itself reject the "private being" if it saw it as such (if I wish my life to have meaning for me, it is necessary that it have meaning *for others*: no one would dare give to life a meaning which he alone would perceive, from which life in its entirety would escape, except within himself). At the extreme limit of the "possible", it is true, there is nonsense . . . but only of that which had a prior sense, for *supplication*—arising from the absence of sense—fixes, in short, a sense, a final sense: this is fulguration, even "apotheosis" of nonsense. But I don't attain the extreme limit on my own and, in actual fact, I can't believe the extreme limit attained, for I never remain there. If I had to be the only one having attained it (assuming that I had . . .), it would be as though it hadn't occurred. For if there subsisted a satisfaction, as small as I imagine it to be, it would distance me as much from the extreme limit. I cannot for a moment cease to incite myself to attain the extreme limit, and cannot make a distinction between myself and those with whom I desire to communicate.

I can only, I suppose, reach the extreme limit in repetition, for this reason, that I am never sure of having attained it, that I will never be

sure. And even supposing the extreme limit attained, it would still not be the extreme limit, if I "fell asleep". The extreme limit implies "one mustn't sleep during that time" (right to the moment of dying), but Pascal accepted sleeplessness in view of the beatitude to come (at least he gave himself that reason). I refuse to be *happy* (to be saved).

What the desire to be happy means: suffering and the desire to escape. When I suffer (for example: yesterday, rheumatism, the cold, and above all, anguish—having read passages from the *120 Days*), I become attached to little pleasures. The nostalgia for salvation responds perhaps to the increase of suffering (or rather to the incapacity to bear it). The idea of salvation comes, I believe, from one whom suffering *breaks apart.* He who masters it, on the contrary, needs to be broken, to proceed on the path towards rupture.

A comic little summary. Hegel, I imagine, touched upon the extreme limit. He was still young and believed himself to be going mad. I even imagine that he worked out the system in order to escape (each type of conquest is, no doubt, the deed of a man fleeing a threat). To conclude, Hegel attains *satisfaction,* turns his back on the extreme limit. *Supplication is dead within him.* Whether or not one seeks salvation, in any case, one continues to live, one can't be sure, one must continue to supplicate. While yet alive, Hegel won salvation, killed supplication, *mutilated himself.* Of him, only the handle of a shovel remained, a modern man. But before mutilating himself, no doubt he touched upon the extreme limit, knew supplication: his memory brought him back to the perceived abyss, *in order to annul it*! The system is the annulment.

Conclusion of the summary. Modern man, the annulled one (but at no cost), took pleasure in salvation on earth. Kierkegaard is the extreme limit of the Christian. Dostoevsky (in the *Underground*) that of shame. In the *120 Days,* we attain the summit of voluptuous terror.

In Dostoevsky, the extreme limit is the effect of the breaking apart; but it is a breaking apart which is like a winter flood: it overflows. Nothing is more painful, more sickly, more like pale religious complication. The *Underground* attributes the extreme limit to misery. There is trickery, as in Hegel's writing, but Dostoevsky extricates himself differently. In Christianity it may not count to degrade supplication, to engulf man entirely in shame. One says: "Never mind that . . ." but no, for (except for the ambiguity) it is a matter of humiliating, of depriving of value. All the same, I didn't moan: that the extreme limit should be

attained through shame is not so bad, but to limit it to shame! Dazzled in the depths, to pass the extreme limit off to the demoniacal—at all costs—is to betray.

My means: expression, my awkwardness. The ordinary condition of life: rivalry between various individuals, striving to be the best. Caesar: ". . . rather than be second in Rome". Men are such—so wretched—that everything seems worthless—unless it surpasses. Often I am so sad that to measure my insufficiency of means without despairing wears me out. The problems which are worth being considered have meaning only on the condition that, posing them, one attains the summit: mad pride necessary for being torn apart. And at times—our nature slips into dissolution for nothing—one tears oneself apart with the sole aim of satisfying this pride: everything is ruined in an all-absorbing vanity. It would be better to be nothing more than a village pedlar, to look at the sun with a sickly eye, rather than . . .

The linkage of the extreme limit to vanity, then of vanity to the extreme limit. Childishness, knowing itself to be such, is deliverance, but taking itself seriously, it is enmired. The search for the extreme limit can in its turn become a habit, dependent on childishness: one must laugh at it, unless, by chance, one has a heavy heart: then ecstasy and madness are within reach.

Once again, childishness recognized as such is the glory, not the shame of man. On the other hand, if one says, with Hobbes, that laughter degrades, one reaches the depths of degradation. Nothing is more childish, nor further from knowing itself to be so. All seriousness avoiding the extreme limit is the degradation of man: through this his slavish nature is rendered tangible. Once again, I call forth childishness, glory: the extreme limit is at the end, is only at the end, like death.

At the elusive extreme limit of my being, I am already dead, and *I* in this growing state of death speak to the living: of death, of the extreme limit. The most serious seem to me to be children, who don't know that they are children: they separate me from true children who know it and who laugh at being. But to be a child, one must know that the serious exists—elsewhere and mattering little—if not, the child could no longer laugh nor know anguish.

It is the extreme limit, mad tragedy, not the seriousness of the statistical, which children need in order to play and to become afraid.

The extreme limit is a window: fear of the extreme limit commits one to the darkness of a prison, with an empty will for "penal administration".

IV

In the infinite horror of war, man, en masse, has access to the extreme point which terrifies him. But man is far from wanting horror (and the extreme limit): his destiny is, in part, to try to avoid the unavoidable. His eyes, although eager for light, persistently avoid the sun, and the gentleness of his glance, in advance, betrays the quickly arrived darkness of sleep: if I envisage the human masses, in their opaque consistency, it is as if already asleep, fleeing and withdrawn in stupor. The fatality of a blind movement nevertheless throws them back towards the extreme limit to which, one day, they suddenly gain access.

The horror of war is greater than that of inner experience. The desolation of a battle field, in principle, has something more grave about it than "dark night". But on the battle field, one approaches horror with a movement which overcomes it: action, project linked to action, permits the *surpassing* of horror. This surpassing gives to action, to project, a captivating grandeur—but horror is in itself negated.

I have understood that I was avoiding the project of an inner experience, and I contented myself with being at its mercy. I have such an eager desire for it; its necessity imposes itself upon me, without my having *decided* anything. In truth, no one can—the nature of experience is, apart from derision, not to be able to exist as project.

I live, and everything becomes as though life without the extreme limit were conceivable. And what is more, desire persists in me, but it is weak. Still yet, the dark perspectives of the extreme limit are inscribed within my memory, but I no longer dread them, and I remain an imbecile, concerned about laughable miseries, about cold, about the sentence which I shall write, about my projects: the "night" into which I know I am thrown, into which I fall during this time, and with me everything that is—this truth that I am aware of, that I can have no doubts about—I am like a child before it, it escapes from me, I remain blind. I belong, for the moment, to the realm of objects which I use, and I remain unconnected to what I write. To be in night, to sink into night, without even having enough strength to *see it,* to know oneself to be in this closed

darkness, and despite it, to *see clearly*—I can still bear this trial while laughing, my eyes closed, at my "childishness".

I come to this position: inner experience is the opposite of action. Nothing more.

"Action" is utterly dependent upon project. And what is serious, is that discursive thought is itself engaged in the mode of existence of project. Discursive thought is evinced by an individual engaged in action: it takes place within him beginning with his projects, on the level of reflexion upon projects. Project is not only the mode of existence implied by action, necessary to action—it is a way of being in paradoxical time: *it is the putting off of existence to a later point.*

One who, now, discovers pity for multitudes wasting their lives (to the extent that projects dominate them), could have the simplicity of the Gospel: anguish, the beauty of tears, would together introduce transparency into his words. I say this as simply as I can (although a ruthless irony provokes me): impossible for me to meet others and their concerns. Moreover, the news is not good. And this is not a bit of "news"; in a sense, it is a secret.

Therefore, to speak, to think, short of joking or . . . is to dodge existence: it is not to die but to be dead. It is to enter the extinguished and calm world in which we usually linger: there everything is suspended, life is put off until later, from postponement to postponement . . . The slight displacement of projects suffices—the flame is extinguished; after the tempest of passions there follows a period of calm. What is strangest is that, on its own, the exercise of thought introduces in the mind the same suspension, the same peace, as activity in the place of work. Descartes' small affirmation is the most subtle of escapes. (Descartes' motto: *"Larvatus prodeo";* what proceeds, though hidden: I am in anguish and I think; thought in me *suspends* anguish; I am the being gifted with the power to *suspend* within him being itself. Following Descartes: the world of "progress", in other words, of project, is the world in which we find ourselves. War disturbs it, it is true: the world of project remains, but in doubt and anguish.)

Principle of inner experience: to emerge through project from the realm of project.

Inner experience is led by discursive reason. Reason alone has the power to undo its work, to hurl down what it has built up. Madness has no effect, allowing debris to subsist, disturbing along with reason the faculty for communicating (perhaps, above all, it is rupture of inner

communication). Natural exaltation or intoxication have a certain "flash in the pan" quality. Without the support of reason, we don't reach "dark incandescence".

Up until now, almost all inner experience depended upon the obsession for salvation. Salvation is the summit of all possible project and the height of matters relating to projects. Moreover, by virtue of the very fact that salvation is a summit, it is negation of projects of momentary interest. At the extreme limit, the desire for salvation turns into the hatred of all project (of the putting off of existence until later): of salvation itself, suspected of having a commonplace motive. If I, in anguish, exhaust remote prospects and inner depths, I see this: salvation *was* the sole means of dissociating eroticism (the Bacchic consumation of bodies) from the nostalgia for existing without delay. A commonplace means, no doubt, but eroticism . . .

Against pride. My privilege is to be humiliated by my profound stupidity and, no doubt, through others, I perceive a greater stupidity. It is vain to linger over differences at this degree of thickness. What I am able to do more than others: to see within me immense storage closets, dressing-rooms; I have not succumbed to the dread which ordinarily averts one's glances; during the feeling that I had of an inner collapse, I didn't flee—I tried only feebly to mislead myself and above all, I didn't succeed. What I perceive is the complete destitution of man, his thickness thrown in—the condition for his complacency.

The imitation of Jesus: according to Saint John of the Cross, we must imitate in God (Jesus) the fall from grace, the agony, the moment of "non-knowledge" of the *"lamma sabachtani"*; drunk to the lees, Christianity is absence of salvation, the despair of God. It fails, in that it attains its goals out of breath. The agony of God in the person of man is fatal—it is the abyss into which vertigo tempted him to fall. In the agony of a God, the confession of sin is irrelevant. This agony justifies not only heaven (the dark incandescence of the heart), but hell (childishness, flowers, Aphrodite, laughter).

Despite appearances to the contrary, the concern for misfortune is the dead part of Christianity. It is anguish reducible to project: indefinitely workable formula, each day a bit more thickness, an increased state of death. Existence and death losing themselves, on the scale of the human masses, in project—life put off infinitely. Of course, ambiguity plays a part in this: life is condemned in Christianity, and the men of progress

sanctify it; Christians have limited it to ecstasy and to sin (this was a positive attitude); progress negates ecstasy, sin—equates life with project, sanctifies project (work): in the world of progress, once project is recognized as the serious side of existence, life is nothing but permissible childishness (anguish, to which misery gives substance, is necessary for authority, but project occupies the mind).

Where the intimate character of project is revealed: its mode of existence transposed into the idleness of rich women and, in general, of the worldly. If the polite, calmed manners and the emptiness of project prevail, life no longer puts up with idleness. In a similar way, consider the boulevards on a Sunday afternoon. The worldly life and bourgeois Sundays bring out the character of ancient festivals, the forgetting of all project, consummation beyond measure.

And above all, "nothing", I know "nothing"—I moan this like a sick child, whose attentive mother holds his forehead (mouth open over the basin). But I don't have a mother, the basin is the starry sky (in my poor nausea, it is thus).

Several lines read in a recent brochure*:

"I have often thought of the day when the birth of a man who would have his eyes very genuinely *on the inside* would at last be consecrated. His life would be like a long tunnel of phosphorescent furs and he would only have to stretch out in order to plunge into everything which he has in common with the rest of the world and which is atrociously incommunicable to us. At the thought that the birth of such a man were to be rendered possible, tomorrow, by a common accord with his fellow beings and his world, I would like everyone to be able to shed tears of joy." This is accompanied by four pages in which an intention principally turned towards the outside is expressed. The possibility of the envisaged birth leaves me, hélas! with my eyes dry: I have *fever* and no longer any tears.

What can they mean, this "Golden Age", this vain concern for the "best possible conditions" and the sick will of a mankind in complete accord? In truth, the will for an *exhausting* experience always begins in euphoria. Impossible to grasp what one is engaging oneself in, to guess the price that one will pay—but later, one will pay *without getting one's fill of paying*; no one felt the extent to which he would be ruined nor the

*_La Transfusion du Verbe_, in _Naissance de l'homme—objet_, by J.-F. Chabrun.

shame he would have at not being ruined enough. This said, if I see that one cannot bear to *live,* that one is suffocating, that in any case one flees from anguish and resorts to project, my anguish grows from the anguish which turbulence evades.

Poetic idleness, poetry put into the form of a project—that which an André Breton could not tolerate laid bare, which the intended abandon of his sentences was to conceal. And for me, anguish without escape, the feeling of complicity, of being harrassed, hunted. Never, however, more complete! one can't offend me: it is the desert which I wanted, the site (the condition) which was necessary for a clear and interminable death.

What I see: poetic facility, diffuse style, verbal project, ostentation and the fall into the worst: commonness, literature. One trumpets that one is going to revive man: one commits him a bit more to the old rut. Vanity! This is quickly said (vanity is not what it appears; it is only the condition for a project, for a putting off of existence until later). One has egotistical satisfaction only in projects; the satisfaction escapes as soon as one accomplishes; one returns quickly to the plan of the project—one falls in this way into flight, like an animal into an endless trap; on one day or another, one dies an idiot. In the anguish enclosing me, my gaiety justifies, as much as it can, human vanity, the immense desert of vanities, its dark horizon where pain and night are hiding—a dead and divine gaiety.

And vanity within me!
Undoubtedly.

"That which I write: an appeal! the most insane, the best destined for the deaf. I address a prayer to my fellow beings (at least to some of them): vanity of this cry of the desert man! You are such that if you perceived yourselves as I do, you could no longer be so. For (here I fall to the ground) have pity on me! I have seen what you are."

Man and his "possible." Sordid being, stupid (to the point of crying out in the cold), has laid down his *possible.* The gentle (flattering) idea occurs: he follows it, catches it. But, this *possible* placed, for a moment, on the ground?
He forgets it!
Decidedly, he forgets!
That's it: it has left.

Speaking here or there of the extreme limit attained, I have spoken of writers, even of a "man of letters" (Dostoevsky). At the thought that confusion might arise easily, I will be more precise. One can know nothing of man which has not taken the form of a sentence, and the infatuation for poetry, on the other hand, makes of untranslatable strings of words a summit. The extreme limit is elsewhere. It is only completely reached if communicated (man is several—solitude is the void, nothingness, lies). Should some sort of expression give evidence of it: the extreme limit is distinct from it. It is never literature. If poetry expresses it, the extreme limit is distinct from it: to the point of not being poetic, for if poetry has it as an object, it doesn't reach it. When the extreme limit is there, the means which serve to attain it are no longer there.

The last known poem of Rimbaud is not the extreme limit. If Rimbaud reached the extreme limit, he only attained the communication of it by means of his despair: he suppressed possible communication, he no longer wrote poems.

The refusal to communicate is a more hostile means of communication, but the most powerful; if it was possible, it is because Rimbaud turned his back on it. In order not to communicate any longer, he gave up. If not, it was in order to have given up that he ceased to communicate. No one will know if horror (weakness) or modesty was responsible for Rimbaud's giving up. It is possible that the limits of horror have been extended (no more God). In any case, to speak of weakness makes little sense: Rimbaud maintained his will for the extreme limit on other levels (that above all of giving up). It is possible that he gave up, failing having attained it (the extreme limit is not disorder or luxuriance) being too demanding to bear it, too lucid not to see. It is even possible that after having attained it, but doubting that this should have a meaning or even that this should take place—as the state of one who attains it does not last—he couldn't bear doubt. A longer search would be useless, although the will for the extreme limit stops at nothing (we can't really attain it).

The self in no way matters. For a reader, I am any individual: name, identity, the historical don't change anything. He (the reader) is any one and I (the author) am also any one. He and I, having emerged without name from . . . without name, are for this . . . without name, just as two grains of sand are for the desert, or rather two waves losing themselves in two adjacent waves are for a sea. The . . . without name to which the "known personality" of the world of etc. belongs, to which it

belongs so totally that it is not aware of it. O death infinitely blessed without which a "personality" would belong to the world of etc. Misery of living men, disputing to the death the possibilities of the world of etc. Joy of the dying man, wave among waves. Inert joy of the dying, of the desert, fall into the impossible, cry without resonance, silence of a fatal accident.

The Christian easily dramatizes life: he lives in the presence of Christ and this takes him outside of himself. Christ is the totality of being, and yet he is, like the "lover", personal, like the "lover", desirable: and suddenly—torment, agony, death. The follower of Christ is led to torment. Has led himself to torment: not to some insignificant torment, but to divine agony. Not only has he the means of attaining torment, but he could not avoid it, and this is the torment which exceeds him, which exceeds God himself—God, who is no less man and tormentable than him.

It does not suffice to recognize—this only puts the mind into play; it is also necessary that the recognition take place in the heart (intimate, half-blind movements . . .). This is no longer philosophy, but sacrifice (communication). Strange coincidence between the naive philosophy of sacrifice (in ancient India) and the pleading philosophy of non-knowledge: sacrifice, the movement of the heart, transposed into knowledge (there is an inversion from the origin to the present moment—the old path leading from the heart to the intelligence, the present one in the opposite direction).

What is strangest is that non-knowledge should have the ability to sanction. As if, from the outside, it had been said to us: "Here you are at last." The path of non-knowledge is the emptiest of nonsense. I could say: "Everything has been attained." No. For supposing that I say it, immediately thereafter I perceive the same closed horizon as the instant before. The more I advance into knowledge, be it through the path of non-knowledge, and the more ultimate non-knowledge becomes heavy with import, anguishing. In point of fact, I give myself to non-knowledge (this is communication), and as there is communication with the darkened world, rendered unfathomable by non-knowledge, dare I say God: and it is thus that there is once again (mystical) knowledge, but I can't stop (I can't—but I must regain my breath): "God if he knew." And further on, always further on. God as the lamb substituted for Isaac. This is no longer sacrifice. Further on there is naked sacrifice, without Isaac. The sacrifice is madness, the renunciation of all knowl-

edge, the fall into the void, and nothing, neither in the fall nor in the void, is revealed, for the revelation of the void is but a means of falling further into absence.

NON-KNOWLEDGE LAYS BARE.

This proposition is the summit, but must be understood in this way: lays bare, therefore *I see* what knowledge was hiding up to that point, but if I see, *I know.* Indeed, I know, but non-knowledge again lays bare what I have known. If nonsense is sense, the sense which is nonsense is lost, becomes nonsense once again (without possible end).

If the proposition (non-knowledge lays bare) possesses a sense—appearing, then disappearing immediately thereafter—this is because it has the meaning: NON-KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATES ECSTASY. Non-knowledge is ANGUISH before all else. In anguish, there appears a nudity which puts one into ecstasy. But ecstasy itself (nudity, communication) is elusive if anguish is elusive. Thus ecstasy only remains possible in the anguish of ecstasy, in this sense, that it cannot be satisfaction, *grasped knowledge.* Obviously, ecstasy is *grasped knowledge* above all else, in particular in the extreme surrender [dénuement]* and the extreme construction of the surrender which I, my life and my written work represent (this I know: no one has ever taken knowledge as far, no one has been able to do so; but for me, it was easy—obligatory). But when the extreme limit of knowledge is there (and the extreme limit of knowledge which I have just proposed is beyond absolute knowledge), it is the same as with absolute knowledge—everything is upset. Barely have I known—entirely known—then surrender in the realm of knowledge (where knowledge leaves me) is revealed, and anguish begins again. But anguish is the horror of surrender and the moment comes when, in audacity, surrender is loved, when I give myself to surrender: it is therefore the nudity which puts one into ecstasy. Then knowledge returns, satisfaction, once again anguish, I begin again, more quickly, right up to exhaustion (just as, in mad laughter, anguish arising from the fact that it is misplaced to laugh, increases the laughter.)

In ecstasy, one can *let oneself go*—this is satisfaction, happiness, platitude. Saint John of the Cross contests rapture and the seductive image, but calms himself in the theopathic state. I have followed right to the very end his method of hardening the heart.

*For the term *dénuement,* I have chosen the English word "surrender." I would like this word to suggest the state of "being entirely without means." The English "destitution" and "penury" seemed to be too closely tied to material loss to be satisfactory.

Suppression of the subject and of the object: the only means of not resulting in the possession of the object by the subject, that is to say in avoiding the absurd rush of *ipse* wanting to become everything.

Conversation with Blanchot. I say to him: inner experience has neither goal, nor authority, which justify it. If I destroy, burst the concern for a goal, at the very least, a void subsists. Blanchot reminds me that goal, authority are the requirements of discursive thought; I insist, describing experience in its extreme form, asking him how he believes this to be possible without authority or anything. On the subject of this authority he adds that it must be expiated.

I want to provide once again the schema of the experience which I call pure experience. I reach first of all the extreme limit of knowledge (for example, I mimic absolute knowledge, in whatever way, but that assumes an infinite effort of the mind wanting knowledge). I know then that I know nothing. As *ipse* I wanted to be everything (through knowledge) and I fall into anguish: the occasion of this anguish is my non-knowledge, nonsense beyond hope (here non-knowledge does not abolish particular knowledge, but its sense—removes from it all sense). I can know after the fact what constitutes the anguish of which I speak. Anguish assumes the desire to communicate—that is, to lose myself—but not complete resolve: anguish is evidence of my fear of communicating, of losing myself. Anguish is given in the theme of knowledge itself: as *ipse,* through knowledge, I would like to be everything, therefore to communicate, to lose myself, however to remain *ipse.* The subject (me, *ipse*) and the object (in part undefined, as long as it is not entirely grasped) are presented for communication, before it takes place. The subject wants to take hold of the object in order to possess it (this will results from being engaged in the play of compositions, see the *Labyrinth*), but the subject can only lose itself: the nonsense of the will to know appears, nonsense of all possible, making *ipse* know that it is going to lose itself and knowledge with it. As long as *ipse* perseveres in its will to know and to be *ipse,* anguish lasts, but if *ipse* abandons itself and knowledge with it, if it gives itself up to non-knowledge in this abandon, then rapture begins. In rapture, my existence finds a sense once again, but the sense is referred immediately to *ipse*; it becomes *my* rapture, a rapture which I *ipse* possess, giving satisfaction to my will to be everything. As soon as I emerge from it, communication, the loss of myself cease; I have ceased to abandon myself—I remain there, but with a new knowledge.

The movement begins again starting from there: I can formulate new knowledge (I have just done so). I arrive at this notion: that subject, object, are perspectives of being at the moment of inertia, that the intended object is the projection of the subject *ipse* wanting to become everything, that all representation of the object is phantasmagoria resulting from this foolish and necessary will (that one postulate the object as thing or as existing matters little), that one necessarily ends up speaking of communication by grasping that communication pulls the rug out from under the object as well as from under the subject (this is what becomes clear at the summit of communication, when there is communication between subject and object of the same type, between two cells, between two individuals). I can formulate this representation of the world and regard it at first as the solution of all puzzles. Suddenly I perceive the same thing as with the first form of knowledge, that this supreme knowledge leaves one as night leaves a child, naked in the depths of the woods. This time, what is more serious, is that the sense of communication is at stake. But when communication itself—at a moment when, inaccessible, it had disappeared—appears to me as nonsense, I attain the height of anguish; in a surge of despair, I abandon myself and communication is once again given to me—rapture and joy.

At this moment, the formulation is no longer necessary—it is done: it is immediately thereafter and from rapture itself that I enter once again into the night of the bewildered child, into anguish, in order at a later point to return to rapture—and this without other end than exhaustion, without possibility of stopping other than a collapse.

This is supplicating joy.

The maladies of inner experience. In it the mystic has the power to animate what pleases him; the intensity suffocates, eliminates doubt and one perceives what one was expecting. As if we disposed of a powerful breath of life: each presupposition of the mind is animated. Rapture is not a window looking out on the outside, on the beyond, but a mirror. This is the first malady. The second is the putting into project of experience. No one can lucidly have an experience without having had the project for it. This less serious malady is not avoidable: project must even be maintained. Now experience is the opposite of project: I attain experience contrary to the project I had of having it. There is established between experience and project the link which exists between pain and the voice of reason: reason represents the inanity of a moral pain (saying: time will erase pain—as when we must give up a loved one). The wound is there, present, dreadful and contesting reason, recognizing its own solid grounds, but only seeing in this one more horror. I don't suffer any

less from a wound, if I sense that it will soon be healed. It is necessary to *make use of* project as of the assurance of an imminent healing. Project can, like the assurance, be a mocking servant, aware of everything, sceptical and knowing itself to be a servant, withdrawing as soon as experience, once it takes place, demands solitude, as do pain (and torment), and cries bitterly: "Leave me alone".

The servant, if everything takes place as he intends it, must make himself be forgotten. But he can trick. The first malady, the mirror, is evidence of a crude servant, whose ties to a profound servitude escape him.

The servant of experience is discursive thought. Here, the nobility of the servant rests upon the discipline of the servitude.

Non-knowledge attained, absolute knowledge is no longer anything but one knowledge among others.

V

One must. Is this to moan? I no longer know. Where am I going? Where is this insipid cloud of thoughts headed—this cloud which I imagine to be similar to the sudden blood in a wounded throat? Insipid, in no way bitter (even in the lowest disarray I remain gay, open, generous. And rich, too rich, this throat rich with blood . . .).

My difficulty: total loss of certainty, the difference between a sculpted object and fog (usually we imagine that it is dreadful). If I expressed joy, I would be off the mark: the joy which I have differs from other joys. I am accurate in speaking of fiascos, of collapses without end, of absence of hope. Yet . . . fiasco, collapse, despair are, in my eyes, light, laying bare, glory. On the other hand: deadly indifference—towards what is important to me; incoherent succession of characters, dissonance, chaos. If I still speak of equilibrium, of euphoria, of power, one will only grasp this on the condition that one resemble me (already). To be less obscure: I crucify myself on my own time, drag my feet on the question, but without any right (without the authority to do so). If I had authority at my disposal, everything within me would be servitude, I would admit to being "guilty". This is not the case: I have no bitterness. Here a deceptive inconsistency is unveiled, inescapably *sovereign*.

The concern for harmony is a great servitude. We can't escape by refusal: in wanting to avoid the false window, we introduce an aggravated lie: the *false* at least admitted itself to be so!

Harmony is the means of "realizing" project. Harmony (measure) leads project to a good end: passion, childish desire prevent one from waiting. Harmony is made manifest by the man engaged in project; he has found calm, has eliminated the impatience of desire.

The harmony of the fine arts realizes project in another sense. In the fine arts, man makes "real" the harmonious mode of existence inherent in project. Art creates a world in the image of the man of project, reflecting this image in all its forms. Yet art is less harmony than the passage (or the return) of harmony to dissonance (in its history and in each work).

Harmony, like project, throws time back into the outside; its principle is the repetition through which all that is "possible" is made eternal. The ideal is architecture, or sculpture, immobilizing harmony, guaranteeing the duration of motifs whose essence is the annulment of time. Art has moreover borrowed repetition—the tranquil investment of time through a renewed theme—from project.

In art, desire returns, but it is, at first, the desire to annul time (to annul desire) while in project, there was simply rejection of desire. Project is expressly made manifest by the slave; it is work and work executed by one who does not enjoy its fruits. In art, man returns to sovereignty (to the expiration of desire) and—if it is at first the desire to annul desire—barely has it arrived at its goals, than it is the desire to rekindle desire.

Of the successive characters that I am, I do not speak. They are not of interest or I must silence them. I am my words—evoking an inner experience—without having to challenge them. These characters, in principle, are neutral, a bit comical (in my eyes). With respect to the inner experience of which I speak, they are deprived of meaning, except in this respect: that they complete my disharmony.

I can't go on, I moan,
I can no longer bear
my prison.

I say this
bitterly:
words which stifle me—
leave me,
release me,
I thirst
for something else.
I want death
and not to admit of
this reign of words,
continuity
without dread,
such that dread
be desirable;
it is nothing
this self which I am,
if not
cowardly acceptance
of what is.
I hate
this life of instrument,
I search for a fissure,
my fissure,
in order to be broken.
I love rain,
lightning,
mud,
a vast expanse of water,
the depths of the earth,
but not me.
In the depths of the earth,
O my tomb,
deliver me from myself,
I no longer want to be.

Almost every time, if I tried to write a book, fatigue would come before the end. I slowly became a stranger to the project which I had formulated. I would forget what enflamed me the day before, changing from one hour to the next with a drowsy slowness. I escape from myself and my book escapes from me; it becomes almost completely like a forgotten name: I am too lazy to look for it but the obscure feeling of forget fills me with anguish.

And if this book resembles me? If the conclusion escapes from the beginning; is unaware of it or keeps it in indifference? Strange rhetoric! Strange way of invading the impossible! Denial, forgetting, existence without form, ambiguous weapons . . . Laziness itself used as unbreakable energy.

At nightfall, on the street, suddenly I remembered, Quarr Abbey, a French monastery on the Isle of Wight, where in 1920 I spent two or three days—remembered as a house surrounded by pines, beneath a moonlit softness, at the seashore; the moonlight linked to the medieval beauty of the service—everything which made me hostile towards a monastic life disappeared—in this place I only experienced the exclusion of the rest of the world. I imagined myself within the walls of the cloister, removed from agitation, for an instant imagining myself a monk and saved from jagged, discursive life: in the street itself, with the help of darkness, my heart streaming with blood became inflamed—I knew a sudden rapture. With the help as well of my indifference to logic, to the spirit of consequence.

Within the walls, the sky a ghostly gray, dusk, the damp uncertainty of space at that precise time; divinity had then a mad, deaf presence, illuminating up to intoxication. My body hadn't interrupted its rapid step, but ecstasy slightly wrenched its muscles. No uncertainty this time, but an indifference towards certainty. I write divinity, not wanting to know anything, not knowing anything. At other times, my ignorance was the abyss over which I was suspended.

What I must *execrate* today: voluntary ignorance, methodical ignorance by which I have come to search for ecstasy. Not that ignorance opens, in fact, the heart to rapture. But I put the *impossible* to the bitter test. All profound life is heavy with the *impossible.* Intention, project together destroy. Yet *I have known* that I knew nothing and this, my secret: "non-knowledge communicates ecstasy". Existence has since begun again, banal, and based on the appearance of a knowledge. I wanted to escape it, to say to myself: this knowledge is false. I know nothing, absolutely nothing. But I know: "non-knowledge communicates ecstasy". I no longer had any *anguish.* I lived enclosed (miserably). At the beginning of this night, the precise image within me of monastic harmony communicated ecstasy to me: no doubt through the foolishness to which I abandoned myself in this way. Unworkability, the impossible! within the disharmony to which *I must* honestly adhere, harmony

alone, by virtue of the *I must,* represents a possibility of disharmony: necessary dishonesty, but one cannot become dishonest through a concern for honesty.

And ecstasy is the way out! Harmony! Perhaps, but heart-rending. The way out? It suffices that I look for it: I fall back again, inert, pitiful: the way out from project, from the will for a way out! For project is the prison from which I wish to escape (project, discursive experience): I formed the project to escape from project! And I know that it suffices to break discourse in me; from that moment on, ecstasy is there, from which only discourse distances me—the ecstasy which discursive thought betrays by proposing it as a way out, and betrays by proposing it as absence of a way out. Impotence cries out within me—(I remember) a long, inner, anguished cry: to have known, to know no longer.

That through which discourse is nonsense in its rage as well, but (I moan) not *enough* (within me *not enough*).

Not enough! not enough anguish, suffering . . . I say it, I, child of joy, whom a wild, happy laugh—never ceased to carry (it released me at times: its infinite *distant* levity remained temptation in collapse, in tears and even in the blows which I made with my head against walls). But . . . to maintain a finger in boiling water . . . and I cry out "not enough"!

I forget—one more time: suffering, laughter, that finger. Infinite surpassing in oblivion, ecstasy, indifference, towards myself, towards this book: I see—that which discourse never managed to attain. I am *open,* yawning gap, to the unintelligible sky and everything in me rushes forth, is reconciled in a final irreconciliation. Rupture of all "possible", violent kiss, abduction, loss in the entire absence of all "possible", in opaque and dead night which is nonetheless light—no less unknowable, no less blinding than the depth of the heart.

And above all *no more object.* Ecstasy is not love: love is possession for which the object is necessary, and at the same time possession of the subject, possessed by it. There is no longer subject–object, but a "yawning gap" between the one and the other and, in the gap, the subject, the object are dissolved; there is passage, communication, but not from one to the other: *the one* and *the other* have lost their separate existence. The questions of the subject, its will to know are suppressed: the subject is no longer there; its interrogation no longer has either meaning or a princi-

ple which introduces it. In the same way no answer remains possible. The answer should be "such is the object", when there is no longer a distinct object.

The subject preserves on the fringes of its ecstasy the role of a child in a drama: surpassed, its presence persists, incapable of more than vaguely and distractedly sensing—presence profoundly absent, it remains off in the wings, occupied as with toys. Ecstasy has no meaning for it, if not that it captivates, *being new*; but should it remain and the subject become bored: ecstasy decidedly no longer has meaning. And as there is in it no desire to persevere in being (this desire belongs to distinct beings), it has no consistency and is dissipated. As if foreign to *man,* ecstasy arises from him, ignorant of the concern of which it was the object, as it is of the intellectual scaffolding dependent upon it (which it allows to collapse): for concern, it is nonsense; for the eagerness to know, it is non-knowledge.

The subject—weariness of itself, necessity of proceeding to the extreme limit—seeks ecstasy, it is true: never does it have *the will* for its ecstasy. There exists an irreducible discord between the subject seeking ecstasy and the ecstasy itself. However, the subject knows ecstasy and senses it: not as a voluntary direction coming from itself, but like the sensation of an effect coming from the outside. I can go before it, instinctively, driven by the distaste for being enmired: then ecstasy arises from a lack of equilibrium. I attain it better by external means, by virtue of the fact that a necessary predisposition cannot exist within me. The spot where I have earlier known ecstasy, memory bewitched by physical sensations, the banal ambiance of which I have kept an exact memory, together have an evocative power greater than the voluntary repetition of a describable movement of the mind.

I carry within me the concern for writing this book like a burden. In reality, I am *acted upon.* Even if nothing, absolutely, responded to the idea which I have of necessary interlocutors (or of necessary readers), the idea alone would act in me. I create with it to such a point that one would more easily remove from me one of my limbs.

The *third,* the companion, the reader who acts upon me is discourse. Or yet still: the reader is discourse—it is he who speaks in me, who maintains in me the discourse intended for him. And no doubt, discourse is project, but even more than this it is that *other,* the reader, who loves me and who already forgets me (kills me), without whose present

insistence I could do nothing, would have no inner experience. Not that in moments of violence—of misfortune—I don't forget him, as he himself forgets me—but I tolerate in me the action of project in that it is a link with this obscure *other* sharing my anguish, my torment, desiring my torment as much as I desire his.

Blanchot asked me: why not pursue my inner experience as if I were the *last man*?[1] In a certain sense . . . However, I know myself to be the reflection of the multitude and the sum of its anguish. On the other hand, if I were the last man, the anguish would be the most insane imaginable! I could in no way escape, I would remain before infinite annihilation thrown back into myself or yet still: empty, indifferent. But inner experience is conquest and as such *for others!* The subject in experience loses its way, it loses itself in the object, which itself is dissolved. It could not, however, become dissolved to this point, if its nature didn't allow it this change; the subject in experience in spite of everything remains: to the extent that it is not a child in the drama, a fly on one's nose, it is *consciousness of others* (I had neglected this the other time). Being the fly, the child, it is no longer exactly the subject (it is laughable, in its own eyes laughable); making itself *consciousness of others* and, as the ancient chorus, the witness, the popularizer of the drama, it loses itself in human communication; as subject, it is thrown outside of itself, beyond itself; it ruins itself in an undefined throng of possible existences. But if this throng were to be absent, if the possible were dead, if I were . . . the last one? Would I have to renounce leaving myself, would I remain enclosed in this self as in the depth of a tomb? Would I from today onward have to moan at the idea of not being, of not being able to hope to be the last one; from today onward a monster, to weep for the *misfortune* which overcomes me? For it is possible that *the last one* without chorus, as I want to imagine him, would die, dead to himself, at the infinite twilight that he would be, would sense the walls (even the depth) of the tomb open . . . I can still imagine . . . (I only do it for others!): it is possible that already alive, I am enshrouded in his tomb—that of the *last one,* of this being in distress, unleashing being within him. Laughter, dream and, in sleep, the rooftops fall in a rain of gravel . . . to know nothing, to this point (not of ecstasy, but of sleep): to strangle myself thus, unsolvable puzzle, to accept sleep, the starry universe my tomb, glorified, glory constellated with deaf stars, unintelligible and further than death, terrifying (nonsense: the taste of garlic which the roasted lamb had).

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Part Three

ANTECEDENTS TO THE TORMENT (OR THE COMEDY)

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. . . for old Nobodaddy aloft
Farted and belched and coughed,
Then swore a great oath that made Heaven quake,
And called aloud to English Blake.
Blake was giving his body ease
At Lambeth beneath the poplar trees;
From his seat then started he
And turned himself round three times three
The moon at that sight blushed scarlet red,
The stars threw down their cups and fled . . .

—*William Blake*

I will now give an account of the antecedents to my "inner experience" (the outcome of which is the "torment"). To this end, I will take up again what I wrote as I went along, at least what is left for me (most often I had written in an obscure, stilted and cumbersome way. I have changed the form, curtailed the length, at times explained—which, at bottom, changes nothing).

I restrict the tale to what leaves me joined with man (as such), rejecting what would reveal that lie and would make an "error" of my person; I represent straightforwardly that inner experience asks of him who engages in it to begin by placing himself on a pinnacle (Christians know this—they feel obliged to "pay for" their sufficiency; this throws them into humility: at the very instant of the self-deprecation, however, the most bitter saint knows himself to be chosen).

*Every man is unaware of the pinnacle upon which he lives perched. Is unaware or pretends to be so (it is difficult to judge the measure of ignorance or the measure feigned). There are few cases of honest insolence (*Ecce homo*—Blake's passage).*

[I take myself back twenty years in time: at first I had laughed, upon emerging from a long Christian piety, my life having dissolved, with a spring-like bad faith, in laughter. Of this laughter, I have already described the point of ecstasy but, from the first day onward, I no longer had any doubt: laughter was revelation, opened up the depth of things. I will reveal the occasion out of which this laughter arose: I was in London (in 1920) and I was to have dinner with Bergson; I had at that time read nothing by him (nor moreover had I read much by other philosophers); I had this curiosity—while at the British Museum I asked for Laughter *(the shortest of his books); reading it irritated me—the theory seemed to me to fall short (for this reason, the public figure disappointed me: this careful little man, philosopher!) but the question—the meaning of laughter which remained hidden—was from then on in my eyes the key question (linked to happy, infinite laughter, by which I saw right away that I was possessed), was the puzzle which at all costs I will solve (which, solved, would of itself solve everything). For a long time I knew nothing other than a chaotic euphoria. After only a few years, I felt the chaos—an accurate image of various beings in a state of incoherence—gradually to become suffocating. I was broken, undone, from having laughed too much, such that, depressed, I found myself: the inconsistent monster which I was, empty of sense and of will, frightened me.]*

I WANT TO CARRY MY PERSON TO THE PINNACLE

If the cashier falsifies the accounts, the director is perhaps hidden behind a piece of furniture, ready to embarrass the indiscreet employee. To write, to falsify the accounts—I know nothing of this, but I know that a *director* is possible, and that, if he happened upon the scene, I would have no recourse other than shame. There are no readers, nevertheless, who have in them anything to cause this disarray. Were the most perspicacious of them to accuse me, I would laugh: it is of myself that I am afraid.

Why think: "I am a lost man" or "I am not looking for anything"? Is it sufficient to admit: "I cannot die without playing this role, and, in order to keep silent, it would be necessary not to die." And any other excuse! The stale smell of silence—or: silence—imaginary attitude and the most "literary" of all. So many excuses: I think, I write, in order not to know of any method of being better than a cloth in tatters.

I would like very much that one no longer hear anything, but one speaks, one cries out: why am I also afraid of hearing my own voice? And I am not speaking of fear, but of terror, of horror. Should one make me be silent (if one dares)! Should one sew my lips together like those of a wound!

I know that I descend alive not even into a tomb, but into a common pit, without either grandeur or intelligence, quite nude (as the woman of pleasure is nude). Would I dare to affirm: "I will not yield—in no case will I extend my confidence and allow myself to be buried as if I were dead"? If someone had pity and wanted to extricate me from the situation, on the contrary, I would accept: I would have for his intentions only a cowardly distaste. It would be better to let me see that one can do nothing (except, perhaps, to overwhelm me involuntarily)—to let me see that one expects my silence.

What is *ridicule*? Ridicule as pain? Absolute? Ridiculous, the adjective, is its own negation. But ridicule is what I don't have the heart to withstand. Things are such: what is ridiculous is never so entirely—that would become bearable; thus the analysis of the elements of the ridiculous (which would be the easy way of getting out of the problem), once formulated, remains useless. What is ridiculous, are the other men—innumerable; in the middle: myself, inevitably, like a wave in the sea.

Unearned joy, which the mind does not avoid, obscures the intelligence. At times, one uses it in order to arrange—in one's own eyes—the illusion of a personal possibility—the counterpart of a horror which is overpowering; at others, one imagines regulating things, precisely by passing into obscurity.

I play the role of the jester in saying in the name of intelligence that it refuses definitively to formulate anything whatsoever—that it abandons not only one who speaks but one who thinks.

The procedure which consists of endlessly finding some novelty in order to escape the preceding results is offered up to agitation, but nothing is more stupid.

If I find a thought to be ridiculous, I dismiss it. And, therefore, if all thought is ridiculous and if it is ridiculous to think . . .

If I say: *"One man is the mirror of another"*, I express my thought, but not if I say: *"The blue of noon is an illusion"*. If I say: *"The blue of*

noon is an illusion" in the tone of one who expresses his thought, I am ridiculous. *In order to express my thought,* a personal idea is necessary. I betray myself in this way: the idea matters little—*I want to carry my person to the pinnacle.* I could, moreover, in no way avoid it. If I had to equate myself with others, I would have for myself the contempt which ridiculous beings inspire. In general we turn away terrified, from those truths without a way out: any means of escape is good (philosophical, utilitarian, messianic). I will perhaps find a new way out. One procedure consisted of grinding one's teeth, of becoming the prey of nightmares and of great sufferings. Even this affectation was better, at times, than to catch oneself in the act of climbing to the pinnacle.

These judgments should lead to silence and yet I am writing. This is in no way paradoxical. Silence is itself a pinnacle and better yet, the saint of all saints. The contempt implied in all silence means that one no longer takes care to verify (as one does by ascending an ordinary pinnacle). I know this now: I don't have the means to silence myself (it would be necessary to perch me at such a height, to deliver me, without the hope of a distraction, to such an obvious state of ridicule . . .). I am ashamed of it and can say to what extent my shame is insignificant.

[The time came when, in a carefree movement, I abandoned myself freely to myself. My infinite vanity received belated and, moreover, miserable confirmations from the outside. I ceased to eagerly exploit possibilities for unhealthy contestation. My disorder began again—less carefree, more adept. If I remembered what I had said of the "pinnacle", I saw the sickest aspect of my vanity (but not a true refusal). I had had the desire, while writing, to be read, esteemed: this memory had the same unpleasant taste of the comic as did my entire life. It was linked moreover—quite distantly—but was linked to the literary style of the times (to the quest for Literature, *to the question raised one day: "Why do you write?"). My "answer" was a few years ahead of its time, was not published, was absurd. It seemed to me nonetheless to come out of the same spirit as that of the quest: out of the decision to deal with life on the outside. I had trouble seeing the way out of such a state of mind. But I no longer doubted that I would find the necessary values—so clear, at the same time so profound, that they eluded the answers destined to fool others or oneself.*

In that which follows—written in 1933—I could only glimpse ecstasy. It was a path without discipline and, at the very most, an obsession.

These several pages are linked:

—to the first lines, which appeared to me to be heart-rending with simplicity, of the overture to Leonora*; I never really go to concerts and in no way went to hear Beethoven; a feeling of divine intoxication invaded me which I could neither have described nor can describe in a straightforward way, which I have attempted to follow by evoking the suspended nature—and which brings me to tears—of the depth of being;*

—to a separation which was only barely cruel: I was sick, bedridden—I remember a beautiful afternoon sun—I suddenly glimpsed that I identified my pain—which a departure had just caused—with an ecstasy, a sudden rapture.]

DEATH IS IN A SENSE AN IMPOSTURE[1]

1

I make demands—around me extends the void, the darkness of the *real* world—I exist, I remain blind, in anguish: other individuals are completely different from me, I feel nothing of what they feel. If I envisage my coming into the world—linked to the birth then to the union of a man and a woman, and even, at the moment of their union . . . a single chance decided the possibility of this *self* which I am: in the end, the mad improbability of the sole being without whom, *for me,* nothing would be, becomes evident. Were there the smallest difference in the continuity of which I am the end point: instead of *me* eager to be me, there would be with respect *to me* only nothingness, as if I were dead.

This infinite improbability from which I come is beneath me like a void: my presence above this void is like the exercise of a fragile power, as if this void demanded the challenge that I *myself* bring it, I—that is to say the infinite, painful improbability of an irreplaceable being which I am.

In the abandon in which I am lost, the empirical knowledge of my similarity with others is irrelevant, for the essence of my self arises from this—that nothing will be able to replace it: the feeling of my fundamental improbability situates me in the world where I remain as though foreign to it, absolutely foreign.

The historical origin of my *self* (regarded by this *self* as a part of all that is the object of knowledge), or even the explanatory investigation of its ways of being, are only so many insignificant traps. Misery of all explanations before an inexhaustible demand. Even in a condemned man's cell, this *self* which my anguish opposes to all the rest would perceive what preceded it and what surrounds it as a void subordinated to its power. [*Such a way of seeing renders the distress of the condemned man stifling: he mocks it, but must nevertheless suffer, for he can't abandon it.*]

In these conditions, why would I concern myself with other points of view, as reasonable as they may be? The experience of the *self,* of its improbability, of its insane demands no less exists.

2

I should, it seems, choose between two opposite ways of seeing. But this necessity for a choice presents itself as linked to the position of the fundamental problem: what exists? What is this profound existence freed from illusory forms? Most often the answer is given as if the question *what is there of an imperative nature?* (or what is moral value?) and not *what exists?* were asked. In other cases, the answer is a way out (uncomprehending evasion of, not destruction of the problem)—if matter is given as profound existence.

I escape confusion by turning away from the problem. I have defined the *self* as a value, but refused to take it for profound existence.

In all honest (matter-of-fact) searching, this *self* completely different from a fellow being is rejected as nothingness (practically unknown); but it is precisely as nothingness (as *illusion*) that it answers to my demands. What is dissipated in it (what seems futile, even shameful) as soon as one asks the question of substantial existence, is precisely what it wishes to be: what is necessary for it is really an empty pride, improbable to the limit of terror and without a real link with the world (the explained, known world is the opposite of the improbable: it is a foundation, that which one cannot withdraw, do what one may).

If the consciousness which I have of my *self* escapes from the world, if, trembling, I abandon all hope for a logical harmony and dedicate myself to *improbability*—at first to my own and, in the end, to that of all things [*this is to play the drunk, staggering man who, in a movement of*

logic, takes himself for a candle, blows it out, and crying out with fear, in the end, takes himself for night]—I can grasp the *self* in tears, in anguish (I can even prolong my vertigo to the vanishing point and only find myself in the desire for another—for a woman—unique, irreplacable, dying, in all things similar to me), but it is only when death approaches that I will know without fail what it is about.

It is by dying, without possible evasion, that I will perceive the rupture which constitutes my nature and in which I have transcended "what exists". As long as I live, I am content with a coming and going, with a compromise. No matter what I say, I know myself to be the member of a species and I remain in harmony, roughly speaking, with a common reality; I take part in what, by all necessity, exists—in what nothing can withdraw. The self-that-dies abandons this harmony: it truly perceives what surrounds it to be a void and itself to be a challenge to this void; the self-that-dies restricts itself to intuiting the vertigo in which everything will end (much later).

And still, it is true: the self-that-dies, if it has not arrived at the state of "moral sovereignty", in the very arms of death maintains with things a sort of harmony in ruins (in which idiocy and blindness coexist). It challenges the world no doubt, but weakly; it evades its own challenge, hides from itself what it was right to the end. Seduction, power, *sovereignty* are necessary to the self-that-dies: one must be a god in order to die.

Death is in one sense the common inevitable, but in another sense profound, inaccessible. The animal is unaware of death although it throws man back into animality. The ideal man embodying reason remains foreign to it: the animality of a god is essential to its nature—at the same time dirty (malodorous) and sacred.

Disgust, feverish seduction become united, exasperated in death: it is no longer a question of banal annulment, but of the very point itself where eagerness runs up against extreme horror. The passion which commands so many frightful games or dreams is no less the desperate desire to be my *self* than that of no longer being anything.

In the halo of death, and there alone, the *self* founds its empire; there the purety of a hopeless requirement comes to light; there the hope of the self-that-dies is realized (vertiginous hope, burning with fever, where the limit of dream is pushed back.)

At the same time, the carnally inconsistent presence of God is distanced, not as a vain appearance, but to the extent that it depends on the world thrown back into oblivion (that which is founded by the interdependence of parts).

There is no longer a God in "inaccessible death", no longer a God in closed night; one no longer hears anything but *lamma sabachtani,* the little sentence which, of all sentences, men have charged with a sacred horror.

In the ideally dark void, there is chaos—to the point of revealing the absence of chaos (there everything is desert, cold, in closed night, while at the same time being of a painful brilliance, inducing fever); life opens itself up to death, the *self* grows until it reaches the pure imperative: this imperative, in the hostile part of being, is formulated "die like a dog"; it has no application in a world from which it turns away.

But, in the distant possibility, this purety of the formulation "die-like-a-dog" responds to the demands of passion—not of the slave for the master: life devoting itself to death is the passion of one lover for another; in it angry jealousy is a factor at work, but never "authority".

And, to settle the matter, the fall into death is seamy; in a solitude heavy in a way different from that in which lovers are laid bare, it is the approach of decay which links the self-that-dies to the nudity of absence.

3

[In that which precedes, I have said nothing of the suffering *which, ordinarily, accompanies death. But suffering is linked to death in a profound way and its horror emerges at every line. I imagine that suffering is always this same game of the last shipwreck. A pain means little and is not clearly different from a sensation of pleasure, before nausea—the intimate cold wherein* I succumb. *A pain is perhaps only a sensation incompatible with the tranquil unity of the* self*: some action, external or internal, challenges the fragile ordering of a composite existence, decomposes me, and it is the horror of this threatening action which makes me grow pale. Not that a pain is necessarily a threat of death: it unveils the existence of possible actions beyond which the* self *could not survive; it* evokes *death, without introducing a real threat.]*

If I now represent the opposite view of this: how little importance death has; I still have reason on my side. *[In moments of suffering, it is true, reason reveals its weakness and there are some such moments which it cannot overcome; the degree of intensity which pain reaches shows reason's lack of solidity; even more, the excessive virulence of the self, evident despite reason.]* Death is in a sense an imposture. The *self,* dying as I said of a dreadful death, no less inattentive to reason than a dog, encloses itself, of its own free will, within horror. Should it escape for an instant from the illusion which is at its very foundations, it will welcome death as a child falls asleep (the same is true of the old man whose youthful illusion has slowly been extinguished or with the young man living a communal life: the work of reason, destructive of illusion, is roughly realized in them).

The anguish-inspiring character of death signifies the need which man has for anguish. Without this need, death would seem easy to him. Man, dying *poorly,* distances himself from nature, engenders an illusory, human world fashioned for *art*: we live in the tragic world, in the false atmosphere of which "tragedy" is the completed from. Nothing is tragic for the animal, which doesn't fall into the trap of the *self.*

It is in this tragic, artificial world, that ecstasy arises. Without a single doubt, all object of ecstasy is created by art. All "mystical knowledge" is founded on the belief in the revealing value of ecstasy. It would be necessary, on the contrary, to regard it as a fiction, as analogous, in a certain sense, to the intuitions of art.

However, if I say that in "mystical knowledge" existence is the work of man, I mean that it is the daughter of the *self* and of its essential illusion. Ecstatic vision has nonetheless the sense of an inevitable object.

The passion of the *self,* love burning within it, seeks an object. The *self* is only liberated *outside of itself.* I can know that I have created the object of my passion, that it does not exist on its own accord: it is no less there. My disillusionment changes it no doubt: it is not God—*I have created it*—but for the same reason it is not Nothingness.

This object, chaos of light and of shadow, is *catastrophe.* I perceive it as object; my thought, however, shapes it according to its image, at the same time that it is its reflection. Perceiving it, my thought itself sinks into annihilation as into a fall wherein one emits a cry. Something immense, exorbitant, is liberated in all directions with a noise of a catastro-

phe; this emerges from an unreal, infinite void, at the same time loses itself in it, with the shock of a blinding flash. In a crash of telescoping trains, a window breaking while causing death is the expression of this all powerful, imperative, and already annihilated irruption.

In common conditions, time is annuled, enclosed within the permanence of forms or of changes which are foreseen. Movements inscribed within an order *arrest* time, which they freeze in a system of measures and equivalences. "Catastrophe" is the most profound of revolutions—it is time "unhinged": the skeleton is the sign of this, the outcome of decay, from which its illusory existence emerges.

4

Thus as the object of its ecstasy, time responds to the enraptured fever of the self-that-dies: for as is the case with time, the self-that-dies is pure change, and neither one nor the other have real existence.

But if the initial questioning subsists, if in the disorder of the self-that-dies there persists the small question: "what exists?"

Time only signifies the flight of objects which seemed real. The substantial existence of things moreover has for the *self* only an ominous meaning: their insistence is for it comparable to the measures taken in preparation for its own execution.

This emerges last of all: whatever its nature, the existence of things cannot enclose that death which it brings to me; this existence is itself projected into my death—and it is my death which encloses it.

If I affirm the illusory existence of the self-that-dies or of time, I don't think that the illusion should be subjected to the judgment of things whose existence is ostensibly substantial: I project their existence, on the contrary, into an illusion which encloses it.

By the very reason of improbability, in its "name" the man who I am—whose coming into the world was what could be thought of as most improbable—encloses, however, the entirety of things. Death, delivering me from a world which kills me, encloses as a matter of fact this real world in the unreality of a self-that-dies.

July 1933.

[In 1933, I was sick a first time; at the beginning of the following year, I was once again even more sick, and only got out of bed to limp, crippled with rheumatism, (I only recovered in the month of May—since which time I have enjoyed a troublefree health). Believing myself to be better, wanting to recover in the sun, I went to Italy, but it rained (this was in the month of April). On certain days, I walked with great difficulty; it so happened that crossing a street made me moan: I was alone and remember (I was so ridiculous) having wept the entire length of the road overlooking Lake Albano (where I tried in vain to stay). I resolved to get back to Paris, but in two nights: I left early and slept at Stresa. It was very beautiful the next day and I stayed. It was the end of a contemptible odyssey: after afternoons of my trip spent lying about on hotel beds, there followed delicious relaxation in the sun. The large lake surrounded by spring mountains sparkled before my eyes like a mirage: it was hot, and I remained seated beneath palm trees, in gardens of flowers. I already suffered less: I tried to walk—it was once again possible. I went up to the pontoon bridge to consult the schedule. Voices of an infinite majesty, at the same time very lively, sure of themselves, crying up to the sky, were raised in a chorus of incredible strength. I remained frozen on the spot, not knowing what those voices were: an instant of transport occurred, before I understood that a loudspeaker was broadcasting mass. I found on the pontoon bridge a bench from which I could enjoy an immense landscape, to which the morning brightness lent its transparency. I remained there in order to hear the mass being sung. The chorus was the purest, the richest in the world, the music maddeningly beautiful. (I know nothing of the conductor or the composer of the mass—on the subject of music, my knowledge is haphazard, superficial). The voices were raised as though in successive and varied waves, slowly reaching intensity, precipitousness, mad richness, but what arose from the miracle was the bursting forth, as of a crystal which breaks, which they attained at the very instant when everything seemed to give out. The secular power of the basses sustained, without interruption, and brought to the burning point (to the point of crying out, to the incandescence which blinds) the high flames of the children's voices (just as, in a hearth, abundant coals, emitting an intense heat, increase tenfold the delirious strength of flames, trifle with their fragility, render the strength of these flames more insane). What one must say in*

*At least up to the moment that I wrote this page: a few days later, I fell seriously ill and have still not recovered (1942).

any case about those melodies is the consent that nothing could have removed from the mind, which in no way turned on points of dogma (I distinguished some Latin phrases from the Credo . . . *from others, it mattered little), but on the glory of a torrent, the triumph to which human strength has access. It seemed to me, on this pontoon bridge, before Lake Maggiore, that never could other songs consecrate with more power the accomplishment of the cultivated man—refined, yet torrential and joyous, who I am, who we are.* No *Christian pain, but an exultation of the gifts by which man has made light of difficulties without number (in particular—this took on much meaning—in the technique of song and of choirs). The sacred nature of the incantation only made firmer a feeling of strength, made one cry out even more to the sky and to the point of rupture the presence of a being exultant in its certitude as though assured of infinite chance. (It mattered little that this stems from the ambiguity of Christian humanism; nothing mattered more—the choir cried out with superhuman force.)*

It is vain to want to liberate life from the lies of art (it happens, at times, that we have contempt for art in order to escape, to trick). It was that year that the storm began to brew above me, but as simple and as heart-breaking as that was, I know how not to betray any of this by speaking, not of things in themselves, but—in order to express myself with more strength—of liturgical song or of opera.

I came back to Paris, restored my health: it was in order to enter suddenly into horror.

I encountered horror, not death. Tragedy moreover dispenses, with anguish, intoxication and rapture to one to whom it is wedded, as to the spectator whom it invites. I returned to Italy and although I was chased "like a madman" from one place to another, I lived the life of a god (the flasks of black wine, lightning, the forebodings). However, I can barely speak of it.

Terrified, religious silence, which took place within me, is no doubt expressed in this new silence. And, as I said, it is not of my life that it is a question.

It would be strange to gain access to power, to strengthen an authority—be it in paradox—and to settle into *a glory of complete rest. The triumph grasped on the Stresa pontoon bridge only attained full meaning at the moment of expiation (moment of anguish, of sweat, of doubt).*

Not that there was sin—for one could not have, one should *not have committed sin, whereas triumph was necessary—one* had *to assume it (the* tragic *consists essentially in this—it is the irremediable).*

In order to express the movement which proceeds from exultation (from its blatant, carefree irony) to the instant of rupture, I will resort once again to music.

Mozart's Don Juan *(which I evoke, after Kierkegaard, and which I heard—once at least—as though the skies opened up—but the first time only, for afterwards,* I expected it*: the miracle no longer had effect) presents two decisive moments. In the first, anguish—for us—is already there (the Commandatore is invited to supper) but Don Juan sings:*

"Vivan le femine—viva il buon vino—gloria e sostegno—d'umanita . . ."

In the second, the hero holding the stony hand of the Commandatore—which chills him—and pressed into repenting—answers (this is before he falls thunderstruck, at the last line):

"No, vecchio infatuato!"

(Useless—psychological—chatter about "don juanism" surprises me, repulses me. Don Juan is in my eyes—which are more naive—only a personal incarnation of the festival, the carefree orgy, which negates and divinely overturns obstacles.)]

THE BLUE OF NOON[1]

When I solicit gently, in the very heart of anguish, a strange absurdity, an eye opens itself at the summit, in the middle of my skull.

This eye which, to contemplate the sun, face to face in its nudity, opens up to it in all its glory, does not arise from my reason: it is a cry which escapes me. For at the moment when the lightning stroke blinds me, I am the flash of a broken life, and this life—anguish and vertigo—opening itself up to an infinite void, is ruptured and spends itself all at once in this void.

The earth bristles with plants, which a continuous movement carries from day to day to the celestial void, and its innumerable surfaces reflect the entirety of men laughing or rent apart back to the brilliant immensity of space. In this free movement, independent of all consciousness, the elevated bodies strain towards an absence of limits which stops one's breath; but although the agitation and the inner hilarity are lost unceasingly in a sky as beautiful, but no less illusory than death, my eyes

continue to subjegate me through a commonplace link to the things which surround me, in the middle of which my steps forward are limited by the habitual necessities of life.

It is only by means of a sickly representation—an eye opening up at the summit of my own head—at the very spot where naive metaphysics located the seat of the soul—that human beings, forgotten on Earth—such as I am today revealed to myself, fallen, without hope, in oblivion—gain access suddenly to the heart-rending fall into the void of the sky.[2]

This fall presumes as an impetus the attitude of the order to stand at attention. The erection, however, does not have the sense of a military stiffness; human bodies are erect on the ground like a challenge to Earth, to the mud which engenders them and which they are happy to send back to Nothingness.

Nature giving birth to man was a dying mother: she gave "being" to the one whose coming into the world was her own death sentence.

But just as the reduction of Nature to a void is insolent, so the destruction of the one who has destroyed is engaged in this movement of insolence. The negation of Nature accomplished by man—rising above a Nothingness which is his work—sends one back directly to vertigo, to the fall into the void of the sky.

To the extent that it is not enclosed by the useful objects which surround it, existence escapes at first from the servitude of nudity only by projecting onto the sky a reverse image of its surrender [*dénuement*]. In this formation of the moral image, it seems that, from Earth to the sky, the fall is reversed from that of the sky to the dark depths of the ground (of sin); its true nature (man victim of the brilliant sky) remains veiled in mythological exuberance.

The very movement in which man negates Mother Earth who gave birth to him, opens the path of subjugation. Human beings abandon themselves to petty despair. Human life is represented then as insufficient, as overwhelmed by the sufferings or the deprivations which reduce it to ugly vanity. Earth is at its feet like some sort of refuse. Above it the sky is empty. Failing a pride large enough to stand up to this void, it prostrates itself face against the earth, eyes riveted to the ground. And, in the fear of the deadly freedom of the sky, it affirms between it

and the infinite void the bond of the slave to the master; desperately, like the blind man, it looks for a terrified consolation in a laughable renunciation.

Beneath the elevated immensity, having become oppressive from deadly emptiness—existence, which surrender [*dénuement*] removes from all possibility, follows once again a movement of arrogance, but arrogance this time opposes it to the flash of the sky: profound movements of liberated anger give rise to it. And it is no longer the Earth, as its "refuse", which its challenge provokes—it is the reflection in the sky of its fears—divine oppression—which becomes the object of its hate.

By opposing itself to Nature, human life had become transcendent and had sent off to the void everything which it is not: on the other hand, if this life rejects the authority which maintained it in oppression, and itself becomes sovereign, it detaches itself from the bonds which paralyze a vertiginous movement towards the void.

The limit is crossed with a weary horror: hope seems a respect which fatigue grants to the necessity of the world.[3]

The ground will give way beneath my feet.

I will die in hideous conditions.

I take pleasure today in being the object of disgust for the sole being to whom destiny links my life.

I solicit everything negative that a laughing man can experience.

The exhausted head in which "I" find myself has become so timid, so eager, that death alone could satisfy it.

Several days ago, I arrived—really, not in a dream—in a city evoking the decor of a tragedy.[4] One evening—I only say it in order to laugh in a more unhappy way—I was not drunk simply from looking at old men turning while dancing—really, not in a dream. During the night, the Commandatore came into my room; in the afternoon (I was passing before his tomb) pride and irony had incited me to invite him. The appearance of the ghost struck me with terror. I was nothing but a wreck; a second victim lay dying beside me: a liquid uglier than blood flowed from lips which disgust rendered similar to those of a dead woman. And now I am condemned to that solitude which I don't accept, which I don't have the heart to bear. Yet I have only a cry to repeat the invitation and—if I believe my anger—it would no longer be me, it would be the shadow of the old man who would go away.

Beginning with an abject suffering, the insolence which slyly persists grows once again—at first slowly, then—in a flash—reaches the wave of a happiness affirmed against all reason.[5]

Beneath the shining light of the sky, today, justice aside, this sickly existence, close to death, and yet real, abandons itself to the "lack" which its coming into the world reveals.

Completed "being", from rupture to rupture, after a growing nausea had delivered it to the void of the sky, has become no longer "being", but wound, and even "agony" of all that it is.

August 1934.

[Going back in time, if I follow again the path which man followed in the search for himself (for his glory), I can only be grasped by a strong and overflowing movement—which is exuberant. I get angry at myself sometimes for allowing the feeling of sickly existence. Rupture is the expression of richness. The insipid and weak man is incapable of it.

Should everything be suspended, impossible, unbearable . . . I don't care! Would I lack strength to that point?

To summon all of man's tendencies into a point, all of the "possibles" which he is, to draw from them at the same time the harmonies and the violent oppositions, no longer to leave outside the laughter tearing apart the fabric of which man is made, on the contrary to know oneself to be assured of insignificance as long as thought is not itself this profound tearing of the fabric and its object—being itself—the fabric torn (Nietzsche had said: "regard as false that which has not made you laugh at least once" Zarathoustra—Old and new tables*), in this respect my efforts recommence and undo Hegel's* Phenomenology. *Hegel's construction is a philosophy of work, of "project". The Hegelian man—Being and God—is accomplished, is completed in the adequation of project.* Ipse *having to become everything does not fail, does not become comic, insufficient, but the private individual, the slave engaged in the paths of work, gains, after many a detour, access to the summit of the universal. The only obstacle in this way of seeing (moreover, of an unequalled profundity—in some ways, inaccessible) is what, in man, is irreducible to project: non-discursive existence, laughter, ecstasy, which link man—in the end—to the negation of project which* he *nevertheless* is*—man* ultimately *ruins himself in a* total *effacement—of what he is, of all human affirmation. Such would be the* easy *passage from the philosophy of work—Hegelian and profane—to sacred philosophy, which the "tor-*

ment" expresses, but which assumes a more accessible philosophy of communication.

I have trouble conceiving that "wisdom"—science—is linked to inert existence. Existence is a tumult which overflows, wherein fever and rupture are linked to intoxication. Hegelian collapse, the finished, profane nature of a philosophy whose movement was its principle, stem from the rejection, in Hegel's life, of everything which could seem to be sacred intoxication. *Not that Hegel was "wrong" to dismiss the lax concessions to which vague minds resorted in his time. But by taking work (discursive thought, project) for existence, he reduces the world to the profane world; he negates the sacred world (communication).*

When the storm of which I have spoken was calmed, my life knew a time of slight depression. I do not know if this crisis finished determining my steps forward, but from that time on they had a primary object. With a clear conscience, I devoted myself to the conquest of an inaccessible good, of a "grail", of a mirror in which would be reflected, right to the extremity of light, the vertigos which I had experienced.

I didn't give it a name at first. Moreover, I stupidly went astray (no matter). What counts in my eyes: to justify my foolishness (and no less that of others), my immense vanity . . . If I have prophesied, better still, I indict myself slightly for that. Among the rights which man claims for himself, he forgets that of being stupid; he is necessarily stupid, but without the right to be so, and sees himself forced to dissimulate. I would get angry at myself for wanting to hide anything.

My search had at first a double object: the sacred, then ecstasy. I wrote what follows as a prelude to this search and really only conducted it later. I insist on this point, that a feeling of unbearable vanity is the core of all this (as humility is the core of Christian experience).]

THE LABYRINTH (OR THE CONSTITUTION OF BEINGS)[1]

There exists at the basis of human life a principle of insufficiency. On his own, each man imagines others to be incapable or unworthy of "being". A slanderous and free conversation expresses the certainty of the

vanity of my fellow beings; what is apparently a mean-spirited chat reveals a blind straining of life towards an undefinable summit.

The sufficiency of each being is challenged unceasingly by those who surround him. Even a look expressing admiration is attached to me like a doubt. *["Genius" lowers more than it uplifts; the idea of "genius" prevents one from being simple, urges one to show the essential, to hide what would disappoint: there is no "genius" conceivable without "art". I would like to simplify, to brave the feeling of insufficiency. I myself am not sufficient and only maintain my "pretense" by means of the shadow in which I find myself.]* A burst of laughter, an expression of repugnance greet gestures, sentences, shortcomings in which my deep insufficiency is betrayed.

The disquiet of many is growing, and is multiplied to the extent that one perceives, at every turn, man's solitude in an empty night. Without human presence, the night in which everything is found—or rather, is lost—would seem to be existence for nothing, nonsense equivalent to the absence of being. But this night stops being empty and charged with anguish, when I grasp that men mean nothing and add in vain their discordance to it. If the demand persists in me that, in the world, there should be "being", "being" and not just my obvious "insufficiency", or the more simple insufficiency of things, I will one day be tempted to respond to this demand by introducing divine sufficiency into my night—although this is the reflection of the sickness of "being" within me. *[I see today the essential link of this "sickness" to what we hold to be divine—sickness is divine—but in these conditions divinity is not "sufficient", that is, there is no "completion" conceivable given the anguish which the sensation of incompleteness introduces within us.]*

Being is in the world so *uncertain* that I can project it where I wish—outside of me. It is a sort of inept man—who did not know how to unravel the essential plot—who limited being to the self. In actual fact, being is exactly *nowhere* and it was a game to grasp it as *divine* at the summit of the pyramid of individual beings. *[Being is "ungraspable". It is only "grasped" in error; the error is not just easy—in this case, it is the condition of thought.]*

Being is *nowhere.*

Man could enclose being in a simple indivisible element. But there is no being without "ipseity". *Without "ipseity", a simple element (an electron) encloses nothing.* The atom, in spite of its name, has constituents,

but only possesses an elementary complexity: the atom itself, due to its relative simplicity, cannot be determined "ipseily"*. Thus the number of particles which constitute a being intervenes in the constitution of its "ipseity": if the knife, of which one successively replaces the handle, then the blade, comes within a hair's breadth of losing its "ipseity", the same is not true of a machine, in which would have disappeared, replaced piece by piece, each of the *numerous* elements which formed it when brand new: this is even less true of a man, whose constituent parts die incessantly (such that nothing of the elements of which we were *comprised* subsists after a certain number of years). I can, if need be, admit that developing from an extreme complexity, being imposes upon reflexion *more* than an elusive appearance—but complexity, gradually increasing, is for this *more* a labyrinth in which it wanders endlessly, then is lost once and for all.

A sponge reduced by a pounding movement to a dust of individual cells, the living dust formed by a multitude of isolated beings is lost in the new sponge which it reconstitutes. A fragment of siphonophore is on its own an autonomous being; however, the whole siphonophore, in which the fragment participates, is itself not very different from a being possessing its unity. It is only beginning with linear animals (worms, insects, fish, reptiles, birds or mammals) that living individuals lose definitively the faculty of constituting, severally, groups which are linked in a single body. Non-linear animals (like the siphonophore, like coral) unite in *colonies* whose elements are cemented together—but they don't form *societies*. On the contrary, superior animals gather without having bodily links between them: bees, men which form stable societies, have no less autonomous bodies. The bees and man have, without a single doubt, an autonomous body—but are they for all that autonomous beings?

With respect to men, their existence is linked to language. Each person imagines, and therefore knows of his existence with the help of words. Words come to him in his head loaded with the multitude of human—or non-human—existences with respect to which his private existence exists. Being is mediated in him through words, which can only arbitrarily give themselves "autonomous being" and only profoundly as "being in relation to". It suffices for a short time to follow the trace, the repeated course of words, in order to perceive, in a sort of vision, the

*Cf. Paul Langevin, *La Notion de corpuscules et d'atomes,* Herman, 1934, p. 35 and ff.

labyrinthine constitution of being. What one vulgarly calls *to know* when a male neighbor knows his female neighbor—and names her—is only existence constituted one instant from parts (in the sense in which all existence has constituent parts—thus the atom constitutes its unity from simple elements) which made of these beings for once a group as real as its parts. The exchange of a limited number of sentences suffices for the creation of the banal and durable connection: two existences are henceforth, both one and the other, at least partially penetrable. Knowledge which the male neighbor has of his female neighbor is no less removed from an encounter of strangers than is life from death. *Knowledge* appears in this way like an unstable biological bond—no less real, however, than that of cells of a tissue. The exchange between two persons possesses in effect the power to survive momentary separation. *[This way of seeing has the defect of presenting knowledge like a foundation of the social bond: it is much more difficult than this, and even, in a sense, it is not like this at all. The knowing of one being by another is only a residue, a banal mode of linking, which the essential acts of communication have rendered possible (I think of the intimate operations of religious activity, of sacrifice, of the sacred: language, which knowledge makes use of, remains intensely charged with these operations). I did well to speak of* knowledge, *not of the sacred, in this sense—that it was better to begin with a familiar reality. I am more annoyed by having given in to a confused mass of scholarly ideas: but this earlier explanation introduces the theory of communication which one will see sketched further on. This is no doubt pitiful, but man only gains access to the notion which is most loaded with burning possibilities by opposing common sense—by opposing the givens of science to common sense. I don't see how, without the givens of science, one would have been able to come back to the obscure feeling, to the instinct of the man still deprived of "common sense".]*

A MAN IS A PARTICLE INSERTED IN UNSTABLE AND TANGLED GROUPS. These groups come to terms with the personal life to which they bring multiple possibilities (society gives to the individual the easy life). Once there is *knowledge,* the existence of a person is only isolated from that of the group by a narrow and negligible point of view. Only the instability of the relations (this banal fact: however intimate a bond may be, separation is easy, is multiplied and can be prolonged) permits the illusion of a being which is isolated, folded back on itself and which possesses the power to exist without some sort of exchange.

In a general way, each element capable of being isolated from the universe always appears like a particle susceptible of entering into the constitution of a group which transcends it. *[In truth, if I envisage the universe, it is, as one will affirm, constituted by a great number of* galaxies *(of nebulous spirals). The galaxies constitute clouds of stars, but does the universe constitute the galaxies? (is it the organized sum of the galaxies?) The question which surpasses understanding leaves a comical bitterness. It affects the universe, its totality . . .]* Being is always a group of particles whose relative autonomies are maintained. These two principles—constitution transcending the constituent parts, relative autonomy of the constituent parts—order the existence of each "being".

1

From these two principles there follows a third which governs the human condition. The uncertain opposition of autonomy to transcendence puts being into a position which slips: each being *ipse*—at the same time that it encloses itself in autonomy, and for this very reason—wants to become the whole of transcendence: in the first place, the whole of the constitution from which it has begun, then one day, without limits, the whole of the universe. Its will for autonomy opposes it at first to the whole, but it withers—is reduced to nothing—to the extent that it refuses to enter into it. It then renounces autonomy for the sake of the whole, but temporarily: the will for autonomy is only abated for a time and quickly, in a single movement in which balance is achieved, being devotes itself to the whole and at the same time devotes the whole to itself.

This being *ipse,* itself constituted from parts and, as such—being result, unpredictable chance—enters into the universe as the will for autonomy. It has constituent parts but seeks to dominate. Pursued by anguish, it surrenders to the desire to submit the world to its autonomy. *Ipse,* the tiny particle, that unpredictable and purely improbable chance, is condemned to wishing itself to be other: all and necessary. The movement which it undergoes—which introduces it into higher and higher constitutions—animated by the desire to be at the summit—gradually engages it in an anguishing ascension; this will to be the *universe* is, however, only a ridiculous challenge directed at the unknowable immensity. The immensity eludes consciousness—it infinitely eludes an individual who seeks it by eluding, in turn, the improbability which he is; it knows only to look for that which can be reduced to the necessity for its

authority (in the authority of knowledge, by means of which man attempts to take himself for the whole of the universe, there is necessity, the experience of misery; it is ridiculous, inevitable fate which befalls us, but this necessity—we attribute it to the universe which we confuse with our knowledge).

This flight headed towards the summit (which is the constitution of knowledge—dominating the realms themselves) is only one of the paths of the "labyrinth". But we can now in no way avoid this path which we must follow from attraction to attraction in search of "being". Solitude, in which we attempt to seek refuge, is a new attraction. No one escapes the constitution of society: in this constitution, each path leads to the summit, leads to the desire for an absolute knowledge, is necessity for limitless power.

Only an inevitable fatigue dissuades us. We stop in the face of disheartening difficulty. The paths leading towards the summit are crowded. And not only is the competition for power intense, but it is most often enmired in the swamp of intrigue. Errors, uncertainty, the feeling that power is useless, the faculty which we maintain for imagining some supreme height above the first summit, together contribute to the confusion essential to the labyrinth. In truth, we cannot say of the summit that it is situated here or there. (In a certain sense it is never reached). An unknown man, whom the desire—or the necessity—to reach the summit drove mad, approaches it more closely, in solitude, than the highly placed figures of his time. It often appears that madness, anguish, crime together prevent access to it, but nothing is clear: who could say of lies and contemptible actions that they distance one from it? Such a great uncertainty is likely to justify humility: but the latter is often only a detour which seemed safe.

This obscurity of conditions is so draconian and even precisely so dreadful that we are not without excuses for renunciation. Pretexts abound. It suffices, in this case, to rely on one or several intermediary persons: I renounce reaching the summit—another will reach it; I can delegate my power, a renunciation which provides itself with a certificate of innocence. Yet it is through this that the worst happens. It is evidence of fatigue, of the feeling of impotence: in seeking the summit, we find anguish. But in fleeing anguish, we fall into the emptiest poverty. We are made to feel the "insufficiency" of it: this is the shame of having been thrown towards the void, which leads to the delegation of one's power (and shame is hidden). It follows that the most superficial of men, and

the most tired, feel the weight of their indifference and their fatigue: indifference and fatigue leave deceit the greatest place—even provoke deceit. We only escape excessive nostalgia for the summit by rendering it deceptive.

2

In what way does the individual human being gain access to the universal?

At the end of irrevocable night, life throws him as a child into the play of beings; he is then the satellite of two adults: he receives from them the illusion of sufficiency (the child regards his parents as gods). This character of satellite in no way disappears later on: we withdraw our confidence from our parents, we delegate it to other men. What the child found in the apparently steady existence of his relatives, man seeks in all places where life converges and is consolidated. The individual, lost in the multitude, delegates to those who occupy its center the concern for taking on the totality of "being". He is content to "take part" in total existence, which maintains, even in simple cases, a diffuse character.

This natural gravitation of beings has as a consequence the existence of relatively stable social groups. In principle, the center of gravity is in a city; in ancient times, a city, like a corolla enclosing a double pistil, is formed around a sovereign and a god. If several cities are formed and forgo their role of the center in favor of a single one, an empire is ordered around one city among others, in which sovereignty and the gods are concentrated: in this case, gravitation around the sovereign city impoverishes the existence of the peripheral cities, in the heart of which the organs which formed the totality of being have disappeared or wasted away. Gradually, groups (of cities, then of empires) gain, in their constitution, access to universality (at least tend towards it).

Universality is one [*seule*], and cannot do battle against fellow beings (barbarians are not entirely fellow beings). Universality suppresses competition. As long as analogous forces are in opposition, one of them must grow at the expense of others. But when a victorious force remains one [*seule*], this way of determining one's existence with the help of an opposition is lacking. The universal God, if he comes into play, is no longer, like the local god, a guarantor of a city in battle against rivals: he is alone at the summit, even allows himself to be taken for the totality of things and can only arbitrarily maintain "ipseity" within himself. In their history, men are thus engaged in the strange battle of *ipse,* which must

become everything and can only become it by dying. *["The "gods who die" have taken the form of universals. The God of the Jews was at first "god of the armies". According to Hegel, the defeat, the downfall of the Jewish people had removed its god from the personal, animal state of the ancient gods, and thrown it into the impersonal, primitive mode of existence—of light. The God of the Jews no longer upheld the existence of combat: in the death of his son, he attained true universality. Born of the cessation of combat, profound universality—rupture—did not survive the resumption of combat. The universal gods, as much as they are able, moreover, flee in war this murderous universality. Allah thrown into military conquest escapes sacrifice in this way. At the same time, He pulls the God of the Christians from its solitude: He engages it, in its turn, in a combat. Islam withers as soon as it renounces conquest: the Church declines in reaction to this.]*

To seek sufficiency is the same mistake as to enclose being in some sort of point: we can enclose nothing, we can only find insufficiency. We try to place ourselves in the presence of God, but God alive within us demands at once that we die; we only know how to grasp this by killing. *[Incessant sacrifice being necessary to survival, we have crucified once and for all—and yet, each day, once again, we crucify. God himself crucifies. "God," said Angèle de Foligno, (ch. LV) "has given to his son whom he loved such a poverty that he has never had, and will never have, an impoverished individual equal to him. And yet he has as a property* Being. *He possesses substance, and it is so much his that this possessing is beyond human words. And yet God has made him poor, as if substance had not been his". "Possessing beyond words . . ." Strange inversion! "The property of substance", "possessing", really exist only in "words"—mystical experience, vision are situated alone beyond words and can only be evoked by them. Now the beyond which is vision, experience, refers to the "yet God has made him poor", not to the possessing, which is only a discursive category. The possessing is there in order to amplify the paradox of a vision.]*

What bursts in the bewilderment of the summit comes to light, moreover, as soon as life begins to go astray. The need for an attraction—the necessity, found in the autonomy of human beings, of imposing one's value upon the universe—introduces from the outset a disordered state in all of life. What characterizes man from the outset and what leads up to the completed rupture at the summit is not only the will for sufficiency, but the cunning, timid attraction on the side of insufficiency.

Our existence is an exasperated attempt to complete being (completed being would be *ipse* having become everything). But the effort is *undergone* by us: it is this which bewilders us and how we are in so many ways bewildered! We don't dare affirm in its fullness our desire to exist without limits: it makes us afraid. But we are all the more uneasy at feeling within us a moment of cruel joy as soon as the evidence of our misery emerges.

The ascension towards a summit where being reaches the universal is a constitution of parts in which a central will subordinates peripheral elements to its law. A stronger will in search of sufficiency tirelessly throws weaker wills into insufficiency. Insufficiency is not simply the revelation of the summit: it bursts at each step, when the constitution throws off to the periphery its constituent parts. If existence thrown into insufficiency maintains its pretense of sufficiency, it foreshadows the situation at the summit, but one whom chance pursues, unaware of failure, perceives this from the outside: *ipse* seeking to become everything is only tragic at the summit in its own eyes, and when its impotence is externally manifest, it is "laughable" (in this last case, it cannot itself suffer—if it became conscious of its impotence, it would abandon its pretense, leaving it to one who is stronger, this being impossible only at the summit).

In the constitution of human beings, the center alone possesses the initiative and throws the peripheral elements off into insignificance. The center alone is the expression of constituted being and takes precedence over the constituent parts. It possesses over the entire group a power of attraction which it even exerts, in part, over a neighboring realm (whose center is less strong). The power of attraction empties the constituent parts of their richest elements. Cities are slowly emptied of life in favor of a capital. (The local accent becomes comical.)

Laughter arises from differences in level, from depressions suddenly produced. If I pull the rug out from under . . . the sufficiency of a solemn figure is followed suddenly by the revelation of an ultimate insufficiency (one pulls the rug out from under pretentious beings). I am made happy, no matter what, by failure experienced. And I lose my seriousness by laughing. As if it were a relief to escape the concern for my sufficiency. I cannot, it is true, abandon my concern forever. I discard it only if I can do so without danger. I laugh at a man whose failure does not tarnish my effort at sufficiency, at a peripheral figure who had preten-

tions and compromised authentic existence (by mimicing its outward appearance). The happiest laughter is that whose source is a child. For the child must grow up, and I know that the insufficiency which it reveals, at which I laugh, will be followed by the sufficiency of the adult (time is provided for that). The child is the opportunity to learn—without deep anxiety—over an abyss of insufficiency.

But just as the child grows up, so does laughter. In its innocent form, it takes place in the same sense as does the constitution of society: laughter guarantees it, reinforces it—(the constitution is the throwing of weak forms off towards the periphery): laughter puts those whom it assembles into unanimous convulsions. But laughter does not reach merely the peripheral regions of existence—it does not have as its object only fools or children (those who became empty or who still are empty); by a necessary reversal, it returns from the child to the father, from the periphery to the center, each time that the father or the center betray, in their turn, their insufficiency. (In both cases, we laugh moreover at an identical situation: the unjustified pretense of sufficiency.) The necessity for reversal is so important that it had, at one time, its consecration: there is no constitution of society which does not have, on the other hand, the challenging of its foundations; rituals show it: the saturnalias or festivals of madmen reversed the roles. *[And the profundity from whence descended blindly the feeling which determined the rituals—the numerous, intimate links between the themes of the carnival and the putting to death of kings indicate this sufficiently enough.]*

If I now compare the constitution of society to a pyramid, it appears as a domination on the part of the center, of the summit (this is a rough, even difficult schema). The summit incessantly throws the foundation off into insignificance and, in this sense, waves of laughter traverse the pyramid by gradually contesting the pretense of sufficiency of the beings placed at a lower level. But the first pattern of these waves issued from the summit flows back and the second pattern traverses the pyramid from the bottom to the top: the flowing back this time contests the sufficiency of beings placed at a higher level. This contestation, on the other hand, right up to the last instant, preserves the summit: it cannot fail, however, to reach it. In truth, being, without number, is in a certain sense suffocated by a reverberating convulsion: laughter, in particular, suffocates no one, but if I envisage the spasm of multitudes (whom one never takes in with a single glance) the flowing back—as I have said—cannot fail to reach the summit. And if it reaches it? This is the agony of God in black night.

3

Laughter intuits the truth which the rupture at the summit lays bare: that our will to arrest being is damned. Laughter slips on the surface, the whole length of slight depressions: rupture opens the abyss. Abyss and depressions are together a same void: the inanity of being which we are. Being within us is elusive—we are lacking it, since we enclose it within *ipse* and since it is desire—necessity—to embrace everything. And the act of grasping clearly the comedy of this changes nothing. The means of escape (humility, inner death, the belief in the power of reason) are only so many paths by which we become further enmired.

Man cannot, by any means, escape insufficiency, nor renounce ambition. His will to flee is the fear which he has of being man: its only effect is hypocrisy—the fact that man is what he is without daring to be so *[in this sense, human existence is only embryonic within us—we are not entirely men].* There is no concurrence imaginable, and man, inevitably, must wish to be everything, remain *ipse*. He is comical in his own eyes if he is aware of this: it is necessary, then, for him to *want* to be comical, for he is so, to the extent that he is man (it is no longer a question of characters who are emissaries of comedy)—without a way out. *[This assumes an anguishing dissociation of oneself, a definitive disharmony, discord—experienced with vigor—without useless efforts to palliate them.]*

In the first place—he can't avoid it—man must do battle, having to respond to his will to be alone and to be everything himself. As long as he does battle, man is still neither comical nor tragic, and everything remains suspended in him; he subjugates everything to the action by means of which he must translate his will (he must then be moral, imperative). But an opening can be cleared.

The object of the battle is a constitution which is more and more vast and, in this sense, it is difficult to gain access fully to the universal. But through success, the battle draws closer to it (in groups of some eminence, human life tends to take on a universal value). If the battle is ever abated—or if a life, in some way, ever escapes it—man gains access to his final solitude: at this moment, the will to be everything breaks him into pieces.

He is no longer doing battle with a group equal to the one which he represents, but with Nothingness. In this extreme contest, he can be

compared to the bull in a bullfight. The bull in the bullfight is at times heavily absorbed in an animal's lack of concern—abandoning itself to the secret collapse of death—at times, seized with rage, it rushes forth upon the void which a fantom matador opens before it without respite. But once this void is affronted, it is nudity which the bull embraces—TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS A MONSTER—taking this sin on lightly. Man is no longer, like the animal, the plaything of Nothingness, but Nothingness is itself his plaything—he ruins himself in it, but illuminates its darkness with his *laughter,* which he reaches only when *intoxicated* with the very void which kills him.

February, 1936.

[I become irritated when I think of the time of "activity" which I spent—during the last years of peacetime—in forcing myself to reach my fellow beings. I had to pay this price. Ecstasy itself is empty when envisaged as a private exercise, only mattering for a single individual.

Even in preaching to the converted, there is, in its predication, a distressful element. Profound communication demands silence. In the end, action, which predication signifies, is limited to this: closing one's door in order to stop discourse (the noise, the mechanics of the outside).

The door must remain open and shut at the same time. What I wanted: profound communication between beings to the exclusion of the links necessary to projects, which discourse forms. I became touchy, in the long run, each day wounded more intimately. If I took refuge in solitude, I was compelled to. It doesn't matter to me, now, that everything should be dead—or seem to be so.

The war put an end to my "activity" and my life became all the less separated from the object of its search. A partition normally separates one from this object. In the end, I was able, I had the strength to do it: I made the partition fall. Nothing restful remained any longer which made the efforts seem illusory. Once, it became possible to become linked to the crystalline inexorable fragility of things—without the concern for responding to minds loaded with empty questions. Desert, doubtless not without mirages dissipated immediately thereafter . . .

Few circumstances were more favorable to ironic intoxication. Rarely did spring make me become better acquainted with the happiness of the sun. I dug my garden, not without ardor, while happily calculating opposite chances (they appeared numerous . . . but only became precise in

May. I remember having sown seeds on the 20th—I provoked fate but without believing in it). Extreme anguish and melancholy, profound serenity free of illusions gave to life many different meanings (not easily reconcilable). The conditions lent themselves poorly to expression; however, my thought freed itself of its chains, reached maturity. I allowed myself to become intoxicated by a feeling of conquest, and the ruptured world stretched out before me like an open realm. These few pages seem to me today to be indecisive—impure, lyrical flights encumber them—but under the influence of the first vision, I believed that they revealed profound truth.

For almost two years, I had been able to advance in inner experience. At the very least in this sense—that the states described by the mystics had ceased to be closed to me. This experience was independent, it is true, from the presuppositions to which the mystics imagine it to be linked. The results of this experience converged one day with those that I drew from long reflexions on eroticism and laughter—as with those which followed a bookish study and the volatile experience of the sacred. It was only later that I broached the problems of method and, for all that, I remained enmired, at first, in vageries—from the point of view at least of the science of knowledge, of philosophy. When, after more than a year, I came to that point—I speak of it in another book—I reached excessive, nauseating clearness. Then, I had nothing to do, could not conceive of a project: I was abandoned to the nausea which I have described under the name of "torment".]

"COMMUNICATION"

. . . [1]From one single particle to another, there is no difference in nature, neither is there any difference between this one and that one. There is *some of* this which is produced here or there, each time in the form of unity, but this unity does not persevere in itself. Waves, undulations, single particles are perhaps only the multiple movements of a homogeneous element; they only possess fleeting unity and do not break the homogeneity of the whole.

The groups constituted from numerous single particles alone possess this heterogeneous character which differentiates me from you and isolates our differences in the rest of the universe. What one calls "being" is never simple, and if it has a lasting unity, it only possesses it when

imperfect: it is undermined by its profound inner division, it remains poorly closed and, at certain points, attackable from the outside.[2]

It is true that this isolated "being"—foreign to what is not it—is the form in which existence and truth at first appeared to you. It is to this irreducible difference—which you are—that you must relate the sense of each object. Yet the unity which you are flees from you and escapes: this unity would only be a dreamless slumber if chance disposed of it according to your most anxious will.

What you are stems from the activity which links the innumerable elements which constitute you to the intense communication of these elements among themselves. These are contagions of energy, of movement, of warmth, or transfers of elements, which constitute inevitably the life of your organized being. Life is never situated at a particular point: it passes rapidly from one point to another (or from multiple points to other points), like a current or like a sort of streaming of electricity. Thus, there where you would like to grasp your timeless substance, you encounter only a slipping, only the poorly coordinated play of your perishable elements.

Further on, your life is not limited to that ungraspable inner streaming; it streams to the outside as well and opens itself incessantly to what flows out or surges forth towards it. The lasting vortex which constitutes you runs up against similar vortexes with which it forms a vast figure, animated by a measured agitation. Now to live signifies for you not only the flux and the fleeting play of light which are united in you, but the passage of warmth or of light from one being to another, from you to your fellow being or from your fellow being to you (even at the moment when you read in me the contagion of my fever which reaches you): words, books, monuments, symbols, laughter are only so many paths of this contagion, of this passage. Individual beings matter little and enclose points of view which cannot be acknowledged, if one considers what is animated, passing from one to the other in love, in tragic scenes, in movements of fervor. Thus we are nothing, neither you nor I, beside burning words which could pass from me to you, imprinted on a page: for I would only have lived in order to write them, and, if it is true that they are addressed to you, you will live from having had the strength to hear them. (In the same way, what do the two lovers, Tristan and Isolde, signify, if considered without their love, in a solitude which leaves them to some commonplace pursuit? Two pale beings, deprived of the marvellous; nothing counts but the love which tears them both apart.)

I am and you are, in the vast flow of things, only a stopping-point favoring a resurgence. Do not delay in becoming precisely aware of this anguishing position: if it was your experience to attach yourself to goals enclosed within those limits in which no one is at stake but you, your life would be that of the great majority; it would be "deprived of the marvellous". Were you to stop a short moment: the complex, the gentle, the violent movement of worlds will make of your death a splashing foam. The glories, the marvels of your life are due to this resurgence of the wave which was tied in you to the immense sound of the cataract of the sky.

The fragile walls of your isolation, which comprised the multiple stopping-points, the obstacles of consciousness, will have served only to reflect for an instant the flash of those universes in the heart of which you never ceased to be lost.

If there were only these moving universes, which would never encounter any eddies capturing the too rapid currents of an indistinct consciousness, when this consciousness links we don't know what inner, infinitely vague brilliance to the most blind movements of nature—without obstacles, those movements would be less vertiginous. The stabilized order of isolated appearances is necessary to the anguished consciousness of the torrential floods which carry it away. But if it is taken for what it appears to be, if it encloses, in a fearful, timid attachment, it is no longer anything but the occasion of a laughable error; one more dwindled existence marks a dead point, an absurd little turning in on itself, forgotten, for a short time, in the midst of the celestial bacchanalia.

From one end to the other of this human life which is our lot, the consciousness of the paucity of stability, even of the profound lack of all true stability, liberates the enchantment of laughter. As if this life suddenly passed from an empty and sad solidity to the happy contagion of warmth and of light, to the free tumult which the waters and the air communicate to one another: flashes and the rebounding of laughter follow the first opening, the permeability of a dawning smile. If a group of people laugh at an absent-minded gesture, or at a sentence revealing an absurdity, there passes within them a current of intense communication. Each isolated existence emerges from itself by means of the image betraying the error of immutable isolation. It emerges from itself in a sort of easy flash; it opens itself at the same time to the contagion of a wave which rebounds, for those who laugh, together become like the waves of the sea—there no longer exists between them any partition as long as the laughter lasts; they are no more separate than are two waves,

but their unity is as undefined, as precarious as that of the agitation of the waters.

Shared laughter assumes the absence of a true anguish, and yet it has no other source than anguish. What engenders it justifies your fear. You cannot imagine that, dropped, from you don't know where, into this unknown immensity, abandoned to enigmatic solitude, condemned in the end to sink into suffering, you are not seized with anguish. But from the isolation in which you grow old to the heart of universes dedicated to your loss, you are free to derive this vertiginous consciousness from what takes place—consciousness, vertigo, which you only reach bound by this anguish. You could not become the mirror of a heart-rending reality if you did not have to *be broken* . . .[3]

To the extent that you oppose an obstacle to overflowing forces, you are headed for pain, reduced to uneasiness. But you are still free to perceive the sense of this anguish within you: the way in which the obstacle which you are must negate itself and wish itself destroyed, given that it set out from forces which broke it. It is possible only on this condition: that your rupture not prevent your reflection from taking place, which asks that a *slipping* be produced (that the rupture be only reflected, and leave for a time the mirror intact). Shared laughter, assuming all anguish aside, while at the same time drawing from it reverberations, is no doubt the cavalier form of this trickery: it is not the one who laughs whom the laughter strikes, but one of his *fellow beings*—though this be without an excess of cruelty.

The forces which together work at destroying us find in us such a happy—and at times such violent complicities—that we cannot just simply turn away from them as interest would lead us to. We are led to contain the fire within us. . . . Rarely are men in a state of ending their lives—and not as one in despair, but as the Hindu, throwing himself royally under a festival cart. But without going to the point of delivering ourselves, we can deliver, of ourselves, a part: we sacrifice goods which belong to ourselves or—that which is linked to us by so many bonds, from which we distinguish ourselves so poorly—our fellow being. Assuredly, this word *sacrifice* signifies this: that men, by virtue of their will, introduce certain goods into a dangerous region, where destructive forces prevail. Thus we *sacrifice* the one "whom we laugh at", abandoning him, without any anguish whatsoever, to some downfall which seems slight to us (laughter, no doubt, does not have the gravity of sacrifice).[4]

We can discover only *in others* how it is that the light exuberance of things has us at its disposal. Barely do we grasp the vanity of our opposition than we are carried away by the movement; it suffices that we cease to oppose ourselves—we communicate with the unlimited world of those who laugh. But we communicate without anguish, full of joy, imagining not laying ourselves open to the movement which will, however, with a definite rigor, have us some day at its disposal.

Without any doubt, one who laughs is himself laughable and, in the profound sense, is so more than his victim, but it matters little that a slight error—a slipping—spills out joy to the realm of laughter. What throws men out of their empty isolation and mingles them with unlimited movements—through which they communicate among themselves, rushing with great commotion like waves one to another—could only be death if the horror of this *self,* which has folded back on itself, was pushed to logical consequences. The consciousness of an external reality—tumultuous and heart-rending—which arises in the recesses of the consciousness of self—asks man to perceive the vanity of these recesses—to "know" them, in a presentiment, to be already destroyed—*but it also asks that they remain.* The foam which is at the crest of the wave requires this incessant slipping: the consciousness of death (and the liberation which it brings to the immensity of beings) would not be formed if one did not approach death, but it ceases to be, as soon as death has done its work. And this is why that agony—as if frozen—of everything that is, which human existence in the heart of the heavens is—assumes the multitude of spectators, those who survive a little (the surviving multitude amplifies the agony, reflects it in the infinite facets of multiple consciousnesses, in which immutable slowness coexists with a rapidity of bacchanalia, in which lightning and the fall of the dead are contemplated): sacrifice requires not only victims, but those who sacrifice; laughter requires not only the laughable persons whom we are, but it demands the inconsequential throng of those who laugh[5] . . .

[From April to May, I wrote even more of this, but without adding anything which matters to me. I became exhausted in vain in trying to develop.

When I expressed the principle of the slipping*—like a law presiding at* communication*—I believed myself to have reached the depth (I was astounded, having given this text to be read, that one not see as I do the signed trace of the criminal, the* belated *and yet decisive explanation of the crime . . . It must be said—none if this took place).*

I imagine today not being mistaken. I gave account at last of the comedy—*which* tragedy *is—and vice versa. I affirmed at the same time: that existence is* communication—*that all representation of life, of being, and generally of "anything", is to be reconsidered from this point of view.*

The crimes—and as a result the puzzles—which I recounted were clearly defined. They were laughter and sacrifice (in what followed, which I didn't think was worth saving, I dealt with the sacrifice, the comedy which demands that a sole individual die in the place of all the others, and I prepared myself to show that the path of communication *(profound bond between peoples) is in anguish (anguish, sacrifice unite men of all times).*

The recourse to scientific givens (the fashionable perhaps—the present-day, the perishable—in the realm of knowledge) appears to me to be of secondary importance, given the foundation, the ecstatic experience from which I set out.[6]]

Part Four

POST-SCRIPTUM TO THE TORMENT (OR THE NEW MYSTICAL THEOLOGY)

This page intentiona

Life will dissolve itself in death, rivers in the sea, and the known in the unknown. Knowledge is access to the unknown. Nonsense is the outcome of every possible sense.

It is an exhausting folly that, there where, visibly, all means are lacking, one nevertheless claims to know, instead of knowing of one's ignorance, of recognizing the unknown; but what is even sadder is the weakness of those who, if they no longer have the means, admit that they don't know, but yet entrench themselves stupidly in what they know. In any case, that a man should not live with the unceasing thought of the unknown, makes one doubt his intelligence all the more, in that this same man is eager, and blindly so, to find in things the part which compels him to love, or which shakes him with inextinguishable laughter—that of the unknown. But it is the same with light: eyes have only reflections of it.

"Night soon appeared to him to be darker, more terrible than any other night whatsoever, as it had really emerged from a wound of thought which could no longer think itself, of thought captured ironically as object by something other than thought. This was night itself. Images which created its darkness flooded into him, and his body transformed into a demoniacal mind sought to represent them to himself. He saw nothing and, far from being overcome, he made out of this absence of visions the culminating point of his glance. His eye, useless for sight, took on extraordinary proportions, began to develop in an inordinate fashion and, dwelling on the horizon, allowed night to penetrate into its center in order to create for itself an iris. Through this void, therefore, it was his glance and the object of his glance which became mingled. This

eye, which saw nothing, did not simply grasp the source of its vision. It saw as would an object, which meant that it did not see. His own glance entered into him in the form of an image at the tragic moment when this glance was regarded as the death of all image."

Maurice Blanchot, Thomas the Obscure

"Never had philosophy appeared more fragile, more precious and more enthralling than at that instant when a yawning caused the existence of God to vanish in the mouth of Bergson."

Ibid.

Outside of the notes of this volume, I only know of *Thomas the Obscure* where the questions of the new theology (which has only the unknown as object) are pressing, although they remain hidden. In a way which is completely independent from his book—orally, yet in such a way that he in no respect lacked the feeling of discretion which demands that, close to him, I thirst for silence—I heard the author set out the foundation for all "spiritual" life, which can only:

—have its principle and its end in the absence of salvation, in the renunciation of all hope,

—affirm of inner experience that it is authority (but all authority expiates itself),

—be contestation of itself and non-knowledge.

I

GOD

God savors himself, says Eckhart. This is possible, but what he savors is, it seems to me, the hatred which he has for himself, to which none, here on Earth, can be compared (I could say: this hatred is time, but that bothers me. Why should I say time? I feel this hatred when I cry; I analyze nothing). If this hatred was for a single instant absent from God, the world would become logical, intelligible—idiots would explain it away (if God did not hate himself, he would be what the depressed idiots believe: dejected, imbecilic, logical). What, at bottom, deprives man of all possibility of speaking of God, is that, in human thought, God neces-

sarily conforms to man, to the extent that man is weary, famished for sleep and for peace. In the act of saying: ". . . all things . . . recognize him as their cause, their principle and their end . . ." there is this: a man cannot bear any longer TO BE, he cries for mercy, he falls, exhausted, into disgrace, as, not being able to go on any longer, one goes to bed.

God finds rest in nothing and is satisfied in nothing. Every existence is threatened, is already in the Nothingness of His insatiability. And no more than He can appease himself can God *know* (knowledge is rest). He knows nothing of the extent of His thirst. And just as He *knows nothing,* He knows nothing of Himself. If he were to reveal himself to Himself, He would have to recognize himself as God, but He cannot even for an instant concede this. He only has knowledge of His Nothingness, that is why He is atheist, profoundly so. He would cease right away to be God (instead of his dreadful absence there would no longer be anything but an imbecilic, stupified presence if He saw himself as such).

Ghost in tears
O dead God
hollow eye
damp moustache
single tooth
O dead God
O dead God
Me
I pursued you
with unfathomable
hatred
and I would die of hatred
as a cloud
is undone.

To the soaring of thoughts being unleashed—eager for distant possibilities—it was vain to oppose a desire for rest. Nothing stops, if not for a time. Peter wanted, on Mount Tabor, to set up tents, in order jealously to protect divine light. However, thirsting for radiant peace, already his steps led him to Golgotha (to the dark wind, to the exhaustion of *lamma sabachtani*).

In the abyss of possibilities, proceeding, thrown always further, hastening towards a point where the possible is the impossible itself, ecstatic, breathless, *experience* thus opens a bit more every time the

horizon of God (the wound); extends a bit more the limits of the heart, the limits of being; it destroys the depths of the heart, the depths of being, by unveiling them.

Saint Angèle de Foligno said: "On one particular occasion, my soul was uplifted and I saw God in a clarity and a fullness which I had never known to that point, in such a full way. And I saw no love there. Thus I lost that love which I was carrying within me; I was made of non-love. And then, after that, I saw him in a ray of darkness, for he is a 'good' so great that he cannot be thought or understood. And nothing which can be thought or understood either reaches him or approaches him" (*Livre de l'expérience* I, 105).[1] A bit further on: "When I see God, as in a ray of darkness, I do not have laughter on my lips—I have neither devotion, nor fervor, nor fervent love. My body or my soul do not tremble and my soul remains frozen instead of being carried by its ordinary movement. My soul sees a Nothingness and sees all things (*nihil videt et omnia videt*); my body is asleep, I am speechless. And all of the favors, numerous and unspeakable, which God has extended to me, and all the words which he has spoken to me . . . are, I perceive, so above this 'good' encountered in such a great ray of darkness that I do not put my hope in them, that my hope does not rest in them" (*ibid,* 106).

It is difficult to say to what extent belief is an obstacle to experience, to what extent the intensity of the experience overturns this obstacle. The dying saint emitted a strange cry: "O unknown Nothingness!" (*o nihil incognitum!*) which she repeated several times. I don't know if I am wrong to see in it an escaping of fever beyond divine limits. The tale of death associates it with the knowledge which we have of our own Nothingness . . . But the saint, in her sickness, completing her thought, gave the only profound explanation for this cry: "There exists an illusion in the vanity of spiritual things, even more than in the vanity of this world—as when one speaks of God, when one makes great penitence, when one penetrates the Scriptures and when one's heart is absorbed in spiritual things" (*Livre de l'expérience,* IIIrd part, VIII). She expressed herself thus, then repeated her cry two more times: "O unknown Nothingness!" I am inclined to believe that the vanity of what is not the "unknown" opening itself up before ecstasy appeared to this dying woman, who could only translate what she experienced through cries. The notes taken at her bedside attenuate, perhaps, the words (I doubt it).

At times, burning experience takes little heed of limits received from the outside. Speaking of an intense state of joy, Angèle de Foligno claims to be angelic and to love to the limit (*Livre de l'expérience,* 76).

The saint at first had led the life of a woman surrounded by frivolous luxury. She lived conjugally, had several sons and was not unaware of the burning desires of the flesh. In 1285, at the age of thirty-seven, she took on a new life, devoting herself gradually to miserable poverty. "In the perspective of the cross", said she of her conversion, "I was given a greater knowledge: I saw how the Son of God died for our sins with the greatest pain. I felt that I had crucified him . . . In this knowledge of the cross, such a fire burned within me that, standing before the cross, I bared myself and offered myself completely to him. And despite my fear, I promised him that I would observe a perpetual chastity" (*ibid,* 11). She went on to say, in the same tale: "It so happened that, according to God's will, my mother died, which was for me a great obstacle, then my husband died and all of my sons followed him in short time. I had proceeded in the way of which I have spoken and I had asked God that they die—thus their death was for me a great consolation" (*ibid,* 12). And further on: "There was in my heart such a fire of divine love that I grew weary neither of genuflexions nor of any penitence. This fire became so ardent that if I heard anyone speak of God, I cried out. If someone had raised an axe over me in order to kill me, I wouldn't have been able to hold myself back" (*ibid,* 21).[2]

II

DESCARTES

In a letter of May 1637, Descartes writes on the subject of the fourth part of the *Discourse*—where he affirms, beginning with the *Cogito,* the certainty of God: "In lingering for a long enough time over this meditation, one gradually acquires a very clear and, if I may speak in such a way, intuitive knowledge of intellectual nature in general—the idea of which, when considered without limitation, is what represents God to us and, when limited, is that of an angel or of a human soul." Now this movement of thought is simpler and much more necessary to man than that from which Descartes has drawn, in the *Discourse,* divine certitude (which is reduced to the argument of Saint Anselme: perfect being cannot fail to have existence as an attribute). And this vital movement is essentially what dies within me.

Descartes' intuition founds discursive knowledge. And no doubt discursive knowledge once established, the "universal science" of which

Descartes undertook the *project,* and which today occupies so much place, can ignore the intuition which is found at the outset (it does without it, wanting, if possible, to avoid being more than it is). But this knowledge—about which we are so vain—what does it mean, when its foundation is removed? Descartes had given as a goal for philosophy: "a clear and assured knowledge of what is useful for life", but in him this goal could not be separated from the foundation. The question, introduced in this way, affects the *value* of reasoned knowledge. If it is foreign to the initial intuition, it is the sign and the evidence of the man who acts. But from the point of view of the intelligibility of being it no longer has any meaning.

It is easy for each one of us to perceive that this science, of which he is proud, even complete with answers to all the questions which it can regularly formulate, would leave us in the end in non-knowledge; that the existence of the world cannot in any way cease being unintelligible. No explanation of the sciences (nor, more generally, of discursive knowledge) would be able to answer for it. No doubt the aptitude which was given to us to understand this or that from all sides, to bring numerous solutions to various problems, leaves us the impression of having developed in us the faculty of understanding. But this spirit of contestation, which was the tormenting genius of Descartes—if it animates us in our turn, it no longer stops at secondary objects: it is henceforth less a question of the well or poorly founded nature of accepted propositions than of deciding, once the best understood propositions are established, if the infinite need for knowledge implied in the initial intuition of Descartes could be satisfied. In other words, the spirit of contestation manages now to formulate the final affirmation: "*I only know one thing: that a man will never know anything.*"

If I had a "very clear knowledge" of God (of that "intellectual nature considered without limitation"), knowledge would immediately thereafter seem to me to know, but only at that price. This clear knowledge of the existence of an infinite knowledge, even if I had it at my disposal only in part, would definitely give me the assurance which I lack. However I perceive that this assurance was, in Descartes, knowledge necessary for *project* (the first title of the *Discourse* was *Discourse on the Method of Properly Conducting one's Reason and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*—formula in which the system and the action of the author are resumed). Without activity linked to *project,* Descartes would not have been able to maintain a deep assurance, which is lost as soon as one is no longer under the spell of *project.* To the extent that *project* is

realized, I clearly distinguish among various objects, but once acquired, the results no longer interest. And no longer being distracted by anything, I cannot rely on God to attend to the concern for infinite knowing.

Descartes imagined man having a knowledge of God, predating that which he has of himself (of the infinite before that of the finite). Yet, he was himself so occupied that he could not represent to himself divine existence—for him the most immediately knowable—in its state of complete idleness. In the state of idleness, that sort of discursive intelligence which is linked in us to activity (as Claude Bernard said, with a rare exactitude, to the "pleasure of not knowing"—which obliges one to seek)—that discursive intelligence is no longer anything but the useless trowel once the palace is finished. As poorly placed as I am for that, I would like to emphasize that in God, *true knowledge can only have as object God himself.* Now this object, whatever the accessibility which Descartes imagined it to have, remains unintelligible to us.

But despite the fact that divine nature, which knows itself in its intimate depth, escapes man's understanding—it does not follow that it escapes that of God.

What appears to be clear, at the point which I have now reached, is that men introduce into it a confusion by means of which thought slips soundlessly from the discursive level to the non-discursive. God no doubt can know himself but not according to the discursive mode of thought which is ours. The "intellectual nature without limitation" finds here its final limitation. I can beginning with man represent to myself—anthropomorphically—the limitless extension of my power of understanding, but cannot pass from there to the knowledge which God must have of himself (must, for the good reason that he is perfect). It thus appears that God having to know himself is no longer "intellectual nature", in the sense in which we can understand it. Even "without limitation", understanding cannot go beyond at least the (discursive) mode without which it would not be what it is.

One cannot speak of the knowledge which God has of himself if not by negations—suffocating negations—images of tongues cut out. Now one abuses oneself in this way, one passes from one level to the other: suffocation, silence are dependent upon experience and not on discourse.

I don't know if God is or is not, but assuming that he is, if I attribute to him exhaustive knowledge of himself and assuming that I link to this knowledge feelings of satisfaction and approbation which are added

within us to the faculty of apprehending, a new feeling of essential dissatisfaction takes hold of me.

If it is necessary for us at some moment in our misery to postulate God, it is to succumb by a rather vain flight to submit the unknowable to the necessity of being known. This is to give precedence to the idea of perfection (to which misery is attached), over all representable difficulty and, what is more, over all that is, such that, inevitably, each profound thing slips from the impossible state, where experience perceives it, to the compliance drawing its profundity from that which it has as a goal to suppress.

God is in us at first the movement of spirit which consists—after having passed from finite knowledge to infinite knowledge—in passing, as if through an extension of limits, to a different, non-discursive mode of knowledge, in such a way that the illusion arises from a satisfaction—realized beyond us—of the thirst for knowing which exists in us.

III

HEGEL

To know means: to relate to the known, to grasp that an unknown thing is the same as another thing known. Which supposes either a solid ground upon which everything rests (Descartes) or the circularity of knowledge (Hegel). In the first case, if the ground gives way . . . in the second, even if assured of having a well-closed circle, one perceives the unsatisfying nature of knowledge. The unending chain of things known is for knowledge but the completion of oneself. Satisfaction turns on the fact that a project for knowledge, which existed, has come to fruition, is accomplished, that nothing (at least nothing important) remains to be discovered. But this circular thought is dialectical. It brings with it the final contradiction (affecting the entire circle): *circular, absolute knowledge is definitive non-knowledge.* Even supposing that I were to attain it, I know that I would know nothing more than I know now.

If I "mimic" absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself (in the system, there can be no knowledge, even in God, which goes beyond absolute knowledge). The thought of this self—of *ipse*—could only make itself absolute by becoming everything. *The Phenome-*

nology of Spirit comprises two essential movements completing a circle: it is the completion by degrees of the consciousness of self (of human *ipse*) and the becoming everything (the becoming God) of this *ipse* completing knowledge (and by this means destroying the particularity within it, thus completing the negation of oneself, becoming absolute knowledge). But if in this way, as if by contagion and by mime, I accomplish in myself Hegel's circular movement, I define—beyond the limits attained—no longer an unknown, but an unknowable. Unknowable not on account of the insufficiency of reason, but by its nature (and even, for Hegel, one could only have concern for this beyond for lack of possessing absolute knowledge . . .). Supposing then that I were to be God, that I were to have in the world the assurance of Hegel (suppressing shadow and doubt)—knowing everything and even why fulfilled knowledge required that man, the innumerable particularities of *selves,* and history produce themselves—at precisely that moment, the question is formulated which allows human, divine existence to enter . . . the deepest foray into darkness without return; why must there be *what I know?* Why is it a necessity? In this question is hidden—it doesn't appear at first—an extreme rupture, so deep that only the silence of ecstasy answers it.

This question is distinct from that of Heidegger (why is there being and not nothingness?) in that it is only asked after all conceivable answers, aberrant or not, have been made to the successive questions formulated by understanding: thus it strikes at the heart of knowledge.

Evident lack of pride in the stubbornness of wanting to know discursively to the very end. It seems however that Hegel was lacking pride (was a servant) only on the surface*. He had no doubt a tone of one who

*No one more than him understood in depth the possibilities of intelligence (no doctrine is comparable to his—it is the summit of positive intelligence). Kierkegaard made a superficial critique of it in that:

1) he had an imperfect knowledge of it;

2) he only opposes the system to the world of positive revelation, not to that of man's non-knowledge. Nietzsche knew barely more of Hegel than a standard popularization. *The Geneology of Morals* is the singular proof of the ignorance in which the dialectic of the master and the slave has been held and remains to be held, of which the clarity is dazzling (it is the decisive moment in the history of the consciousness of self and, it must be said, to the extent that we have to distinguish between each thing that affects us, no one knows anything of *himself* if he has not understood this movement which determines and limits man's successive possibilities.) The passage on the master and the slave in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (IV, A), is translated and commented upon by A. Kojève in the January 15 edition (1939) of *Mesures* under the title *Autonomy and Dependence of the*

irritatingly gives out empty promises, but in a portrait of him as an old man, I imagine seeing exhaustion, the horror of being in the depths of things—of being God. Hegel, at the moment when the system closed, believed himself for two years to be going mad: perhaps he was afraid of accepting evil—which the system justifies and renders necessary; or perhaps linking the certainty of having attained absolute knowledge with the completion of history—with the passing of existence to the state of empty monotony—he saw himself, in a profound sense, becoming dead; perhaps even his various bouts of sadness took shape in the more profound horror of being God. It seems to me however, that Hegel, shrinking back from the way of ecstasy (from the only direct resolution of anguish) *had* to take refuge in a sometimes effective (when he wrote or spoke), but essentially vain attempt at equilibrium and harmony with the existing, active, official world.

My existence, of course, like any other, moves from the unknown to the known (relates the unknown to the known). No difficulty; I believe I am able, as much as anyone I know, to surrender to operations of knowledge. This is, for me, necessary—as much as for others. My existence is composed of steps forward, of movements which it directs to points which are suitable. Knowledge is in me—I mean this for every affirmation of this book; it is linked to these steps forward, to these movements (the latter are themselves linked to my fears, to my desires, to my joys). Knowledge is in no way distinct from me: *I am it,* it is the existence which I am. But this existence is not reducible to it; this reduction would require that the known be the aim of existence and not existence the aim of the known.

There is in understanding a blind spot: which is reminiscent of the structure of the eye. In understanding, as in the eye, one can only reveal it with difficulty. But whereas the blind spot of the eye is inconsequential, the nature of understanding demands that the blind spot within it be more meaningful than understanding itself. To the extent that understanding is auxiliary to action, the spot within it is as negligible as it is within the eye. But to the extent that one views in understanding man himself, by that I mean an exploration of what is possible in being, the spot absorbs one's attention: it is no longer the spot which loses itself in

Consciousness of Self. Reproduced in: Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel,* Gallimard, 1947, pp. 11–34).

knowledge, but knowledge which loses itself in it. In this way existence closes the circle, but it couldn't do this without including the night from which it proceeds only in order to enter it again. Since it moved from the unknown to the known, it is necessary that it inverse itself at the summit and go back to the unknown.

Action introduces the known (the manufactured); then understanding, which is linked to it, relates the non-manufactured, unknown elements, one after the other, to the known. But desire, poetry, laughter, unceasingly cause life to slip in the opposite direction, moving from the known to the unknown. Existence in the end discloses the blind spot of understanding and right away becomes completely absorbed in it. It could not be otherwise unless a possibility for rest were to present itself at a certain point. But nothing of the kind takes place: what alone remains is circular agitation—which does not exhaust itself in ecstasy and begins again from it.

Ultimate possibility. That non-knowledge still be knowledge. I would explore night! But no, it is night which explores me . . . Death quenches my thirst for non-knowledge. But absence is not rest. Absence and death are without reply within me and, without fail, absorb me cruelly.

Even within the closed completed circle (unceasing) non-knowledge is the end and knowledge the means. To the extent that it takes itself to be an end, it sinks into the blind spot. But poetry, laughter, ecstasy are not the means for other things. In the "system", poetry, laughter, ecstasy are nothing. Hegel gets rid of them in a hurry: he knows of no other end than knowledge. His immense fatigue is linked in my eyes to horror of the blind spot.

The completion of the circle was for Hegel the completion of man. Completed man was for him necessarily "work". Hegel, himself, could be it, being "knowledge". For knowledge "works", which does neither poetry, laughter, nor ecstasy. But poetry, laughter, ecstasy are not completed man—do not provide any "satisfaction". Short of dying of them, one leaves them like a thief (or as one leaves a girl after love), dazed, thrown back stupidly into the absence of death: into distinct consciousness, activity, work.

IV

ECSTASY

TALE OF A PARTLY-FAILED EXPERIENCE

At the moment when daylight fades, when silence invades an increasingly pure sky, I found myself alone, seated on a narrow white veranda, not seeing anything of where I was but the roof of a house, the foliage of a tree and the sky. Before getting up in order to go to bed, I felt the extent to which the sweetness of things had penetrated me. I had just had the desire for a violent alteration of spirit and, in this sense, I saw that the felicitous state into which I had fallen did not differ entirely from "mystical" states. At the very least, as I had passed suddenly from inattention to surprise, I felt this state with more intensity than one normally does and as if another and not I had experienced it. I could not deny that, with the exception of attention, which was lacking only at first, this banal felicity was an authentic inner experience, obviously distinct from project, from discourse. Without giving these words more than an evocative value, I thought that the "sweetness of the sky" communicated itself to me and I could feel precisely the state within me which responded to it. I felt it to be present inside my head like a vaporous streaming, subtly graspable, but participating in the sweetness of the outside, putting me in possession of it, making me take pleasure in it.

I remembered vividly having known a similar sort of felicity in a car while it rained and while hedges and trees, barely covered with tenuous foliage, emerged from the spring mist and came slowly towards me. I entered into possession of each damp tree and only left it sadly for another. At that moment, I thought that this dreamy pleasure would not cease belonging to me, that I would live from that moment on, endowed with the power to enjoy things in a melancholy way and breathe in their delights. I must admit today that these states of communication were only rarely accessible to me.

I was far from knowing what I see clearly today, that anguish is linked to them. I couldn't understand at the time that a trip which I had been greatly looking forward to had only brought me uneasiness, that everything had been hostile for me, beings and things, but above all men,

whose empty lives in remote villages I was obliged to see—empty to the point of diminishing him who perceives them—at the same time that I saw a self-assured and malevolent reality. It is from having escaped for a moment, by means of a precarious solitude, from so much poverty, that I perceived the tenderness of the damp trees, the heartrending strangeness of their passing: I remember that, in the back of the car, I had abandoned myself, I was absent, sweetly elated; I was gentle, I gently absorbed things.

I remember having made a comparison of my enjoyment and those which the first volumes of *Remembrance of Things Past* describe. But at that time, I had only an incomplete, superficial idea of Marcel Proust (*The Past Recaptured* had not yet appeared)[1] and young, I dreamed only of naive possibilities of triumph.

Upon leaving the veranda to go to my room, I began to contest within myself the unique value which I had attributed earlier to ecstasy before the empty unknown. The state into which I had just entered without thinking of it—was I to have contempt for it? But why? What gave me the right to classify, to place such an ecstasy above slightly different possibilities, less strange but more human and, it seemed to me, as profound?

But whereas ecstasy before the void is always fleeting, furtive and has only little concern to "persevere in being", the felicity in which I was immersed wished only to last. I should have, by this fact, been alerted: on the contrary, I took pleasure in it and, in the peacefulness of my room, I practiced running through the possible depth of it. The streaming of which I have spoken right away became more intense: I dissolved into a more solemn felicity in which I captured a diffuse sweetness by enveloping it. It suffices to arouse in oneself an intense state in order to be liberated from the agitating obtrusiveness of discourse: attention passes then from "projects" to the being which one is, which, little by little, is put into motion, emerges from the shadows; it passes from effects on the outside, possible or real (from projected, or reflected, or realized action) to this inner presence which we cannot apprehend without a startled jump of our entire being, detesting the servility of discourse.

This plenitude of inner movement, distinguishing itself from the attention normally paid to objects of discourse, is necessary to the arresting of the latter. This is why the mastery of this movement, which the Hindus strive to obtain in *yoga*, increases the little chance which we have of getting out of prison. But this plenitude is itself only a chance. It is true that in it, I lose myself, I gain access to the "unknown" in being, but

my attention being necessary to plenitude, this self attentive to the presence of this "unknown" only loses itself in part—it can also be distinguished from it: its durable presence still requires a contestation of the known appearances of the subject which have remained, and of the object, which it still is. For *I* remain: everything escapes if I have not been able to lose myself in Nothingness; what I have glimpsed is brought back to the level of objects known to me.

If I only gain access to the simple intensity of inner movement, it goes without saying that discourse is only rejected for a time, that it remains at bottom the master. I can drop off into a quickly accessible felicity. At the very most: I am not abandoned in the same way to the arbitrary power of action; the rhythm of projects which is discourse slows down; the value of action remains contested within me to the benefit of a different "possible" whose direction I see. But the mind attentive to inner movement only gains access to the unknowable depth of things: by turning to an entire forgetting of self—not satisfying itself with anything, going always further to the impossible. I knew this, however I lingered that day over the movement which a chance felicity had awakened within me: it was a prolonged pleasure, a pleasant possession of a slightly insipid sweetness. I by no means forgot myself in this way, I tried to capture the fixed upon object, to envelope its sweetness in my own sweetness. At the end of a very short period of time, I refused the reduction of experience to the poverty which I am. Even my "poverty", in its own interest, demanded that I emerge from it. Revolt often has humble beginnings, but once begun doesn't stop: I first wanted to return from a contemplation which brought the object back to me (as usually happens when we enjoy scenery) to the vision of this object in which I lose myself at other times, which I call the unknown and which is distinct from Nothingness by nothing which discourse can enunciate.

FIRST DIGRESSION ON ECSTASY BEFORE AN OBJECT: THE POINT

If I describe the "experience" which I had on that day, it is because it had a partly-failed character: the bitterness, the humiliating bewilderment that I found in it, the breathless efforts to which I was reduced "in order to emerge" illuminate better the region in which experience takes place than less breathless movements, reaching their goal without error.

However, I will put off to a later point this tale (which, for other reasons, exhausts me, as much as the failed experience exhausted me). I would like, if possible, to leave nothing in the shadows.

If dozing beatitude is linked, as one might expect, to the faculty which the mind assumes in order to provoke its inner movements, it is time for us to emerge from it—even if this means making ourselves the prey of disorder. Experience would only be an enticement, if it weren't revolt: in the first place against the attachment of the mind to action (to project, to discourse—against the verbal servitude of reasonable being, of the servant); in the second place against the reassurances, the submissiveness which experience itself introduces.

The "I" embodies currish docility—not to the extent that it is absurd, unknowable *ipse,* but an equivocation between the particularity of this *ipse* and the universality of reason. The "I" is in fact the expression of the universal. It loses the wildness of *ipse* in order to give a domesticated appearance to the universal; owing to this ambiguous and submissive position, we represent to ourselves the universal itself in the likeness of the one who expresses it, like a domesticated being, in opposition to wildness. The "I" is neither the irrationality of *ipse,* neither that of the whole, and that shows the foolishness which the absence of wildness (common intelligence) is.

In Christian experience, rebellious anger opposed to the "I" is still ambiguous. But the terms of equivocation are not the same solely from the point of view of reason. It is often the wild *ipse* (the proud master) who is humiliated; but sometimes it is the servile "I". And in the humiliation of the servile "I", the universal (God) is restored to pride. Hence the difference between a mystic (negative) theology and the positive one (but in the end the mystic is subordinated, the Christian attitude is servile; in common piety, God himself is a completed servant).

Ipse and the whole together slip away from the clutches of discursive intelligence (which enslaves); the middle terms alone are assimilable. But in its irrationality, proud *ipse,* without having to humiliate itself, can, casting the middle terms into darkness, in a single and abrupt renunciation of itself (as *ipse*), attain the irrationality of the whole (in this case knowledge is still mediation—between me and the world—but negative: it is the rejection of knowledge, night, the annihilation of all middle terms, which constitute this negative mediation). But the whole, in this case, is only called the whole temporarily; *ipse,* losing itself in it, moves toward it as towards an opposite (a contrary thing) but it in no less way moves from the unknown to the unknown, and, no doubt, there is still knowledge, strictly speaking, as long as *ipse* can be distinguished from the whole, but in *ipse's* renunciation of itself, there is fusion: in fusion

neither *ipse* nor the whole subsist. It is the annihilation of everything which is not the ultimate "unknown", the abyss into which one has sunk.

Understood in this way, the full communication which is experience leading to the extreme limit is accessible to the extent that existence successively strips itself of its middle terms: of that which originates in discourse, then—if the mind enters into a non-discursive inwardness—of all that returns to discourse given that one can have distinct awareness of it—in other words, that an ambiguous "I" can make of it a "servile possession".

In these conditions this still appears: the dialogue from person to person, from soul to God, is a voluntary and temporary mystification (of oneself). Existence ordinarily communicates itself; it leaves its ipseity to meet fellow beings. There is communication, from one being to another (erotic communication) or from one to several others (sacred or comic communication). But *ipse* encountering in a final step, instead of a fellow being, its opposite, tries nevertheless to find again the terms of situations in which it was accustomed to communicating, of losing itself. Its frailty demands that it be available for a fellow being and that it not be able to make from the first step the leap into the impossible (for *ipse* and the whole are opposites, while the "I" and God are like beings).

For one who is a stranger to experience, that which precedes is obscure—but it is not destined for him (I write for one, who, entering into my book, would fall into it as into a hole, who would never again get out). One can choose between two things: either the "I" speaks in me (and most will read what I write as if "I", vulgarly, had written it) or *ipse*. *Ipse* having to communicate—with others who resemble it—has recourse to degrading sentences. It would sink into the insignificance of the "I" (the ambiguous), if it didn't try to communicate. In this way, poetic existence in me addresses itself to poetic existence in others, and it is a paradox, no doubt, if I expect of fellow creatures drunk with poetry that which I wouldn't expect knowing them to be lucid. Now I cannot myself be *ipse* without having cast this cry to them. Only by this cry do I have the power to annihilate in me the "I" as they will annihilate it in them if they hear me.

When the mind rejects the blissful monotony of inner movements, it can itself be thrown back into imbalance. From that moment on, it has meaning only in irrational audacity, can only seize upon fleeting, ridiculous visions, or yet: awaken them.

A comic necessity demands that one dramatize. Experience would remain inaccessible if we didn't know how to dramatize—by forcing ourselves to do so. (What is strange is that bringing to thought, as to experience, a discipline which I hadn't been able to have beforehand, I express myself with an unequalled disorder. And disorder alone is possible, whereas it is at the price of an effort equal to my disorder that one will grasp discipline—this character: "one cannot escape, man must put up with it". And yet, I only find, in my disciplined construction—and adapting itself to it—a disordered expression; not intended so, but so.)

From one hour to the next, I become sick at the idea that I am writing, that I must pursue. Never do I have security, certainty. Continuity horrifies me. I persevere in disorder, loyal to the passions of which I really know nothing, which upset me in every sense.

Within the felicity of inner movements, the subject alone is modified: this felicity, in this sense, has no object. The movements flow out into an external existence: there they lose themselves, they "communicate", it would appear, with the outside, without the latter taking a determined shape and being perceived as such.

Will I reach the end for once? I become exhausted: at moments, everything slips away. An effort to which are opposed so many contrary efforts, as if I hated in it a desire to cry out—such that the cry, which nevertheless I would emit, was lost in dread. But nothing delirious, nothing forced. I have little chance of making myself understood. The disorder in which I find myself is the measure of man, forever thirsting for moral ruin.

I come back to ecstasy before the object.

The mind awakening to inner life is, however, in search of an object. It rejects the object which action proposes for an object of a different nature, but cannot do without an object: its existence cannot close in on itself. (Inner movements are by no means the object; neither are they the subject in that they are the subject which loses itself, but the subject can in the end bring them back to itself and as such they are ambiguous: in the end the necessity of an object, that is to say, the necessity to leave oneself, becomes urgent.)

I will say this, be it obscure: the object in experience is at first the projection of a dramatic loss of self. It is the image of the subject. The subject tries at first to move towards its fellow being. But once it has

entered into inner experience, it is in search of an object like itself—reduced to interiority. In addition, the subject, the experience of which is in itself and from the beginning dramatic (is the loss of self), needs to objectify this dramatic character. The situation of the object which the mind seeks needs to be objectively dramatized. Starting from the felicity of movements, it is possible to fix a vertiginous point ostensibly containing inwardly that which the world harbors as being heartrending, the continuous slipping of everything into Nothingness. If you wish, time.

But it is only a question there of a fellow being. The point, before me, reduced to the most paltry simplicity, is a person. At each instant of experience, this point can radiate arms, cry out, set itself ablaze.

The objective projection of oneself—which takes in this way the form of a point—cannot however be so perfect that the character of "fellow being"—which belongs to it—is able to be maintained without lying. The point is not the whole, nor is it *ipse* (when Christ is the point, in him man is already no longer *ipse*; he can still be distinguished, however, from the whole: it is an "I", but fleeing at the same time in the two directions).

This remains of the point, even effaced, that it has given the optical form to experience. As soon as it admits the existence of the point, *the mind is an eye* (it becomes it in experience as it had become it in action).

In the felicity of inner movements, existence is in equilibrium. The equilibrium is lost in the breathless search, long vain, for the object. The object is the arbitrary projection of oneself. But the self necessarily sets before it this point, its profound fellow being, given that it can only leave itself in love. It is once it has left itself that it can gain access to non-love.

It is nevertheless without artifice that existence, in imbalance and anguish, gains access to the "point" which delivers it. In advance, this point is before me like a "possible" and experience can't do without it. In the projection of the point, the inner movements have the role of the magnifying glass concentrating light into a very small incendiary site. It is only in such a concentration—beyond itself—that existence has the leisure of perceiving, in the form of an inner flash of light, "that which it is": the movement of painful communication which it is, which goes no less from within to without, than from without to within. And no doubt it is a question of an arbitrary projection of oneself, but what appears in this way is the profound objectivity of existence, from the moment that the latter is no longer a little entity turned in on itself, but a wave of life losing itself.

The vaporous flow of inner movements is in this case the magnifying glass as well as the light. But in the flow, there was nothing yet crying out, whereas starting from the projected "point", existence gives way in a cry. If I had more on this subject than uncertain knowledge, I would be led to believe that the experience of Buddhists does not cross the threshhold, does not know of the cry, limits itself to the outpouring of movements.

One only attains the point by dramatizing. To dramatize is what the devout persons who follow the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatious do (but not them alone.) If one were to imagine the place, the characters of the drama and the drama itself, the torture to which Christ is led: Saint Ignatious' disciple creates for himself a theatrical representation. He is in a peaceful room: one asks him to have the feelings he would have on Calvary. Of these feelings, one tells him that he *should* have them, despite the calming nature of his room. One desires that he leave himself, intentionally dramatizing this human life, of which one knows in advance that it has every likelihood of being a half-anxious, half-dozing futile exercise. But as he does not yet have a properly inner life, before having broken discourse within him, one asks him to project the point of which I have spoken, similar to him—but even more so to that which he wants to be—in the person of Jesus Christ in the throes of death. The projection of the point, in Christianity, is attempted before the mind has at its disposal its inner movements, before it has become free of discourse. It is only the rough projection, from which one attempts to attain non-discursive experience.

In any case, we can only project the object-point by drama. I had recourse to upsetting images. In particular, I would gaze at the photographic image—or sometimes the memory which I have of it—of a Chinese man who must have been tortured in my lifetime*. Of this torture, I had had in the past a series of successive representations. In the end, the patient writhed, his chest flayed, arms and legs cut off at the elbows and at the knees. His hair standing on end, hideous, hagard, striped with blood, beautiful as a wasp.

I write "beautiful"! . . . something escapes me, flees from me, fear

*Dumas, who in the *Traité de Psychologie* has reproduced 2 of the shots (out of 5 which were taken portraying the torture from the beginning, and which I had for a long time at home), attributes the torture to a relatively distant time. They date in fact from the time of the Boxer rebellion.

robs me of myself and, as if I had wanted to stare at the sun, my eyes rebel.

I had at the same time recourse to a type of dramatization stripped to the bare essentials. I did not set out like the Christian from a single discourse, but also from a state of diffuse communication, from a felicity of inner movements. These movements which I grasped in their stream—or river-like flowing, I could set out from them in order to condense them in a point where the increased intensity resulted in the simple escape of water changing into a precipitation evocative of a waterfall, of a flash of light or of lightning. This precipitation could take place precisely when I projected before me the river of existence flowing out of me. The fact that existence, in this way, condensed itself into a flash, dramatized itself, was due to the distaste which the lânguor of this outflowing—which I could enjoy at my convenience—soon inspired in me.

In languor, felicity—communication is diffuse: nothing is communicated from one term to the other, but from oneself to an empty indefinite expanse, where everything is drowned. In these conditions, existence naturally thirsts for more troubling communication. Whether it be a question of hearts held breathless or of impudent lasciviousness, whether it be a question of divine love, everywhere around us I have found desire extended toward a fellow being: eroticism around us is so violent, it intoxicates hearts with so much force—to conclude, its abyss is so deep within us—that there is no celestial opening which does not take its form and its fever from it. Who among us does not dream of breaking open the gates of the mystical realm—who does not imagine himself to be "dying to die", to be pining away, to ruin himself in order to love? If it is possible for others, for Orientals whose imagination does not burn at the names of Theresa, Heloise, Isolde, to abandon themselves to empty infinity with no other desire, we cannot conceive of ultimate collapse in a way other than in love. At this price alone, it seems to me, I gain access to the extreme limit of what is possible and if not, something still is missing from the path in which I can't help but burn everything—right up to the exhaustion of human strength.

The young and seductive Chinese man of whom I have spoken, left to the work of the executioner—I loved him with a love in which the sadistic instinct played no part: he communicated his pain to me or perhaps the excessive nature of his pain, and it was precisely that which I was seeking, not so as to take pleasure in it, but in order to ruin in me that which is opposed to ruin.

Before excessive cruelty, either that of men, or that of fate, it is natural to rebel, to cry out (our hearts fail us): "That can no longer be!" and to weep, to lay the blame on some whipping-post. It is easier to tell oneself: that which weeps and damns within me is my desire to sleep in peace, my fury at being disturbed. Excessive acts are signs, suddenly given support, of what the world sovereignly is. It is to this type of sign that the author of the *Exercises* had recourse, wanting to "disturb" his disciples. That didn't prevent him, and his own, from damning the world: I can not help but love him, right to the dregs and without hope.

I now cite, from memory, an incident which appeared in the *Journal* fifteen years ago (I cite it from memory, but I add nothing): in a small city or perhaps a village of France, a poor worker returns at the end of a week bringing home his pay in bills. A boy a few years of age sees the bills, plays with them and throws them in the fire. Noticing this too late, the father sees red, takes hold of an axe and in a fit of rage cuts off the boy's two hands. The mother was bathing her little girl in the next room. She enters, drawn by the cries, and falls dead. The little girl drowned in the bath. Having suddenly gone mad, the father runs away, and wandered about in the country.*

Although it may not be quite apparent, I meant nothing less in the following sentences, written three years ago:[2]

"I fix a point before me and I represent this point to myself as the geometric place of all possible existence and of all unity, of all separation and of all anguish, of all unsatisfied desire and of all death.

"I adhere to this point and a deep love of what is in this point burns me to the point that I refuse to be alive for anything other than what is there—for that point which, being together life and death of a loved being, has the flash of a cataract.

"And at the same time it is necessary to strip what is there of its external representations until there is nothing more than pure interiority,

*I must compare to this passage, published in the 1st edition (1943), the following incident which appeared in *Ce soir* on September 30, 1947: "Prague September 29.—A shocking drama has just taken place at the residence of the butcher of Chomutov. The shopkeeper was counting his day's cash intake . . . when he had to leave for a moment. His son, five years of age, in order to amuse himself, set fire to the bank notes. The butcher's wife, busy bathing her other son, aged 1 year, could not intervene, but his cries alerted the father, who . . . grabbed his chopping knife and cut the child's wrists. At the sight of this, the mother collapsed, killed by an embolism, and the baby which she was in the midst of washing, drowned in the bathtub. The butcher took to his heels." Apparently, a simple repetition of a perfect theme, without interest from my point of view. I however had to mention the incident.

a pure inner fall into a void: this point endlessly absorbing this fall into what is Nothingness within it, that is to say "past" and, in this same movement, endlessly prostituting its fleeting but flashing appearance to love."

I wrote at the same time by means of a strangely alleviated anguish:

"If I picture to myself the enraptured face of a dying individual in a vision and in a halo which transfigures it, that which radiates from this face, illuminates with its necessity the cloud of the heavens, whose grey glimmer thus becomes more penetrating than that of the sun itself. In this representation, death appears to be of the same nature as the light which illuminates, to the extent that the latter disappears from its place of origin: it appears that no less a loss than death is required for the flash of light to traverse and transfigure lackluster existence, since it is only its free uprooting which *becomes in me* the power of life and of time. Thus I cease to be anything more than a mirror of death, in the same way that the universe is the mirror of light."

These passages of *L'Amitié* describe ecstasy before the "point".

"I had to stop writing. I went to sit down, as I often do, before the open window: hardly was I seated when I felt myself drawn into a sort of ecstatic movement. This time, I could no longer doubt, as I had painfully done the day before, that such a flash was more desirable than erotic pleasure. I don't see anything: *that* is neither visible nor tangible in any imaginable way; nor intelligible. *That* renders painful and heavy the idea of not dying. If I picture everything that I have loved with anguish, it would be necessary to imagine the fleeting realities to which my love was attached as so many clouds behind which was hidden *what is there.* Images of ecstasy betray. *What is there* measures up to terror, terror summons it. Such a violent eruption was necessary for *that to be there.*"

". . . this time, all of a sudden, remembering *what is there,* I had to weep. I got up, my head emptied—from loving, from being in *ecstasy* . . ."

SECOND DIGRESSION ON ECSTASY IN THE VOID[3]

Impatience, contestation, transform the flashes of illumination, soft or fulgurating, into a more and more bitter night.

At the end of the first of these transcribed texts, I added:

"Love in vain wants to grasp what will cease to be.

"The impossibility of satisfaction in love is a *guide* to the *accomplishing leap* at the same time that in advance, it is the entombment of every possible illusion."

What I call contestation does not simply have the character of an intellectual proceeding (of which I speak with respect to Hegel, to Descartes—or in the principles of the introduction). Often this character is even wanting (in the writings of Angèle de Foligno, as far as it would appear). "Contestation" is still a movement essential to love—that nothing can satisfy. What is presumptuous in the little sentence, often cited, of Saint Augustine, is not the first affirmation: "Our heart is uneasy" but the second: "until the moment when it rests in Thee". For there is deep down in a man's heart so much uneasiness that it is not in the power of any God—nor of any woman—to allay it. What allays it on each occasion is for only a period of time a certain woman or God: the uneasiness would quickly return if it weren't for fatigue. God no doubt, in the immense elusiveness of vague domains, can for a long time postpone to a later point the new allaying of an uneasiness which has begun again. But the allaying will die sooner than the uneasiness.

I said (in the second part): "Non-knowledge communicates ecstasy." A gratuitous and deceptive affirmation. It is founded in experience—if one lives it . . . If not, it is suspended.

It is easy to say that one cannot speak of ecstasy. There is in it an element which one cannot reduce, which remains "beyond expression", but ecstasy, in this respect, does not differ from other forms: I can have, can communicate the precise knowledge of it as much—or more than—that of laughter, of physical love—*or of things*; the difficulty, however, is that being less commonly experienced than laughter or things, what I say of it cannot be familiar, easily recognizable.

Non-knowledge communicates ecstasy—but only if the possibility (the movement) of ecstasy already belonged, to some degree, to one who disrobes himself of knowledge. (The restriction is all the more admissible in that I have from the start wanted the extreme limit of what is possible, in that there is no human "possible" to which I haven't been bound, in these conditions, to have recourse.) The movement prior to the ecstasy of non-knowledge is the ecstasy before an object (whether the latter be the pure point—as the renouncing of dogmatic beliefs would have it—or some upsetting image). If this ecstasy before the object is at first given (as

a "possible") and if I suppress afterwards the object—as "contestation" inevitably does—if for this reason I enter into anguish—into horror, into the night of non-knowledge—ecstasy is near and, when it sets in, sends me further into ruin than anything imaginable. If I had not known of ecstasy before the object, I would not have reached ecstasy in night. But *initiated* as I was in the object—and my initiation had represented the furthest penetration of what is possible—I could, in night, only find a deeper ecstasy. From that moment night, non-knowledge, will each time be the path of ecstasy into which I will lose myself.

I said earlier of the position of the point that starting from it, the mind is an eye. Experience from that moment onward has an optical perspective in that one distinguishes within it a perceived object from a perceiving subject, just as a spectacle is different from a mirror. The apparatus of vision (the physical apparatus) occupies moreover in this case the greatest place. It is a spectator, it is eyes which seek out the point, or at least, in this operation visual existence is condensed in the eyes. This character does not cease if night falls. What is thereby found in deep obscurity is a keen desire to see when, in the face of this desire, everything slips away.

But the desire for existence thus dissipated into night turns to an object of ecstasy. The desired spectacle, the object, in the expectation of which passion goes beyond itself, is the reason why "I could die for not dying". This object grows dim and night is there: anguish binds me, it sears me, but this night which is substituted for the object and now alone responds to my anticipation? Suddenly I know, I discover it in a cry: it is not an object, it is IT I was waiting for. It was necessary that the contemplated object make of me this mirror of redirected light, that I had become, for night to offer itself at last to my thirst. If I hadn't gone to IT as eyes go to the object of their love, if the anticipation of a passion hadn't searched for it, IT would only be absence of light. Whereas my exorbitant gaze finds IT, ruins itself in it and not only does the object loved to the point of weeping leave no regrets, but I come within a shade of forgetting—of not recognizing and of demeaning—this object without which, however, my gaze wouldn't have "become exorbitant", discovered night.

Contemplating night, I see nothing, love nothing. I remain immobile, frozen, absorbed in IT. I can imagine a landscape of terror, sublime, the earth open as a volcano, the sky filled with fire, or any other vision capable of "putting the mind into ecstasy"; as beautiful and disturbing as it may be, night surpasses this limited 'possible' and yet IT is nothing,

there is nothing in IT which can be felt, not even finally darkness. In IT, everything fades away, but, exorbitant, I traverse an empty depth and the empty depth traverses me. In IT, I communicate with the "unknown" opposed to the *ipse* which I am; I become *ipse,* unknown to myself, two terms merge in a single wrenching, barely differing from a void—not able to be distinguished from it by anything that I can grasp—nevertheless differing from it more than does the world of a thousand colors.

RESUMPTION AND END OF THE TALE

What I desired:
. . . it is Venus entirely riveted to her prey . . .
but further on:
. . . already the venom having reached my heart
Casts into this dying heart an unknown chill . . .
. . . . . .
And death, stealing light from my eyes . . .

"I wanted," I said, "to return at first from a contemplation which brought the object back to myself (as is normally the case when we take pleasure in a landscape) to the vision of that object in which I lose myself at other times, which I call the "unknown" and which is not distinct from Nothingness by anything which discourse is capable of articulating". In this sentence at which the interrupted tale stops, I gave to night the name of object, but it matters little. In the meantime, I have shown the way which leads generally from the common state, in which we are aware of the world, to the "unknown". But on the day of the half-failed experience which I relate, in my effort to find access once again to this emptiness, I exhausted myself in vain. At the end of a long period of time, nothing happened but this: I perceived the possession of a streaming of existence within me and before me, as if it took place confined by two intersecting branches (like the tentacles of my avarice). In the end, as if the branches intersected even more, the flow which I directed escaped beyond it, in the prolonging of the St. Andrew's cross which was formed. At this moment, this flow became engulfed in a brisk and free current, this current fled before me, suddenly freed from an avaricious hold and I remained raised up, in suspense, breathless. This escape was empty of intellectual content and I only imagine today that it answered to the

position of the "point", but the slipping of myself towards the "point", the precipitated confusion were more animated there; and more than before the "point", I remained held in suspense by its ungraspable nature. I open here this parenthesis in order to complete if I can what I had said previously: as long as this slipping away wasn't graspable, it was captivating; it was so to the ultimate degree of tension. So much so that I see in it now what always is in the "point", at least what always begins in it: a furtive, bewildered flight towards night, but at this moment which hardly lasted, the movement of flight was so rapid that the possession of the "point" which usually limits it, was from the start surpassed, so that, without transition, I had gone from a jealous embrace to utter dispossession. And this word "dispossession" is so true that in little time I found myself emptied, trying to grasp once again in vain the ungraspable which had definitely just escaped; I felt then idiotic.

I found myself in a state comparable to that of a man enraged with a woman whom he loves and who, suddenly, sees a chance incident deprive him of any outlet: be it the arrival of a visitor. The visitor brings lethargy directly with him—just as difficult to dismiss, but all the less acceptable at that moment, given that the desire for the ungraspable was at stake. I could have stopped at that point, been discouraged, but even this solution failed: like him who was enraged, I was excited and could not relax. Telling myself and rightly so, that it was useless to search for that which had just escaped from me, I abandoned the question to the intense flowing of inner movements which I had aroused so lightly. And tired, as one falls asleep, I resigned myself to submit to the law which I believed to be that of those movements: I thought that a voluptuous possession alone measured up to their resources.

This streaming is within us of a disarming plasticity. To imagine suffices, and the dreamed-of form vaguely takes shape. It is thus that years ago, when this streaming remained diffuse within me, without object, I felt myself, in the darkness of my room, become a tree and even a tree struck by lightning:[4] my arms lifted little by little and their movement became knotted like that of strong branches broken almost at the level of the trunk. Moreover these follies derive their possibility from the indifference one has for them. If I had had this plan: to become a tree, it would have failed. I had become a tree as one dreams, with no other consequence—but I was awake, I took pleasure in no longer being myself, in being different, in slipping away. If I have this inner streaming at my disposal today, it cannot change me, but become an object distinct from me. When tired, I told myself that only a voluptuous possession

was open to me, I obscurely evoked a presence which the sweetness, the nudity, the night of breasts would have formed: at once this sweetness, this nudity, this warm night became mingled, made of the milky flow emanating from me. For a long time my tenderness drank deep of this pure incarnation of sin. Then it grew tired. The image which followed that of femininity was "divine"; it was comprised of an internally violent majesty leaving me the memory of a somber sky where rages the empty plenitude of wind. This new image remained graspable: I embraced this vast emptiness and its sound. I only experienced its presence while seized with fear, but it belonged to me entirely, being my possession. And being able to enjoy it only tenderly, in the end, I rebelled.

The drama went on. I couldn't extricate myself from it, so great was my uneasiness. I thirsted for something else and suffered from my obstinacy. It so happened that physical fatigue stopped me and, as I had been sick for several weeks and, having the use of only one lung, on doctor's orders, I had to stretch out from time to time—forcing myself to forget, or at the very least, to regain my breath.

Despair, impatience, horror at myself, in time delivered me—even while I was trying sometimes to find once again the bewildering path of ecstasy, sometimes to be done with it, to go resolutely to bed, to sleep. Suddenly, I stood up and I was completely taken. As I had earlier become a tree, but the tree was still myself—and what I became differed no less than one of the "objects" which I had just possessed—so I became a flame. But I say "flame" only by comparison. When I had become the tree, I had in mind, clearly and distinctly, an idea of a woody plant. Whereas the new chance experience answered to nothing which one could have evoked in advance. The upper part of my body—above the solar plexus—had disappeared, or at least no longer gave rise to sensations which could be isolated. Only my legs—which kept me standing upright, connected what I had become to the floor—kept a link to what I had been: the rest was an inflamed gushing forth, *overpowering,* even free of its own convulsion. A character of dance and of decomposing agility (as if made of the thousand idle futilities and of life's thousand moments of uncontrollable laughter) situated this flame "outside of me". And as everything mingles in a dance, so there was nothing which didn't go there to become consumed. I was thrown into this hearth, nothing remained of me but this hearth. In its entirety, the hearth itself was a streaming outside of me.

The next day, I wrote of this flame: "It is not aware of itself, it is absorbed in its own unknown; in this unknown, it loses itself, annihi-

lates itself. Without this thirst for non-knowledge, it would cease right away. The flame is God, but ruined in the negation of itself".

It is possible that the first sentences account more for the flame, for the silent absorption, for the slipping elsewhere. What I was able to say later remains exact, but hampered by exactitude. And if now, the tale finished, I come back to myself, I feel sad as happens when, burning, we discover in ourselves that which is not yet consumed and will not be able to be consumed, not being commensurate to the fire. And yet I have little concern for myself, for the impossible spider, not yet crushed, that I am, so poorly dissimulated in its network of webs. In spite of it the spider, lurking in the background, is horror having become a being, to this extent that being night, it nevertheless radiates like a sun . . .

To the feeling of an indelible shame, is added that of having little strength. I can imagine myself making right the obscurity of my book by means of a conversation. I can even say to myself that this remedy is the only one, that if truths condescend to the complexity of human lives, nothing can insure that they will be given clearly at a single time, though clarity be great in one who persists in saying them. But I must remember that a dialogue is wretched, even better able than a book to reduce its objects to the poverty of discourse. How would I not feel exhausted, knowing of this desired clarity that while waiting I call it the darkness for which I thirst, for which man however thirsts desperately—although his eyes flee from it—as they flee the brightness of the sun?

V

FORTUNE

"O wretchedness of all givers! O eclipse of my sun! O craving for desire! O ravenous hunger in satiety!"

(Zarathustra, *The Night Song.*)

What one doesn't usually see while speaking: that discourse, even negating its own value, doesn't assume only him who engages in it, but him who listens to it . . . I find in myself nothing, which is not even more than myself, at the disposal of my fellow being. And this movement

of my thought which flees from me—not only can I not avoid it, but there is no moment so secret that it doesn't animate me. Thus I speak—everything in me gives itself to others.

But knowing that, no longer forgetting it, undergoing the necessity of giving myself decomposes me. I can know that I am a point, a wave lost in other waves, laugh at myself, at the comedy of "originality" that I remain; I at the same time can only say to myself: I am alone, bitter . . .

And to conclude: solitude of light, of desert . . .

Mirage of penetrable existences wherein nothing troubling would arise without going to the undertow of a flash, just as spilled blood, death, wouldn't slip with poison, with froth, except at the end of a slower ecstasy.

But instead of embracing this unleashing of oneself, a being stops in himself the torrent which gives him over to life, and devotes himself, in the hope of avoiding ruin, in the fear of overpowering glories, to the possession of things. And things possess him when he believes to be possessing them.

O desert of "things" which speak! Hideousness of existence: the fear of being changes a man into a pubkeeper.

Servitude, inextricable downfall: the slave frees himself from the master through work (the essential movement of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*), but the product of his work becomes his master.

What dies is the possibility for celebration, for free communication among beings, the Golden Age (the possibility for a same intoxication, for a same vertigo, for a same sensual pleasure).

What the ebbing abandons: disabled, arrogant marionettes, repelling each other, hating each other, challenging one another. They claim to love one another, fall into zealous hypocrisy, hence the nostalgia for tempests, for tidal waves.

By means of misery, life, from protest to protest, devoted to the ever increased exigency—all the more distant from the Golden Age (from the absence of disclaiming). Once the ugliness has been perceived, beauty rarefying love . . .

Beauty demanding wealth, but wealth in its turn challenged—the glorious man surviving the completed ruin of himself, on the condition of an insane loss of rest. Like a shot of lightning, chance—light in the debris—alone escaping from avaricious comedy.

To conclude, solitude (where I am)—at the limit of a cry which the hatred of self strangles. The desire to communicate growing in proportion to the contesting of easy, ridiculous communications.

Existence taken to the extreme, in conditions of madness, forgotten, despised, hunted. Yet, in these conditions of madness, torn from isolation, breaking like uncontrollable laughter, given to impossible debauches.

The most difficult: renouncing "average" man in favor of the extreme limit, we contest a fallen humanity, removed from the Golden Age, avarice and falsehood. We contest at the same time that which is not the "desert" where the extreme limit is encountered, "desert" where debauches of the solitary individual are unleashed . . . there being is a point or a wave, but it is, it would seem, the only point, the only wave; in no way is the solitary individual separated from the "other", but the other is not there.

And the other, was he there?

The desert, would it in any way be less empty? the orgy less "desolate"?

Thus I speak—everything in me gives itself to others! . . .

VI

NIETZSCHE

OF A SACRIFICE IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS VICTIM

While I was writing, anxiety arose. The begun tale remained, before my eyes, blackened with strokes, eager for ink. But having conceived of it sufficed for me. I was disconcerted at having to finish it and not expecting anything from it.

Remembering Lautréamont's *Poésies* I hit on the idea of inverting the terms of the *Pater.* As a *continued story,* I imagined this dialogue:

I sleep. Although mute, God addresses himself to me, insinuating, as in love, in a low voice:

—O my father, you, on earth, the evil which is in you delivers me. I am the temptation of which you are the fall. Insult me as I insult those who love me. Give me each day my bread of bitterness. My will is absent in the heavens as on earth. Impotence binds me. My name is lackluster.

Hesitant, troubled, I reply:

—So be it.

"One is most dishonest to one's god: he is not allowed *to sin."*
(Beyond Good and Evil, 65a.*)*

I rely on God to deny himself, to loathe himself, to throw what he dares, what he is, into absence, into death. When I am God, I negate him right to the depths of negation. If I am only me, I am not aware of him. To the extent that there subsists in me clear consciousness, I name him without knowing of him: I am not aware of him. I try to know of him: immediately thereafter, I become non-knowledge, I become God, unknown, unknowable ignorance.

"There is a great ladder of religious cruelty, with many rungs; but three of these are the most important. Once one sacrificed human beings to one's god, perhaps precisely those whom one loved most: the sacrifices of the first-born in all prehistoric religions belong here, as well as the sacrifice of the Emperor Tiberius in the Mithras grotto of the isle of Capri, that most gruesome of all Roman anachronisms. Then, during the moral epoch of mankind, one sacrificed to one's god one's own strongest instincts, one's "nature": this festive joy lights up the cruel eyes of the ascetic, the "anti-natural" enthusiast. Finally—what remained to be sacrificed? At long last, did one not have to sacrifice for once whatever is comforting, holy, healing; all hope, all faith in hidden harmony, in future blisses and justices? didn't one have to sacrifice God himself and, from cruelty against oneself, worship the stone, stupidity, gravity, fate, the Nothing? To sacrifice God for the Nothing—this paradoxical mystery of the final cruelty was reserved for the generation that is now coming up: all of us already know something of this.—"
(Beyond Good and Evil, 55.)

I believe that one sacrifices the goods which one abuses (to make use of is nothing but a fundamental abuse).

Man is eager, obliged to be so, but he condemns eagerness, which is only endured necessity—and elevates the gift, of oneself or of possessed goods, which alone makes glorious. Making his food out of plants, out of animals, he recognizes in them however the sacred nature, similar to his own, such that one cannot destroy them and consume them without offense. Before each element that man absorbs (to his profit) was felt the obligation of admitting the abuse he was making of it. A certain number of men among others had the responsibility of recognizing a plant, an animal, having become victim. These men had a sacred relation with the plant or the animal, ate nothing of them, *gave* them as food to the men of the other group. If they ate some, it was with a revealing parsimony: they had recognized in advance the illegitimate character, serious and tragic, of consumption. Is it not a tragedy itself that man cannot live except by destroying, killing, absorbing?

And not only plants, animals, but other men.

Nothing can restrain human progress. There would only be satiety (if not for each man—most individuals must for their part abandon the quest—at least for the whole lot) if man became everything.

On this path, it was a step, but only a step, that a man subjugate others, make of his fellow man his thing—possessed, absorbed, as are the animal or the plant. But the fact that man became the thing of man had this repercussion: that the master for whom the slave became a thing—he is the sovereign—withdrew from communion, broke the communion of men among themselves. The sovereign's infraction of the common code began the isolation of man—his separation into pieces which could be reunited only rarely at first, then never.

The master's possession of unarmed slaves or of prisoners whom one could eat numbers man himself, as nature subject to appropriation (no longer unduly, but as much as the animal or the plant), among the objects it was necessary to sacrifice from time to time. It so happened moreover that men suffered from the absence of communication resulting from existence separated from a king. They had to put to death not the slave, but the king, to assure the return to communion for the entire people. Among men, it must have therefore seemed that one couldn't choose one more worthy of the knife than a king. But if it was a question of military leaders, the sacrifice ceased to be possible (a war commander was going too far). For them, one substituted carnival kings (disguised prisoners, pampered before death).

The saturnalias during which one sacrificed these false kings permitted the temporary return to the Golden Age. One inversed the roles: for once the master served the slave and such a man embodying the power of the master, from whence arose the separation of men among themselves,

was there put to death, assuring the fusion of all in a single dance (and as well in a single anguish, then in a single rush into pleasure).

But man's appropriation of all appropriable resources was in no way limited to living organisms. I am not speaking so much of the recent and thankless exploitation of natural resources (of an industry whose negative effects—imbalance—to my astonishment one perceives so little, at the same time as the prosperity which it brings about); but of the mind of man to whose profit the entire appropriation takes place—different in this way from the stomach, which digests food, never digests itself—has changed itself in the end into a thing (into an appropriated object). The mind of man has become his own slave and through the work of autodigestion which the operation assumes, has consumed, subjugated, destroyed itself. Cog within the cogs which he has set out, he makes of himself an abuse whose effects escape him. To the extent that this effect occurs only in the end, nothing subsists in him which is not a servile thing. There is nothing right up to God which is not reduced to servitude. A work of rodents in the end cuts him up, assigns him positions; then—as everything is mobile, altered without interruption—deprives him of them, shows the absence or the uselessness of them.

If one says that "God is dead", some think of Jesus, whose sacrifice brought back the Golden Age, (the realm of the heavens), like that of the kings (but Jesus alone died, God who abandoned him was nevertheless waiting for him, sat him on his right); others think of the abuse which I have just evoked, which allows no value to subsist—the mind reduced, in accordance with Descartes' formula, to the "clear and assured consciousness of that which is useful to life". But that "God should be dead", victim of a sacrifice, only has meaning if profound, and differs as much from the evasion of a God in the notion of a clear and servile world as does a human sacrifice, sanctifying the victim, from the slavery which makes of it an instrument of work.

I have understood this each day a bit more about notions drawn from scholarly books—as are totemism, sacrifice—that they engage in an intellectual servitude: I can less and less evoke a historical fact without being rendered defenseless by the abuse which there is in speaking of it as of appropriated or digested things. Not that I am struck by the measure of error: it is inevitable. But I am all the less afraid of erring in that I accept it. I am humble and don't without uneasiness awaken a past for a long time dead. Whatever knowledge they have of it, the living do not possess the past as they believe to: if they think to hold it, the latter escapes them. I give myself excuses: building my theory, I didn't forget

that it leads to a movement which is elusive; I could situate only thus the sacrifice which is incumbent upon us.

On account of the growing servility of intellectual forms within us, it has fallen upon us to perform a deeper sacrifice than those of the men who preceded us. We no longer have to compensate with offerings for the abuse which man has made of the vegetable, animal, human species. The reduction of men themselves to servitude receives now (moreover for a long time now) consequences in the political realm (it is good, instead of drawing religious consequences from it to abolish the abuses). But the supreme abuse which man ultimately made of his reason requires a last sacrifice: reason, intelligibility, the ground itself upon which he stands—man must reject them, in him God must die; this is the depth of terror, the extreme limit where he succumbs. *Man can find himself only on the condition of escaping, without rest, from the avarice which grips him.*

DIGRESSION ON POETRY AND MARCEL PROUST

If I feel the weight of which I have spoken, it is usually blindly—this is not unusual. I want to free myself, already poetry . . . but measuring up to a completed absorption, poetry?

It is true that the effect, even were it of the sacrifice of a king, is only ever poetic. One puts a man to death, one does not liberate any slave. One even aggravates the state of things by adding a murder to the acts of servitude. This was quite quickly the common feeling—human sacrifice, far from alleviating, horrified: other solutions than that which Christianity brought were necessary. Consumated once and for all on the cross, sacrifice was the blackest of all crimes: if it is renewed, it is in image form. Then Christianity initiated the real negation of servitude: it put God—servitude agreed to—in the place of the master—servitude submitted to.

But to conclude, we cannot imagine any real amendment of abuses which cannot help but be inevitable (they are so at first: one could not conceive of man's development if there had not been slavery—thereafter, but when it ceased in the long run to be what it was at first—inevitable—one mitigated it, and it was more the aging of an institution than a voluntary change). The meaning of sacrifice is to continue to make tolerable—alive—a life which inevitable avarice brings ceaselessly back to death. One cannot suppress avarice (should one try, one increases hypocrisy). But if sacrifice is not the suppression of evil, it differs nonetheless from poetry in that it is not usually limited to the realm of words. If it is necessary that man reach the extreme limit, that his reason give way, *that God die,* then words, their sickest games, cannot suffice.

Of poetry, I will now say that it is, I believe, the sacrifice in which words are victims. Words—we use them, we make of them the instruments of useful acts. We would in no way have anything of the human about us if language had to be entirely servile within us. Neither can we do without the efficacious relations which words introduce between men and things. But we tear words from these links in a delirium.

Should words such as *horse* or *butter* enter into a poem, they do so detached from interested concerns. For as many times as the words *butter, horse* are put to practical ends, the use which poetry makes of them liberates human life from these ends. When the farm girl says *butter* or

the stable boy says *horse,* they know butter, horse. The knowledge which they have of them in a sense even exhausts the idea of knowing, for they can make butter or lead a horse at will. The making, the raising, the using, perfect and even found knowledge (the essential links of knowledge are relations of practical efficacy; to know an object is, according to Janet, to know how to go about making it). But, on the contrary, *poetry leads from the known to the unknown.* It can do what neither the boy nor the girl can do: introduce the idea of a butter horse. It places one, in this way, before the unknowable. No doubt I have barely enunciated the words when the familiar images of horses and of butter present themselves, but they are solicited only in order to die. In which sense poetry is sacrifice, but of the most accessible sort. For if the use or abuse of words, to which the operations of words oblige us, takes place on the ideal, unreal level of language, the same is true of the sacrifice of words which is poetry.

If I honestly, naively, say of the unknown which surrounds me, from which I come, to which I go, that it is truly such, that, of its night, I neither know, nor can know anything—assuming that this unknown is concerned or annoyed with the feeling which one has for it—I imagine that no one is more than I in harmony with the concern which it requires. I imagine this, not that I need to tell myself: "I have done everything, now I can rest", but because one cannot be subject to a greater requirement. I can in no way imagine the unknown concerned about me (I said assuming: even if it is true, it is absurd, but after all: I know nothing). It is to my mind impious to think of it. In the same way, in the presence of the unknown, it is impious to be moral (shameful, like a fisherman, to bait the unknown). Morality is the straightjacket which a man, inserted in a known order, imposes upon himself (what he knows—these are the consequences of his acts); the unknown breaks the straightjacket, abandons one to disastrous consequences.

No doubt in order to better ruin knowledge, I have carried it further than another, and, in a similar way, the requirement to which the hatred for morality leads me is only a hypertrophy of morality. (If one must renounce salvation, in whatever form one gives it. Would morality, then, only have been self-seeking?) But would I be where I am if I knew nothing of the twists and turns of the most wretched labyrinth? (And in everyday life, loyalty, purity of heart, in a word, the true moral laws, are only truly broken by petty little men.)

The realm of morality is the realm of *project.* The opposite of project

is sacrifice. Sacrifice falls into the forms of project, but only in appearance (or to the extent of its decadence). A rite is the divining of a hidden necessity (remaining forever obscure). And whereas, in project, the result alone counts, in sacrifice, it is in the act itself that value is concentrated. Nothing in sacrifice is put off until later—it has the power to contest everything at the instant that it takes place, to summon everything, to render everything present. The crucial instant is that of death, yet as soon as the action begins, everything is challenged, everything is present.

Sacrifice is immoral, poetry is immoral*.

This still: in the desire for an inaccessible unknown, which at all costs we must situate beyond reach, I arrive at this feverish contestation of poetry—where, I believe, I will contest myself with others. But of poetry, I have at first put forward only a narrow form—the simple holocaust of words. I will now give it a more vast and more vague horizon: that of the modern *Thousand and One Nights* which are the books of Marcel Proust.

I have only a breathless interest for the philosophies of time—giving apparent answers in the form of an analysis of time. I find it more naive to say: to the extent that things known in an illusory fashion are nevertheless the defenseless victims of time, they are given up to the obscurity of the unknown. Not only does time tamper with them, annihilate them, (knowledge could, if need be, follow them a bit in this tampering), but the evil which is time within them, which masters them from above, breaks them, negates them, is the unknowable itself which, at the succession of each instant, opens itself within them, as it opens itself within us who would experience it if we didn't force ourselves to flee it in false pretexts of knowledge. And to the extent that the work of Proust is an effort to bind time, to know it—in other words that it is not, according to the desire of the author, poetry—I feel far removed from it.

But Proust writes of love that it is "time made tangible to the heart" and yet the love that he lives is only a torment, an enticement in which what he loves endlessly eludes his grasp.

Of Albertine, who was perhaps Albert, Proust went so far as to say that she was "like a great goddess of time" (*The Captive,* II, 250); what he meant is, it seems to me, that she will remain for him, no matter what he does, inaccessible, unknown, that she was going to escape him. At all

*This is so barely paradoxical that the sacrifice of mass is, in its essence, the greatest of all crimes. The Hindus, the ancient Greeks knew the profound immorality of sacrifice.

costs, however, he wanted to enclose her, possess her, "to know her" and, to say he wanted to, is to say too little: his desire was strong, was overpowering to such an extent that it became the token of loss. Satisfied, the desire would die: should she cease to be the unknown, Proust would cease thirsting to know—he would cease to love. Love returned with the suspicion of a lie, through which Albertine eluded any knowledge of her, the will for any possession of her. And Proust imagined grasping the definitive distress of love—when it is not that of love, but only that of possession—by writing: "The image which I sought, in which I found rest, in exchange for which I would have wanted to die, was no longer that of Albertine having an unknown life, it was that of an Albertine as much known by me as was possible (and it is for that reason that this love could not last unless it remained unhappy, for, by definition, it did not satisfy the need for mystery), it was that of an Albertine who did not reflect a distant world, but who desired nothing other—there were moments when, in fact, it seemed to be so—than to be with me, completely similar to me, an Albertine in the image of what precisely was mine and not in the image of the unknown" (*The Captive,* I, 100). But the exhausting effort, having revealed itself to be useless: ". . . this beauty which, in thinking of the successive years in which I had known Albertine, whether at the square in Balbec, or in Paris—I had discovered it in her very recently—and which consisted in my friend's development in so many areas and comprised so many days gone by—this beauty took on for me a heart-rending quality. Then, I sensed that the inexhaustible space of the evenings when I hadn't known Albertine was hollowed out, like a chasm, beneath that blushing face. Try as I might to take Albertine on my lap, to hold her head in my hands—I could caress her, slowly pass my hands over her body, but as if I had handled a stone which encloses the salt marshes of immemorial oceans or the ray of a star, I felt that I touched only the closed shell of a being who, on the inside, has access to the infinite. How I suffered from this position to which we are reduced by the neglect of nature which, in instituting the division of bodies, did not think to make possible the interpenetration of souls (for if her body was in the power of my own, her thought escaped from the grasp of my thought). And I realized that Albertine—the marvellous captive whose presence I had thought would enrich my dwelling-place, all the while hiding her perfectly there, even from those who came to see me and who didn't suspect her presence, at the end of the hall, in the next room—that Albertine was even for me that figure who, unbeknownst to everyone, held within it, in a bottle, the Princess of China; inviting me in an urgent, cruel and inescapable manner, to seek the past, she was more like a great goddess of Time" (*The Captive,* II, 250). The girl in this

game—is she not that which man's eagerness, from time immemorial, had to grasp: jealousy, the narrow path which in the end leads only to the unknown?

There are other paths leading to the same point; the unknown, which life reveals definitively, which the world is, at each instant is embodied in some new object. In each one of them, it is the measure of the unknown which provides them with the power to seduce. But the unknown (seduction) becomes elusive if I want to possess, if I attempt to know the object: while Proust never tired of wanting to use, to abuse objects which life proposes. Such that he knew hardly anything of love but impossible jealousy and not the communication in which the feeling of self gives way, where, in the excess of desire, we give ourselves. If the truth which a woman proposes to the one who loves her is the unknown (the inaccessible), he can neither know her nor reach her, but she can break him: if he is broken, what does he himself become, if not the unknown, the inaccessible, which lay dormant in him? But neither lover could at will grasp anything from such a game, nor immobilize it, nor make it last. That which communicates (which is penetrated in each one by the other) is the measure of blindness which neither knows nor knows of itself. And no doubt there are no lovers whom one doesn't find busy, bent on killing love, attempting to limit it, to appropriate it, to provide it with barriers. But rarely does the obsession to possess, to know, decompose to the degree that Proust described in *The Captive,* rarely is it linked to so much disintegrating lucidity.

The lucidity which tore him apart before the one he loved must, however, have been absent in him when, with just as great an anguish, he believed to apprehend, to forever capture fleeting "impressions": does he not claim to have grasped the ungraspable?

"So many times," he said, "in the course of my life, reality had disappointed me because, at the moment when I perceived it, my imagination, which was the only organ by which I could take pleasure in beauty, could not be applied to it by virtue of the unavoidable law which demands that one be able to imagine only that which is absent. And then suddenly the effect of this strict law is neutralized, suspended, by a marvellous device of nature, which had caused the mirroring of a sensation—sound of the fork and of the hammer, same unevenness of paving stones—in the past, which permitted my imagination to taste of it, at the same time as in the present, where the agitation of my senses, made effective by the sound, the contact, had added to the dreams of my imagination that of which they are usually bereft, the idea of existence--and thanks to this subterfuge, had permitted my being to obtain, to

isolate, to immobilize—for the length of a flash—that which it never apprehends: a fraction of time in its pure state" (*The Past Recaptured,* II, 15).

I imagine that Marcel Proust's pronounced eagerness for pleasure was linked to this fact—that he could only take pleasure in an object by being assured of its possession. But these moments of intense communication which we experience with that which surrounds us—whether it is a matter of a row of trees, of a sunlit room—are in themselves ungraspable. We only take pleasure in them to the extent that we *communicate,* that we are lost, inattentive. If we cease to be lost, if our attention is intensified, we cease for all that to *communicate.* We seek to understand, to capture the pleasure: it escapes from us.

The difficulty (which I have attempted to show in the introduction) stems principally from this—that in wanting to grasp, nothing remains in our hands but the bare object, without the impression which accompanied it. The intense release of life which had occurred, as in love, moving towards the object, losing itself in it, escapes from us, because in order to apprehend it, our attention is turned naturally towards the object, not towards ourselves. Being most often discursive, its progress is reducible to the linking of words, and discourse, the words, which permit us to reach objects with ease, attain poorly the inner states, which remain strangely unknowable to us. We have consciousness of these states, but in a fleeting fashion, and to want to stop there, to have them enter our field of attention, is, in the first instance, to want to know them, and we only become aware of them to the extent that we let go of our discursive mania to know! Even prompted by good will, we can do nothing about it; though we want to give our attention to what is inner, this attention slips nevertheless to the object. We only emerge from this based on states proceeding from objects which are in themselves barely graspable (silence, breath). Memory—above all, memory which is not voluntary, not expressly elicited—in order to bring Proust's attention back to what is inner, played a role reminiscent of that of breath, in that suspended attention which an East Indian monk directs to himself.

If the impression is not current and emerges in memory—or, if one likes, in the imagination—it is the same communication, the same loss of self, the same inner state as the first time. But we can grasp this state, linger over it for an instant, for it has itself become "object" in memory. We can know it—at least recognize it—therefore possess it, without tampering with it.

It seems to me that this felicity of reminiscences, opposing itself to the

ungraspable void of first impressions, stems from the character of the author. Proust imagined himself discovering a sort of way out: but the way out which meant something for him had no meaning for anyone else. It stems in any case from this: that *recognition,* which is not discursive—and destroys nothing—provided Proust's will for possession with a sufficient appeasement, analogous to that of *knowledge,* which, itself, is discursive and destroys.

This opposition between knowledge and recognition is moreover that of intelligence and memory. And if one of them, intelligence, opens itself up to the future, even when the object of its analysis is past, if it is nothing more than the faculty of project—and, in that sense, the negation of time—the other, memory, consisting in the union of past and of present, is within us time itself. Nevertheless, what I must indicate is that Proust in his lazy fashion only half knew the opposition of these two terms, for barely does he say that "the marvellous device" of memory has permitted his being "to obtain, to isolate, to immobilize—the length of a flash—what it never apprehends: a fraction of time in its pure state" then he adds: "the being which had arisen again in me when, with such a shudder of happiness, I had heard the sound common at once both to the spoon which touches the plate and to the hammer which strikes the wheel, to the unevenness for one's footsteps of the paving-stones of the Guermantes' courtyard and of the St. Mark baptistery—that being is only nourished by the essence of things: in them alone it finds its subsistance, its delights. It languishes in the observation of the present where the senses cannot bring this essence to it, in the consideration of a past which the intelligence withers, in the expectation of a future which the will constructs out of fragments of the present and of the past, yet from which it removes some of their reality, only conserving of them what suits the strictly human, utilitarian ends which it assigns to them. But should a sound, a smell, already heard and inhaled once be experienced again, in the present at the same time as in the past, real without existing, ideal without being abstract, immediately the permanent and usually hidden essence of things is liberated and our true self which, at times, seemed dead for a long time, but which could not otherwise be, is awakened, is animated when it receives the celestial nourishment which is brought to it. A minute liberated from the order of time has recreated within us, in order that we feel it, man liberated from the order of time. And one understands that this man is confident in his joy, one understands that the word death has no meaning for him; situated out of time, what could he fear from the future?" (*The Past Recaptured,* II, 15–16). Thus "time in its pure state" is, on the following page, "liberated from the order of time". Such is the illusion of memory that the unfathomable

unknown of time—which it, profoundly, acknowledges—is in it confused with its opposite, knowledge, through which we sometimes have the illusion of escaping from time, of gaining access to the eternal. Memory is usually linked to the faculty for project, to intelligence, which never operates without it, but the memory evoked by the sound, the contact, was that of pure memory, free of all project. This pure memory, in which our "true self", *ipse* different from the "I" of project, is inscribed, liberates no "permanent and usually hidden essence of things", if not communication, the state into which we are thrown when, pulled from the known, we no longer grasp, in things, anything but the unknown which is usually elusive in them.

The known—ideal, liberated from time—belongs so little to moments of felicity that, on the subject of a line from the Vinteuil *septet* (situated near another about which he says: "This line was what could have best characterized—as if cutting off the rest of my life, the visible world—those impressions which, at distant intervals, I rediscovered in my life to be the points of reference, the beginnings, for the creation of a true life: the impression experienced before the church bells of Martinville, before a row of trees near Balbec . . .") he says this: "I saw (her) pass by up to five or six times, without being able to see her face, but so tender, so different . . . from what any other woman had ever made me desire, that this line, which offered me, in such a sweet tone, a happiness which was really worth obtaining, was perhaps—that invisible creature whose language I did not know and whom I understood so well—the only Unknown whom I had ever had the opportunity to encounter" (*The Captive,* II, 78). A woman's desirable qualities—he says this in twenty ways—were in Proust's eyes, the measure of the unknown in her (if it had been possible, to take pleasure in her would have been to extract from her "something like the square root of her unknown"). But knowledge always killed desire, destroying the unknown (which "often did not withstand a simple presentation"). In the realm of "impressions", at least knowledge could reduce nothing, dissolve nothing. And the unknown formed their attractions as it does that of desirable beings. A line from a septet, a ray of summer sunshine, together steal from the will to know a secret which no reminiscence will ever make penetrable.

But in the "impression" brought back to memory, as in the poetic image, there remains an ambiguity arising from the possibility of grasping what, in essence, is elusive. In the contest between opposing wills—the will to take and the will to lose—the desire to appropriate unto oneself and the opposite desire to communicate—poetry is on the same

level as the states of "consolation", as visions, as the words of mystics. The "consolations" translate an inaccessible (impossible) element into forms which are, in the long run, familiar. In the "consolations", the devout soul, taking pleasure in the divine, possesses it. Whether he emits cries or faints, he has not been left speechless, he does not attain the depths, the dark void. The most inner images of poetry—and those which cause the greatest loss—the "impressions" about which Proust was able to say "such that I remained in ecstasy on the uneven paving-stones . . ." or "if the actual site had not immediately conquered me, I would have lost consciousness . . ." or "they force . . . our will . . . to teeter on the edge of a vertigo, of an uncertainty similar to that which one experiences before an ineffable vision, at the moment of falling asleep . . ."—the poetic images or the "impressions" reserve, at the same time that they overflow, a feeling of ownership, the persistance of an "I" relating everything to itself.

The measure of what is inaccessible in the "impressions"—the sort of insatiable hunger which precedes them—emerges better from these pages of *Within a Budding Grove* (II, 18–21) than from the commentaries of *The Past Recaptured:*

"All of a sudden I was filled with that profound happiness which I hadn't often experienced since Combray, a happiness analogous to that which, among others, the church bells of Martinville had provided for me. But this time it remained incomplete. I had just perceived, set back from the road which we had been following as we rode our donkeys, three trees which were to serve as an entrance way to a covered lane and which formed a figure which I did not see for the first time—I could not manage to recognize the site from which they seemed to be detached, but I sensed that it had formerly been familiar to me, such that my mind having vacillated between some distant year and the present moment, the vicinity of Balbec wavered before my eyes and I wondered if this entire outing wasn't a fiction, Balbec a spot to which I had gone only in my imagination, Mme de Villeparisis a character of a novel, and the three old trees the reality which one discovers by lifting one's eyes from the book which one had been reading and which had described a place to which one ended up believing oneself to be actually transported.

"I looked at the trees, I saw them clearly, but my mind sensed that they covered something which it could not grasp, as is the case with those objects placed too far away whose outer shell, our stretched-out fingers, at the end of our extended arm, brush only at moments, without managing to grasp anything. Then one rests a moment in order to throw one's arm forward in a more forceful gesture, in an attempt to reach

further. But in order that my mind might muster its strength in this way, and gain momentum, it would have been necessary for me to remain alone. How I would have liked to be able to remain apart as I would in the outings by the Guermantes' way, when I would distance myself from my parents! It even seemed to me that I should have done so. I recognized that type of pleasure which requires, it is true, a certain effort which the mind must direct towards itself, but beside which the charms of nonchalance which make you renounce it seem quite mediocre. This pleasure, whose object was only intuited, and which I had to create myself—I only experienced it on rare occasions, but each time it seemed to me that the things which had taken place in the interval hardly had any importance, and that by attaching myself to its sole reality I could at last begin a true life. For an instant, I placed my hand before my eyes in order to be able to close them without Mme de Villeparisis' noticing. I remained without thinking about anything, then from my collected thoughts, captured with more strength, I lept forward in the direction of the trees, or rather in that inner direction at the end of which I saw them in myself. I sensed once again behind them the same known but vague object which I could not bring back to myself. Yet I saw all three of them approach, as the carriage moved forward. Where had I already seen them? There was no spot near Combray, where a lane opened up in this way. The site which they reminded me of—there wasn't any room for it either in the German countryside where I had gone a year earlier to a spa with my grandmother. Was it necessary to believe that they came from years of my life so distant already that the countryside surrounding them had been entirely abolished in my memory and that—like those pages which one is suddenly moved to find in a work which one never imagined having read—they alone remained of the forgotten book of my early childhood? Did they not on the contrary belong only to landscapes of dream, always the same, at least for me for whom their strange appearance was only the objectification in my sleep of the effort which I made the day before—whether to reach the mystery in a place behind whose appearance I intuited it, as had so often been my experience at the Guermantes' way—whether to try to reintroduce it into a place which I had desired to know and which, from the day that I had known it, had appeared to me to be completely superficial, like Balbec? Were they not simply a completely new image—an image detached from a dream of the preceding night but already so effaced that it seemed to me to come from much further away? Or had I never seen them and were they hiding behind themselves—like certain trees, a certain tuft of grass which I had seen in the Guermantes' way—a sense which was as obscure, as difficult to grasp as a distant past, such that, elicited by them to deepen a

thought, I believed I had to recognize a memory? Or yet did they not even hide thoughts and was it my tired vision which caused me to see double in time as one sees double in space? I didn't know. Yet they came toward me; perhaps a mythical apparition, replete with witches or with norna which proposed its oracles to me. I thought rather that they were fantoms from the past, dear companions from my childhood, vanished friends who invoked our common memories. They like shadows seemed to ask me to take them away with me, to bring them back to life. In their naive and passionate gesticulation I recognized the impotent regret of a loved one who has lost the use of speech, who feels that he will not be able to tell us what he wants and what we are not able to guess. Soon, at a crossroad, the carriage abandoned them. It drew me far from what I alone thought to be true, from what would have made me truly happy—it resembled my life.

"I saw the trees grow distant while shaking their desperate arms, seeming to say to me: what you do not learn from us today, you will never know. If you allow us to fall back into the depths of that path from which we sought to pull ourselves up to you, a whole part of you which we brought to you will fall forever into Nothingness. In fact, if, in what followed, I found again the type of pleasure and uneasiness which I had just felt anew, and if one evening—too late, but forever more—I attached myself to it, I, on the other hand, never knew what those trees had wanted to bring to me, there where I had seen them. And when, the carriage having turned off, I turned my back on them and ceased to see them, while Mme de Villeparisis asked me why I appeared to be daydreaming, I was sad as if I had just lost a friend, died myself, renounced a friend or disowned a God."

Isn't the absence of satisfaction more profound than the feeling of triumph at the end of the work?

But Proust, without the feeling of triumph, would have lacked a reason for writing . . . What he said at great length in *The Past Recaptured*: the act of writing regarded as an infinite reverberation of reminiscences, of impressions . . .

But to the measure of satisfaction, of triumph, is opposed an opposite measure. What the work tries to translate is nothing less than the moments of felicity, the inexhaustible suffering of love. Otherwise, what sense would these affirmations: "As for happiness, it has almost a single usefulness—to make unhappiness possible"; or: "One can almost say that works, like artesian wells, rise all the higher if suffering has all the more deeply hollowed out the heart" (*The Past Recaptured,* II, 65 and 66). I even believe that the final absence of satisfaction was, more than a

momentary satisfaction, the work's resilience and its reason for being. There is in the last volume a sort of balance between life and death—between the impressions regained, "freed from time", and the characters who represent, in the Guermantes salon, a herd of passive victims of this same time. The visible intention was that the triumph of time regained should likewise emerge. But at times a stronger movement surpasses the intention: this movement overflows the entire work, assures its diffuse unity. The ghosts found again in the Guermantes salon, worn and aged after many years, were already like objects eaten away on the inside, who vanish into dust as soon as one touches them. Even young they only ever appeared ruined, victims of the author's cunning maneuvers—all the more intimately corrupting because they are directed with sympathy. In this way the very beings to whom we normally attribute the existence which they imagine for themselves—that of possessors of themselves and of a part of others—had no more than a poetic existence, of a scope in which a capricious havoc was wreaked. For the strangest thing about this movement—which is completed by the putting to death, first of the Berma by her children, then of the author by his work—is that it contains the secret of poetry. Poetry is only a havoc which restores. It gives to time, which eats away, that which a dull vanity removes from it; it dissipates the false pretenses of an ordered world.

I did not intend to say that *In Remembrance of Things Past* was an expression of poetry more pure and more beautiful than any other. One even finds that the elements of poetry are broken down in it. The desire to know is within it endlessly mixed with the opposite desire—that of drawing from each thing the measure of the unknown which it contains. But poetry is not reducible to a simple "holocaust of words". In the same way it would be childish to conclude that we only passively escape from dull stupor (from foolishness)—if we are ridiculous. For in the face of this time which undoes us, which can only undo what we want to consolidate, we ourselves have the recourse of carrying a "heart to be devoured". Oreste or Phèdre, who have been ravaged, are to poetry what the victim is to sacrifice.

The triumph of the reminiscences makes less sense than one imagines. Linked to the unknown, to non-knowledge, it is ecstasy freeing itself from a great anguish. With the help of a concession made to the need to possess, to know (deceived, if one likes, by *recognition*), a balance is established. Often the unknown gives us anguish, but it is the condition for ecstasy. Anguish is the fear of losing, expression of the desire to possess. It is a stopping-point before the communication which excites

desire but which inspires fear. Should we give the slip to the need to possess—anguish just as quickly turns to ecstasy.

The appeasement given to the need to possess must still be great enough to sever, between us and the unknown object, all possibility for discursive links (the foreignness—the unknown—of the object revealed to expectation must not be dissipated by any investigation). In the case of reminiscences, the will to possess, to know, receives a sufficient response. "The dazzling and indistinct vision brushed past me as if it had said to me: "Grasp me in passing, if you have the strength to, and try to solve the puzzle of happiness which I propose to you." And all most right away I recognized it—it was Venice . . ." (*The Past Recaptured,* II, 8).

If poetry is the path followed at all times by man's desire to redress the abuse which he makes of language, it takes place, as I said, on the same level. Or on those—parallel—of expression.

It differs in this way from the reminiscences whose play within us inhabits the realm of images which assail the mind before it expresses them (without, for all that, their becoming expressions). If there enters into this play a certain element of sacrifice, the object of this play is even more unreal than that of poetry. In truth, the reminiscences are so close to poetry that the author himself links them to their expression, an expression which he could only not give them in principle. One will compare the realm of images with that of inner experience, but understood in the way which I have outlined, experience contests everything, by which it attains the least unreal among various objects (and yet if it appears so scarcely real, this is because experience does not reach this object outside of the subject with which it unites the object). Moreover, as poetry itself tends to do, the reminiscences tend (less keenly) to contest everything, but avoid this at the same time that they tend towards this—and always for the same reason. Like poetry, reminiscences do not imply the refusal to possess; they maintain desire, on the contrary, and can only have, as a consequence, an individual object. Even a "damned" poet is eager to possess the moving world of images which he expresses and through which he enriches the heritage of man.

The poetic image, if it leads from the known to the unknown, attaches itself however to the known which gives it form, and although it tears the known and life apart in this rupture, it holds fast to it. From whence it follows that poetry is almost entirely poetry in decline, pleasure taken in images which are, it is true, drawn from the servile realm (poetic images, as well as noble, solemn images) but excluded from the inner ruin which is access to the unknown. Even images which are ru-

ined profoundly are within the realm of possession. It is difficult to no longer possess anything but ruin, but this is not to no longer possess anything—it is to retain with one hand what the other gives.

Even simple minds felt obscurely that Rimbaud had extended the "possible" of poetry by abandoning it, by making sacrifice complete, without ambiguity, without reserve. That he only reached a tiring absurdity (his African existence) is what was of secondary importance in their eyes (in which respect they were not wrong—one pays for sacrifice—that's all). But those minds could not follow Rimbaud: they could only admire him, Rimbaud having by his flight, extended the "possible" for himself, at the same time that he suppressed this "possible" for others. Given that they only admired Rimbaud out of love for poetry, some of them continued to enjoy poetry or to write, but with a bad conscience; others enclosed themselves in a chaos of inconsequential absurdities in which they took pleasure and, abandoning themselves, did not hesitate before any well-defined affirmation. And as often happens, "all of them"—of numerous kinds, each time in a different form—united in a single person, together constituted a type of defined existence. Bad conscience could suddenly be translated into a humble, even childish attitude, but on a level other than that of art—the social level. In the world of literature—or of painting—on the condition that certain rules of lack of decorum are observed, one returns to habits in which abuse (exploitation) was difficult to distinguish from the cautiousness of one's betters. I do not mean to say anything hostile but only that nothing remained, or almost nothing, of Rimbaud's silent contestation.

The sense of a beyond far from escapes those very individuals who designate poetry as an "earth of treasures". Breton (in the *Second Manifesto*) wrote: "It is clear that surrealism is not interested in taking great account of everything which is produced around it under the pretext of art, indeed of anti-art, or philosophy or of anti-philosophy—in a word, of all that does not have as a goal the annihilation of being in an inner and blind brilliance, which is no more the soul of ice than that of fire." The "annihilation" had from the very first words a "promising" outlook, and there was no point in speaking of it, without contesting the means brought to this end.

If I wanted to speak at length about Marcel Proust, it is because he had an inner experience which was perhaps limited (yet how engaging, with so much frivolity, so much happy nonchalance mixed in), but free of dogmatic interference. I will add to this friendship, for his way of

forgetting, of suffering—a feeling of sovereign complicity. And still this: the poetic movement of his work, whatever its weakness, takes the path by which poetry touches upon the "extreme limit" (which one will see further on).

Among various sacrifices, poetry is the only one whose fire we can maintain, renew. But its misery is even more tangible than those of other sacrifices (if we envisage the part left to *personal* possession, to ambition). What is essential is that on its own, the desire for poetry renders our misery intolerable: certain that the sacrifice of objects is powerless to truly liberate us, we often experience the necessity for going further, right to the sacrifice of the subject. Which of itself can be of no consequence, but if the subject succumbs, it lifts the weight of eagerness—its life escapes avarice. The one who sacrifices, the poet, having unceasingly to bring ruin into the ungraspable world of words, grows quickly tired of enriching a literary treasure. He is condemned to do it: if he lost the taste for the treasure, he would cease to be a poet. But he cannot fail to see the abuse, the exploitation made of personal genius (of glory). Having a "parcel" of genius at his disposal, a man comes to believe that it is "his" as the farmer believes a parcel of land to be "his".[1] But just as our forefathers, more timid, felt before the harvest, the herds—which they had to exploit in order to live—that there was in those harvests, those herds, an element (which everyone recognizes in a man or in a child), which one cannot "use" without qualms, so others, at first, revolted at the idea of "using" poetic genius. And when this revolt is felt, everything becomes dark—one must vomit the wrongdoing, one must "expiate" it.

If one could, what one would want, without any doubt, would be to suppress wrongdoing. But the desire to suppress only had as an effect (genius remains obstinately personal) the expression of desire. Witness these phrases, whose intimate resonance takes the place of an external efficacity which they don't have: "All men," said Blake, "are alike through poetic genius." And Lautréamont: "Poetry must be created by everyone, not just one." I would like one, honestly, to try as one might to provide these intentions with some consequences: is poetry any less the act of those who are visited by genius?

Poetic genius is not verbal talent (verbal talent is necessary, since it is a question of words, but it often leads one astray): it is the divining of ruins secretly expected, in order that so many immutable things become undone, lose themselves, communicate. Nothing is rarer. This instinct which divines and the act even definitely requires, of one who is in possession of it, silence, solitude: and the more it inspires, all the more cruelly it isolates. But since it is instinct of required acts of destruction, if

the exploitation which the less well-endowed make of their genius demands to be "expiated", an obscure feeling suddenly guides the most inspired individual towards death. Another, not knowing how, not being able to die, short of destroying himself entirely, destroys at least poetry within himself.[2]

(What one doesn't grasp: that, literature being nothing if it isn't poetry, poetry being the opposite of its name, literary language—expression of hidden desires, of obscure life—is the perversion of language even a bit more than eroticism is the perversion of sexual function. Hence the "terror" which holds sway in the end "in letters", as does the search for vice, for new stimulation at the end of a debauchee's life.)

The idea—which deceives some, permitting them to deceive others—of a rediscovered existence, of united mind, which the inner seduction of poetry would excite, surprises me all the more that:

No one more than Hegel placed importance on the separation of men among themselves. He was the only one to give that fatal rupture its place—an entire place—in the domain of philosophic speculation. But it is not Romantic poetry, it is "obligatory military service" which seemed to him to guarantee the return to that communal life, without which there was, according to him, no knowledge possible (he saw in it the sign of the times, the proof that history was completing itself).

I have often seen Hegel quoted—as if by chance—often by those who are haunted by the fate of a poetic "Golden Age", but one neglects this fact, that the thoughts of Hegel do not stand alone, to the extent that one cannot grasp their sense, if not in the necessity of the movement which is their coherence.

And this cruel image of a "Golden Age" dissimulated beneath the appearance of an "Age of Iron"—I have several reasons at the very least for proposing it as a meditation for changeable minds. Why continue to fool ourselves? Led by a blind instinct, the poet feels that he is slowly distancing himself from others. The more he enters into the secrets *which are those of others as much as his own,* and the more he separates himself, the more he is alone. The solitude in the depth of his being begins the world again, but only begins it again for himself. The poet, carried too far away, triumphs over his anguish, but not that of others. He cannot be turned away from a destiny which absorbs him, far away from which he would perish. It is necessary for him to go off a bit further, there lies his only country. No one can cure him of not being the crowd.

To be known[3]*!* How could he not be aware of the fact that he is *the unknown,* beneath the mask of one man among others.

The putting to death of the author by his work. "Happiness is beneficial for the body, but it is grief which develops the mind's strength. Moreover, does it not have us discover each time a law, which would be no less indispensible for restoring us to truth, for forcing us to take things seriously, pulling out each time the weeds of habit, of scepticism, of flightiness, of indifference? It is true that this truth, which is not compatible with happiness, with health, is not always compatible with life. Grief finishes by killing. For each pain which is new, and too intense, we feel one more vein stand out and develop its deadly meander the length of our temple, beneath our eyes. And it is thus that those terrible faces of Rembrandt, of the old Beethoven, whom everyone made fun of, are gradually developed. And this would amount to nothing but bags under the eyes and wrinkles on the forehead if there hadn't been suffering in their hearts. But since some forces can turn into other forces, since heat which lasts becomes light and since the electricity of lightning can photograph, since the deaf pain of our heart can raise above itself like a banner—the visible permanence of an image for each new grief—let us accept physical pain which it gives us for the spiritual knowledge which it brings us: let us allow our bodies to dis-integrate since each new piece which breaks off, comes—this time luminous and legible, in order to complete this knowledge at the price of sufferings which others, more gifted, don't need, in order to make it progressively more solid as the emotions dis-integrate our life—to be added to our work." The gods to whom we sacrifice are themselves sacrifice, tears wept to the point of dying. This *In Remembrance of Things Past* which the author would not have written, if, broken with pain, he had not yielded to that pain, saying: "Let us allow our bodies to dis-integrate . . ." what is this if not the river, flowing in advance to the estuary, which is the sentence itself: "Let us . . ."? and the open sea into which the estuary empties is death. So much so that the work was not only what led the author to his tomb, but the way in which he died; it was written on his deathbed . . . The author himself wanted us to feel him dying a bit more at every line. And it is himself whom he depicts while speaking of all those, the invited, "who were not there, because they couldn't be, whom their secretary, trying to give the illusion of their survival, had excused through one of those messages which one sent from time to time to the Princess." One must hardly substitute a manuscript for the rosary of "those sick individuals dying now for years, who no longer get up, no longer move, and

who, even in the midst of frivolous assiduousness of visitors attracted by a tourist's curiosity, or a confidence of pilgrims, their eyes closed, holding their rosary, half throwing back their pall, are similar to dying individuals whom pain has sculpted right to a skeleton in a flesh as rigid and white as marble, and stretched out over their tomb."

ON A SACRIFICE IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS VICTIM (CONTINUATION AND CONCLUSION)

"Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: 'I seek God! I seek God!'—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Whither is God?' he cried; 'I will tell you. We have killed him—*you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe up the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite Nothingness? Do we not feel the breath of an empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.*

'How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A GREATER DEED; AND WHOEVER IS BORN AFTER US—FOR THE SAKE OF THIS DEED HE

WILL BELONG TO A HIGHER HISTORY THAN ALL HISTORY HITHERTO."

(*The Gay Science*)

This sacrifice *which we consummate*[4] is distinguished from others in this way: the one who sacrifices is himself affected by the blow which he strikes—he succumbs and loses himself with his victim. Once again: the atheist is satisfied with a world completed without God; the one who sacrifices is, on the contrary, in the anguish before an incompleted world, incompletable and forever unintelligible, which destroys him, tears him apart (and this world destroys itself, tears itself apart.)

Another thing which stops me: this world which destroys itself, tears itself apart . . . does not usually do this with a great commotion, but in a movement which escapes one who speaks. The difference between this world and the orator is due to the absence of will. The world is mad, profoundly so and without design. The mad man is at first a play-actor. It may happen that one of us tends towards madness, feels himself become everything. Like the peasant who, stumbling against a piece of raised earth infers the presence of the mole, and in no way thinks of the little blind creature, but of the means of destroying it, so the friends of the unhappy individual, on the basis of certain signs, infer his "megalomania", and wonder to which doctor they will entrust their sick friend. I prefer to stick to the "little blind creature" which, in the drama, plays the major role—that of the agent of sacrifice. It is the madness, the megalomania of man which throws him at the throat of God. And what God himself does with an absent simplicity (in which only the madman understands that it is time to weep), this madman does with cries of impotence. And those cries, this unbridled madness in the end, what are they if not the blood of a sacrifice in which, as in age-old tragedies, the entire stage, when the curtain falls, is strewn with the dead?

It is when I collapse that I have a start. At that moment: everything right up to the likelihood of the world is dissipated. It was necessary, in the end, to see everything with lifeless eyes, to become God, otherwise we would not know what it is to sink, to no longer know anything. Nietzsche for a long time kept himself from sinking. When it was time for him to yield, when he understood that the preparations for sacrifice were ready, he could only say with gaiety: I, myself, Dionysus, etc.[5]

To which curiosity is attached: Did Nietzsche have an understanding of "sacrifice" which was fleeting? or bigoted? or such? or different still?

Everything takes place in divine confusion! Only blind will, "innocence", save us from "projects", from errors, where the eye, eager for discernment, leads us.

Given that Nietzsche had of the eternal return the vision with which one is familiar, the intensity of Nietzsche's feelings made him laugh and tremble at the same time.[6] He wept too much: these were tears of jubilation. Traversing the forest, the length of Lake Silvaplana, he had stopped "near an enormous rock which stood in the form of a pyramid, not far from Surlej". I imagine myself arriving at the shore of the lake and, at imagining it, I weep. Not that I have found in the idea of the eternal return anything which might move me in my turn. The most obvious aspect of a discovery which was to make the ground give way beneath our feet—in Nietzsche's eyes a sort of transfigured man alone would know how to overcome the horror of it—is that before it the best will is immaterial. Only the object of his vision—what made him laugh and tremble—was not the return (and not even time), but what the return laid bare, the impossible depth of things. And this depth, should one reach it by one path or by another, is always the same since it is night and since, perceiving it, there is nothing left to do but collapse (become agitated right to the point of fever, lose oneself in ecstasy, weep).

I remain indifferent while attempting to apprehend the intellectual content of the vision—and through it, how Nietzsche was torn apart—instead of perceiving that Nietzsche finished being unnerved through a representation of time which contested life right to its lack of sense and saw in this way what one can only see in collapse (as he had seen for the first time on the day when he understood that God was dead, that it was he who had killed him). I can inscribe time at will into a circular hypothesis, but nothing will have changed: each hypothesis about time is exhausting, acts as a means of access to the unknown. The least surprising is that, in a movement towards ecstasy, I have the illusion of knowing and of possessing, as if I were engaged in a scientific study (I wrap the unknown in some sort of known, however I can).

Laughter in tears. The putting to death of God is a sacrifice which, making me tremble, allows me yet to laugh, for, in it, I succumb no less than the victim (whereas the sacrifice of Man saved). In fact, what succumbs with God, with me, is the bad conscience which those who sacrificed had in turning away from sacrifice[7] (the uneasiness of the soul which flees, but remains stubborn, assured of eternal salvation, crying out that obviously it is not worthy of salvation).

This sacrifice of reason is to all appearances imaginary—it has neither a bloody conclusion, nor anything analogous to that. It differs nevertheless from poetry in that it is total, does not withhold any pleasure, if not by an arbitrary slipping which one cannot maintain, or by abandoned laughter. If it leaves a residue of chance, it is as if it has forgotten itself, as has the wildflower after harvest.

This strange sacrifice assuming a final state of megalomania—we feel ourselves become God—has nevertheless ordinary consequences in one case: should pleasure be evaded through a "slipping" and should megalomania not be entirely consumed, we remain condemned to making ourselves "recognized", to wanting to be a God for the crowd; a condition which is liable to produce madness, but nothing else. In any case, the final consequence is solitude, madness being able only to make it greater, through its unawareness of it.

If someone takes satisfaction in poetry, does not feel the nostalgia for going further, he is free to imagine that everyone one day will know of his royalty and, having recognized themselves in him, will take him for themselves (a bit of naivete abandons one irretrievably to this easy charm: to taste of the possession of the future). But he can, if he wishes, go further. The world, the shadow of God, which, as poet, he himself is, can suddenly seem to him to be marked for ruin. So that the unknown, the impossible which they are in the end, are revealed. But then he will feel so alone that solitude will be like another death for him.[8]

If one proceeds right to the end, one must efface oneself, undergo solitude, suffer severely from it, renounce being *recognized*: to be as though absent, insane over this, to undergo things without will and without hope, to be elsewhere. One must bury thought alive (due to what exists in its depths). I publish it knowing it in advance to be misread, having to be so. Its agitation must end, must remain hidden, or almost hidden, old woman in a corner, without honor. It and I—we can only sink to that point in non-sense. Thought ruins and its destruction is incommunicable to the crowd—it addresses itself to the least weak.

What is hidden in laughter must remain so.[9] If our knowledge goes further and we know what is there hidden, we must leave the unknown which destroys knowledge, this new knowledge which blinds us, in darkness (where we find ourselves), such that others remain naively blind.

The extreme movement of thought must show itself for what it is: foreign to action. Action has its laws, its demands, to which practical thought responds. Extended to what is beyond in the search for a distant

possible, autonomous thought can only check the realm of action.[10] If action is "abuse", and if thought which is not useful is sacrifice, the "abuse" must take place, has every right. Inserted within a cycle of practical goals, a sacrifice has as a goal, far from condemning abuse, making it possible (the avaricious use of the harvest is possible once the bountifulness of the first fruits has past). But just as autonomous thought refuses to judge the realm of action, practical thought cannot in return oppose rules which are valid for it to the extending of life into the distant limits of the possible.

Consequence of solitude. "Around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely *shallow,* interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives."

(*Beyond Good and Evil,* 40.)

Remark on a tonic side of solitude. ". . . and suffering itself they take for something that must be *abolished.*

We opposite men, having opened our eyes and conscience to the question where and how the plant "man" has so far grown most vigorously to a new height—we think that this has happened every time under the opposite conditions, that to this end the dangerousness of his situation must first grow to the point of enormity, his power of invention and simulation (his "spirit") had to develop under prolonged pressure and constraint into refinement and audacity, his life-will had to be enhanced into an unconditional power-will. We think that hardness, forcefulness, slavery, danger in the alley and in the heart, life in hiding, stoicism, the art of experiment and devilry of every kind, that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species "man" as much as its opposite does."

(*Beyond Good and Evil,* 44.)

Is there a silence more stifling, more sound-proof, further beneath the earth? In the obscure unknown, one's breath is cut short. The lees of possible agonies are sacrifice.

If I have known how to produce the silence of others within me, *I am,* myself, Dionysus, *I am* the crucified. But should I forget my solitude . . .

Extreme flash: I am blind, extreme night: I remain so. From one to the other, always there, the objects which I see, a slipper, a bed.

Pure and ultimate jesting of fever. In the cloudy silence of the heart and the melancholy of a grey day, in that expansive desert of oblivion which only presents to my fatigue a sick bed, soon a death bed, that hand which I, in a sign of distress, had let drop at my side, hanging with the sheets—a ray of light which slips toward me asks me gently to take it up again, to lift it before my eyes. And as if there were awakened in me, dizzy, mad, emerging from a long fog in which they believed themselves dead, lives together like a crowd and as though jostling each other at the miraculous moment of a festival—my hand holds a flower and carries it to my lips.[11]

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Part Five

MANIBUS DATE LILIA PLENIS

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GLORIA IN EXCELSIS MIHI

At the height of the heavens,
the angels, whose voice I hear, glorify me.
I am, beneath the sun, a wandering ant,
small and black, a rolling stone
reaches me,
crushes me,
dead,
in the sky
the sun blazes furiously,
it blinds,
I cry out:
"it will not dare"
it dares.

Who am I
not "me" no no
but the desert the night the immensity
which I am
What are
desert immensity night animal
soon irrevocable Nothingness
and without having known anything
Death
answer
sponge streaming with solar
dreams
enter me
so that I no longer know
but these tears.

Star
which I am
O death
thunderous star
mad bell of my death.

Poems
not courageous
but gentleness
ear of delight
a lamb's voice is howling
beyond go beyond
torch extinguished.

GOD

With warm hands
I die you die
where is he
where am I
without laughter
I am dead
dead and dead
in the pitch-black night
arrow shot
at him.

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Notes*

INNER EXPERIENCE

Published in 1943 by Gallimard and re-issued in 1954 (our text) as the first volume of the Somme Athéologique, *augmented by a text which appeared in 1947,* Méthode de méditation, *and by a postface.* Post-scriptum 1953. (*Bataille had planned some far more extensive modifications for this re-issue which we examine in our notes for* Post-scriptum 1953, *cf. the Gallimard notes, p. 482.*)

In an additional unpublished note of 1953 [Box 9, E, 3] Bataille dates the creation of Inner Experience:

This book was begun in Paris during the winter of 1941 *(The Torment)* and finished during the summer of 1942 in Boussy-le-Château. But the texts in roman type of Part Three *(Antecedents to the Torment)* are earlier; only the first and the last among the texts had not previously been published; the second appeared under the title of *Sacrifices,* accompanying the etchings of André Masson; the third, prior to 1930, and the fourth appeared respectively in *Minotaure* and in *Recherches philosophiques.* All of these texts were modified in 1942. I want, in short, to specify that the earliest of these writings, dating probably from 1924, expresses feelings which, when it was published, I for a long time had no longer felt. (I had to obviate in this way a misunderstanding about certain facts [*crossed out:* like those which might still occur].)

*Text in italics is a Gallimard editorial notation.

This note should be examined together with the following fragment of a plan for a preface to Mme Edwarda (*cf. Gallimard, vol. III,* Notes, *p. 491*):

I wrote this little book in September–October 1941, right before *The Torment,* which forms Part Two of *Inner Experience.* The two texts, to my way of thinking, are very closely linked and one cannot understand one without the other [. . .]

One does not find, in Bataille's papers, any complete manuscript of Inner Experience, but:

CAR [Notebook 4, August 1942] = *manuscript from page 11*

A [Notebook 3] =

—sketch for the Preface (*6 pages not numbered);*

—manuscript for pages 15–21 and 29–30 (pages numbered 1–24 and 3 pages not numbered).

B [Envelope 66] =

—first draft of pages 15–17 (8 pages of a notebook);

—rough notes for pages 18–42 (pages numbered 1–52, 1–29, a– n, 101–145 and 5 pages not numbered);

—rough notes for pages 172–181 (17 pages not numbered);

—notes and scattered fragments (50 pages not numbered).

(Bataille used approximately ten envelopes for this manuscript, postmarked in July 1942, which showed his address to be the home of Mme Moré, in Boussy-Saint-Antoine par Brunoy (S.-et-O.)—an envelope from May 1942 addressed 3 Rue de Lille, in Paris.)

C [Box 9, L] = Communication, *pp. 110–115 (12 typewritten pages, the first six of which are unpublished; the manuscript for this text can be rediscovered [Box 13, E, F and G] in a group of notes for a first version of* La Part maudite.

In another instance, we give in the Annex *to Volume VI, p. 279 (Gallimard Edition) under the title of* Collège socratique, *an unpublished text dating probably from the spring of 1943, which extends Bataille's reflexions on "inner experience".*

Here now are the "publisher's comments" for the 1943 edition:

BEYOND POETRY
(on the cover of the volume)

We are perhaps the wound, the sickness of nature.

It would be necessary for us in this case—and moreover possible, "easy"—to turn the wound into a celebration, a strength of the sickness. The poetry in which the most blood would be lost would be the most forceful. The saddest dawn would announce the joy of day.

Poetry would be the sign announcing the greatest inner ruptures. Human musculature would only be completely in play, it would only reach its highest degree of strength and the perfect movement of "decision"—which, no matter what, being demands—in ecstatic trance*.

Can one not free from its religious antecedents the possibility for mystical experience—this possibility having remained open to the non-believer, in what ever way it appears? Free it from the ascesis of dogma and from the atmosphere of religions? Free it, in a word, from mysticism—to the point of linking it to the nudity of ignorance?

Beyond all knowledge there is non-knowledge and he who would become absorbed in the thought that beyond his knowledge he knows nothing—even were he to have within him Hegel's inexorable lucidity—would no longer be Hegel, but a painful tooth in Hegel's mouth. Would a sick tooth alone be missing from the great philosopher?

Preface (9). **

1. *Here, in A, this sketch of a preface is interrupted:*

The preface properly speaking should turn on this precise point. I have known [*crossed out*: 20 years ago] a time of effervescence and of prophecy, many glimmers have arisen which attempted to dazzle. Minds in revolution were in some cases drunk, in other cases gritting their teeth, dreaming of cataclysms, and in yet other cases were speaking, were intoxicated with speaking. As with all human things (but a bit more no doubt) comedy, affectation, words beyond feelings and feelings, half-false (literary) feelings gave to the whole thing a halo of deceit. I thought: So many of the words which I hear—I don't believe in them, I understand poorly how . . . but I shared a deep belief. Independently of what I was hearing, I thought that there existed within us an inward

*These first lines, dated January 24, 1943, can be found in the manuscript for *Le Coupable* (cf. Gallimard vol. V, p. 554).

**Throughout, parenthetical page citation refers to French edition.

strength requiring what I don't know (no one knows what) but requiring it with madness, desiring it as would a woman in love who cries in the dark. And it matters little what—what does the desired being mean? . . . but the tears which flow out are like death and I believe—although, no doubt, I am the only one to believe it—that the death of those who are sick is the eager anticipation of the joys of those who survive. And when I say of the joys, I say too little. So many sobs, so many death-struggles, so many pains demand an answer which blinds, something gentle, extravagant, transfiguring.

It seemed to me to be obvious that one could not respond to such an anticipation with poems, pictures, exhibitions. And I think that this was obvious for everyone. But an anticipation is never well defined: there were other similar ones linked to literature, to the fine arts, to business, to personal fame. In the confusion, remaining without a profound answer to the profound anticipation which they had experienced—or believed to experience—most forgot it. And gradually there were no more glimmers, nor effervescence, nor prophecy. At least, I ceased to discern the appearance of any in the attitude or the words of others. However, the anticipation in me had become no less bitter, no less urgent. I felt only that I was gradually becoming alone.

When I spoke of confusion, I did not mean that there was none in my mind. And when I spoke of a list of poems, I was not thinking that these objects are worthy of contempt nor that there was nothing else which that term had not completely covered. I will also not pretend never having thought of such wretched responses. My anticipation outlasted that of others—but I will seize the opportunity to say that no doubt my persistence betrays a mad and often unjustified presumption on my part. It outlasted that of others in any case, and my ceaseless pursuit for an answer continued as well.

And as always, I hastened and whereas I should have been silent—in this sense that nothing was yet *[laid bare?]* in me and that I could do no more than glimpse things—I spoke on several occasions as if I carried the answer within me. I affirmed that this answer was the sacred and it is true that I still today believe that I reached it, but I no longer think today that it was a question of a complete answer and then I believe that I couldn't have made it accessible. Today I say that it is inner experience and I will say what I mean by that in my book. But in the meantime those who were anticipating with me have vanished, the answer which I give is given to the desert—in a profound silence. And even more, although I am in no way given to see providence behind acts and their coincidences, I cannot regret to any extent, given what it was, that this

answer disappeared just as totally. It no longer exists anywhere but in the hidden recesses of the heart and it no longer has a public existence. This is addressed not to a public eager for new and striking sensations but to those who can only descend to the depths of man's possibilities.

In any case, this answers to such an extent to my feeling that I can ask myself if I should not have avoided this preamble. It is in certain respects misplaced to connect what I am going to speak about now, to a past of literary agitation. But exactitude in the sense of mediocrity as in the other sense. And although the old preoccupations seem in general to have corrupted those who possessed them and cannot surpass them, it can make sense to connect this "experience" to them rather than to any other thing.

Perhaps. It seems to me in fact that I am introducing in this way a clarity into a book in which, as one will see, one may wonder if the author is not victim of an incurable moral sadness and singularly removed from the living. However, this clarity, after the fact, seems to me to be insufficient. "Rather than to any other thing" is quickly said. Perhaps, given the earlier concerns of some. But not for the better. For without any doubt, what I speak of is connected in me to what I imagine to be as far removed as possible from deliquescences, at the same time from pessimism, from the perverse and unfortunate contempt for health, for human strength, which together are often linked to the exercise of poetry. I must say it loudly, for the movement of my book engages one in confusion. No one is gay more than I, no one is more the friend of man—of his virtues, (and the most juvenile)—more hostile to his failures, to his judicial fetters, to his compassions. How I would like to say of this book the same thing which Nietzsche said of the *Gay Science:* "almost no phrase wherein profundity and playfulness do not tenderly hold hands". And I am not wrong to put at opposite poles from the literary cafés, this Mediterranean sky of Zarathustra, to which my entire life has tended. Misfortune to one who damns! Casting this cry, I am happy to introduce it at the head of a book which is bitter. And since one could see in it an inexplicable contradiction, to resolve this right away by calling to witness Nietzsche, who wrote in *Ecce Homo:* "Another ideal . . ."

(At the end of the preface, vital necessity for man to no longer flee beyond himself—ex. pictures in order to manage to hold the attention for an instant.

That I now no longer have, as before, the possibility for resolving, or for believing to resolve, through a bold move, a challenge to the world, the difficulties that it presents to me, but only by an attention at each instant.)

(10)
In CAR, this text precedes:
23–8–42.

In a depression (the hollow of the basin, having scraped the bottom):

The sense of man is non-sense. Should a being need (in order to subsist, even to appear) to conform to senses in particular (successive, discordant, saying, man is made for this, for that, always the equivalent of "the carpenter for the plane" with only the general appearance), one will one day call someone to account, one will contest, nothing will remain. Chance, the last demon, (nothing has a final sense—there is no treasure hidden from thieves), but should chance remain elusive! I was not without it—in the end, I was without it. I had what I loved, *satisfied my heart.* What I loved, is taken from me. Everything is finished. I can only say after Job: "What the Lord has given, the Lord taketh away . . ."

Interrupted. (It is Sunday morning, the sun gilds the foliage of the tall trees before me, a song begins with fullness, voices of men and women united, it is the *Kyrie eleison.* O miserable echo, scarcely quiet, of another *superman* which I heard on the shores of Lake Maggiore.* . . . and which remains in me the sign less of my chance than that of men. And now? a sermon! of which only the studied tone reached me, unintelligible.

"The Lord taketh away . . ."

But when chance is the Lord, what is it once it has been taken away? non-sense. I tell myself: would non-sense be my plane? Before chance abandons me, in advance I have often found non-sense like a little fragment of bone which breaks off horribly as one is savoring a morsel. Today, neither morsel, nor flavor. Nothing but non-sense, truth deserted, creating a desert, glimpsed as heart-breaking in the pale blue of the sky through the foliage of the trees (which is the absence of man and of all sense). What defeats me the most is that I reached a truth today, only too great a truth for me—through chance, through the excess of strength which it provides. Today, as I find that something sickly has ruined my life, I can only say: it is not a truth for the sickly—the ill-advised cannot bear it. But finally I discover this in a very gentle start: this truth requires

Cf. Antecedents to the Torment, *Gallimard, pp. 90–91.*

my strength—if this is so, I make fun of my bad luck; I must raise myself to my highest height and, now that chance is absent from me, I must *nevertheless* find the strength (and perhaps, at bottom, the only type of strength commensurate to such a deserted truth—that which one finds *nevertheless*). Yesterday, at midnight, in the depths of discouragement, I heard in the lobby of the hotel some card players discussing, speaking at the top of their lungs, getting their hackles up over diamonds or clubs—and, in that absurd garden at Passy, the continual chirping of ducks stricken with insomnia; never in me did the vice-grip of idiocy grasp more cruelly the world—I was there, in bed, lights out, my shutters closed, alone and sick. To feel the expanse of the sky and the absence of an answer, evidence that if no one had found an answer, it wouldn't be me, after so much time, who would find one, that we were enclosed forever within the idiocy of the ducks, the card players, as in a prison without any imaginable key (and perhaps chance was on the inside like a flight, a means of avoiding the dirty walls which one bangs against in the dark: yesterday, in my weakness, I banged against them like a giant). Another thing, I said to myself one moment: either there will never be an answer, or it has already been given (in the past). And I forced myself—I evoked the answer given in the past. Nothing frightened me: not even my cowardice frightened me any longer. Like other times, I asked God to enlighten me: he gave I don't know what kind of paltry answer . . . There was no longer at that moment anything to surpass the limits of a duck. And this morning I am bursting, absorbed in a truth which frightens, yet simple. These lines, slowly written, still like a partition, but . . . it's over, I want to remain alone with non-sense.

Supposing that there were in the world a sense—as one has always created it, but one saying: "this is clear . . .", another: "that, which no one before me had seen . . .", and on and on, without end—sense would be provided, man would have to discover it. I accept it and even want to imagine having reached it, without a doubt. I could not then prevent myself from saying: this world is full of sense, I will see it right to its innermost depths, *right to the point where it loses* . . . that sense which it indubitably has for me.

To experience (to contest—oneself and the world—to perceive in knowledge a bait, an obstacle) is one simple resolution among others. One must laugh in it at the follies without which one would not have come to form it. I wanted to return to simplicity *[illegible; crossed out:* human]. If I have followed bizarre paths, I do not excuse those who endlessly amuse themselves with oddities. The human mind is as if de-

composed, but to linger over the decomposition, to take pleasure in it, is more and more opposed to my way of thinking. I would have liked to write a book such that one might not draw facile inferences from it. I would not want one to provide my book with outcomes which are dishonest: I would prefer that one disparage it, or better, that one not take any notice of it.

I have proposed: the friendship of man for himself, the effacement of self in the evidence of pride, a "desert" in which solitude gains access to the "without number", and in the exercise of life, the most discipline possible.

The key to man's integrity:

NO LONGER TO WANT TO BE EVERYTHING,
this is the hatred for salvation.

(11).

2. *CAR:* [. . .] It does not seem so to me [. . .]

3. *This work is possibly a first version of* La Part maudite *(cf. Gallimard vol. V, p. 472, their note 2 for* Méthode de méditation *p. 220).*

4. *CAR, following:* I have now finished this austere, strict book in which it is as though I have left the Earth beyond approachable problems.

(15).
Part One
I. Critique of dogmatic servitude (and of mysticism)

1. *In B, attached to the rough draft for the* Introduction *are these pages numbered 1–8:*

I should have said, all along, what "inner experience" is and answer the questions which one asks about it. That was more difficult than one might believe.

To begin with, I fail with the definition. I must content myself with empiricism. By "inner experience" I mean what one normally designates by the name of "mystical experience"—the experience of states of ecstasy, of rapture, or at least of meditated emotion. But I envisage less "confessional experience"—to which one in general refers—than experience in itself, free of ties, be they vague, to any confession whatsoever. This is what justifies the abandonment of the word "mystical", to which I could not adhere without inviting confusion.

I will not propose a more concise definition. I will show, last of all, that inner experience is linked to the necessity, for the mind, of putting everything into question—without any conceivable respite or rest. This necessity came to light despite religious presuppositions, but its consequences are all the more far-reaching if one puts them aside. It is useless to insist on the meaning, the implication of this suspension of religious presuppositions. That philosophical presuppositions should have directed these experiences as was the case anyway, was not necessarily favorable to the development of experience itself; in any case, the intellectual consequences of it were right away limited. But I must go on. Even suppositions of some consequence are dangerous and vain. And as "inner experience" exists at the *heart* of the possible, I can provide no definition which is not linked to the necessity, of which I have spoken, of putting everything into question without measure.

Nothing further from the possibilities which are mine—or from the intentions of this book—than any mysticism whatsoever, in harmony with poetic imagination. At all times, minds which were inclined towards inner experience indulged in any facilities which they could find: "Such minds, said Hegel, when they abandon themselves to the disordered unrest of their souls, imagine that by masking their consciousness of self and by overcoming their understanding they are the chosen ones to whom God gives wisdom during their slumber; in fact what they conceive and bring into the world during this slumber, are dreams . . ." "Experience" does not have the same effect on beings who are less intellectually careful: it is the source of visions. The mind surpasses its limits with so much force that an entire world, external in appearance, becomes under its control. That which is contemplated in experience is perceived with a surprising intensity and in conditions of general uneasiness. The evidence relevant to the phenomenon itself—the intensity—slips easily from an ungraspable notion to objectivation in a predictable form. The visionary, no doubt, cheats with less difficulty than a philosopher, but it is always a sham.

A "mystic" sees what he wants—this depends on powers which are relative. And in the same way, he discovers—what he knew. No doubt there are wills, beliefs which are unequally favorable, but as such *[man?]* experience introduces nothing which has not at first been a part of one's understanding—*if not the contestation of understanding as the origin of beliefs.*

One will see that I represent inner experience under the guise of things which are best able to be off-putting. But it is not desirable that it be attractive. One must, on the contrary, present it as being barely accessible. In truth, it is even man's inaccessible heart.

First of all, it is necessary to cease believing that one can approach it through a science which does without experience itself. Without denying the interest of scholarly works, how can one not see to what extent they turn their back on experience by studying the life of dead figures. Experience which is not living and which is no longer even conceivable as a "possible" is derision. It is a mode of knowledge which one cannot procure for oneself through intermediary persons, above all when those persons are from another time.

I will moreover try in particular to make one understand why it is that this work of scholars, ignorant of experience, is by this very fact alien to the subject which they discuss. This is my means of making known what experience precisely consists of (something which a definition will not permit). Science, scientific knowledge, can, it is true, claim experience as their object, but it happens in the course of scholarly studies that the conditions of observation change the nature of the phenomenon being observed. This is the case, if there is one, of "inner experience". First of all, I have shown that one who experiences is involved, through it, in errors of judgment. And in the same way, if one envisages science with a true faith—if one makes use of that sort of judgment which founds the belief in discursive knowledge—this amounts to saying: if experience itself has not put faith and judgment into question—the object to which knowledge lays claim can only in appearance coincide with that of mystical pursuits.

The destruction of the object by the observer is tangible to an unequal degree, depending on the case. It is strange in the case of Pierre Janet*. This scholar in no way adheres to bookish knowledge, to which mystical studies are usually limited. He had the good fortune to care for an "ecstatic" patient in a hospital ward. He designates her in his writings by the familiar name of Madeleine. He had this creature entirely at his disposal for more than six years. He had her half undress in order to photograph her in ecstasy (in the pose of crucifixion). Mixed in this, there was no desire to blaspheme but rather, a meticulous scientific care (Janet observed everything—breathing, heart, excretions). A paternal, ironic and, in a word, infinitely contemptuous benevolence presided at his work. His affectionate kindness won him the blind confidence of the subject.

(16)

2. *A, first draft crossed out:*

[. . .] categories of understanding.

*Cf. below, the note for p. (18).

The rigor which accompanies my refusal surprises and even risks being [*illegible; crossed out:* to remain without consequence] in this sense—that it is difficult to maintain a position which is contrary to one's habits. But this rigor [*crossed out:* is no less founded on the intimate necessity for "experience" than on the rigidity of a principle] thrusts itself upon me without discussion.

If I said assuredly [. . .]

3. *A:*

[. . .] distrustfully hostile towards the idea of perfection [*crossed out:* this hostility exists within me like a rupture, is linked to my *blind man's* glance, to the state of "non-knowledge" where the mind enters deeper into the lost depths of darkness].

[A first draft, crossed out, provided the following:]

I cannot forget that in any case God signifies the salvation of the soul and the other links of the imperfect to the perfect. What I call "the inconceivable unknown"—I have no desire or means within me of assuming it to be perfect. And I can add this: as soon as I have *vision* of the "unknown", the idea which I had of the perfect is—in fact—in a state of glaring antagonism with "that" and this antagonism is the same thing as the rupture which results from my state of *"blindness"*, of the "non-knowledge" which plunges me then deeper into the most hidden depths of darkness. Without that, everything would result, I think, in something vaguely calming.

(17)

4. *A:*

[. . .] sovereignty without partition.

April 42.

II. Experience, sole authority, sole value

It is no less necessary to oppose "experience" to the progress of science than to pull it out of a dogmatic slumber. The aim of "experience" is "experience" itself and not a certain knowledge acquired—without going through it—after the fact.

One often studies "experience" with the help of written documents, without noticing that, without having reached "experience" oneself, one

speaks of it in an empty fashion. "Experience" can no doubt become an object of science, like one psychological given among others, but this object's interest is clearly different from that of "experience" itself.

Science apprehends objects in order to distinguish them one from the other and in order to grasp the constant relationships among them. "Experience" flees from knowledge of this order: it distinguishes itself as clearly as possible from discursive thought, which cannot

[All of this is crossed out and replaced by:]

(18)

1. *A:*

II.

2–8–42.

This "introduction" was to have six parts, specified in advance. Having only written the first, I temporarily abandoned things, passing to the "Post-scriptum". I have come to the point of giving my reasons for my way of writing. The "introduction" had three pages: I dropped it, I wrote the preface, which had not been foreseen. I finished what touches on "dogmatic servitude" with great difficulty. Then I began the reading of Janet*, imagining it necessary to use its subtlety in order to proceed further. I formulated, without writing anything down, a development which set out from it. But as soon as it existed in my mind, since it had a sufficient precision, I ceased to concern myself with it—I forgot it. In truth, "inner experience" abandons life to ceaseless disturbance.

I continue the already begun "introduction" without adhering to my first intention. The change, it is true, affects less the plan than the execution; I will simplify everything.

Of the plan which I had decided upon I will give [. . .]

(22)

III. Principles of a method and a community

*Cf. above, our note for p. (15). Bataille is probably alluding here to *De l'angoisse à l'extase.—Études sur les croyances et les sentiments*, Paris, Alcan, 1926–1928. He borrowed this book from the Bibliothèque Nationale in May 1942 (likewise in January and February 1935).

1. *In B, these scattered notes:*

Inner experience is a movement in which man contests himself in his entirety.

Heidegger addresses himself to a community of men who refuse this contestation. He does it, but as this contestation is addressed to the scientific community, as a contestation, it is, in fact, a quite ugly, stunted gnome—too stylized to be a monster, embarrassed, if not ashamed of being so.

those who are not freed from the deadly habits (intelligence) of school—I must regard them as absent (ex. M. Janet)

aberration of the non-existence of a community.

[on the other side]:

difference between immediate sympathy and the desert where sympathy dies—towards the extreme limit.

In the community: to put on guard one who acquires his intelligence at the University. He cannot grasp: he is missing an essential element.

Difference between the domestic state and the wild state—mountain and prairie

*

To show that it is not a matter of addition
knowledge + this or that
and that it was not a new value either

no renewal of method with respect to philosophy: one applies existing intelligence from the moment when experience begins

reserve: the method of the Holocausts

that communication cannot be authority but only experience

The point of view for judging from now on must be that of the lack which resulted from the suppression of authorities

[on the other side, crossed out]:

And as for religion the situation is reversed. Whereas previously, short of being able to establish *[relations with a?]* God

It is through a non-recourse to God that a less limited path is opened. But this must be made tangible on another level—that of method.

*

coincidence of a new discourse and of the impotence of discourse

Now what is the key to dramatization: it is authority, such that one can say, if one manages to grasp the drama, that one is dealing with authority—and reciprocally that if one is lacking authority, if nothing has a particular value, no drama is possible

in the same way if an authority, a value exist, there is necessarily drama

for that amounts to saying: one can only take it totally seriously

further on: but authority is always something common, commonly felt, or is not. One must seek its authenticity. One can only seek it in common.

*

one could believe

reduction of the possible for example possibility for an inner experience

but from the moment when the little phrase is pronounced, authority is inner experience itself, man has once again his possible at his disposal, and even this time, all of his possible

next after authority,

principle of sacrifice, that is, of all religion, this is a dramatization tending to take on a general value

this leads to the sacrifice in which everything is victim

but it has two *[sources ?]* (Blanchot)

development of intelligence

(23)

2. *B:* [. . .] without authority this time, on the contrary against authority, in a movement of divine freedom.

(24)

3. *B:* [. . .] important (but it is in a less empty form—a bit empty—what I have already said: experience is authority): it is necessary [. . .]

(25)

4. *B. crossed out:*

[. . .] my eyes are closed.

The practical difficulty of inner experience [*crossed out:* of method (dramatization)] stems from the faithfulness of a dog which man shows to discourse.

[in the margins:]

tale of the tempest by the fireside

that I don't write for one who would be unable to browse, but for one who, entering into this book, would fall as into a hole.

It is through an "intimate [. . .]

(28)

5. *B:*

[. . .] we can allow their useless noise to die out.

The effort is worth more than the trouble in that those states perhaps indifferent in themselves literally lift us outside of discourse (get us out of the mire). Indifferent is moreover quickly said. Aesthetic criticism of these states can go as far as one wishes—it is not that which is important. But they are that which no sentence can capture—bits of free existence and the escape of the mind into the unknowable. They together constitute this—even the escape.

But if the spirit of contestation was not within us, we could get caught in the languor of these states, take pleasure in them as we do in those states which are commanded by graspable objects and grasp them in the end, appropriate them for ourselves. From then on, there is a necessity for constant exchanges, for frenzies following upon bursts of energy, for an agitation, at times burning, feverish, at others icy, for a questioning undertaken endlessly in a new direction. It is by means of often comical and always breathless mishaps that the mind slowly gets itself out of the sand. These silent "movements" are nothing yet—it is necessary for us to release their light and, projecting it outside of us, to adore it, then to extinguish it.

I will limit myself, to begin with, to the principles whose developments are further on, often in a great disorder (and the essential in Part IV, chapter V). Only I would still like to reintroduce this: that

no innovation

this is yoga, that is to say essentially the art of mastering inner movements, but represented in a form—by presenting it in my own way—

which removes its pedantic character, of a coarse recipe, by on the contrary allowing to emerge

In addition, in yoga, at least such as it is transmitted to Occidentals, the mastery of inner movements appears as a hygiene or as an aesthetic. Whereas I insert it into a movement which continues. I imagine that in India there exists a tendency to drag on about the method, to play the virtuoso, but that—the mind being everywhere the same—the practice of yoga is developed beginning with a feeling of dissatisfaction, with a nostalgia for going beyond. But what is expressed to us is rather—it must be said—the aspects of coarseness, of platitude, for example Vivekananda even if it surpasses is no less such through its very poor intellectual means . . . And what one has shown to me of it as having practically the most meaning had none.

This is not a reason for distancing oneself from it with too much ill-humor

what I say is insufficient

in any case necessity despite the example of Christianity

for Christianity is the *[forcing?]* where individual aptitudes

If one says recipe one should remember poetry . . .

In all method including the mastery of moments *[movements?]* one must give inspiration the greatest rein but one must not neglect recipes.

The essential of the Hindu recipe is in a certain way to listen to breathing

and also one must put words in one's head in order to provide nourishment for the need for words and at the same time in order to introduce feelings

silence

To seek all affectivity which one could link to this word which is barely a word since it is already the abolition of the sound which the word is. One must seek this silence in the sick delectation of the heart as one of those ungraspable lovers born in the most vaporous regions of dream. Nothing more than the shadow of summer heat, the transparency, in a room, of a ray of moonlight. When a flower's perfume is heavy with the secret fragrance of a past of childhood vacations, we linger alone over breathing in the flower *[. . . cf. p. (29)]*

(29)

6. *B:*

[. . .] the abysses of the heart.

Hindus still have recourse to a means of the same type. They pronounce as in a cavernous way, prolonged with a strangely virile but troubled resonance for us evocative of silence, of the night of cathedrals, the syllable OM. This syllable is for them sacred. In this way they maintain themselves in a religious torpor, full of troubled even majestuous divinity, and whose prolonging in interiority is infinite (but personally the "local color" of this procedure, even more than its aspect of "pious artifice" displeased me—if I have tried to pronounce the syllable it is hardly enough to have grasped the sought-after effects and, moreover, I have never known how to give it the desired resonance).

Hindus do not limit themselves to these simple means, they also have some which are more heavy-handed. Certain among them, if need be, ingest drugs (to my taste nothing is more repugnant nor more contrary to what is for me the necessarily resilient, in the end torrential spirit of "inner experience"). Tantric *yoga* uses sexual pleasure, not in order to ruin oneself in it, but to detach oneself before the end from the object, from the woman, whom they make use of (they avoid the last moment of pleasure). In these practices, it is always a matter of an object having powerful prolongations within us—but an object which one disregards in one way or another, having only these prolongations in mind; it is always a matter of entering into possession of interiority, of acquiring the mastery of inner movements, detached from the objects of our life.

Culture in excess of these means, all the more dangerous that they are rich, that they evince a disquieting inclination towards virtuosity. Not being easily offended by licencentiousness, I find it contemptible to "abuse" a woman and pleasure for means other than those of their own. Contemptible above all to "exploit" experience, to make a stilted exercise out of it, even a competition.

[in the margins:]

a royalty exercised upon ourselves

royal commandment

expiation = here direction towards experience

putting to death of the king which lays bare if it does not kill

it is not an exceptional path

it is the putting of animal life into human (or divine) rhythm

Expiation is what project tries to avoid and precisely the project which protects some engages others.

To move on to the end of the book.

I imagine that it is best to oppose to this thick, stifling vegetation the poorest means. More especially as they quickly have a powerful effect. Barely have we embarked on the path of interiority than we enter into a

fabulous region, with felicitous, ungraspable but intoxicating landscapes. For what one anticipates at the same time as the inner states is the possibility of increasing their intensity. Barely have we succeeded in directing our attention towards them than they are made fertile by it: what remained unnoticed up to that point takes on a fullness, not of a storm—it is a question of slowly moving states—but of an invading flood. What is exalted, at such moments, is sensibility within us. It sufficed that we detach it from the neutral objects to which we usually direct it. It becomes such that—the Hindus have noticed this—a minute cracking, (Hindus say a drop of a pin) have an extraordinary resonance, as if they immediately touched delicately but intensely our hearts.

But I know few things, almost nothing, about India *[cf. p. (30)]*

(30)

7. *B (scattered notes):*

I imagine that is the same [*crossed out:* arousal of sensibility] in this case, as it is in vision. We keep our pupil almost closed against an intense light and we dilate it in darkness. But this time it is no longer a particular organ which is at stake—it is the heart of sensuous being. This is because, in a general fashion, we have, within us, blacked out all objects. And it is this which makes the voyage to the end of being possible. For

normally hoarded, but for this reason detached
result responding to the givens introduced
but in the same way, we only have it relatively speaking
misleading possibilities
with intense moments one can recompose objects
but starting from that . . .

(31)

8. *B:*

[. . .] to be born again no longer [*crossed out:* What strikes me in this regard: supposing that I myself were at first a peasant of Louis XIV (or some other absurd simple man, or a girl, it matters little). In any case what I am now would have been irrelevant to the simple man. In the same way it is irrelevant to me what . . . would be. And what does the identity of a self mean without the necessity of concern? I would like very much to concern myself, actually, with what will happen to me

tomorrow, next year, and further on . . . I do not escape from this necessity. But to extend it beyond a threshhold, like death! that I should have to burn in hell forever—I couldn't care any less about this than if *I* were any human being, unknown by me, arriving]

What strikes me in this regard: assume the following: x dead [. . .]

(33)

9. *B:*

[. . .] appear to be of the same nature (strictly speaking, it is true, it is not so arbitrary, it is touching to concern oneself *[absurdly ?]* with *k: k* contains in itself at bottom the multitude of being but in an incongruous form).

To imagine oneself, [. . .]

10. *B. on the other side:*

It is possible that I might wish to be everything, enclose everything: in this case, I would enclose in order to stream forth, to flow out, to lose myself—my concern to be everything would be my total absence of concern.

(36)

11. *B:*

[. . .] Interrogation encounters the very object which makes one pass from logical operation to vertigo: like excitement nudity.

Life in the end is inflamed and is playful.

Something sovereignly attractive [. . .]

(37)

12. *B (scattered notes):*

If I push (pleading) interrogation right to the end, I know nothing, and man within me is nothing but insatiable, unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

The will to know is so much within me thirst to become everything that

No difference between knowledge and being everything. Knowledge assumes at any particular moment an arbitrary intervention saying with

authority: this question does not exist, you know everything that you must know.

And through this one closes the world, one enclosed it in a past: revelation, the word of God.

(39)

13. *B (scattered notes):*

The community of which I speak is that which virtually existed owing to Nietzsche's existence (who is its requirement) and which each one of Nietzsche's readers undoes by evading—that is to say by not resolving the enigma put forward (by not even reading it).

14. *B:* No doubt I have more than Nietzsche dwelled upon the meaning of the night of non-knowledge (the "death of God"). He does not linger [. . .]

(41)

15. *B:*

[. . .] bacchant philosophy.

The pseudonym Dianus* seems to me to reunite the flavor of a bearded woman and that of a god who is dying, his throat streaming with blood.

With respect to the ideal of the "sheltered man", key to the most commonly affirmed vulgar prejudices, I would like to tell of the shame that I feel over having touched upon it—be it from a distance—to tell of it and this so anxiously that only the thickest do not share it.

It is difficult[. . .]

(42)

16. *B:*

[. . .] puts into play. Silence and laughter as well . . . but a mode of human relations breaking with the cowardly neutrality of rule, insignificance understood from the very first as a principle. Thus, dying, I would imagine being able to communicate more than by writing this book

**Cf. Le Coupable, p. 239.*

(there is in the dreadful moments of death a liberty unknown to us—right to the basest giving up, I tremble to speak of it). A book? without the smallest possibility of crying out when a reader touches me with a greasy paw, has me enter into his seamy enterprise. How I become saddened today over my lack of discipline—at least according to appearances—which risks leading one profoundly astray. What alone liberates me is the idea that a book is really let go, no longer belongs to its author.

[We give next these scattered notes in B]:

End of *Intellectual Expression of Experience*

in the end: it is only a sketch and, I know it now, I will never write anything else. But I also know that this is the only intellectual expression of experience which remains possible for, if it is true that, despite all the obstacles, we can express experience, there is one which makes the play of expression exhausting. There is nothing we can say without a new point of view adding itself afterwards: it is inexhaustible. It is only if we deal with completely simple objects (as in mathematics) that we can hope to exhaust the possible: and no doubt this is an error. Such an obstacle, it is true, is not particular to experience but the latter augments the obstacle by this fact that, instead of wanting to evade it, experience throws itself at the obstacle.

To write my book

I force myself

nothing else, sickness forbids me and moreover I am only interested in it . . .

and once the book is finished, after which I

life continuing, but one more sadness, the book finished, let go, me beyond in the void. Obliged to get back to what will yield the most interest for me, will I seek in my misery a sympathy, an outstretched hand. Or would I not *[take up?]* on the contrary that hand in order to bite it cruelly, in order to die alone (in order to find once again a purer air and to pursue contestation, for me and for the one whom I will have bitten up to that point).

One might as well leave open (and I wish to—I don't speak of it as though resigned) that infinite rejuvenation of knowledge through a change of points of view. Thus I prefer to say to myself: I will come back to it in another book, in order to better see myself, and to permit one to see, that a slipping movement is beginning which neither I nor anyone else can *[stop?]*. Permitting one to see in the end that the play of light

between two nights already proclaims that supremacy of the night to which experience is linked. For just as the renewal necessary to life foreshadows that we belong to death, so that of knowledge foreshadows that it is the liege of the unknown. And given that experience takes my life in order to devote it to the unknown, it is quite necessary that its expression—which to all appearances is removed from it, being discourse—nevertheless remain profoundly faithful to it, being only a sketch, admitting with it, with even a bit of pleasure, that element of death which is the flowing out of a river moving towards the sea.

Part Two

(76)

1. Le dernier homme: *this is the title of a book by Maurice Blanchot, published by Gallimard in 1951.*

Part Three

Death is in a sense an imposture

(83)

1. *One will find in the first volume of the* Complete Works, *under the title of* Sacrifices, *a first version of this text (cf. Vol. I of Gallimard, pp. 87–96 and* Notes, *pp. 613–614).*

The Blue of Noon

(92)

1. *Taken from* Minotaure *no. 8, June 1936, pp. 50–52 (cf. Gallimard, Vol. I, Notes, p. 641). This text accompanied a poem by André Masson* Du haut de Montserrat, *and the reproductions of two paintings from 1935,* Aube à Montserrat *and* Paysage aux prodiges; *it was preceded by this prefatory note:*

What André Masson experienced at Montserrat, in particular during the night of the *Paysage aux prodiges,* what he expressed in the paintings

which these pages reproduce, is closely associated with what I myself have experienced and expressed in the following text.

It is necessary to give the greatest importance possible to the fact that the reality in question can only be reached in religious ecstasy.

[*This prefatory note leads us to take up here the tale which André Masson tells of his night on Montserrat (published by Jean-Paul Clébert in* Georges Bataille and André Masson, *"Les Lettres nouvelles", May 1971):*]

"Prodigious spot. At an altitude of fourteen hundred meters, we spent, my wife and I, a winter night, lost at the summit. This is one of the most astounding memories of my life. We were lodging at the monastery. We were dressed for summer. We had lingered before the sunset which I was drawing. The sun was setting in the direction of Aragon, because this mountain is, like Mount Sinai, in a sort of sierra. I saw the sea of clouds approach, break like a rising tide. Then night fell. We had lost the path to climb down. We slid endlessly, I could not keep still—I was restless because there were constant shooting stars. We found ourselves on a platform no larger than that and . . . the abyss.

"Then I had a nervous attack (a sequel to that nervous illness which followed my war wound) and my wife said to me: We can't stay here, we have to climb back up. There was then a double vertigo, the abyss and the sky with the shooting stars, the sky itself appeared to me like an abyss, something which I had never felt before—the vertigo above and the vertigo below. And I found myself in a sort of maelstrom, almost a tempest, and as though hysterical. I thought I was going mad.

"Then we managed to climb up again by hanging on to boxwood and cane-apple trees, and, up above, we waited for morning. Well, there the spectacle was opposite. The mountain entirely covered with clouds. Only the spot where we were emerged. And the sun rose. It was sublime. We were on our height like Moses waiting for the arrival of the Lord.

"When we arrived below, one of the monks was surprised to see us arrive from that direction and when my wife explained to him that we had passed the night at the summit, he cried out: Caramba! It was the first time that I heard that word spoken which Hugo had made popular. The hostelry was not yet open, but one heard music, children's choirs absolutely as in Parsifal, *the priests who celebrated mass. Although we were paralyzed with fear, it was extraordinary. It was one of my most gripping moments. The cosmic and the religious linked all of a sudden by an adventure: travellers lose their way on a mountain, are present at the death of a star, at its rebirth, descend to a religious place where one appears to celebrate that event and not at all the death of Christ . . ."*

(93)

2. *All of this beginning refers to the* Dossier de l'Oeil pinéal *(cf. Gallimard, Vol. II, pp. 13–17 and* Notes, *pp. 413–421).*

(94)

3. Minotaure *provides for this paragraph:*

No limit, no measure can be given to the violence of those who are liberated by a vertigo experienced before the vault of the sky. The smallest hope is regarded simply as the cowardice or the fatigue still accorded to the necessity of the world and there no longer exists a human interest which does not sink into derision: the representation of sufferings, of miseries, or of words of which they would be guilty would make them laugh.

The ground [. . .]

(95)

4. *This city is Trente (cf. Gallimard Volume VI,* Sur Nietzsche, Note *p. 409, note for p. 127.)*

5. *following in Minotaure:*

Prometheus moaned when a chaos of rocks fell on him.

Don Juan was drunk with carefree insolence when he was swallowed by the earth.

Beneath the shining light of the sky [. . .]

[Moreover: this entire passage (from: I will die in hideous conditions, *p. 94 to:* against all reason) *is taken up again in the novel* The Blue of Noon *(cf. Gallimard, Vol. III, pp. 395–396).]*

The labyrinth (or the constitution of beings)

(97)

1. *A first version of this text (in* Recherches Philosophiques, *Gallimard, Vol. V 1935–1936, pp. 364–372) is provided in the first volume of the Complete Works (cf. Gallimard, Vol. I, pp. 433–441).*

"Communication"

(110)

1. *In C, this paragraph precedes:*
There exist not only differences of nature which are reducible (I could draw gold from sulfur): the difference between you and me is historical as well as a difference of nature; but it is not reducible, for my death could not make me you, nor your death me.

(111)

2. *C:*
[. . .] attackable from the outside.

I. From laughter to anguish

It is true that this [. . .]

(113)

3. *C:*
[. . .] break you; but you only become this extreme point and this moment of foaming crest which is *reflexion* by being an obstacle to the rushing forth which breaks you, an obstacle soon destined to being broken.

*

To the extent [. . .]

(114)

4. *C:*
[. . .] Thus we *sacrifice* the one whom we laugh at, we abandon him to a downfall more or less pronounced, more or less lasting. It also happens that our fellow being *sacrifices* himself as it were, of his own free will, that, of his own movement, he makes himself *sacred* (like the *madman*). However we only ever perceive in others the way in which the

spring-like movement of life has us, our pretensions, our naive illusions at its disposal. Barely have we grasped the vanity [. . .]

(115)

5. In C, pages 7–12, the text continues:

What strikes only in shared laughter and what seems at times to merit scorn, is the facile and superficial illusion of anguish. You laugh at seeing a woman fall on the sidewalk: you would not laugh if she had thrown herself from a window, if she had been crushed at your feet. You would not laugh because you would feel anguish—that it is true you could keep to yourself; but this anguish which you feel before a sudden and terrifying destruction—you could have felt it, perhaps less strongly but still anguish—if the woman who fell on the sidewalk had mattered to you. In actual fact, you feel anguish, you don't laugh, as soon as you feel bonds of solidarity which unite you to the victim: this can be due to the bonds of a particular affection.

You should then lay the blame on weakness. When you laugh, you perceive yourself to be the accomplice of a destruction of what you are—you take yourself for that wind of destructive life which leads everything without pity to its end (and whose disheveled joy carries off the partitions which separated you from others). But it suffices that you see yourself threatened by this same wind—you or yours—your complicity and your joy immediately turn into fear.

2. *From anguish to glory*

Anguish often ties its bonds around us without anything other resulting from it: it can resolve itself at the same instant. But even while its object proves to weigh heavily, it can, if we have felt it for others, abandon us alone to its sadness; and if it resulted from a danger which threatens us it may happen that death alone brings it to its conclusion.

But anguish is far from limited to the impasse which it at times is: and most often, it can be found along the path of decisive movements. Like laughter, it breaks down the barriers of isolation. When the object which provokes it is the same for everyone, it brings men closely together. And it is, as you will see, in this bringing together, where breath is suspended, that human existence reaches the decisive moment of its abandonment and its rupture in the darkness of the universe.

*

At this point, I require a more profound test of your attention. What follows is not more difficult, more intelligent than the rest, but its level of intelligence asks that you proceed now right to the end of reflexion. To gain access to the deserted extremity of things assumes that a condition is realized: the silence of discourse, when discourse (the ordinary and halting steps forward of thought) has served only an introductory function. You reach now with me the point where life stops, where it exhausts itself, loses itself. Where it loses itself in a remoteness (off in a distance) so charged that there everything is overwhelming. There is no mystery more profound, more impenetrable, whereas, we, however, only have meaning to the extent that its profundity, suddenly, remains open, accessible to us.

*

It is the strange and painful fate of those who live today to be unable to approach the threshhold which you now reach with me, if not guided by the markers and the traces which only an *archeological* reflexion permits one, with difficulty, to discover. Such that we must arrive covered with the dusty clothes of the archeologue; how could we, in fact, reach that point where everything which is revealed is made *sacred,* if we hadn't sought the paths followed by the *sacrifices* of all times? Above all, how would it have been possible to make clear the sense of this ultimate step forward, if we hadn't had at our disposal, on those paths, the far-reaching givens which an indifferent lucidity has patiently established? But how vain is that science which has the *sacred* as an object and which limits itself to knowing it as crudely as the physiologue who would of life know only the dissection table. If, before the threshhold, we couldn't cast off the archeologue's clothes and lay ourselves bare, it would have been better not to have begun any step forward.

This is why, I must ask you now, since you are running over sentences in which the silence of thought is inscribed with even more necessity than its logical sequence, to give up, if from very far away you do not feel the anguish in which I find myself, seeking to *communicate* with you. If this reading was not to have for you the gravity, the deadly sadness of sacrifice, I would want to have not written anything.

*

SACRIFICE IS THE COMMUNICATION OF ANGUISH. Thus the only true sacrifice is human sacrifice. For the victim, whom the sacrificial knife puts into death's power, is there for me. In him, I was able to perceive myself destroyed by the rage to destroy, or, at least, when I was afraid to look too closely, I felt myself to be in solidarity with the existence which fell before me into Nothingness. If I myself were dead, if I myself had been destroyed, my anguish would not have gone further than the knife. I would not have been able to recognize myself open to the winds of the outside since all knowledge would be dissolved in me as soon as my heart would have ceased to beat. In order that in me this existence given to men cease to be unprofitably closed and *communicate,* it was necessary that another die before me. And not only before me but before others in all things similar to me and, like me, adherents through anguish to the annihilation which takes place, and yet, like me, protected from a blow savagely directed towards the victim. For this fear, this anguish which seizes man here and there in his abandon must not leave as it has come. It must not be resolved too quickly through the deliverance of death, all the less that it is dissipated at random, all the less that it becomes interminable and sickly; it must be communicated from one man to another, it must be accumulated and laden like a storm, inscribing its point of night in the luminous order of things.

*

Anguish binds beings each time they feel the threat of death weighing upon them. It is because they will one day be dying that they are not separated from the surging forth of the world, in excess. And yet they don't have the strength to desire fully a fusion which it is not possible to know, since it annihilates. They stop then at a stirring nostalgia for death, approaching it closely enough to know of its terror but from far enough to escape from it. From the closed isolation which is the saddest of deaths to the fusion of physical death—where one who is at stake is cruelly suppressed, as if he had never been—there is neither rest nor appeasement; and anguish is nothing but absence of all rest and the impossibility of appeasement; there is battle and rupture (there is no way out), between the desire to give oneself completely to the bacchanalia which breaks out and destroys, and the concern to last, to participate in the bacchanalia without being dead.

*

There is no way out and the *communication of anguish*—which takes place in sacrifice—is not the solution but the introduction and the maintenance of rupture in the very center, in the heart of humanity. It is only in the midst of anguish that this being which you are maintains enough consistency and yet leaves gaping the wound through which, hastening from all points of the universe, deadly destruction enters. Without your anguish, you would not be this faithful mirror of excess movements, of the vertiginous flight of day and night, which you have become. This is why it would not be for you to refuse that wild amplification of this pain which you are suffering from, of the splendor which follows you, and of your ultimate reality—which sacrifice is. What you feel of yourself, your isolated moments of anguish let you know everything which enters into play. But the anguish which you do not *communicate* to your fellow being is, as it were, scorned and mistreated. It has only to the most feeble degree the power to reflect the glory which comes from the profundity of the sky. This power is due to the place which you accord to it. You must yet discover in anguish what you possess of a most precious nature, what you, consequently, must communicate to your fellow beings and, through this, what you must magnify without measure. Without sacrifice, anguish would only be what it is—I mean what it appears to be to the sick individual—it would not be the *heart* in which the movement of worlds is bound and is ruptured.

*

You must, then, abandon yourself to your destiny or, more exactly, accept that it lead you to your glory. This anguish which wounds you—it is necessary that it tear you apart even more so that you communicate it to your fellow beings. You must go to the public square and shout it out as it is, you must shout it out to your fellow being. The latter must learn from you that thirst for blood which is manifested by no one in isolation: the anguish which is communicated, in the darkness, from one to the other, demands that blood flow; the shared desire to emerge from the circle of solitude which leaves one barren, to negate egotism without light, demands that a victim be chosen to die. Desire chooses, if possible, one whom divine seduction designated: it will designate you if you are *king*. But it does not matter that fate calls you, or anyone else. It is even necessary that you survive, in order that that absolutely icy light which death releases be reflected in you, in the rays of your anguish. And

in the same way, when you die, you will transmit to others the hard message of light.

*

For it is true—and this truth asks that you suffer and drink deep of it—that anguish communicated turns into glory. Death or isolation stopped everything. But in an anguished group, there is no longer either isolation or death. Isolation is resolved in the communication of anguish. And death can only strike the isolated individual, it cannot annihilate the group. From that time on, just as the accumulated storm becomes lightning and thunder, anguish coming closer and closer is lost in a flash of glory. It suffices that a single individual encounter the violent destiny with which it is heavy.

[There follows this hand-written note]:

This text is not finished: what should have emerged from what follows is that the necessity for sacrifice should not be understood in a literal sense [*crossed out:* it is a question of the mystical complicity with the death of one's fellow being and not of really renewing the savage practice. Cruelty and anguish are married in this way] but as the expression of the nature of things which more ancient men found in their rites. It is a question of complicity with death and only of *that which is* revealing itself in anguish to the mind, not of acts to accomplish.

6. *Dionys Mascolo communicates to us the proofs of the first edition of* Inner Experience: *Bataille foresaw here a lengthy development, in part unpublished, in part borrowed from* L'Amitié *(extracts from the first pages of* Le Coupable *published under the pseudonym of* Dianus *in 1940—cf. Gallimard, Vol. VI,* Annexe 3, *p. 292). In the lines which follow, referring to our* Annexe, *we are content to indicate the beginning and the end of the borrowed passages:*

[. . .] *ecstatic experience from which I set out.*

I have described what precedes above all as an—indirect—description of "states of ecstasy" which I had reached.

Dianus, in L'Amitié (Mesures, *April 15, 1940) makes tangible the links between what precedes and inner experience. This emerges from a certain number of pages:*]*

"The path of ecstasy [. . .] their powerlessness to love." [*Cf.* Annexe, *p. 297.*]

**Italics and brackets are Bataille's.*

"Ecstasy is communication [. . .] Now communication is not completion." [Cf. Annexe, *p. 297.*]

"As the inaccessible [. . .] with a supposed substance." [*Cf.* Annexe, *pp. 300–301.*]

"The method for ecstasy [. . .] is quickly introduced." [*Cf.* Annexe, *pp. 301–302.*]

"This could be strongly expressed [. . .] than rupture (the putting to death), than sacrifice." [*Cf.* Annexe, *p. 303.*]

"The most important: each man [. . .] which responds to his need to love." [*Cf.* Annexe, *pp. 304–305.*]

[*What follows was unpublished:*]

*[*That spring finished in disaster—mad depression, collapse. It is not that I didn't, like any being, maintain my power to be absent from the present time (to remain "anachronistic", like the bird whose song the hecatomb does not interrupt). But soon I had to "day-dream" in order to better face things: I saw so little that I took my shadow for someone else . . . Who could resist my "final address"? . . .*]

TO WHOMEVER WISHES TRULY TO HEAR ME

1

Should one open one's eyes in the street: what extends before one, common and free, which believes itself to be everything and is only horror, must run up against true force in some places: in such places, a violent feeling seizes the most coarse.

A will which obliges one to silence can only be akin to anguish. Anguish is not the fear of a definable pain.

If some eager will exists in you, which tramples over commonness and refuses to let go of glory for rest, it is vain and friable—desire for the picturesque—as long as it is not inclination towards anguish.

Compared to the strongest man, the crowd is needy and, what is even sadder, in its eyes intimate values are without consequence. There is no way to remedy this. It is as vain to speak of what no longer has any appeal for the crowd as it is to dream about festivals. One draws a consequence from it: that a new value only has meaning on the condition that it answer to the matter-of-fact concern of the majority. Let one understand me well if I cry out that these ideas are not only shortsighted: they betray the poverty of the "strongest". It is true that in the long run fatigue wins out. One forgets the foundation: that the happiest give their chance to the majority *by losing themselves.*

One who loses his life is a *saint*—it matters little to what end. But not

like the soldier whose value is all the greater that he is inaccessible to fear. The *saint* inhabits anguish: he is all the more a *saint* that he has sweated anguish.

The anguish of the neurotic individual is the same as that of the *saint.* The neurotic, the saint are engaged in the same battle. Their blood flows from similar wounds. But the first one gasps and the other one gives.

What chance demands of men: *friendship.*

But anguish? shameful old hag at whom one refuses even to spit!

2

If you demand of thought that it betray life and hide its trials, I only owe you boredom if at least . . .

What I am waiting for? at first your passivity, that the sound which you are stop. I ask you to follow me step by step into night, better yet, into despair. I will warn you neither of the holes—you will fall into them—nor of the walls—you will run up against them. In advance, "my heart breaks from laughing" at your awkwardness.

The Scriptures say of fools that they are without number. I will add that in itself, the foolishness of the wisest is infinite. Night falls over a crowd for whom each truth is only a gross insult for the others. Happy is he who wished himself to be the child of that crowd and that night! In him human foolishness has entered into the realm of anguish.

Sly cruelty, impudent coarseness, trickery, good sense (above all insipid), veiled interest, an old maid's gullibility, *laughter* on every occasion, these are the first words of my new "wisdom".

In a night of vomiting, to pass from this prostitution to a sadness of death; to reduce a vain uproar to an anxious silence is both a *lesser* and a *greater* wisdom.

Sovereignty alone attains a complete "wisdom". It obliges one to silence and yet is only laughter (and if it stops laughing, it is *laughable*).

"Wisdom" is to be everyone.

The grossest weakness: to damn a constraint imposed on "everyone" and to be in control of oneself.

You are made in the image of *everyone.* You constrain obscure desires harshly within yourself. Harshness (gross ignorance) imposes itself upon you in the incompatible throng of needs.

It is vain to flee pain and to want to liberate men from it. One increases it in fleeing it. The only means of suffering less is to be deaf. Pain is a cry of misfortune, a cry of hatred against chance . . .

3

What I have said comes from the heart, nothing in it stops me. It gives me nausea: the black foolishness in which I would flee it?

Empty expression, while marble eyes, a throbbing desire that one hollow out my eyes! To be blind, deaf to the auction cries of useless words—maledictions, calomnies, erors, praise—blind! imbeciles, moon-faced dullards, my fellow beings, *whom I see . . .*

If one has not suffered enough—right to nausea—and if one sees me: I am only lies. One sees me clean and cunning. I have *seen.* I have not seen only that mud which enmires me, those heavy eyes which I question, but which dead eyes perceive.

What I have seen, what I know. There is no longer any power in the world: a slumber—interminable—weighs me down. It matters little that I force myself. It is useless. I will not extirpate my tongue, laughing! I must continue, pass from one minute to another—the minute measured on the dial—this tongue filling my mouth.

My fellow beings! my friends! like stuffy houses, with dusty windows: eyes *closed,* eyelids open! I would like to burst open and the windows to fall with a single crash, opening up to the violent wind.

What a crash of windows teaches: that everything is dead with the possible exception of it: that it is light . . .

The one for whom I write—(whom I address familiarly), he will have to weep out of compassion for what he has just read; then he will laugh, for he has *recognized* himself. No one is sun or lightning: but in him sun and lightning are prolonged . . . I offer him a puzzle: his greatest danger? would it be to weep—or to laugh? or to survive his tears? or to survive his laughter?

If I could know—perceive and discover—"the one for whom I write" I imagine that I would die. Worthy of me, he would have contempt for me. But I would not die of his contempt: survival needs weight.

4

The one who writes with his blood does not want to be *read?* . . . One mustn't read me: I don't want to be covered with evasions. I propose a challenge, not a book. I offer nothing for insomnia.

In anguish, a brutal accident, a pool of blood, a body remains on the road, deprived of life . . . Assuming that the conclusion *made sense,* death leaves one speechless. In time, in death, there exists a promise of

silence, a definitive silence . . . I evade the inexorable promise, if I "dramatize" death; drama differs from time in that it is speech while time is mute.

But what does the vertigo mean which overtakes me if I sense the collapse of time within me—dark, filthy, such that one day, it will make me silent? Nothing—it is an obvious fact and it cries out: my cry is addressed to my fellow being! Nonsense? Nonsense corrupts one who remains deaf to this great cry. If silence is the truth of the universe, without comedy, my living mouth could not mimic the silence of death.

What few ears tolerate—the truth which revolts. Without this bare truth, intelligence becomes spiritless; it is no longer, in the heart of things, anything but a way out, a position taken of falsifying: *man does not live on bread alone, but also on poison.*

This truth is itself poison. It terrifies, withdrawing hope (of saving man, of distancing misery). It is necessary to hide it from those who avoid it—this is a proud bewitching truth, and, like a raised stem, it is cheerful.

A joke along the way: ten behinds of men or of women, at random . . . You would take hold of the most corrupt truths? they ask to love . . . Your fellow being whom you do not care about is the same thing as you: what you see, what you hear, what you are . . .

Part Four

I. God.

(122)

1. *Angèle de Foligno,* Le Livre de l'expérience des vrais fidèles, *Paris: Droz, 1927. Translation Ferré, with Latin text alongside.*

(123)

2. *The translation of these passages, by Bataille it appears, can be found on the last page of notebook I (September– December 1939) for* Le Coupable.

IV. Ecstasy

(132)

1. The Past Recaptured *appeared in 1927. The experience of which it is a question here is situated then before 1927.*

(141)

2. *In "La Pratique de la joie devant la mort"* in Acéphale *no. 5, June 1939. (Cf. Gallimard, Vol. I, pp. 556–557.)*

(143)

3. *In the first edition:* [. . .] ecstasy before the void.

(147)

4. *The Acéphale group's nighttime outings in the forest of Marly resulted in a tree struck by lightning. Is this here a reminiscence?*

VI. Nietzsche

(172)

1. *B:* A man having a parcel of genius has come to believe that it is "his" like a thing. He exploits it, he makes it give in return, like the farmer his parcel of earth, profits of vanity and money. But just as our forefathers [. . .]

(173)

2. *B:* [. . .] at least poetry, the poet, if a feeling of necessary ruin tears him apart.

(What one doesn't grasp [. . .])

(174)

3. *B: To be known!* [*crossed out:* this is the bridge, the commonness which fate proposes. Before temptation] how could he [. . .]

(176)

4. *B:* This sacrifice which man has made, which he makes of God, distinguishes itself from all the others [. . .]

(177)

5. *B (On the same page as for the preceding note):*

[. . .] the one who sacrifices is himself hit by the blow which he has struck, he succumbs with his victim. *[Cf. Gallimard, p. 176.]*

*

And how would he be other than a madman?

For a long time he maintained himself on the slope. It was the slope of sacrifice where he became everything and when he began to yield he could only say: Ecce homo.

The "likelihood" itself of the world is dissipating. How the world was beautiful! *I no longer have anything.*

*

No solitude greater, more soundproof, more feeble! What an unstable unknown is discovered there! And what an absence of breath!

[Cf. Gallimard, p. 180? The two pages which follow are described in the note below:]

6. *B provides this:*

I imagine myself arriving at the shores of Lake Silvaplana, near the rock which Nietzsche designated, and I weep.

Having had of the eternal return the vision which one knows of, Nietzsche wrote: "The intensity of my feelings makes me tremble and laugh at the same time . . . I had wept too much . . . these were not tears of self-pity, these were tears of jubilation . . ." Traversing the forest, the length of Lake Silvaplana, he had stopped that day near an enormous block of stone which stood in the form of a pyramid, not far from Surlej.

But the object of his vision, that which made him tremble was not the return (which left him from that time on indifferent) and not even time, but what the return exposed (just as for others, another rupture), the unknown, over which I weep and which no one discovers without trembling.

One remains indifferent, seeking with difficulty to grasp the intellectual content of vision instead of perceiving a representation of time which contested life, right to the little sense which it has, through which Nietzsche finished losing his foothold. Through it? thanks to it, perhaps.

(The return, which cannot impose itself upon the mind, is no less plausible, along with other imaginable conceptions. Like all perspectives of time, it puts the sense of life into question, proposes its nonsense, but in a new way and, when Nietzsche had his first apprehension of it, *without any answer being given to him,* he was happy to have found something.)

Laughter in tears. The putting to death of God [. . . *cf. Gallimard, p. 178.*]

(178)

7. *B:*

[. . .] evading sacrifice.

[in the margins:]

then why advance to madness

one must show this movement starting from there

[the following page:]

if the poet taking pleasure in poetry, king of the "earth of treasures", does not have nostalgia [. . . *cf. Gallimard, p. 179.*]

(179)

8. *B:*

[. . .] But he will feel, at that moment, *more alone,* so alone that his solitude will be like another death, the increased weight of sacrifice.

The sacrifice of God creates the desert around him. The crowd avoids him and *fails to recognize* him. The crowd is unaware that it takes place just as it is unaware of the unknown itself.

9. *B. following:*

To withdraw to the background, to be alone, to avoid being *recognized,* is the condition of this sacrifice: the king kills himself, desiring that the communication which is impossible with him take place without him. Even more, he, the king, abolishes royalty. Necessary abolition, withdrawal, *without which human unity would not be discovered.* To bury thought alive, the impossible agitation which it is, to sink into nonsense to that point

to make the necessity for this solitude felt even more
its wildflower nature
like that which is hidden, and must be, when one laughs

10. *B:* [. . .] Prolonged beyond action, seeking beyond it a distant possible, autonomous thought neither opposes nor can oppose any limit to the exercise of action. Action takes place at first. A distant possible is sought when the necessities of action permit. Reciprocally, practical thought cannot oppose the rules which are valid for it to the prolonging of life in the depths of silence. And further on: the sound which action makes would be, after all, intolerable for itself if silence didn't prolong it in that way. But if it weren't silence this prolonging would be a lie [*crossed out:* that which action is not, cannot be].

(181)

11. *We provide here, to conclude, these few scattered notes in B:*

lack of power in a path to which one is committed is repugnant
against the [*forcing?*]
to suppress a part of the forcing [*of the forces?*] to dram. through recipes
but to force is not a sin, once committed one must
forcing exists everywhere: in love [*in?*] poetry
it is a poison
laughter is the only way out
profound, divine meaning of laughter in this sense
to force is the return of project in its [*opposite?*]

*

At times one would like to cry out: Courage! with the idea that from time to time one would encounter a hand, that one would so grasp it and would have one's own so grasped that one would in no way regret living in such a harsh time, that one would become oneself cheerfully harsh

and that beneath the cloud of sweat one would feel something joyful in human nature.

On the last day When the first

he will not say but he could say: it is not I who is knocking, it is the entire earth.

Isn't it curious? The English call the Germans liars and false prophets. A German begins to paint the world upside down. Ludwig, the greatest no doubt, gave a representation of human life which was a complete exaggeration. Nothing but the impossible, the unreal. But barely had he finished this mad painting when we have the Germans determined to prove its truth. And to build a world which resembles that which L. had painted, in all respects faithful to his nightmare images. As if the metamorphoses in prison were orders destined to them, they decomposed the air, in the vicinity of their large shoes human nature is completely reduced to that state of unintelligible oppression. Thus without the English one would not have had that German prophet of modern times, and how much more heart-breaking in a sense than those of ancient times.

The upheavals of these times are of another amplitude than those of times in which horror only entered into one valley at a time and did not spread its sheets of sweat over continents and seas.

*

Yes, I live, I pursue a light dream.

but my inner clairvoyance?

eyes apparently heavy with sleep—discreet and smiling, imperceptible, it will never cease to keep watch.

*

And the day when they would all bathe in their blood, the sun, as always indifferent (the sun, flies, water represent indifference), no one would think of them any longer.

*

How would I die in harmony without being sure that those who live will enjoy as much, more than I; death is not as I thought the icy skeleton but the nude bacchante—young, drunk and beautiful. Death is quite this sun of darkness.

*

Each one draws from things the entire measure of the unknown which he has the heart to bear without collapsing, for things reveal themselves to be great, desirable, arresting, to the extent that we see in them that unknown which they are, not the known which they appear to be. But we only bear the unknown each time on the condition that there is much of the known in them, and the more we can grasp of it, the more we are reassured. Unless

[digression on Marcel Proust]

An aspect of the paradoxical to say of the known that in actual fact it is the unknown.

It is a question only of the measure of the unknown which is in communication.

And in Proust there is also communication from a dead figure to a living one; this assures perpetuity since if one can communicate from one in the past to one in the present one can do so as well from this one to that one.

Another thing, the measure of the unknown in poetry.

The charm of Proust's style is due to a sort of prolonged exhaustion in which develops that which the dissolving progression of time (death) leaves open. Whereas a brief style is like a misreading of time (that of the pebble). But Proust's sentences are a stream, they flow out, they promise, they gently murmur the flowing of time proceeding towards death.

*

1) Necessary terror. Poetry renewing destruction without respite
2) The author put to death by his work

[final paragraph]

Challenge of everything. It can take on different forms. Linked to poetic genius: form which is the most separate from the crowd. Opposition between the return to the Golden Age and poetic genius: Hegel and military service. Poetic genius on the side of the extreme limit. But what happens to poetic genius in solitude? (In a general way—for the introduction—from the moment when one no longer sets out from dogmatic presupposition, one sets out from poetry). The solitude of the genius necessary for the sacrifice in which everything is victim. *Un-*

known (unrecognized) character of sacrifice. This is the adventure of the mind which has proceeded to the depth of things, has descended to hell.

Necessity of becoming everything—possibility which genius has in solitude, but proximity to madness. Nietzsche Crucifies Dionysus Ecce Homo: megalomania.

One can in no way hope for a result analogous to that of the sacrifice of kings. Effectiveness is in fact at work only in the unrecognized region. Finally poetic genius effaces itself without the crowd noticing anything. Some only.

But everything dissolves. Nothing left to oppose to the military world. Nothing left. Nothing left. All the mind's fever destroying itself in the silence of torment, of ecstasy. Total virility and transparency.

[*on the other side:*]

destruction of beings in advance, when they arrive at the salon of Princess Guermantes, the destruction of the puppets is completed—and at the summit, the execution of the Berma by her own children,—as if he wanted to give himself the pretext of pulling the sheet (already a pall) in advance over his face.

[*in the margin:* à propos of Terror, if one envisages that the end of expression is to suppress in us thought (discourse)

and than through death it escapes from the insignificance of poetry, from the reserve of possession which belongs to it]

and according to poetic law no one escapes unless they are among those who bring to Time "their heart to be devoured". Phèdre's passion which is such that she utters no sentence which is not poetic and how many among them are so to the point of tearing one apart. But only the author has reserved for himself in his work the role of Phèdre: he was unable to find any other response to his passion than lies (and that perhaps due to the fact that he did not like the women with whom alone "communication" in the mutual giving of self is possible).

*

alone. Already like those of a man who has reached the extreme limit of the saturnalias which he has unleashed in his heart

And it is not hope in him, it is the worst pain which he

(And for Nietzsche the fact that his reason was sinking into megalomania was the equivalent of a confirmation of the solitude of a tomb; the sacrifice of reason took on the form the most laden with meaning in that madness is that which separates the others and has us rediscover in us the universe of what was separated. Resignation is missing: it is madness despite itself, it is voluntary effacement of oneself.)

*

The profound importance of poetry is of the sacrifice of words, of images, and by virtue of the misery of this sacrifice (in this respect the same is true of poetry as of any sacrifice whatsoever), it causes a slipping from impotent sacrifice of objects to that of the subject. What Rimbaud sacrificed is not only poetry as object but the poet as subject

detestable survival but much more upsetting than death

the author put to death by his work.

to note that poetry is also holocaust constituted with the assistance of words

*

communication with the unknown

the unknown which we ourselves are, *ipse* infinitely fragile, trembling, conscious of its fragility, not the *I* sure of itself imagining itself necessary and undertaking to know.

the sacrifice which Rimbaud made of poetry is not poetic in this sense that it truly took place, that it did not take shape [*crossed out:* merely?] in the realm of words, that it changed life

I can have no doubts in what concerns the principle of sacrifice

the object of sacrifice is what man in general abuses, what is exploited. Sacrifice compensates for abuse, for exploitation. In the same way the links of sacrifice and communication are clear.

Abuse, exploitation are what break "communication", sacrifice what reestablishes it, from whence it follows that the choice of sacrificed objects turns on those whose destruction is of a nature to guarantee the return to the communication which abuse put an end to. This double source of choice is of a nature to make some adjustments necessary. This is clear. I can imagine that it is incomplete but I don't think that one can shake its foundations for all that. Much more obscure is the particular interpretation, bearing on this or that historical form . . .

*

Paradox of the *[illegible]*

In solitude and in the renouncing of poetry, poetic genius abandons femininity, becomes male, and it is to the extent that it effaces everything, that it is resolved to engage in profound silence, that it is male.

Takes upon itself absence of satisfaction, absence of rest, absence of salvation.

With respect to the military world, poetic genius renders it possible in this sense that without it the passion for knowledge would divert it into sterile oppositions.

*

beauty, power to seduce, necessary to poetry before destruction (par. 2). Hence the necessity for power (par. 3).

male character of effacement?

But the only sacrifice which makes one laugh for in it bad conscience is dissipated (itself victim).

If the poet accepts immediacy . . . he can picture an (illusory) return to others. But he can go further, to the extreme limit in the path upon which he found himself, he [*illegible*] to isolate himself.

I say if the poet because . . . philosopher

To say as well that the sacred is necessary to the world of action, but it must all the more withdraw itself from the world, reserve itself, in that it is total.

*

In this unintelligible, unrecognizable sacrifice, what is attained, this time again, is the sacred, but in a form so total that one can only enshroud it deeply.

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Inner Experience

GEORGES BATAILLE

Translated, with an Introduction, by Leslie Anne Boldt

"English readers will now be able to appreciate what many consider Bataille's finest work, undoubtedly one of the outstanding texts of modern French writing, just as they will be able to fill a major gap in the history of post-structuralist thought. Whereas Bataille may be the acknowledged forefather of such figures as Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, this centrality is often not appreciated by American admirers of the latter."

—Michele Richman
University of Pennsylvania

"I consider the publication in English of *Inner Experience* to be of great importance and long overdue. It is only recently that many have come to recognize Bataille's profound influence on a number of the most important contemporary French thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Kristeva—an influence much more important than that of existentialists such as Sartre or Camus." —Allan Stoekl, *Yale University*

"We receive these hazy illusions like a narcotic necessary to bear life. But what happens to us when, disintoxicated, we learn what we are? Lost among babblers in a night in which we can only hate the appearance of light which comes from babbling. The self-acknowledged suffering of the disintoxicated is the subject of this book.

—Georges Bataille, from *the Preface*

His is a journey marked by the questioning of experience itself, until what is reached is sovereign laughter, non-knowledge, and a Presence in no way distinct from Absence, where "The mind moves in a strange world where anguish and ecstasy coexist."

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