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SUMMARY

Exercises in Futility: Echoes of a Bataillean Experience in the Selected Works of Fiction and Video Games

The chief support of this thesis are the works of the French thinker, Georges Bataille, especially the ones that concern his idiosyncratic understanding of mystical experience, which he explored under the name of inner experience. The different ways of facing the challenge that this experience poses to the human being – elucidated in, among other texts, *Inner Experience*, *Guilty*, *Erotism*, and many shorter pieces – form a conceptual framework, a peculiar *anthropology of the sacred*. This framework is here applied to works of literature and video games, all of which were selected because of the potential to recognise within them examples of experiences that exceed the profane. To exceed the profane is – according to Bataille – to exceed the order of production and accumulation, to escape a reality delineated by the self-preserving tendency of the subject. The afore-mentioned anthropology of the sacred is gradually revealed throughout the thesis – its elements are lifted from Bataille’s texts and plugged (to use a Deleuzoguattarian expression) into particular literary and ludo-narrative assemblages.

The order out of which one breaks in an experience of the sacred is first described by means of a *viral topology* extrapolated from William S. Burroughs’ Nova trilogy. It is a vision of a semiotic coordinate system imposed upon organic life, a system that arranges organisms into sequences or lines of habit, tendency or addiction, thus turning them into mere vessels for parasitic myths.

Such myths – parasitic in the sense Roland Barthes wrote of – are then contrasted with an alternative idea of myth, one that combines notions forwarded by Bataille in “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” and Bruno Schulz’s literary practice of mythicising reality. This kind of myth opens its participants onto experiences that surpass the established order defined by the profane, leading them to states of sanctity and exuberance proper to the sort of life that has not been cleared of seduction, which

is here conceptualised with the aid of Jean Baudrillard. Moreover, Schulz's writing is connected with the dynamics of the known and the unknown, knowledge and non-knowledge, the possible and the impossible. The interplay of these opposing states of being is characterised – on the basis of Bataille's *Inner Experience* – as the pathway that includes the eponymous experience in the tapestry of human fate.

Bataille's theory of laughter – which was for him an experience of supreme importance, and of which he thus wrote extensively – is deployed in a reading of Ambrose Bierce's short story, "The Death of Halpin Frayser." This reading offers an occasion to assume a heterological perspective, which was proposed by Bataille as a way of thinking about what is experienced when a person encounters something irrevocably unknown, inherently inexplicable.

Bataille, who repeatedly contested the claim language lays to the definition of the limits of existence, is compared with a character from a video game entitled *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II – The Sith Lords*. Such a comparison is warranted by the character's hidden objective, which, as the story of the game unfolds, turns out to be the utter elimination of "the Force" that underlies the universe portrayed in *Star Wars*. What is examined is, therefore, the analogy between such intentions and the variety of Bataille's themes that concern the ability to defeat language – or even thought itself – within oneself.

A study of asceticism follows: excerpts from Bataille that demonstrate his objections to ascetic practices are set against the hagiography of saint Simeon the Stylite (and its contemporary analyses), paving the way towards a discussion on the issues of memory and oblivion, signal and noise. Pierre Klossowski's novel, *Baphomet*, is called forth in this context, whereas Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal and Roger Caillois' unique study on mimicry bolster the theoretical foundation of these considerations. What is more, points at which Bataille seems to be less critical – or even appreciative – of asceticism are also pinpointed, thus showing that his attitude towards it was, in fact, unequivocal.

This ambiguity, together with the above-mentioned understanding of mimicry, allows for the figure of a *solar ascetic* to be drawn.

Bataille's understanding of the dynamics of transcendence and immanence as opposite modes of being – the first referring, subversively, to the profane ordering of the world, and the second one to the confusion of ecstasy – is used to interpret “Terror,” a short story by Vladimir Nabokov, as a text that depicts a spontaneous experience of falling out of a profane and known order, and into an intensity that – due to a radical separation of what the first-person narrator is going through from any sort of religious explanation – comes to pass as an experience of raw immanence.

Masochistic eroticism, exemplified predominantly with Schulz's visual art, is dissected as a practice of constructing situations wherein the transcendent composition of parts is doomed to collapse upon itself, rendering one susceptible to an experience of immanence. These deliberations are also entangled with the duality of guilt and innocence.

Don DeLillo's novel, *Cosmopolis*, is looked at through the combined lenses introduced one by one in earlier chapters. This means that the adventures of the book's protagonist are presented as a movement that, firstly, takes him away from a life determined by dreams of technological transcendence and a concern for future security, and secondly, propels him towards experiences grounded in the chance encounters that shape his immediate, bodily reality. Moreover, the profound relationship between transcendence and the future is investigated.

The vision of a “labyrinthine constitution of being” espoused by Bataille is then discussed in connection with that vision's interpretation laid out by Nick Land, who relates the ever-incomplete labyrinth of being to fractal mathematics, highlighting the link between the circulation of matter and the eternal return. What follows is a reflection on the position of the human being – or the human animal, which exists as the tension between immanent animality and that which transcends it – as the monster of the labyrinth. Labyrinthine reality is, furthermore, imagined as a space haunted by

reverberations of God, of the very guarantee that there is order to the world, and that its source lies beyond the human mind. It is within this context that two short stories – “The Gig Economy” and “God-Shaped Hole” – published by a contemporary, pseudonymous writer, Zero HP Lovecraft, are analysed. Various visions of the future of transcendence – displayed in the two stories by Zero, explicit in Land’s accelerationist prophecies, augured by Jacek Dukaj in his book on the twilight of the written word – are pondered. Light is shed on the manifold dangers that might stem from resolving the “sacred tension” that conditions the human mode of being.

Finally, the conceptual apparatus built throughout this thesis serves to analyse a number of video games within the world-building of which a prominent role of transcendence, immanence or their dynamics can be discerned. Thus is illustrated a potential analytical use of the theories elaborated herein for the purposes of further research. Ultimately, the interplay of transcendence and immanence – grasped, first and foremost, in a Bataillean sense – is presented as a conceptual framework that can be fruitfully employed in analyses of those contemporary cultural phenomena that continue to convey an echo of mystical experience.

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