Using Georges Bataille in Art History:
Informe, Figuration and Politics.

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Abstract

The theories of the French intellectual Georges Bataille have had a significant influence on much recent arts practice and criticism. Bataille's later work (c.1937–1962), however, is often overlooked in cultural practice and theory. In this later period his thought becomes richer; no less transgressive, no less excessive, and indubitably more philosophical. This thesis will argue the importance of using the chronological range of Bataille's writing. In particular, it will redress the critical neglect in art history of his later work. The selective use of Bataille's early work, especially the *informe*, in the American art history of Rosalind Krauss will be critiqued. The thesis will deploy concepts developed extensively in two late works, *Inner Experience* and *The Accursed Share*, to discuss the practice of two visual artists that do not figure in the type of methodology that Krauss adopts; the Anglo-Irish painter Francis Bacon and the Swiss installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn.

Inner Experience, a work revolving around the theme of 'limit-experience', will be the catalyst in an analysis of the works of Francis Bacon. This thesis will demonstrate that although Bacon was an avowed atheist, he ventures to capture a sacred and impossible moment in his painting that parallels the "movement of contestation" in "inner experience."

The conception of economy developed in *The Accursed Share* derives from the germ of Bataille's economic theory, first outlined in the 1933 essay "The Notion of Expenditure." Thomas Hirschhorn's practice and his desire to "work politically" will be examined from the perspective of Bataillean expenditure and the notion of general economy.

Acknowledgement and Dedication

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Ray Spiteri, for his guidance, doggedness, patience and intimate knowledge of both Georges Bataille and his milieu. I would also like to acknowledge the Art History Department at Victoria University, especially Roger Blackley and David Maskill, for being friendly, helpful and accommodating. The Staff Library at Archives New Zealand was a place I valued for peace and quiet. Thank you to my employer for making this facility available in the later stages of study.

I would like to acknowledge the support and understanding of my family. My mother, Heather, and father, Tim, who have always supported me, and to my sisters, Sue and Nicky. A special acknowledgement goes to my daughters, Mathilde and Leonor.

Lastly, and most importantly, I dedicate this thesis to my partner Sara for her support, understanding, and love throughout the process.

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Introduction

A subtitle for either *Formless: A User's Guide* (1996) or *The Optical Unconscious* (1993) could conceivably, albeit in a journalistic vein, read, "How Greenberg Got it Wrong."[1] In *Formless,* Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois use a number of concepts that have evolved through the previous fifteen years of Krauss's critical practice to trace an alternative developmental trajectory of twentieth-century art. Yet, for Krauss, this goal is intertwined with a concerted effort to distance herself from the influence of her previous mentor, the formalist critic Clement Greenberg. It is partially within the dynamic of Greenberg's influence and her desire to separate from it that Krauss's alternative art history develops. Even Krauss's most recent publication *Perpetual Inventory* (2010) suggests that her concern to distance has not entirely abated despite the decades.[2] Greenberg is still alluded to. The front cover of *Perpetual Inventory* is illustrated with a staged photographic profile of a much younger Krauss resting her head on a typewriter, while the quote cited on the back cover reads: "Spare me smart Jewish girls and their typewriters." This cynical line from Greenberg was previously quoted by Krauss in *The Optical Unconscious* within a passage that portrays Greenberg as arrogant, contemptuous, and judgemental.[3] Although the quote was directed at an anonymous critic, it can easily be read as what the Jewish Krauss perceives as Greenberg's opinion of her after her disengagement with his particular brand of formalism.

Much of the substance of *Formless: A User's Guide* had already appeared in *The Optical Unconscious*. Ideas from previous essays, published in the journal *October* and appearing in influential exhibitions such as *Primitivism in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984) and *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (1985), are reworked into a formidable deconstruction of Greenberg's formalist exposition.[4] For Krauss, Georges Bataille's

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1 Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois. *Formless: A User's Guide* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997). On their website MIT Press note that *The Optical Unconscious* has "the gait and tone of fiction." See Massachusetts Institute of Technology website, Catalogue, Accessed 7 June, 2011, http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?tid=8884&ttype=2

2 Rosalind Krauss, *Perpetual Memory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).

3 Krauss, *Optical,* 309.

4 William Rubin (ed.) *"Primitivism" in the Twentieth Century: An Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York : Museum of Modern Art, 1984;) Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingstone. *L'amour fou:*

informe is a useful tool in her task and a chapter in *The Optical Unconscious* is dedicated to its operation. The *informe* allows Krauss to refute Greenberg, while emphasising her own distinctly different postmodern theories, but without relinquishing what she had acquired from his methodology. Krauss's use of Bataille is, therefore, both enmeshed in her polemic with Greenberg, and remains coloured by his influence. The natural, yet overlooked, outcome is that Krauss's account of Georges Bataille's bearing on art is argued from the perspective of the use value of Bataille for her project.[5]

Krauss, of course, admits that her work is not necessary aligned with Bataille, but not in *Formless: A User's Guide.* Less guarded when interviewed about the exhibition and book she discloses:

Our position is not necessarily Bataille's. We're aligned with Bataille when it pleases us to be so, and not aligned when it doesn't. Although Bataille gave up on art, artists didn't. It's not like art came to an end in 1930 when Bataille discontinued *Documents*. Artists continued to have projects we want to address and we have every right to do so. "*Informe*" is not a show about Bataille and art. It's not a show about Bataille. The show is a kind of a bet. The bet is that it is possible to make visible a Bataillean interpretation, a concept – whatever you want to call it – by sheer choice of objects which we reinterpret through this structure to make it something that can be thought in art. We're not particularly interested in Bataille as an art critic, or Bataille's tastes in art.[6]

Bataille is a Gordian figure in French literature.[7] He did not entirely relinquish an interest in art after the cessation of *Documents,* but recognised relatively early that it had a problematic tendency to sublimate. Why would the last book he authored, *The Tears of Eros* (1961), contain hundreds of illustrations of paintings, prints and sculptures if, as Krauss asserts, he had given up on art?[8] Although not exactly straightforward art histories, the incontrovertible fact remains that Bataille wrote numerous studies on artists and art long *after Documents* ceased publication.[9]

Photography and Surrealism (New York: Abbeville, 1985).

5   The introduction to *Formless* is titled "The Use Value of 'Formless.'"

6   Lauren Sedofsky, "Down and Dirty" *Artforum International*, Vol. 34 (Summer 1996):90-8.

7   Bataille is a notoriously difficult figure to discuss academically because he devoted himself to overthrowing the role of discursive reasoning as the basis of knowledge. To argue for his work discursively is, therefore, to struggle against his goals. The inevitable result, although necessary in assessing his thought, is always ultimately unsatisfying because to frame his work within any discipline of knowledge, for example art history, is also to neuter him by default.

8   Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros* trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights, 1989).

9   For instance, Georges Bataille, *Manet* trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (Geneva: Skira, 1955); Georges Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux, or the Birth of Art* trans. Austryn Wainhouse.

Formless: A User's Guide is addressed to a new audience and it conveys the following unavoidable impression: Bataille's influence on art is understood via Krauss and Krauss demonstrates that Bataille is important for artists and art historians because of the *informe*. Krauss is an established academic writer and is afforded great respect. She holds a position of eminence in what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would describe as the academic field of art history. Krauss uses this position to make proclamations on art, and as these emanate from an experienced and intelligent practitioner, they are treated accordingly with the seriousness they deserve. Her position, however, is constantly under threat from challengers promoting new ideologies, which Krauss aggressively and understandably defends her view against.[10] She goes to determined lengths, for instance, to differentiate her structural stance on the *informe* from that of a rival; unfortunately, this also undermines her project. Curiously, the French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman is unfavourably referenced ten times in *Formless* and his book, which was published the year before *Formless*, *La ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* is severely, almost obsessively, slated by Krauss and Bois.[11] Didi-Huberman holds a different view of *informe* that is relevant to figurative painting. To Krauss, therefore, he presents a threat to her dominant position in the field. Her insistence on holding the right interpretation of Bataille, unfortunately, is also her "Achilles heel."

The point, however, is not that Krauss's use of the *informe* is wrong per se and Didi-Huberman's is right; she skilfully applies the *informe* to an astute critical analysis of art. In an academic demarcation of territory, though, her choice to insist on her application above others is, contra Bataille, an inevitable delimitation that bleeds dry the *informe's* disruptive force. The *informe* ends up serving a purpose, namely the validation of Krauss's chosen historical trajectory. *Informe* is an operation that un-works *all* categories, but Krauss implies it can be this and this but *not* that. Additionally, for her to emphasise that the *informe* is Bataille's significant contribution to the field of art criticism and history is also the *circumscription* of his thirty-five year writing career to the brief lifespan (1929-1931) of the magazine *Documents*. Bataille was a prolific writer

(London: Macmillan, 1980); and Bataille, *Tears*.

10 Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production" in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 36.

11 Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris:Macula, 1995).

and the "Critical Dictionary" entry "Informe" in *Documents* is just over one hundred words long.

It will be demonstrated that Krauss's use of the *informe* is part of a revisionist project to establish a different twentieth-century art history underpinned by a structuralism heavily indebted to formalism. Krauss excludes the *informe* from the same territory that proved troubling for an earlier formalist criticism: theme and politics. Her role as a gatekeeper is also complicated by her predilection for decorum. Ultimately, her application of *informe* is sublimated: ironically, it is an effort at desublimation that is in turn re-sublimated as art; the very concern that Bataille raised apropos art as a transgressive activity in 1931.[12]

The first chapter examines Rosalind Krauss's adoption of Georges Bataille's *informe* and its subsequent delimitation by positioning it within her revisionist art historical agenda. Krauss encountered the *informe* in her analysis of surrealism, where she had previously located a structural historical model for late-twentieth century art practice. Krauss's structural use of *informe* to reassess surrealist photography, however, drew particular criticism from feminist positions. Krauss endeavoured to separate her interpretation of *informe* from any thematics, including feminism and figurative painting. It will be demonstrated though, that art with an overt theme can evoke the *informe* in precisely the same manner as that identified by Krauss. This will be proven to be the case in the work of the feminist artist Lynda Benglis. The same operation of *informe* can also be recognised in the late figurative paintings of Jackson Pollock. These examples of *informe* demonstrate that Bataille's *informe* can be applied to a wider gamut of work than proposed by Krauss.

Krauss's neglect of the role of figurative painting in modern art history is based in the formalist and structural dismissal of theme. Bataille, however, wrote extensively on figurative painting and included the English artist Francis Bacon's work *Two Figures* as an illustration in his final work *The Tears of Eros*.[13]

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12 On this note see this review of *Formless*: Daniel Adler, "Down and Dirty: Art History as Desublimation" *Art Journal* Vol. 57, No. 2 (Summer, 1998): 114-118. Georges Bataille, "The Modern Spirit and The Play of Transpositions" in Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.)
13 Francis Bacon *Two Figures*, 1953, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 116.5 cm, Private Collection.

Chapter Two demonstrates how Bataille's concepts can be employed to discuss the early figurative paintings of Francis Bacon. Bacon was a well established painter and numerous monographs and studies are available on his work.[14] When Bacon's work is considered with reference to Bataille's writing, though, rich parallels can be drawn between the two figures. The intensely personal and psychological themes in Bataille's work, which are downplayed in structural methodology, are able to account for different artistic practices. Bacon and Bataille both rely on the excision of an element and its introduction into another context in order to logically disrupt the frame into which that element is inserted. The artist and the writer wrestle with experiences that are ultimately impossible to convey rationally.

Pablo Picasso is highly regarded by Bataille, Bacon, and Krauss. Unlike Krauss's semiological conception of Picasso, however, Bataille and Bacon share an appreciation of him as a figurative artist and, in particular, his violent alteration of forms.[15] Bacon recognises that Picasso has an ability to almost unveil the psychological real. Both acknowledge the importance of Picasso's attack on conventional mimetic rendering and rational idealism.

Bataille indicates that he has a revived interest in art in his essay "The Sacred." In this work he refers to the artist's quest to capture a moment that is a real, sacred and "privileged instant" beyond rational elucidation. By way of the "privileged instant," the *informe* evolves into the "inner experience" and is given psychological force as a "movement of contestation" in pursuit of a state which is unable to be encompassed within conventional knowledge.

Bataille was consumed with what it meant to be human after Nietzsche's famous argument for the "death of God." He was cognizant, however, that the religious armature of a perverted and excessive asceticism could allow for a dramatic encounter

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14 These range, for instance, from the biographies by Michael Peppiatt and Andrew Sinclair, to the more specialised philosophical studies by Gilles Deleuze and Bacon's close friend, Michel Leiris. Leiris, an ethnographer who was involved with Bataille on *Documents*, comes closest to Bataille's thought on the sacred, as demonstrated in his 1983 work, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile. Michel Leiris,* (*Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile* trans. John Weightman (Oxford: Phaidon, 1983). This topic is a shared concern in French sociology and ethnology, derived in particular from the writing of Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Roger Caillois. Bataille, however, is not referenced in Leiris's work.

15 For instance, semiotics plays a significant role in Rosalind Krauss, "In The Name of Picasso." *October,* Vol. 16 (Spring, 1981): 5-22.

with the sacred mainstay on which all religion and society is founded. Bacon was captivated by the psychological intensity of the human scream and struggled to evoke this dramatic instant in his painting. He was obsessed with trying to render an immediate and real human experience – something able to be conveyed without ratiocination. The paint, as Picasso had shown, could somehow mysteriously enable a sensation of the psychological real to be perceived. Bacon and Bataille sought to capture the same sacred or real moment. Both figures also come to realise, however, that they, like Picasso, were unable to seize or reveal this moment in either words or paint. Consequently, Bacon considered his paintings depicting the scream failures. The scream motif in Bacon's work can also be approached, through the prism of Bataille, as an external manifestation of a sacred erotic sphere that separates participants from the useful world of work.

The third chapter engages Bataille's concepts in an assessment of the work of the Swiss installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn. Hirschhorn's Bataille is a politicized Bataille. Unlike Bacon, however, there is only one monograph on Hirschhorn. This is comprised of interviews, artist statements, an evaluation of a single work, and a substantial text by the art historian Benjamin Buchloh.[16] Buchloh's approach is grounded in his Marxist viewpoint. Marxism also has a bearing on Hirschhorn's practice, but any analysis through Bataille, whom Hirschhorn regards highly, is neglected in Buchloh's appraisal. When considered through the wider ambit that Bataille provides, his work articulates and addresses political concerns that are not limited to a predominantly Marxist or post-Marxist perspective. Hirschhorn is a self-confessed "fan" of Bataille who, unlike Krauss, is committed to "working politically."[17] Bataille, who was one of the first intellectuals to critique the rise of fascism in Europe, always maintained an interest in politics. He moved from overt ultra-left wing polemics in the 1930s to a more moderate position after 1940 because he was interested in the evolution of political structures and their impact on society.

Hirschhorn's art practice can be placed within Bataille's economic theory where the energy of the universe oscillates between both social structures and everyday

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16 Benjamin Buchloh, Thomas Hirschhorn, Alison M. Gingeras, Carlos Basualdo, *Thomas Hirschhorn* (London: Phaidon, 2004.)
17 Buchloh, (et al.), *Thomas Hirschhorn,* 21.

relationships in a "play of forces." Instead of the traditional focus on economic accumulation and productive use of profit, Bataille bases his economic theory on expenditure. Hirschhorn is influenced by Bataille's notion of "general economy," and consciously develops a practice which actively engages with the "forces" surrounding him. Although less successful in his early work, principally because Hirschhorn neglected to form a social contract with his unaware participants, the artist's work *Bataille Monument* involved full, cognizant and empowering participation with the Turkish-German community in which the work was installed as part of Documenta XI.

Bataille's thought is founded fundamentally on the relationship between the sacred and profane. This relationship underpins the other complex societal interactions he explores; for example, assimilation/excretion and the homogeneous/heterogeneous. *Bataille Monument* creates a space where interactions between a homogeneous culture and its heterogeneous "other" are evident. *Bataille Monument* was informed by Hirschhorn's critical stance of official anti-immigration policies in a number of European countries, including Germany. Bataille has argued that while engaged in work man is reduced to the status of a thing, however, this condition is regularly punctuated during times of festival, when the sacred aspect of the human is restored. To consider man as a worker only designates the subject to a perpetual state of thing-ness. Turkish immigrants both employed in the earlier Federal Republic of Germany and after unification have been considered solely as a labour force and denied citizen status – they became things. Furthermore, German law has historically defined citizenship through the homogeneity of *ius sanguinis* or ascription by blood-ties. German law has only recently been amended to accord citizenship by birthright or *ius solis* (literally "right of the soil.") This legislative change has allowed Turkish-German and other immigrant communities to be incorporated into German society as rightful citizens. It has also liberated them from their defining status as labour power and legitimised their sacred and differing natures. The homogenising tendencies in German society, however, continue to struggle with the full accommodation of these heterogeneous others. *Bataille Monument* provides a space where these issues can be explored by raising uncomfortable questions regarding the new status of Turkish-German immigrants by emphasising their non-working – therefore sacred – sides.

Chapter 1

Rosalind Krauss has used Georges Bataille's anti-concept *informe* in a post-structural manner that focuses on the inherent properties of an art work as a self-sufficient entity and excludes thematic and political concerns. Her early writing was characterised by formalism. To show the connection between Krauss's use of *informe* and a formalist art methodology it is first necessary to examine briefly formalist critical practice in the United States.

Formalism is an art historical methodology that had its beginnings in nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe in the work of two art historians: the Swiss Heinrich Wöllflin and the Austrian Alois Riegl. Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk argue that in the United States formalist art criticism developed into a generally more austere and autonomous practice than its European art historical formalist model. Hatt and Klonk maintain that this was due to an amalgamation of formalist principles with the practice of art historical connoisseurship that had been the prevalent American model. [1] American formalism had a tendency to remove the artwork from its wider cultural and historical context in order to examine it as a largely self-sufficient artistic phenomenon. This rarefied and culturally isolated form of analysis is particularly evident in the dominant style of formalist criticism developed in the United States by the art critic Clement Greenberg.

The formalist *Artforum* writers were drawn to Greenberg's particular mode of formalism because, unlike the poetic and unsubstantiated mode of much bell-lettrist writing in vogue at the time, it was a "verifiable system."[2] His methodology identified optical and physical elements that could be discerned in the artwork. The various formalist writers developed their own subtle variations based on Greenberg's critical model. Krauss wrote for the formalist influenced *Artforum* magazine from 1966 until 1974. At this early stage of her career she was under the influence of her fellow critic Michael Fried, who acted as her mentor.

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1 Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006): 94.

2 Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2003): 77.

The critic and art historian Michael Fried, an important early role model, encouraged Krauss into a critical practice that was governed by the ongoing refinement of aesthetic taste.[3] Although principally a critic in the 1960s, Fried applied the concepts in Greenberg's mode of formalist criticism to a wider art historical agenda. Fried recognized in Greenberg's writings a logic that identified an affinity between modern artists and the formal properties in their art. Up until the nineteenth century art was duty bound to both state and church, but modern secular society brought an end to this obligation. Fried argued that modern artists retained a duty to art, though, as they were compelled through radical self-criticism to solve the aesthetic problems intrinsic to their practice.[4] This appertained not only to their art, but also to the art of previous generations. In Fried's view, formalist criticism was engaged to a progressive, moral art history and aesthetic value judgements, although unavoidably subjective, were yoked to the greater goal of historical progression. The critic was ethically constrained to objectively guide and admonish the artist along a path that would culminate in art as a state of purity and self-awareness.[5] Fried favourably quotes from his earlier work: "all judgements of value and taste end in experience"[6] For Fried, experience is founded on the presence of the artwork in the viewer's consciousness. Krauss would ground her practice on experience as well, but with an important modifier – the condition of experience as an also unconscious activity in the mind of the competent viewer.

It is generally accepted that the dominant brand of formalist theory lead to a crisis in art in the 1960s. Formalism's reductive logic took painting and sculpture to a theoretical impasse where it was possible to envisage what the end of traditional art would look like. Reduced to absolute self-referential essentials, painting and sculpture would be fated to repeat endless variations of their respective final pure states. By the mid 1960s Greenberg's writing had become clichéd and predictable; he no longer held a pre-eminent place in the art world.[7] Fried perceived that the formal art criticism he wrote no longer had an audience. He redirected his research into art history, mapping out a formalist trajectory from previous epochs to the colour field painting he advocated in

3 Newman, *Challeging Art,*187.
4 Michael Fried, "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella" in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 217.
5 Fried, "Three American Painters," 213-220; Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 17.
6 Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 18.
7 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 170

earlier writing.[8] By this stage, Krauss had turned to Continental philosophy and structuralism in pursuit of a reinvigorated and updated critical stance. Structuralism would furnish Krauss with the opportunity to disengage from the 'endgame' crisis in conventional formalism while still focusing on the primacy of art as an aesthetic experience. Eventually her interest in structural semiotics would lead to Bataille's writing and the *informe*.

Krauss's adoption of the *informe* evolved from her work on surrealism, where she identified a structural historical model for the diverse artistic practices of the 1970s. Structuralism was an attractive option for Krauss because its premise that disciplines could be examined without recourse to external referents would update art historical formalism without necessarily abandoning its principles.[9] Krauss adapted structural semiotic theories to art historical analysis. To provide the contextual background for Krauss's use of structuralism to reassess surrealism it is first necessary to discuss her appraisal of art practices in the 1970s.

Her use of semiotics is evident in the 1977 essay, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America." Krauss argues for an internal "text" in art that does not have recourse to an external referent.[10] Two important concepts are developed in this essay that will be used later in her reassessment of surrealism: the index and the supplement.[11] The index is a particular type of sign that only makes sense when related to its referent. Krauss links this concept to the photograph, as the photograph objectively isolates part of the real world and produces this selection as an index of the moment it records.[12] In the second part of the essay, Krauss introduces the perception of language as a supplement to the index. Drawing on the work of the structuralist critic Roland Barthes, she contends that the photograph is a mute object.[13] The photograph, therefore, objectively references the real world, but requires a supplement in order to communicate. The supplement often

8   Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 15.
9   For an interesting account of the affinity between formalism and Krauss's use of structuralism see Yve-Alain Bois's *Art Journal* (Winter, 1985) review of Krauss's *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*: 369.
10 Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977).
11 The index is a semiotic term drawn primarily from the work of the European structural linguist Roman Jakobson.
12 Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2." in *October,* Vol 4, (Autumn, 1977): 70.
13 Roland Barthes, "Rhetorique de l'image" in *Communications* no. 4, p.4. (1964): 42.

takes the form of the literal caption.[14] Using Walter Benjamin's argument connecting image to image in the staggered cinematic sequence, Krauss identifies an alternative means for the photograph to communicate without recourse to actual words.[15] There is an implicit problem, however, that is not resolved in "Notes." How will Krauss apply the idea of the supplement to the individual photograph in a way that does not rely on captions or sequence? Her essay "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" is her undertaking to answer this problem.[16]

One of Krauss's principal concerns in the "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" is to demonstrate that the diversity of surrealist photographic practice is semiologically cohesive. She identifies surrealist photography as the precursor to the range of postmodern art practices that she had examined in earlier essays. The main function of this essay, however, is the endeavour to resolve the problem with the supplement that was established in "Notes on the Index." In her earlier work the photograph lacked the ability to communicate without captions or the insertion into a visual sequence. Krauss proposes that surrealist photographic practices allow a paradoxical writing to exist in the individual photographic print. In the course of her writing she draws attention to surrealist journals as examples of an image/text combination in the movement. *Documents,* edited by Bataille, is mentioned as one of these publications. Bataille enters as an aside, but does not feature as a theorist in the essay.

The principal authority for her essay is the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Krauss introduces two of Derrida's semiotic concepts: spacing and doubling.[17] She adapts the concept of spacing that Derrida contends is integral to the forming of meaning in language to art criticism and analyses the dada use of photomontage as a largely unsatisfactory early attempt at this in the visual arts.[18] Photomontage physically cuts images up: it does not preserve the integrity of the photographic print as a whole. In contrast to dada, the surrealist photographers manipulate the individual photographic

14 Krauss, "Notes: Part 2," 66.

15 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 226.

16 Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" in *October,* Vol. 19 (Winter, 1981): 3-34.

17 From Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). First published in 1967.

18 Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions," 18. She states that photomontage was rarely used by surrealist photographers.

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print thus allowing spacing to operate internally without literally severing each image from its original context. Krauss argues that an important spacing strategy in surrealist photography is doubling. In semiotic theories of language acquisition doubling is part of the process that allows the infant to progress from babbling to articulate speech.[19] She can now account for the semiotic coherence of surrealist photography, where it can be demonstrated that a form of visual language is "written" into the image as its supplement. [20]

Krauss assesses the role of framing in this semiotic process with particular reference to the straight documentary style of surrealist photography. Straight photography will continue to feature in her writing on the *informe*. This is the first reference Krauss makes to a Man Ray photograph of a hat (Fig. 1).[21] The work's point of view – the way it frames reality – visibly presents "the automatic writing of the world: the constant, uninterrupted production of signs."[22] Although Krauss refers to this work as an erotically charged piece, she does not register at this time the significance of the work as *informe*. She will demonstrate later that this Man Ray photograph is *informe* in the sense that it shuttles between representations of masculine and feminine states.[23] At this stage, however, Krauss is content to have resolved the problem identified in the photograph as index: to provide it with an internal and seamless supplement.

Krauss's first significant use of Bataille as a theorist is in her 1983 essay "No More Play."[24] The essay assesses the influence of primitivism on Alberto Giacometti's early surrealist work. The essay is also an opportunity for Krauss to associate aspects of contemporary sculpture with an important precursor.

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19 Krauss illustrates this with reference to the structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss's work on language. See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologiques.* Vol. 1. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
20 Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions," 29. "Surreality *is*, we could say, nature convulsed into a kind of writing. The special access that photography has to this experience is its privileged connection to the real. The manipulations then available to photography – what we have been calling doubling and spacing – appear to document these convulsions. The photographs are not *interpretations* of reality, decoding it, as in Heartfield's photomontages. They are presentations of that very reality as configured, or coded, or written." Krauss is drawing on Derrida's concept of *différance* in her argument for spacing and doubling.
21 Fig. 1. Man Ray, *Hat* 1933, silver print, 17.1 x 14 cm, Private Collection, Geneva. 1997.
22 Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions," 31.
23 Krauss, "Corpus Delicti" *October,* Vol. 33 (Summer 1985): 31-72.
24 Rosalind Krauss ,"No More Play" in *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). This essay features in the exhibition catalogue *"Primitivism" in the Twentieth Century Art.* Rubin (ed.) *"Primitivism."*

As previously demonstrated, one of Krauss's significant critical projects dating from the late 1970s, is to historically account for the diversity of contemporary artistic practice. "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America" is essentially an argument for photography, while her 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" is the case for sculpture's modernist lineage. Krauss states that sculpture traditionally has been tied to the logic of the monument. The monument commemorates; it is vertical, usually figurative, and sits on a pedestal. With the advent of modernism, however, sculpture is no longer necessarily an emphatically vertical monument. Modernist sculpture does not require the pedestal of the monument: it can simply be a base. In an earlier argument, Krauss used Constantin Brancusi as an historical example of how sculpture becomes base only. Brancusi work, however, is generally aligned on the vertical axis. "No More Play" is Krauss's effort to advance a better historical and surrealist model for contemporary sculptural practice. Brancusi's constructivist vertical sculpture, is therefore, rejected in favour of Giacometti's early horizontally inclined surrealist production.[25] The essay title is also that of a Giacometti sculpture that is unequivocally horizontal and this provides the key structural justification for her reassessment of Giacometti.[26] She draws on a number of Bataille's concepts to assist in the revision of Giacometti's work from the 1920s to the early 1930s. The *informe* is introduced in the essay as part of her strategy. In a sense though, *informe* is peripheral to her principal argument for horizontality, it enters her critical practice through the back door as part of Krauss's use of Bataille's term "alteration."[27]

The first section of "No More Play" traces the influence of primitivism on Giacometti's early work and Bataille is referenced when Krauss identifies two contending views of primitivism that existed in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[28] The journal *Documents* and Bataille operate on one side of this divide. Krauss acknowledges that

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25 Krauss, "No More Play," 73.
26 Krauss, "No More Play," 73. She introduces this in the middle of the essay in the following passage. "Any artist's work can be seen from the vantage of either of the two, possibly conflicting, perspectives. One of these looks at the oeuvre from within the totality of the individual. The other regards it, far more impersonally, within a historical dimension, which is to say, comparatively, in relation to the work of others and *the collective development of a given medium*." (italics mine) Krauss "No More Play," 85. As demonstrated in the essay's conclusion: "At a deeper, structural level, he renounced the horizontal and everything it meant: both a dimension within which to rethink the formal concerns of sculpture, and a matrix through which human anatomy was altered."
27 Krauss later cites the *Documents* "Critical Dictionary" article "Informe", but her discussion in the essay centres on the characteristics of *informe* that appear in Bataille's writings on primitive art.
28 Krauss, "No More Play," 51.

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Bataille's negative *Documents* review of the psychologist G. H. Luquet's work *L'Art primitif* is a critique of the wider contemporaneous art historical project to aestheticise primitive art. *Documents* has a contrary stance to this type of approach. What Bataille specifically objects to in Luquet's work is the proposition that random mark-making in early childhood and primitive art is the beginning of a path that leads to a cohesive state of representation.[29] Bataille counters Luquet and concludes that this kind of mark-making is a joyous compulsion to deface and alter surfaces. He defines the process with the term "alteration."[30]

Krauss discusses Giacometti's sculpture *Suspended Ball* using the concept of alteration.[31] The work is erotic, yet disturbing, due to its deliberately confused sexual symbolism. Krauss argues that the signifiers in *Suspended Ball* – the plaster wedge and the split ball – not only swing physically, but also sway between symbols of masculine and feminine sex. This is an example of alteration. Krauss states that the work allows multiple traditionally transgressive sexual readings to circulate. The sexuality suggested in the sculpture is indeterminate. She maintains that this instability is driven by the *informe*. At this stage, however, Krauss does not explicitly use the *informe* as her principal critical tool. Instead, she proceeds to discuss the role of Bataille's "Critical Dictionary" in the 1920s and 1930s. She refers to the dictionary's job – a "job" that will later pass to the *informe* – "to transgress the neat boundaries of the art world with its categories based on *form*."[32] Having effectively glossed over *informe,* Krauss progresses to discuss some of Bataille's other concepts in her reassessment of Giacometti. Alteration, *informe, acéphale,* the minotaur, the labyrinth, and base materialism are all terms that Krauss sources from Bataille's early work. The essay's critical focus, however, is on horizontality and she relates this aspect of Giacometti's work to Bataille's concept of *bassesse* as a continuation of the argument she had been developing since "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."

Bassesse (low or base materialism) is the particular concept that allows Krauss to

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29 Krauss, "No More Play," 52. Luquet assesses child art and primitive art as a single category.
30 Krauss, "No More Play," 54. Krauss states that Bataille is drawn to the term "alteration" because it is ambivalent. It contains "the divergent significations of *devolution* and *evolution*."
31 Alberto Giacometti, *Suspended Ball,* 1930-31, iron and plaster, 61cm, The Alberto Giacometti Foundation, Basel.
32 Krauss, "No More Play," 64. In "Corpus Delicti" she will associate the article "Informe" with the overall project of the dictionary. The job of the dictionary will be become the job of the *informe.*

articulate the collapse of Giacometti's sculpture to the horizontal plane and connect his work to the modernist condition of sculpture as base that she identifies in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."[33] *Bassesse* lowers. Krauss gives further impetus to her justification for *bassesse* by referencing Bataille's "Critical Dictionary" entry "Bouche," where the lowering process is linked to rotation. Krauss, however, conflates one meaning of the word base with another. Base is a noun with one meaning and an adjective with another. Krauss's proposal for a physical sculptural base is compounded into a case for lowering to a base condition. *Bassesse* is associated with the word "base" as an adjective. Although there are colloquial expressions, such as "knocked him off his pedestal," the appeal to base matter is at most only tangential to the notion of sculpture as base. The French equivalent for the English term "horizontal" is *horizontal*. Krauss claims Giacometti for her art history because his work stresses the *horizontal* rather than *bassesse*. [34] Krauss will introduce her second essay on surrealist photographic practice with the specific concept of rotation in photographic framing. *Informe* will become a major critical tool in "Corpus Delicti" where *informe* continues to be associated with *bassesse.*

The anti-concept *informe* plays a major critical role in "Corpus Delicti" which Krauss writes primarily for the catalogue of the exhibition *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* that she co-curates with Jane Livingstone in 1985.[35] Krauss introduces the *informe* in "Corpus Delicti" with a description of photographic compositional rotation, a common technique in surrealist photography. Her proposal uses the idea of framing that was explored previously in "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." *Informe,* however, as a concept was absent in the earlier essay. "Corpus Delicti" is an opportunity to add the *informe* to her critical arsenal to re-evaluate surrealist photography as the precursor to contemporary photographic practice. She invokes the concept of *bassesse* as a lowering that is achieved through the operation of the *informe* and indicates that surrealist photographers enabled this through the disorientating effects of rotation.[36] She demonstrates that the body photographed from a particular angle effects a compositional fall toward the horizontal lower edge of the frame. This proposed operation of *informe* relies on a particular interpretation of *déclasser,* a word in Bataille's critical dictionary

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33 Krauss, "No More Play," 74. She allies horizontality with her earlier work on the index.
34 Krauss makes this very clear at the conclusion of "No More Play."
35 Krauss and Livingstone, *L'amour fou.*
36 Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," 34, 37, 41.

article "Informe." She interprets *déclasser* in her translation of Bataille's article as "to bring things *down.*"[37] Other interpretations, which incidentally Krauss does acknowledge but downplays, have a quite different emphasis. Iain White in *Encyclopedia Acephalica* interprets *déclasser* as "declassify." [38] The psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida interprets the word as "disorder."[39] These alternative interpretations signify a quite different, less orderly, less structural sense of *informe.*[40] This raises a question about Krauss's close association of *informe* with *bassesse.* If the anti-concept *informe* crushes all concepts in its path then why should it not also crush the concept *bassesse?*[41]

A version of "Corpus Delicti" appears in the journal *October* in the same year as the exhibition *L'Amour fou* and the differences between the exhibition catalogue and the journal article highlight a significant problem.[42] The catalogue version is illustrated with substantially more photographs of naked women. Krauss asserts in her text that surrealism has been routinely and mistakenly perceived as an anti-feminist enterprise.[43] Anticipating criticism of her project, Krauss counters with a structuralist justification for the proliferation of female nudes in surrealist photographic practice. Her case is organised around the concept of the fetish. Krauss admits that the subject "woman" in surrealism is obsessive, but that in most cases this fetishization is not normalized as natural, but is presented as a "woman-as-fetish" or "woman as substitute" category that

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37 This is the translation of the article "Informe" that Krauss uses: *A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus* formless *is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing has its form. What is designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.* (Endpapers, *Formless.*)

38 Georges Bataille (et al.) *Encyclopedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary and Related Texts* trans. Iain White, (London: Atlas, 1996).

39 Pierre Fédida, "The Movement of the Informe," trans. M. Stone-Richards and Ming Tiampo. *Qui Parle* 10, no. 1(Fall/Winter 1996): 49-62. This is Fédida's interpretation: *"A dictionary would begin from the moment where it no longer gave the meaning of words. Thus* informe *is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term which works to disorder, generally requiring that each thing take its form."* Fédida p. 49.

40 *Merriam Webster English-French Dictionary.* (Chicago: Merriam Webster Mass Market, 2000.) *Déclasser* is: déclasser [deklase] vt 1: to demote, to downgrade 2: to get out of order, to disarrange 3: to demean, Merriam-Webster, 2000

41 Fedida proposes that what Bataille intends with *informe* is the destruction of all concepts as "knowledge-words." This would entail *informe's* destruction of *bassesse* as a concept as well. *Informe* would also effectively destroy itself if proposed as a concept – in this sense *informe* is an anti-concept. See Fédida, "The Movement."

42 Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," 31-72.

43 Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," 72.

can be constructed and deconstructed. Krauss invokes the *informe* as an operation that can destabilize gender. She suggests that the works combine the concept of "woman" as "/woman/ and /photograph/." Krauss then compares the fragmented, disorientated, blurred, and unnatural images in surrealism with antithetical examples of cohesive, stable, focused, and natural depictions of women in conventional Straight Photography. She argues that Straight Photography, as epitomised in the practice of Edward Weston, gives the illusion of mastery over the image and, therefore, the domination over the subject photographed. From this position she declares that Straight Photography is problematic for feminism, whereas surrealist photography should not be so.[44] Her defence of surrealism, however, presents woman as a depleted term, empty of content and able to be manipulated at will. It also is a clear demonstration of Krauss' apolitical art historical methodology.

Hal Foster critically reviews the exhibition *L'Amour fou* and its catalogue in the magazine *Art in America* and asserts that the multitude of photographs of women in the exhibition overwhelm the curatorial project. Part of his article is written from a feminist perspective. Toward the end of the review Foster contends that Krauss's appeal to fetishization, although a valid theoretical point, is probably not sufficient justification to propose that surrealist photographic practice is proto-feminist.[45] He maintains that part of the significance of surrealism as an historical project *is* its misogyny. This should be preserved as a necessary problematic in the movement.[46] Foster states that Krauss overlooks this issue. Her reasons are based in her critical analysis of contemporary art practice. Foster cogently argues that Krauss is attempting to establish an historical lineage for postmodern photography.

A familiar surrealist photomontage both opens Foster's review of "L'Amour fou" and is discussed by the feminist literary critic Susan Suleiman.[47] The image depicts sixteen photographic frontal portraits of surrealists arranged as a frame around the reproduction of a painting of a female nude by Rene Magritte. The work bears the text, "*je ne vois pas la,*" painted above the depicted woman, and "*cachée dans la forêt*" below. The

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44 Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," 71-72

45 The exhibition *L'Amor fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville, 1985) was roundly criticized in feminist scholarship.

46 Hal Foster, "L'Amour Faux," *Art in America* (January 1986):117-128.

47 René Magritte, *I Do Not See the [Woman] Hidden in the Forest,* 1929, photomontage, Collection Galerie 1900-2000, Marcel and David Fleiss, Paris.

translation of the first line of text is "i do not see the" and the second reads "hidden in the forest." To reinforce the idea that the woman is invisible, the eyes in the portraits of the men are closed.

Suleiman declares this photomontage emblematic of the different positions of the surrealist viewing subject and producer.[48] The viewer can plainly see the woman, whereas the producers of the woman as "imaginary," that is, the surrealists that frame the painting need not, as for them "woman" is a mental construct. Woman appears centrally in the image as fetish, consequently there is no actual representation of a real woman. This is also part of Krauss's provocative assertion for a proto-feminist surrealism, where "woman" is able to be constructed and deconstructed. It forms the argument for *informe* in "Corpus Delicti." Suleiman, however, takes an oppositional stance to Krauss on theory and has a more empirical assessment of the movement. She contends that women writers and artists were marginalized in the movement and, like Foster, specifically targets Krauss's essay as eliding this historical fact.[49] Suleiman maintains that the proposal that "woman" is constructed in surrealism as "fetish" ultimately ignores the wider social issue of women's marginalisation in the histories of surrealism. She asserts that theory cannot afford to close its eyes to this reality in either the arts or in society generally.

Krauss responds to Suleiman's criticisms throughout "Claude Cahun and Dora Maar: By Way of Introduction" – the first essay in her book *Bachelors*. The final comments in this essay, however, are a particular rebuttal to Suleiman's concern that women artists were and have been historically sidelined in surrealism. Krauss extrapolates her assertion to cover the general place of women in modern and postmodern art history and concludes the essay with the statement: "... art made by women needs no special pleading, and in the essays that follow I will offer none."[50] The most significant essay in *Bachelors,* "Untitled," a study of the photographer Cindy Sherman, is a continuation of Krauss's project to link contemporary art to her particular account of modernism. Cahun, in this sense, although Krauss doesn't explicitly state it, is a forerunner to Sherman.

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48 Susan Suleiman, "A Double Margin: Reflections on Women Writers and the Avant-garde in France," in *Yale French Studies* Number: 75 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 162-3.
49 Suleiman, "A Double Margin," 168. A particularly convincing example is that from 1924-1933 there were no official women members of surrealism. Women started to be officially admitted into the movement when it was in decline.
50 Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 50.

Krauss considers that the association of Sherman's photographic practice with a feminist political agenda restricts her work to impoverished readings. The structural semiotic and deconstructive analysis that Krauss applies to Sherman, therefore, has a dual purpose. Firstly, it places Sherman's work in Krauss's revisionist modernist history, and secondly, it disassociates it not only from feminism, but also from Julia Kristeva's influential theory of the "abject." A significant problem for Krauss is that feminist criticism of Sherman's photographs focus on their content – the signified – and that which constitutes the work – the signifiers – do not become an integral part of this type of assessment.[51] Her stance is based on how signifiers operate. Krauss's essay is also an opportunity to connect Sherman with concepts previously utilised in her analysis of surrealism.

Although he is not referenced in the text, many of these ideas stem from Krauss's particular interpretation of early Bataille. Krauss devotes a specific section of her essay to Sherman's "horizontal" work.[52] In this series Krauss informs us that the signifier is "point of view."[53] She rejects Laura Mulvey's feminist methodology as relatively unsophisticated, due partly to the importance Mulvey attaches to content.[54] To substantiate her position, Krauss demonstrates at length her knowledge of both Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. This passage, however, functions mainly as a preamble to her theory of the horizontal – the "point of view" signifier – drawn from Bataille. As stated earlier, *informe* is the motor that allows Krauss to destabilize the vertical axis to the horizontal base. Krauss uses this concept to incorporate Sherman within a legacy that includes not only the surrealists, but also Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, and Ed Ruscha – artists who would be excluded from a feminist account of Sherman's work. An indication of her subsequent motivation to separate Sherman from contemporary practices based on the abject– a theory supporting artistic production often allied with feminism and gender politics – appears toward the end of this section.[55]

Krauss distances her semiotic reading of Sherman's work based on the *informe* from

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51 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 104-106.
52 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 125-133.
53 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 125.
54 Laura Mulvey, "A Phantasmagloria of the Female Body: The World of Cindy Sherman," *New Left Review,* no.188: 136-50.
55 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 131.

Mulvey's feminist analysis founded on "the abject" in the section titled "The Vomit Pictures."[56] In around 1987 Sherman began a series of close-up photographs that depict rotting food and pools of vomit. Mulvey claims that these works address the collapse of the exterior/interior relationship in the feminine body and the presentation of "woman's" body – the cosmetic facade stripped away – as the abject "monstrous feminine."[57] The "monstrous feminine" is Mulvey's theme for this series or, in semiotic terms, the signified. Krauss contends that Sherman's work should be read in terms of its signifiers; among them the "horizontal" and, from an earlier argument in the essay, the dissipating glitters and reflections of "wild light."[58] Krauss asserts that this type of assessment allows the implied body in the work to remain "formless" because there is no appeal to a particular psychoanalytical theme. [59] The emphasis throughout Krauss's essay is on the need to view the photographs as interactions of signifiers. This section, in particular, reveals Krauss's theoretical basis in Jacques Derrida's concept of the transcendental signifier. The problematic signified for Krauss, in the case of feminist critiques of Sherman, is their predetermined political agenda. Krauss maintains that the feminist position neglects the inherent properties in the art which operate constantly at a structural semiotic level within it and without necessary reference to any particular signified.[60] A parallel can be drawn with Krauss's methodology and formalism: the intrinsic properties of the medium in formalism, with an additional semiotic and deconstructive overlay, are the chain of signifiers; and the content or subject of the work becomes the signified.[61]

In 1993 the *October* editorial board organized a roundtable panel to discuss the growing tendency toward politicization in contemporary American art.[62] The panel addressed a

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56 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 148-154. Krauss, "*Informe* Without Conclusion," *October,* Vol. 78 (Autumn, 1996):98. In "*Informe* Without Conclusion," written three years later and forming (with alterations and additions) part of the catalogue for *Formless,* Krauss comments: "Which is to say that "abjection," in producing a thematics of essences and substances, is in the strongest contradiction with the idea of the *informe.*" See also Krauss, "Informe Without Conclusion,"105.
57 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 148-151.
58 In this case a pool of vomit horizontally occupies space.
59 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 151.
60 Krauss, *Bachelors,* 154.
61 See Hatt and Klonk, *Art History,* 208.
62 Hal Foster, "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial," *October,* Vol. 66. (Autumn, 1993.): 3-27. The panel for the first roundtable is comprised of: Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, and Benjamin Buchloh. Foster, in his introductory comments, states the purpose of the roundtable: "For this first conversation we focus on the tendency that to some of us appears persuasive in contemporary art and criticism alike: a certain turn away from questions of representation to iconographies of content; a certain turn from a politics of representation to a politics of the signified." Foster,"Whitney," 3.

concern that recent trends toward conscious political themes directed attention away from the art work and onto what it represented.[63] The first roundtable discussion concentrated on the 1993 Whitney Biennial exhibition as a high-profile example of the rise of identity politics in the visual arts. Krauss refers to her essay on Cindy Sherman as exemplifying her concern that the alignment of art with politics indicates that "no one is *looking* at the work."[64] Hal Foster reveals the real motivation for convening the group when he states that the role of the critic is being displaced by artwork that functions as socio-political criticism[65] Krauss's hegemonic position in the art world is based on her ability to offer intelligent, formal and semiotic close readings of art works. The roundtable's apprehension is that a politically engaged art practice and criticism will eventually dominate the semiotic methodology espoused in *October*. The crisis for *October* revolved around, as Krauss had identified in the feminist readings of Sherman, the abject body.

Abject art was a particularly effective tool for feminist and gay politics because it was visceral and immediately confrontational. It provoked a psychological reaction, whereas Krauss's formalist and structuralist methodologies have always been apolitical. As demonstrated, her focus on structural semiotics relies on the operation of signifiers. The signified is rarely commented on. The main signified in abject art is the body, especially as a porous container of fluids and essences. Widespread praxis in abject art is to represent the body literally, rather than through artistic sublimation.

Four months after the first roundtable was held, *October* organised a second to debate the relationship between the abject and the *informe* in contemporary art.[66] The subtext of this discussion was how these terms functioned in the recent political turn in the visual arts that had formed the topic of the previous roundtable. Krauss's concern was to categorically distance the *informe* as a structural operation from the overt politicization of the abject.[67] In this way she could continue to use the *informe* as an apolitical tool without conflating it with the abject and drawing it into social politics.

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63 Benjamin Buchloh, a Marxist art historian and editor on *October,* is the only dissenting voice.
64 Foster, "Whitney," 21.
65 Foster, "Whitney," 23. Krauss and Foster are anxious that many of the art works are "imitating critical discourse."
66 Hal Foster, "The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the *Informe* and the Abject." *October,* Vol. 67 (Winter, 1994): 3-21. The second roundtable panel is comprised of Hal Foster, Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, and Helen Molesworth.
67 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 2. Krauss makes this clear in her opening comments. Foster, 1994, p.2

Krauss's main objection to the association of the abject with the *informe,* is that the abject focuses on the body as a literal entity, while the *informe* is a structural operation.[68] Abjection is closely connected to a thematics that allies it with the body as signified, whereas Krauss emphasizes that the *informe* can be observed as an interaction between signifiers. In her view, the signified is less important because its position is fixed. She argues that less literal representations of the body allow for layered interpretations where the fluidity of the *informe* can be discerned.

The other *October* editors and co-panellists do not necessarily hold the same view on the body as thematic or on its position as a signified as Krauss. Hal Foster questions the idea that the body is always represented literally and proposes that its critical position in both theoretical discourse and artistic practice is often ambiguous. Foster's remarks are later seconded by Denis Hollier, who remarks on the place of the body in systems of signification.[69] Hollier states: "A signified can always be a signifier. What you say about Serra can also be said of a work of art that looks literal. The literalness is not about the object, in the sign, but in its reception. There is nothing that ties you to a literal reading."[70] The panel had previously been discussing Richard Serra's film *Hand Catching Lead* (1968).[71] The activity of Serra's hand is construed by Krauss as an operation that references both the sphincter and the glottis. She resorts to a structural interpretation of the *informe* that is not fixed on the representation of any actual body part. As such, there is no necessarily fixed referent to the hand in Serra's work. The important feature for Krauss is that pictures of sphincters and glotti are not needed to convey the movement between signifiers. Benjamin Buchloh, however, suggests that this may be a case of the sublimation of bodily parts into their representation as a hand. The issue of sublimation is voiced at various times in the conversation, particularly in the discussion of Cy Twombly's graffiti paintings. Krauss stresses that the strength of Twomby's work lies in the difficulty to read his graffiti marks as specific literal

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68 This is constantly highlighted throughout the conversation.
69 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 16.
70 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 16. Richard Serra's film *Hand Catching Lead*,1968 depicts the artist's hand attempting to catch falling pieces of lead. Sometimes Serra succeeds, holds the piece and lets go, sometimes he fails to catch the piece. Denis Hollier is a French Studies academic and editor for *October.* He is a Bataille specialist and the author of *Against Architecture* (Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille,* trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990). He has had particular theoretical influence on Krauss's work. Krauss and Hollier were also married.
71 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 13.

depictions of the body. [72] In another sense, though, the marks are also tasteful sublimations of what they signify: anuses.

The discussion of Twombly's work had been raised with specific reference to a Robert Mapplethorpe photographic self-portrait that depicts the artist with the end of a bullwhip inserted into his anus. Krauss rejects the Mapplethorpe photograph because the image is a literal reference to gender politics. [73] Krauss argues that the literality of Mapplethorpe's image lacks "polysemic energy" when compared to Twombly's paintings. [74] The importance of AIDS as a contemporary theme in politically engaged art had been the topic of conversation immediately prior to the introduction of the self-portrait. [75]

The Mapplethorpe photograph is an overt and explicit representation of an anus and an act. As such, it is not a sublimation. Krauss discloses that her early formalist assessment and rejection of Twombly's work was because it was not a proper sublimation. [76] In the roundtable, Foster raises the point that the structural use of *informe* implies "resublimation in the guise of desublimation." [77] He directs his comments at Krauss who then skirts around an answer by changing the topic. Buchloh asks Krauss if her formalist rejection of Twombly was tied to sexual explicitness. She replies that this wasn't the case. Sublimation, however, always played an important role in her formalist analysis of art. Krauss's dismissal of Mapplethorpe's photograph is on the basis of its literal connection to a political theme, but it is also because his work – far more explicit than Twombly – is not decorously sublimated. This proposition can be argued by using a photograph that is similar to the Mapplethorpe and is as equally politically charged. The photograph, which dates from a period when Krauss was beginning to discover in structuralism an apolitical and theoretical update of formalism, was the catalyst in the establishment of the journal *October* in 1976.

Krauss's break with *Artforum* in 1975 revolves partly around the magazine's publication

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72 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 12
73 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self-Portrait with Whip,* 1978, unique gelatin silver print, 35.5 x 35.5cm.
74 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 18.
75 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 15.
76 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject," 18. Krauss states "Because it wasn't properly sublimatory, because it had a material quality that kept it there on the chalkboard, in the schoolroom, with all those awful Art Brut connotations."
77 Foster, "*Informe* and Abject,"18.

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of a controversial artwork by the artist Lynda Benglis in 1974 (Fig. 2).[78] At this stage, the writers and editors at *Artforum* were divided into two camps: one dominated by a formalism with evolving structuralist tendencies, and the other aligned with contemporary socio-political issues. The political faction of the magazine was in the ascendancy.[79]

In the November 1974 issue of *Artforum* Benglis published a photograph that caused an outrage among the majority of the magazine's editors.[80] The photograph depicts Benglis standing nude, posed provocatively, greased in oil, wearing sunglasses, and holding a gigantic dildo that projects from her crotch. Benglis's photograph had its origins as the final piece in a collaborative series with the artist Robert Morris. The work was published in *Artforum* and was originally intended to accompany an article on the artist.[81] The series investigated the different conventions the media uses to represent male and female artists. Benglis adopts the guise of various characters and blurs

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78 Fig. 2. Lynda Benglis, *Untitled,* 1974, colour photograph, 26.5 x 26.5 cm, photographic advertisement in *Artforum International* (November 1974). Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974.* (New York: Soho Press, 2003), 414.
79 *Artforum's* editor at the time, John Coplans, was actively promoting a political agenda.
80 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 524-525, endnote 127.

   A number of the editors publish a Letter to the Editor in the next issue. Max Kozloff later apologizes and distances himself from this act. This is the text of the letter:

   "For the first time in the 13 years of *Artforum*'s existence, a group of associate editors feel compelled to dissociate themselves publicly from a portion of the magazine's content, specifically the copyrighted advertisement of Lynda Benglis photographed by Arthur Gordon and printed by courtesy of the Paula Cooper Gallery....The copyright and the caption linger as vestiges of the artist's original intention. We want to make clear the reasons why we object to its appearance within *Artforum*'s covers:

   1. In the specific content of this journal it exists as an object of extreme vulgarity. Although we realize that it is by no means the first instance of vulgarity to appear in the magazine, it represents a qualitative leap in that genre, brutalizing ourselves and, we think, our readers.

   2. *Artforum* has, over the past few years, made conscious efforts to support the movement for women's liberation, and it is therefore doubly shocking to encounter in its pages this gesture that reads as a shabby mockery of the aims of the movement.

   3. Ms. Benglis's advertisement insinuates two interconnected definitions of art-world roles that are seriously open to question. One is that the artist is free to be exploitative in his or her relation to a general public and that community of writers and readers who make *Artforum*. The other is that *Artforum* should be a natural accomplice to that exploitation....We are aware of the economic independencies which govern the entire chain of artistic production and distribution. Nonetheless, the credibility of our work demands that we be always on guard against such complicity....To our great regret, we find ourselves compromised in this manner and that we owe our readers an acknowledgement of that compromise....
   Lawrence Alloway, Max Kozloff, Rosalind Krauss, Joseph Masheck, Annette Michelson, Letter to the Editor, December 1974.
81 Robert Pincus-Witten, "Lynda Benglis: The Frozen Gesture," *Artforum International* (November, 1974): 54-59.

prescribed boundaries by highlighting and confusing traditional notions of gender roles.[82] The penultimate photograph in the project is a half-length frontal photograph of Morris; bare-chested, draped in chains, wearing a German First World War helmet and reflective sunglasses. The photograph has unmistakable homoerotic and sadomasochistic overtones.[83] Benglis rejoinder to Morris is the controversial image later published in *Artforum*. Benglis and the magazine could not agree initially on how to publish the photograph. *Artforum's* chief editor John Coplans wanted to present it as a very small illustration to Robert Pincus-Witten's article on Benglis. Benglis, whose intention was to publish the individual image in *Artforum* as an art work, insisted that the photograph predominate the page.[84] Eventually Benglis and Coplans compromised and it appeared as a double-page "advertisement" for Benglis's dealer, the Paula Cooper Gallery.[85] By selling the space as advertising, Coplans attempted to distance the piece from the concern that it would be perceived as editorial content, although it was clear that the photograph never functioned as straight advertising.[86]

Benglis's practice is allied to a particular type of feminism that does not reject outright the role of pornography. She uses aspects of pornographic practice to undermine traditional conceptions of gender politics and the image she exhibited in *Artforum* is tied to this undertaking.[87] An element of the ensuing furore surrounded the perception that the magazine was being increasingly compromised by commercial necessity to advertise.[88] Krauss maintains this stance. In her view, the publication of the photograph set a precedent: anyone could potentially buy a place in the magazine or purchase an article.[89] Michelson also held this position, but indicates she has neither a problem with an artist purchasing advertising space, nor with the content of Benglis's work. Michelson thought that Krauss did not share exactly the same view.[90]

The disruption of the gender binarism male/female that Benglis produces in her "advertisement" in *Artforum* is an example of *informe*. A comparison can be made with

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82 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 420.
83 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 391.
84 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 391.
85 The dealer's name appears in very small white print.
86 This became a key issue in the ensuing controversy.
87 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 418.
88 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 388, 396, 414-415, 417.
89 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 414-415.
90 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 417.

Brassaï's photograph *Nu 115* (1932-33) of a female nude that features in Krauss's essay "Corpus Delicti" and has been used by her in a number of publications since (Fig.3).[91] Both are photographs of women, although a dildo appears in one, and the subject is cropped to imply a phallic resemblance in the other. Krauss asserts that Brassaï's work exhibits the condition of *informe.* Benglis, using the same criteria, shares similar characteristics.[92] There are two crucial differences, though; the Benglis is used politically, whereas the Brassaï is not. Benglis's work was intended to disrupt, confuse and undermine, and its reception ultimately proves that she was successful. The work is *informe* because it simultaneously appears as both pornography and as an undermining of the pornographic image. It is an *informe* operation that is political rather than aesthetic. By contrast, whatever Brassaï's original subversive intention, his photograph has been used by Krauss as an example of *informe* as an apolitical structural operation. The woman photographed by Brassaï is anonymous and headless. The Brassaï is a soft image, whereas the Benglis is sharply focused. Benglis's photograph is aggressive and crude – its crudity is its overwhelming power – it has an "in your face" element of crassness. When Krauss first encounters the image in John Coplans's office he explains to her that it is too expensive to publish in the article. She relates that her comments were: "Oh well, I would think you wouldn't do because it's too disgusting."[93] Krauss also rejects the image on grounds of taste and decorum.[94] The incident plays a major part in her decision to leave *Artforum* in 1975.

After leaving *Artforum* Krauss adopts a structural critical practice that is still influenced by formalism. Toward the end of the Amy Newman's interviews in *Challenging Art* she comments on the continuing influence and legacy of Clement Greenberg.[95] Krauss considers that although art practices have moved away from traditional mediums, Greenberg's notion of historical progression is still relevant to artists today. She

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91 Fig. 3. Brassaï (Gyula Halász), *Nu 115,*1932-33, silver print, 18.4 x 29.8 cm, Madame Brassaï Collection, Paris.

92 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 418. Benglis states "I wanted it to be ambiguous enough that it couldn't be said what it was."

93 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 418. Krauss, on finding out that the Benglis photograph it is going to appear as an advertisement, reacts strongly. Although the editor's letter expresses a concern with the growing commercial pressures on the content of the magazine, the overwhelming objections expressed are to do with "vulgarity."

94 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 418. Coplans reflects that Krauss and Michelson were academics who did not want to publish in a "journal that has a naked woman with a cock stuck up her pussy." The art historian Barbara Rose states: "After that how could you publish an important article about Matisse in that magazine."

95 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 462.

observes that contemporary art can be connected to Greenberg, although she admits it is a Greenbergian logic that has become "perverted and strangely changed."[96] She claims "Art" is still posing the question: "What is art?"[97] Krauss states strongly that aesthetic experience, based in one's feeling for culture, should continue to play a central role in contemporary arts. Aesthetics remains an important condition for Krauss's experience of art. Aesthetics is allied to the concepts of beauty – and taste.

The Optical Unconscious is Krauss's principal effort to found an alternative history of twentieth century art. The book is a complex deconstruction of the formalist modernist art criticism and history. Krauss utilizes a number of structuralist and post-structuralist theorists in the polyvalent structure of the text. The main premise of the study is that visual experience is mediated through the unconscious and this effects the interpretation of what is seen.[98] This view, indebted in part to psychoanalysis, contrasts with Greenberg and Fried's more empirical and objective accounts of vision.[99] Krauss bases her work on the structuralist graphs that she first employs in her 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."[100] She adapts the semiotic square of the structural linguist Algirdas Greimas and overlays this structure with the L-schema graph of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in order to produce a range of complex variants that she applies to art analysis. The graphs are reworked with ideas that she has been developing over the last two decades, including the *informe.* Krauss realizes that she can use the logic of graphs to deconstruct Greenberg and Fried's formalist art criticism and historical methodology which is based on the primacy of visual experience as purely optical.[101]

The book has a chapter dedicated to Bataille and, in particular, to the *informe. Informe* is crucial to Krauss's deconstructive project because it operates *within* modernism, yet structurally erodes its formal logic. Toward the end of this section, Krauss uses her

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96 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 462.
97 Newman, *Challenging Art,* 462.
98 Krauss, *Optical,* 180.
99 Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 17.
100 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979): 30-44.
101 Krauss, *Optical,* 21. The thesis of the book is encapsulated in the following quote: *"The fifth advantage of the graph only came to me later. After I had begun to fill in the space of an alternative history, one that had developed against the grain of modernist opticality, one that had risen on the very site of modernism only to defy its logic, to cross the wires of its various categories, to flout all its notions about essences and purifications, to refuse its concern with foundations – above all a foundation in the presumed ontological ground of the visual. When does this other history begin, this refusal of the optical logic of mainstream modernism?"*

graph as a means of mapping the operation of the *informe*.[102] The *informe* occupies the neutral axis of the graph and produces the third term "low" in the relationship between noble and ignoble.[103] Low can also be thought of as "base." As previously discussed, base plays a dual role in Krauss's methodology as that which is base – as in "a base act" – and that which signifies lowering to a physical horizontal state. With the exception of the graph, which is introduced with reference to Roland Barthes's analysis of Bataille's essay on "The Big Toe," there is little new material in the chapter.[104]

The chapter on Jackson Pollock is the most significant in the book because his work is also of fundamental importance in Greenberg and Fried's formalist accounts of modernism that Krauss works against. Greenberg assesses Pollock through finished paintings viewed on a wall. This links his art to the tradition of painting, which is usually a vertically experienced act. Greenberg associated Pollock with cubism because of his progressive reduction of pictorial space to closer identification with its support. Greenberg's idea of physical space was further developed into pure optics by Fried. The painting could be thought of as an optical mirage where the eye, in a sense operating independently of the body, governs visual experience.[105] Krauss proposes another less orderly way to read Pollock's work if we think about how he painted. Krauss associates the artist's practice of painting on the floor with the concepts of "horizontality" and "the index." From this viewpoint she incorporates Pollock into her alternative account of modernism and identifies his successors as Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, and Robert Morris among others.[106]

Pollock felt threatened by the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. Krauss claims that the horizontal functioned in this psychological rivalry, as it allowed Pollock to "one-up" Picasso and eliminate the unconscious represented by the figure.[107] Krauss connects the

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102Krauss, *Optical,* 91.

103Krauss, *Optical,* 91. The *informe* operates on the neutral axis of the graph.

104For new material introduced see Krauss, *Optical,* 186-192.

105Fried, Art and Objecthood, 225.

106Krauss, *Optical,* 259-265. Krauss identifies in Pollock violent psychological tendencies that can also be observed in Twombly's work. Twombly's work exhibits the graffitist's need to strike and mar a surface, leaving traces of a presence. The surface of the work functions as an index. The mark is a trace, Krauss argues using Jacques Derrida's concepts of the *arche-trace* and *différance,* and is evidence of a self-effaced presence: it is a striking out of self. Krauss applies this reading to Pollock's systematic elimination of figurative elements in his iconic drip paintings of the late 1940s and early 1950s. These works were produced on the floor. She uses Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings* as an example of an interpretation of Pollock's horizontal painting method.

107Krauss, *Optical,* p. 282-284.

act of horizontal lowering in Pollock's painting technique to *bassesse* – the condition that is produced by the *informe.* In doing so Krauss argues that Pollock both cancels the figure and registers this event as horizontal.[108] She associates the lowering act and the artwork's resultant position with a violent nullification of figure. This horizontalization and cancellation continues to feature in a range of artists that she promotes as heirs to Pollock.[109] Krauss presents her selection of artists in opposition to the colour field painters proclaimed by Greenberg and Fried, because she considered that their selections were still tied to the condition of the vertical. Krauss asserts that these artists have sublimated Pollock's violent act of effacement into the formalist paradigm of "opticality."

Krauss quotes from Michael Fried's 1965 essay "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella'" in *The Optical Unconscious* and disagrees with him on a number of points.[110] For Fried, Pollock's painting is distinguished by intelligence.[111] Krauss, however, claims his work is driven by irrational and violent tendencies. Fried, like Greenberg, situates the origins of Pollock's work in cubism, while Krauss argues for surrealist antecedents.[112] Fried and Krauss both agree, although, that the drip technique was a means to eliminate pictorial and narrative content.

The return of the figure in painting is problematic for Krauss because of the indebtedness to formalism in her revised poststructural schema. The dispassionate lens of the camera is the most appropriate means to render the figure because the photochemical imprint it produces is, as in formalism, discipline specific. The film records an index of the world, while any painted manifestation is, pace Greenberg, illusionist because it attempts to ape the conditions of three-dimensionality suitable to sculpture. Although sharing a formalist concern with medium, Fried does not, however, necessarily view the resurgence of figurative elements in Pollock's work as a problem.

The formalist ideas of space and opticality in Fried's description of one of Pollock's later works, *Cut Out* (1948-50) are troubling for Krauss (Fig. 4).[113] *Cut Out* is a

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108Krauss, *Optical*, 284.
109Krauss, *Optical,* 293.
110Krauss, *Optical,* 247.
111Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 223.
112Krauss, *Optical,* Chapter Six.
113Fig. 4. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled (Cut-Out)* c.1948-50, oil, enamel, aluminum paint, and mixed

combination of figuration and the all-over drip technique. Her key point is that Fried defines the space between the field and figure as "purely and wholly optical: so that the figure created by removing part of the painted field and backing it with canvas-board seems to lie somewhere within our own eyes, as strange as this may sound."[114] She discounts Fried's rational analysis because it is overtly concerned with pure opticality, although she neglects an important detail in his description. Fried is interested in how the return of the figure functions in the painting and concludes that there is something odd at work in *Cut Out.* But if the accent is, as Krauss's type of analysis advocates, moved away from opticality and on to the operation that the figure performs in the work, then negation becomes the very means to achieve figuration. That is, the figure is inscribed precisely by being removed. The key quote is: "The result is that the figure is not seen as an object in the world, or shape on a flat surface – in fact it is not seen as the presence of anything – but rather as the absence, over a particular area, of the visual field."[115] The discussion revolves around a figure (because this is what Fried is trying awkwardly to describe) and its simultaneous absence in producing itself. Krauss underplays this aspect of Fried's passage because, without knowing it, Fried is discussing an operation that is *informe.* It is a use of *informe,* however, that operates in figurative painting and is, therefore, not aligned with her horizontal "striking out" or obliteration of the figure.

The art historian T. J. Clark, who also considers that *Cut Out* is one of Pollock's best works, rejects Krauss's assessment of the artist's work as horizontal.[116] He proposes that the evidence Krauss uses in her argument is largely unsubstantiated.[117] Siding with Greenberg and Fried, he asserts that although Pollock worked on large canvases on the floor, his intention while working was always that a finished painting would hang vertically on a wall.[118]

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mediums on cardboard and canvas, 77.3 x 57 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki. Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 229.

114 Krauss, 1993, p.347. Krauss is quoting from "Three American Painters" (Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 228). Pollock's integration of physical space is achieved by the network of paint that he layers over the entire work sealing the canvas and its support in the same space. Fried resorts to the notion of opticality and the exorbited eye.

115 Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 228.

116 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 351.

117 Clark, *Farewell,* 324.

118 Clark, *Farewell,* 325. Krauss would assert that the artist's intention is irrelevant to her argument.

Clark contends, like Krauss, that Pollock's working process is one of erasure because the work is produced in a process of over-painting, but he also argues that imagery remains present in the work although hidden.[119] He asserts that Pollock never discounted the return of the figurative and that the retrospective overemphasis on biography has represented this as a crisis.[120] Clark agrees, although, with Fried: the revival would have to be conditioned on the fact that it had previously been cancelled.[121]

Number 10A, 1948, also colloquially known as *The Wooden Horse,* is a painting Pollock produced at the same time as his large, iconic, abstract canvases (Fig. 5).[122] The work incorporates a collaged element: a small wooden horse head. The canvas field is swirled in oil and duco paint. Clark comments that the head and the field are only sensible if read "conceptually and visually – as negations of one another."[123] He imagines a conversation between the horse head and the paint. The horse head, rather matter-of-factly, addresses the paint: "Likeness is easy...It happens without us even meaning it [T]o avoid likeness as you do is just bravura, the last kind modernist painting allows itself, and as meretricious as all the rest."[124] To deliberately paint in a manner that consciously draws attention to the medium is tawdry, but this remains of significance in modernist painting.[125] The paint, noting its condition, replies that while the removal of the figure is often sought, or as Krauss would maintain in the case of Pollock, struck out by the lowering operation of the *informe,* it can nevertheless reappear. It says:

For modern art [remember this is the oil and duco's opinion] has never been driven by a dogmatic wish to avoid the pursuit of resemblance per se, but by the belief that in present circumstances it could only reinvent the possibility of making and matching by having it be exactly that – a possibility, not a foregone conclusion. These thrown lines, this wretched meandering – the scratches of blue, red, and yellow that (almost) fill them out and give them body – they are ways of circling *around* likeness, looking for likeness in those movements of matter and body where you would least expect it. With always the chance

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119Clark, *Farewell,* 327. He states: "The first drip painting is meant to be understood as hiding and revealing an imagery underneath." Krauss contends that Pollock strikes out, but the graffiti mark, as she argues, reveals a presence. Clark describes Pollock's works are often allusions to nature. Clark maintains that we have grown accustomed through formalism to view these readings as facile but that there is no valid reason why this should be so. See Clark, *Farewell,* 343.
120Clark, *Farewell,* 340.
121Clark, *Farewell,* 351.
122Fig. 5. Jackson Pollock, *The Wooden Horse: Number 10A 1948* 1948, oil, enamel, and wood hobbyhorse head on brown cotton canvas, mounted on fiberboard, 90.1 x 190.5 cm, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.
123Clark, *Farewell,* 353.
124Clark, *Farewell,* 353.
125The argument for medium as paint could be extrapolated to any art medium.

that it will not be found. (italics Clark's)[126]

Pollock never discounted the return of the figure.[127] Fried and Clark assess work where the figure reappears as "a negation of the negation"[128] What Clark is describing in *The Wooden Horse* is identical to that which Krauss argues for in Man Ray, Giacometti and Brassaï; an *informe* operation, but one that occurs in figurative painting. Although Clark does not explicitly state it, what the paint is discussing is the *informe* tied to a "circling *around* likeness."

Krauss has an aversion for figurative painting that she has inherited from formalism. This influences her application of Bataille's writing and the *informe* to the study of art. Bataille's work, however, is a rich resource that enables engagements with the painting practices she neglects. An artist such as Francis Bacon deems that paint has the ability to unlock what conventional knowledge cannot express. His quest to seize a real yet indefinable moment in paint can be elaborated on using the notion of the *informe* and how this develops into the "inner experience" in Bataille's later work.

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126 Clark, *Farewell,* 355.
127 Greenberg also did not reject Pollock's figurative work out of hand. See Clark, *Farewell,* 345.
128 Clark, *Farewell,* 345. See also Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* 228 : "The figure is something we *don't* see – it is literally, *where* we don't see -rather than something, a shape or an object in the world we do see."

Chapter 2

The young Francis Bacon was transfixed with the rendering of the scream in two works of art. One appears in Nicolas Poussin's seventeenth-century painting, the *Massacre of the Innocents,* and the other in Sergei Eisenstein's film, *The Battleship Potemkin* (Figs.6-7).[1] The art critic David Sylvester recorded a series of interviews with the artist and published these in *Interviews with Francis Bacon*. A telling editorial decision appears within the book: the close-up shot of a nanny's bloodied face from *Potemkin* is juxtaposed with the head of a distraught mother in the Poussin painting.[2] Both individuals scream. The single shot from the film and the cropped head from the painting are contextually isolated in the book from their respective sources. The editorial choice to present the above two details of screams in *Interviews with Francis Bacon* is particularly insightful because early in his career Bacon attempted the same operation: he laboured to isolate the instance of a scream. The illustrated details on these pages appear amid a discussion of the scream in Bacon's work. Bacon discloses his failure to Sylvester:

> I did hope to make the best painting of the human cry. I was not able to do it and it is much better in the Eisenstein and there it is. I think probably the best human cry in painting was made by Poussin.[3]

Bacon attempted to seize the real and psychologically intense instant of the scream in paint. As a human act, this moment lacks rational comprehension; the scream itself is a rupture of thought. It is a sudden, violent and intuitive acknowledgment that rationalisation fails. Bataille would tie such immediate, overwhelming and incomprehensible instances to the sacred. Drawing on the thought of the sociologist Émile Durkheim, Bataille recognised that the notion of the sacred is the foundation on which the existence of God is built.[4] In Western culture, the values of truth, reason and salvation were based fundamentally on the idea of God. As atheism gained ground in the nineteenth century, however, especially under the influence of the German Romantic

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1   Fig. 6. Nicolas Poussin, *The Massacre of the Innocents,* 1630-31, oil on canvas, 147 x 171.1 cm, Musée Condé, Chantilly. Fig. 7. Sergei Eisenstein, Director, Still from *The Battleship Potemkin,* 1925.
2   David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 34-35.
3   Sylvester, *Interviews,* 34.
4   Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* trans. Joseph Ward Swain. (New York: Dover Publications, 2008,) 37.

philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and God's existence was no longer required, a moral and ethical crisis ensued. The place of each and every truth was questioned. With the full awareness of the significance of this crisis, Bataille was determined to question what the nature of human experience was without the security of notions such as God, the ideal, truth and reason. As Durkheim points out, the sacred predates God.

The incomprehensible and untouchable sacred, in its complex and regulated relationship with profane, quotidian existence, informs Bataille's investigations into those experiences and operations which can be discerned, but are unable to be rationally apprehended. In this sense, it forms the matrix within which the disruptive *informe* and the later, more personal and psychological, "inner experience" are developed in Bataille's thought. Because the instant of the scream is a real – also irrational, excessive, and stupefying – act that punctuates normal experience, Bacon's quest to unveil it in his art can be assessed through Bataille's writing.

Bacon excises his formative experiences of the scream from their original narrative contextualisation in order to evoke dramatically a real moment. Similarly, Bataille ousts God from religion, so he can question without ceasing the limits of the possible. Both figures rely on irreconcilable violent and disruptive associations in order to critique idealised convention.

Bacon declares that the manifestation of the cry is much better in the Eisenstein scene that is commonly referred to as the Odessa Steps sequence of *The Battleship Potemkin*. Bacon esteems the entire film and this sequence; but it is the cry of an injured nanny that particularly captivates him. How does this cry function in the film?

The Battleship Potemkin was produced in the Soviet Union in 1925. As Communist state propaganda, it underlines the brutality of the Tsarist effort to suppress a 1905 naval proletariat mutiny. The dramatic shot of a screaming nanny operates as the cumulative endpoint of the Imperial Cossacks violence that forms the Odessa Steps rhythmic montage sequence. Because the close-up of the nanny is devoid of other visual clues, it only makes narrative sense when situated within the sequence as a whole. Additionally and obviously, a time-based medium such as film does not translate well into a printed static format, as images are presented individually rather than in motion. Consequently,

the removal of this photographic still, in the photographs Bacon owned as well as in Sylvester's book, decontextualises the nanny into an isolated image – a bloodied, bespectacled and screaming face.

Bacon claims that Poussin creates "the best painting of the human cry" in the *Massacre of the Innocents*. The painting is the dramatic rendition of a Gospel incident and, like *Potemkin*, it relies primarily on narrative to serve an ideological purpose. It depicts the enacting of King Herod's edict that all male infants over the age of two years in the vicinity of Bethlehem are to be put to death. One of Herod's troops raises a sword, poised to kill a child, whom he pins to the ground with his foot. The child's screaming mother reaches to restrain the soldier's arm. The New Testament Gospel of Matthew declares that this act of infanticide fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy concerning the life of the Messiah.[5] The slaughtered infants were named the Holy Innocents and venerated in the Catholic Church as martyrs.[6] Poussin, therefore, was compelled to convey the religious significance of the event to his French Catholic patron – the fulfilment of prophecy concerning Christ and a sacred scene of martyrdom – rather than highlight the natural maternal instinct of the horrified mother. The violent scene is sanctified and from the perspective of the Church the distraught mother is significant solely within the sacred confines of ecclesiastic tradition.

Bacon was drawn to the cry of the overwhelmed mother in Poussin's work and tried to paint a better scream. In his many visits to view the work at the Musée Condé in Chantilly in the late 1920s, he focused on the anguished cry itself, rather than on how it functions in the religious narrative.[7] Later he watched Eisenstein's silent film in a darkened cinema. The flickering nanny image was dramatically intensified and musical accompaniment heightened the brutality of the shot, while the actor's filmic scream remained mute. As Bacon attempts to paint the best human cry, he mentally isolates these renditions of the cry from the context within which they are structured; from the theology surrounding the painting and the propaganda of the film. He was driven to paint a similarly decontextualised scream but thought that he failed. Why does Bacon judge his efforts as failures?

5 *The Authorized King James Bible,* The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapter Two, verses 16-18.
6 Encyclopedia Britannica, "Feast of the Holy Innocents," *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Accessed 21 May 2011, http:www.britannica.com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/EBchecked/topic/269793/Feast-of-the-Holy-Innocents
7 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 35.

Bacon's early paintings of screams were produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s. When Sylvester enquires in 1966 why he thinks he was unsuccessful in these works Bacon replies that they were "too abstract."[8] He says that at the time he "wanted to paint the scream more than the horror," but now thought that he would have been more successful if he had focused on the horror that induces the scream rather than scream itself.[9] What does Bacon mean by the "horror" in this remark?

The scream as horror relies on drama because the scream is caused by an horrific experience. The horror is not disclosed through narrative, which rationalizes and dissipates but is conveyed through the intensity of a psychologically dramatic moment. The visual signs of the scream – the gaping mouth, the raised eyebrows, and the astonished and wide-open eyes – are more than simple physiological facts: these signs have psychological origins. Bacon thought that his renditions of the scream lacked the necessary drama to be convincing, whereas, by comparison, the screams in *Potemkin* and the *Massacre* have an excessive vibrancy. With the benefit of hindsight, he recognises that the scream is horrific because it is produced by scream-inducing external forces. He deems that the screams in the other artists' works come directly across what he refers to as the "nervous system," a phrase Bacon uses to refer to a matrix of raw intuition.[10] In the case of a scream, the real moment is sensed without the discursive and rationalizing process of the brain.

Bacon cites Pablo Picasso as an important influence because his figural deformations are "profoundly un-illustrated but profoundly real."[11] During the late 1920s he attended an exhibition of drawings of biomorphic bathers from the Picasso's Dinard Period.[12] He recognises a psychological and violent non-idealised "realism" in these works that he will aspire to in his own art.[13] The importance of an image of a bather from this period is raised when interviewed by Sylvester. Bacon describes how "a curious curved image unlocking the door of a bathing cabin is far more real" than if it were conventionally

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8   Sylvester, *Interviews,* 48.
9   Sylvester, *Interviews,* 48.
10 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 12.
11 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 170. Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Studies for a Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 243. Peppiatt, Bacon's foremost biographer, states that of all the influences in his career, surrealism as a movement and Picasso at his most surreal were the most significant.
12 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 8.
13 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 170-172.

illustrated, because the gesture of turning the key dramatically enhances the deformed figure.[14] A charcoal drawing illustrated in *Interviews with Francis Bacon* clearly shows a biomorphic figure opening a door with a small key, where the key turn is given an unexpected force due to the disjunctive relationship between it and the abstracted form. [15] The gesture of the limb moving towards the cabin entrance is similarly accentuated in this work. It is this dramatic act that suggests the real.

The interpretation of what Bacon categorizes pejoratively as "illustration" helps understand what he denotes as "realism." He opposes two terms: realism and illustration. Illustration is the process of descriptively rendering, as accurately as possible, the outward appearance of a viewed subject. Bacon believed that contemporary painting, in the wake of photography and the cinema – practices which more effectively communicate illustrative representation – had to reinvent itself. Painting could uncover the elusive real that exists under a surface layer of mimetic optical effects. This reality is not rational; it is something that has to be sensed instinctively. As Bacon explains:

Can you analyze the difference, in fact, between paint which conveys directly and paint which conveys through illustration? This is a very, very difficult problem to put into words. It is something to do with instinct.[16]

Bacon is a figurative artist and as such his work will always exhibit elements of perceptible human or natural forms. Almost paradoxically, however, he considered that painting exposes the real by emphasizing the artificial condition of art.[17] With the accent on the artifice of paint, the artist is concerned less with making a two-dimensional visual representation of the subject – an illustration – and more concentrated on how the manipulated medium can potentially capture the real.

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14 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 170. Sylvester illustrates this comment with a Picasso work titled *Bather and Cabin, 1928* (Pablo Picasso, *Bather and Cabin, Dinard, 9 August 1928,* oil on canvas, 21.6 x 15.9 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Hillman Periodicals Fund) although Bacon's description does not seem to match with this work. The book also illustrates a drawing from the Dinard period (Pablo Picasso, *untitled charcoal drawing*, 1927, 34.5 x 50.5 cm) which clearly depicts a biomorphic figure with a key. Numerous images of Picasso's bathers with keys were illustrated in journals in the late 1920s, including *Cahiers d'art* and *Documents*. What Bacon refers to may be an actual work (painting or drawing) or a mental amalgamation of these works from this period.
15 Pablo Picasso, untitled, 1927, charcoal on paper, 34.5 x 50.5 cm.
16 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 18.
17 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 148, 172. "I believe that reality in art is something profoundly artificial and that it has to be recreated. Otherwise it will just be an illustration of something – which will be very second-hand."

Bacon bypassed illustration by focusing on the inherent artificiality of the medium and elected to approach the real through the psychological drama of violent sensation. Violence is one of many unusual phrases Bacon used when describing his painting practice. He states that his preference for working from photographs is attributable to their "slight remove from fact, which returns me onto the fact more violently."[18] Figurative painting is the "attempt to bring the figurative thing up onto the nervous system more violently and more poignantly."[19] For Bacon, the real is violent. He describes painting as "the attempt to remake the violence of reality itself."[20] Bacon states:

We nearly always live through screens – a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks violent, that perhaps I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens.[21]

Bacon strove to apprehend the veiled real, but all he can do is clear away part of that which obscures it. Bacon especially valued Picasso because he almost captured a genuine moment that was not dependent on illustrative convention.[22] Picasso conveyed a convincing non-illustrational sense of reality – an actuality less obscured by the screens of appearance. For Bacon, reality is brutal, whereas traditional modes of idealistic illustration and narration are deceptive because they densely veil the raw fact. Bacon considered that Picasso tore the veils of illustration apart in a quest to expose the real through violence. He acknowledges that Picasso has a "brutality of fact."[23]

A shared appreciation of the work of Pablo Picasso connects Bacon and Bataille because both valued the violence in Picasso's art. For Bacon, Picasso brutally stripped away superficial and illustrative visual appearance. He opened a pathway to the real. In Bataille's opinion, Picasso was important because he violently challenged accepted conventions of idealism. Picasso's work will feature significantly in Bataille's earliest conflicts with the ideal, where he formulates a critique of conventional materialism. In the magazine *Documents* his treatment of the artist is underpinned by an argument that stresses psychological violence.

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18 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 43.
19 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 12.
20 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 82.
21 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 82.
22 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 182.
23 Sylvester, *Interviews,* 182. Picasso's importance is underlined by the subtitle of the interviews with David Sylvester: *Interviews with Francis Bacon: The Brutality of Fact.*

First it is necessary to briefly discuss Bataille's intention to use *Documents* as a "war machine against idealism.[24] *Documents* was founded in 1929 with Bataille appointed as editor and given the title General Secretariat.[25] He quickly moulded the magazine into a provocative publication that flouted general etiquette by introducing and contrasting diverse material outside the scope of the founders' original scholarly intentions. Bataille's antipathy to idealism is disclosed in his early article "Materialism" where he proclaims that traditional materialists are actually idealist because they class matter as a type of ideal state.[26] Bataille's materialism is active; he proposes that it "*excludes all idealism*" and should instead be "based on *psychological* or social facts" that are habitually excluded from nominal materialist positions (italics mine).[27]

Bataille explores the psychological violence of Picasso's art within the framework of *Documents* broader anti-idealist programme.[28] Bataille's first contribution to *Documents*, "The Academic Horse," is an indication of how he will use the artist as part of this agenda in later writing.[29] Ostensibly a morphological discussion of horse imagery in ancient coinage, the motivation of the article is to oppose classical ideals with brutal exuberance.[30] Bataille compares Greek depictions of the horse with later adaptations in ancient Gaul. The horse is chosen because, after man, it is the animal most associated with the ideals of antiquity. Bataille emphasized that what was commonly regarded at the time as an inability to render classical form accurately, was in fact a willed "positive extravagance, everywhere taking a first schematic interpretation to its most absurd consequences." He argued that this was due to the Gaulish refusal to accept the homogenizing authority represented by the ideal. Bataille revealed both his preference for what would overturn the classical and that his specific target is the ideal when he writes: "The absurdities of barbarous peoples are out of step with scientific arrogance,

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24 Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography,* trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. (London: Verso, 2002), 123.
25 Surya, *Bataille,* 117.
26 Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939,* trans. Allan Stoekl. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 14. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 15.
27 Bataille, *Visions,* 15-16.
28 The significant appropriation of Picasso in *Documents* should be considered within the framework of a contemporary ideological (and personal) struggle between Bataille and André Breton. Bataille thought that Breton's surrealist aspirations were underpinned by poetic idealism and that Breton had used Picasso to such ends in his work, for example, *Surrealism and Painting* (1928). Bataille sought to recoup Picasso from this interpretation. See C.F.B. Miller in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 214-221.
29 Georges Bataille "The Academic Horse" in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 237.
30 Bataille was well regarded as a skilled numismatist. C.F.B. Miller "Archaeology" in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 47.

nightmares with geometrical traces, and the horse-monsters imagined in Gaul with the academic horse."[31] The arrogance of the ideal, represented in the arts of the academy, has blinded itself, according to Bataille, to the base foundation of reality; the ideal is a mutation – horses evolved from "pachyderms" and the human from "the hideous anthropomorphic monkey."[32] Discrepancies in the material world are real and if the ideal exists, it is in "violent opposition" with nature, its classicism undermined by what is both "formless and indecisive."[33]

Picasso's importance in Bataille's conflict with idealism pivoted on his avant-garde vicious deformation of ideal forms. Picasso is discussed in an article concerning the Surrealist painter Salvador Dali. "The Lugubrious Game" intensifies the assault on the ideal which had begun in "The Academic Horse." Bataille observes that Picasso's paintings don't distract, they terrify. The artist is figured as monstrous and "jaws with hideous teeth" appear in "Picasso's skull."[34] Bataille writes critically of the idea that it "has over man the same degrading power that a harness has over a horse," it "brutalizes all men and causes them to be docile."[35] Picasso's monstrous, "hideous" paintings disrupt order – they paralyze thought and prevent the idea from arising. Bataille emphasizes this in the following passage:

But why hesitate to write that when Picasso paints, the dislocation of forms leads to that of thought, in other words that the immediate intellectual movement, which in other cases leads to the idea, aborts.[36]

Picasso was given monstrous attributes by Bataille because his paintings dislocate recognizable human forms. Bataille develops this theme in his article "The Deviations of Nature." Although not specifically addressing Picasso on this instance, Bataille proposes that ideal human proportions are countered with the aberration of extreme anatomical birth-defects.[37] This "monster" is wholly other; the antithesis of the ideal human form, but is entirely derived from nature.[38] Bataille refers to the practice of combining multiple images of normal, but irregularly-featured, individuals into a composite figure that approximates the ideal Hellenized human form. This natural

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31 Bataille "Academic" in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 238.
32 Bataille "Academic" in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 238.
33 Bataille "Academic" in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 238.
34 Georges Bataille, "The Lugubrious Game" in Bataille, *Visions,* 24.
35 Bataille, "Lugubrious" in Bataille, *Visions,* 24.
36 Georges Bataille, "The Lugubrious Game" in Bataille, *Visions,* 24.
37 Georges Bataille, "The Deviations of Nature" in Bataille, *Visions,* 53.
38 The monster, as other, is an example of what Bataille will later describe as the heterogeneous. He will formulate a science of heterology. The monster is also a form of the impure sacred.

"dialectic of forms" is challenged, however, in the anatomical monster because –
despite its self-evident material reality – it has a perturbing presence that exists outside
the accepted parameters of the classification system. Bataille advances the question:
What is real? The average human being and the monster are equally tangible. The ideal
human form, however, is either a theoretical construct, or is in reality the monster's
opposite – a similarly freakish anomaly.

"The Deviations of Nature" suggests Picasso's dislocation of forms; in "Rotten Sun"
Bataille explicitly discusses the artist in anti-idealist terms.[39] Bataille presents two
manifestations of the sun. The sun situated above us illuminates, but only on the
provision that we do not gaze at it directly. He names this sun an "elevation" and
associates it with the spirit or the ideal. In contradistinction, the second sun is the fiery
globe that burns our eyes. The intensity of the gazed-at sun not only physically blinds,
but chops down the elevated spirit (that which is figured as the ideal sun) with a
"sudden fall of unheard-of violence." Bataille demonstrates this through the Greek myth
of the solar-bound flight of Icarus. The burning sun causes the idea, like Icarus, to
plummet burning to earth. Picasso is the artistic embodiment of the looked-at sun
because he has a disruptive and vertiginous "blinding brilliance."[40] He declares that
Picasso achieves this violent dislocation through "the elaboration or decomposition of
forms."[41]

As Bataille identifies, Picasso's deformation of ideal forms is an attempt to apprehend
what Bacon would term a real and irrational moment. Although Picasso comes close,
this fleeting instant itself is impossible to seize: it can only be invoked. Anguish marks
Bacon's quest for the real. In his view he fails and is only able to clear some of the
mimetic veils away from a moment of "otherness" that signifies the original instant as
sacred. Bataille's thoughts on the sacred assist in clarifying what is entailed in Bacon's

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39 Georges Bataille, "Rotten Sun" in Bataille, *Visions,* 57. This article appears in *Documents* 3 (1930), an
issue dedicated to Picasso.
40 Bataille, "Rotten" in Bataille, *Visions,* 58. Bataille qualifies his argument, stating: "that it would be a
priori ridiculous to try to determine the precise equivalents in an activity as complex as painting."
However, he proceeds to write: "It is nevertheless possible to say that academic painting corresponded
to an elevation – without excess – of the spirit."
41 Bataille, "Rotten" in Bataille *Visions,* 58. Bataille illustrates his article in the *Documents* issue with a
Picasso drawing (*dessin,* 1929) that features this "elaboration and decomposition of forms." The
figure is rendered so that the outline of one of the breasts also delineates the contour of the right arm.
The eyes, mouth and nose placements suggest simultaneous profile and frontal views typically
associated with the artist's work.

uncompromising struggle to grasp this impossibility in his art.

By the time *Documents* ceased publication in 1931, Bataille had virtually lost interest in art as either an effective critique of the ideal or a vehicle of violent transformation.[42] In his dismissal of art's aestheticism in 1931, Bataille observed that contemporary society had forgotten "how to use blood and bones to break the regularity" of everyday life with ritual practices.[43] An ongoing interest in ethnology, combined with his revitalised enthusiasm for the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, eventually led Bataille to reconsider his position by the late 1930s. Throughout his life he maintained a fascination with the sacred and associated religious rites. He based his enquiry into the sacred on the work of Marcel Mauss and Émile Durkheim. It is in Durkheim's ground-breaking work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, albeit, manipulated in an unexpected way, that the concept of the sacred is developed so that Bataille can contemplate on how it relates to artistic practice. Durkheim approaches religion from a sociological perspective and asserts that aspects of even the most complicated and developed faiths can be discerned in the simplest forms of tribal religion.[44]

Durkheim explains the place of asceticism in religious practice. The ascetic is purified and sanctified by being separated from the profane world. The ascetic it is set aside and marked by dedication to the pursuit of the sacred. This disassociation is distinguished by violence and the ascetic cannot approach the sacred without some form of suffering and pain. The anguish is often physical, but is always marked with psychological distress. Durkheim states "that suffering causes exceptional strength."[45] It is in this distressed condition that the ascetic achieves the highest pinnacle possible and draws closest to the

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42 Bataille's main concerns during the early 1930s were political. He would make an early and prescient critique of fascism in "The Psychological Structure of Fascism (Georges Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" in Bataille, *Visions*) in 1933 and was involved with a number of left-wing political movements including the independent communist Boris Souvarine's Democratic Communist Circle and the extremist, but short-lived, far-left grouping of French intellectuals known as Contre Attaque. Contre Attaque failed as an effective counter to fascism, and Bataille turned to more to sociological, philosophical and religious issues that marked the idiosyncratic journal *Acéphale* (and small secret community of the same name) from 1936. *Acéphale* finished sporadic publication in 1939. Bataille was also involved with the College of Sociology (whose main focus centred on the place of the sacred in society) during this immediate pre-war period. His sociological, philosophical and religious concerns would find further expression in the *Summa atheologica,* which Bataille began writing on the eve of war in late 1939 and in later works such as *Eroticism* (Georges Bataille, *Eroticism,* trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987)

43 Georges Bataille, "The Modern Spirit and The Play of Transpositions" in Ades and Baker, *Undercover,* 242.

44 Durkheim, *Elementary*, 1-2.

45 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 315.

sacred goal.[46] Union with the sacred, however, is denied – it is the untouchable "other," for instance, contact with the Ark of Covenant in the Old Testament results in instantaneous death. The sacred in a developed monotheistic religion like Christianity is the Godhead: the Trinity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. But Durkheim argues that the sacred is the prior and fundamental condition of God's existence.[47] This is a key point that Bataille extracts. When Bataille refers to the sacred, he is referring to a domain where God is not required.

Bataille's conception of the sacred was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Although Bataille drew widely on Nietzsche's writing to elaborate his own position, his reconsideration of the role of the artist was underpinned by the philosopher's most well-known and almost clichéd concept: "God is dead."[48] Bataille opens his essay "The Sacred" with a lengthy passage analogous with Durkheim's description of the suffering ascetic. The artist is specifically referenced:

If one wants to represent, with an initial clarity, the "grail" obstinately pursued through successive, deceptive, and cloudy depths, it is necessary to insist upon the fact that it could never have been a *substantial* reality; on the contrary, it was an element characterized by the impossibility of its enduring. The term *privileged instant* is the one that, with a certain amount of accuracy, accounts for what can be encountered *at random* in the search; the opposite of a *substance* that withstands the test of time, it is something that flees as soon as it is seen and cannot be grasped. The will to fix such instants, which belong, it is true, to painting or writing is only the way to make them reappear, because the painting or the poetic text *evokes* but does not *make substantial* what once appeared. This gives rise to a mixture of unhappiness and exultation, of disgust and insolence, nothing seems more miserable and more dead than the stabilized thing, nothing is more desirable than what will soon disappear. But as he feels what he loves escaping, the painter or writer trembles from the cold of extreme want; vain efforts are expended to create pathways permitting the endless reattainment of that which flees.[49]

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46 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 316. He writes "there is something excessive in the disdain they profess for all that ordinarily impassions men." Bataille uses this concept of religious suffering; however, he turns it on its head. Ordinarily the suffering ascetic (especially in a moralistic and idealistic religion like Christianity) is focused on a pure sacred. Bataille focuses instead on the role of suffering in the quest for an impure sacred: a life dedicated to all that is transgressive.

47 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 37. This is evident in Durkheim's premise for the work. See Durkheim, *Elementary*, 1-2.

48 The death of God is given its most famous expression in the passage 'The Madman' which appears in Nietzsche's 1882 *The Gay Science.* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (ed.), (New York: Vintage, 1974.) It also referred to in a number of other texts, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One,* trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.* Horstmann, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Judith Norman (eds.), trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.) See Nietzsche, *Science,* 181-182.

49 Georges Bataille, "The Sacred" in Bataille, *Visions,* 241.

The essay is a reprising of Bataille's concern that creative activities aestheticise experience. The artist pursues the ungraspable moment of the real (Bataille calls this the "grail"), which is perceived in the progressive chain of lived experience. Bataille calls the mute flash prior to conceptualisation a "privileged instant." It is this point that the artist earnestly desires to seize, but ultimately can only evoke as an unsatisfactory reappearance – another moment unlike the initial experience. Additionally, this instant seems lifeless because it fails to equal the intensity of what was previously experienced. The artist is anguished in this state. The initial moment is sacred; the striving of the artist resembles ascetic suffering in Durkheim's analysis. The ascetic and the artist suffer because although they are able to draw close to the sacred, they are unable to possess it. This conflict between desire and the realisation that it is impossible to fulfil (fulfilment would be a dead thing) would find further expression in *Inner Experience*, the first book of Bataille's trilogy the *Atheological Summa,* in the term the "movement of contestation."

The "movement of contestation" is a phrase that Bataille coins in *Inner Experience* and the *Summa* to describe an interminable and provocative questioning of knowledge.[50] He states that these questions are posed in a process of "circular agitation" that can lead to the "inner experience."[51]

Although drawing on aspects of mysticism, Bataille takes care to differentiate his term "inner experience" from mystical experience, as the former is neither confessional nor has any religious goal.[52] Inner experience, an evolution of Bataille's position in *Documents*, is profoundly non-idealist. It is a personal experience that is unable to be rationally circumscribed, and in this sense, it is a psychological development of the operation of the *informe*. Inner experience is not founded in science, which would make it the quest for knowledge; or in dogma which would give it a moral dimension.[53] The experience yields not knowledge, which would be an answer; nor the grasping of non-

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50 Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience,* trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988),12
51 Bataille, *Inner,* 111.
52 Bataille, *Inner,* 3. Bataille also makes it very clear that the means of attaining the "inner experience" are very difficult to communicate. See Bataille, *Inner,* 8.
53 Bataille, *Inner,* 7,13,55. Bataille continued to explore "inner experience" in the following two books of the *Summa*.

knowledge, which becomes a kind of knowledge. Paradoxically, it becomes the experience of experience itself – in a sense not an experience at all. Bataille states:

NON-KNOWLEDGE LAYS BARE.
This proposition is the summit, but must be understood in this way: it 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).[54]

The writer Maurice Blanchot, who maintained a close relationship with Bataille and provided incisive advice during the writing of *Inner Experience*, elaborates on the inner experience in his essay "The Limit-experience."[55] Like Bataille, Blanchot defines the limit-experience as "the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically into question."[56] This questioning takes the form of a negation that reaches the stage where there is nothing to negate – where negation is affirmed as pure affirmation. It affirms only the lack of negation. Blanchot clearly states what the limit-experience is:

Thus the limit-experience is experience itself: thought thinking that which will not let itself be thought; thought thinking more than it is able by an affirmation that affirms more than can be affirmed. This more itself is the experience affirming only by an excess of affirmation and, in this surplus, affirming without anything being affirmed – finally affirming nothing.[57]

Bataille assiduously seeks the inner experience, but is conscious of the impossibility of his task. In this sense, the inner experience is a development of the impossibility of resolution inherent in the operation of the *informe.* His constant questioning and doubting of knowledge leaves the pursuer in an exhausted and anguished state.

The title of the *Atheological Summa* was adapted from the famous treatise of Catholic philosophy and theology, the *Summa Theologica*, written by the thirteenth-century Dominican friar St. Thomas Aquinas. A brief outline of the argument of the *Summa Theologica* indicates what Bataille finds intolerable in Aquinas's work. Aquinas argued

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54 Bataille, *Inner,* 52.
55 Maurice Blanchot, "The Limit-experience" in Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation.* Trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). Blanchot uses the term "limit-experience" rather than "inner experience."
56 Blanchot, "Limit-experience" in Blanchot, *Infinite,* 203.
57 Blanchot, "Limit-experience" in Blanchot, *Infinite,* 209.

for the existence of God through reason by incorporating Aristotle's philosophy into what was previously a Catholic theology based exclusively on faith.[58] Although Aquinas valued the purely secular philosophy of the ancients, he considered these rational and idealist arguments were comparatively richer when based on faith in God. Aquinas's philosophy follows a path of reason with the expectation that the ultimate truth, whether the argument is theological or secular, will be God.[59] Although Bataille does not specifically cite Aquinas in *Inner Experience,* he does criticize the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel's comparable idealist position.[60] Bataille's contradictory position pivots on the questioning of rational idealism because it does not account for the myriad of human experience that is unreasonable.

The alternative to reasoned thought in the Christian tradition is mysticism. The appeal of the Christian mystics for Bataille lay in their emotional fervour; their abandonment of reason, and the search for the validation of God's existence in personal experience and anguished suffering. Bataille was influenced by esoteric mystic writing. The thirteenth-century mystic Angela of Foligno particularly attracted Bataille because at times she suffered strongly and felt God to be a meaningless absence rather than a presence.[61] Angela and all Christian mystics are troubling for Bataille, though, due to their investment in salvation and belief in God. As demonstrated**,** Bataille, using Nietzsche, removed God entirely from religious and mystic experience. With God effectively cut away from religion, there is no longer any basis for salvation.

As discussed, religious concepts articulated through sociology, especially the sacred, remained of vital importance to Bataille.[62] Sacrificial rites – whether a blood offering or

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58 *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* "Saint Thomas Aquinas." Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Accessed 22 May 2011, http://www.britannica.com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/EBchecked/topic/31211/Saint-Thomas-Aquinas

59 Aquinas reasoned argument for God is presented in his famous Five Ways (*Quinquae Viae.*)

60 Hollier, *Architecture,* 41. Denis Hollier argues that the Gothic cathedral and the *Summa Theologica* are part of a syncretic rational idealism. Hegel's idealist philosophy is also allied with Aquinas's *Summa*: "Indeed the thirteenth century, in a way that may remind us of Hegel, lived itself as a period of the completion of knowledge, as if its tasks were merely that of organizing an acquisition considered as definitive and very nearly complete."

61 Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 69. As indicated in Angela's death cries "Oh, unknown nothingness!"

62 Bataille was influenced Emile Durkheim's view that the sacred is the realm that is necessarily isolated and maintained by society itself. Therefore the sacred continues to exist as a realm of significance despite God's absence. Marcel Mauss who co-authored the work *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function,* trans. W.D. Halls (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964.)) was also particularly influential in Bataille's understanding

the personal and excessive sacrifice of suffering – captivated Bataille. Following Nietzsche, Bataille carried the idea of sacrifice to its ultimate pinnacle: the stunning realization of the death of God himself – not the death of the crucified Christ at Calvary who will be resurrected and worshipped, but of God in totality – God as any meaning, reason, ideal, hope or salvation. Bataille quotes a significant passage from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* in *Inner Experience* that demonstrates the magnitude of this act:

""Finally – what remained to be sacrificed? At long last, did one not have to sacrifice for once whatever is comforting, holy, healing, 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)[63]

Bataille states in *Inner Experience* that this atheological sense of experience should not be confused with the ascetic practices of various Eastern religions because these non-salvific religions still have objectives, for example, the extinction of the cyclic self in Nirvana.[64] The mystic and the ascetic suffer in order to obtain a goal, but suffering religiously and excessively in the name of suffering alone (not masochism) is the path to the inner experience. The inner experience is the experience of experience itself and has no redeeming feature. Furthermore, Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern systems are typically characterized by restraint, whereas the inner experience is sought through an overwhelming and unrestrained excess. Bataille overturns Durkheim's notion of asceticism, replacing it with transgressive excess. Reason, figured as either the God of Aquinas or the substitution of God in the ideals of the philosophy of Hegel, is removed.

Bataille uses a meditative practice in his pursuit of inner experience which involves an operation of excision and substitution. A hallmark of Bataille's meditation is that, though necessarily atheistic, it demands a focus, or what Bataille terms in *Inner Experience* a "Point." The role of the point is to induce a vertiginous psychic sliding

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of the role of the sacred in society. Mauss's work *The Gift* (Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990) was important resource for Bataille's essay "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933).

63 Bataille, *Inner,* 131.

64 Bataille, *Inner,* 21. Bataille's denial of ascesis is also drawn from Nietzsche.

that shatters the self in dissolution.[65] In Bataille's case the point was an upsetting image. God is dead, buried, rotting and no longer able to be contemplated on, but Bataille replaces God with an image so harrowing that the emotional, psychic, and spiritual excess of suffering it represented overwhelmed him. The horrifying 1905 photographic image of a Chinese criminal being executed by the infamous "Death of a Hundred Cuts" (*lingchi*) furnished Bataille with his meditative point. The victim portrayed is a *mortal* manifestation of the crucified God as the man Christ: in a sense, as the religious focus on the suffering Christ, this victim becomes Bataille's "Christ." Before this image of horror one senses what Bataille designated the Impossible in a "prayer" of supplication in *Inner Experience*:

Meaning of supplication. I express it thus, in the form of a prayer: Oh 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!"[66]

Christ is only exceptional for Bataille in His last moments – as the figure of dread – abandoned by God the Father on the Cross at the ninth hour: "Lamma sabachtani!" the man Jesus of Nazareth cries in anguish. Bataille maintains: "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."[67] Bataille expunged Christ from the narrative of the Passion and replaced Him with the Chinese man, with the all important distinction that this suffering human – unlike the Christ-man in God's ideal redemptive plan – will *never* rise from the dead.[68] This is the image of godless terror – if the victim cries it is because he suffers for no purpose, he is truly forsaken – there is no God or hope; only pain beyond comprehension and an ignominious demise. The victim is the abject personification of an agonizing death without salvation.

Bacon relies on an operation of cutting and pasting in painting as does Bataille in

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65 Hollywood, *Ecstasy,* 73-74.
66 Bataille, *Inner,* 35.
67 Bataille, *Inner,* 72.
68 On this topic see James Elkins (James Elkins, "The Very Theory of Transgression: Bataille, Lingchi, and Surrealism" in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 5, no. 2, (2004): 5-19.)

meditation. Bataille substitutes Christ – with all the transcendent powers that figure represents – and inserts the victim of *lingchi* into the framework of the Crucifixion. He replaces Him with a mortal man experiencing a pain so dramatic that, by comparison, the agony of the Crucifixion pales. He recounts that the Chinese man "communicated his pain to me or perhaps the excessive nature of his pain" and that, for Bataille, it was his "ruin."[69] Bataille identified with the incomprehensible and excessive nature of this violence – part of the excess is that there is no hope of resurrection for this other "Christ." Incomprehension of the abject agony led Bataille to the ecstasy of the inner experience.

Bacon is obsessed with the violent sensation of the real. If he makes use of the structure of the Crucifixion or comparable religious narratives, it is because important artists have produced powerful sensations of the real using these religious armatures.[70] Like Bataille, Bacon relied on drama and similarly, for him, there is no God. Bataille uses religious narrative – altered to exclude salvation – to heighten his anguish; whereas Bacon wants to dispose of narrative function altogether. For instance, with the scream he is struck by the immediate sensation of this depicted act; whether it occurs in paintings, photographs or an amalgam of images. He mentally excises these sensations. Bacon regards his efforts to paint the scream as failures because they lack the dramatic horror of his formative experiences, both in the creative arts and of the actual scream itself. The introduction of this visual motif into a new setting, and the resulting incomprehension that accompanies this innovative, unexpected and dramatic amalgamation, elides the narrative function of the original context. Bacon states he is not a story-teller, citing the poet Paul Valéry's quote that he desires "to give the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance."[71] The difference between Bataille and Bacon is this: in order to ruin him Bataille requires the violent narrative and religious significance of an event like the Crucifixion, but in his case missing the key roles of God, Christ and the hope of the salvific; whereas Bacon rejects the traditional narrative function of religious figurative art in order to focus on the conveyance of the dramatic sensation itself. Both figures, however, rely on an operation of disruption. The disruptive incorporation of a scream into Bacon's *Study After Velàsquez's Portrait of Innocent X* dramatically alters Diego

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69 Bataille, *Inner,* 120.
70 Bacon also uses the traditional formal properties of religious paintings like the Crucifixion e.g. the triptych format, central figure of suffering, attendants and gilt framing.
71 Sylvester, *Interviews,* p.65.

Velàsquez's original portrait (Figs. 8-9).[72] The scream is evoked and the Pope becomes an anguished and incoherent picture of suffering.

Bacon disorders Velàsquez's seventeenth century portrait of Pope Innocent X, portrayed as Christ's Vicar – the head of Catholicism's spiritual and temporal power on earth – with the enigmatic device of a disturbing scream. The once secure Pope is a picture of alarm. The dramatic power of the scream that Bacon experienced before Poussin's painting and in Eisenstein's film is incorporated into the armature of Velàsquez's painting in the 1953 *Study After Velàsquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. Bacon's work is jarring because its salient features collide: this is the Pope and he is screaming. It is useful to compare Bacon's study with the Velàsquez original, because the latter work is produced in order to communicate that Innocent X is a power and an authority, while Bacon deliberately undermines this requirement. Velàsquez depicts Pope Innocent X seated authoritatively and confidently on the Papal throne as God's representative on earth.[73] A state portrait is not a private or unguarded occasion. There are some similarities in Bacon's work: the Pope is seated on a throne loosely based on the original portrait; the forearms, the overall composition, and the garments are similar. There are also significant differences; Bacon's Pope wears glasses, he floats in an indeterminate space interrupted by broad stripes of black paint, and he is enclosed in a golden structure.[74] The most remarkable difference is that Bacon's Pope screams. This is a transgressive image that depends on debasing what the Pope, as depicted by Velàsquez, represents. Bacon had been developing the scream in a series of *Heads* in the late 1940s and one of the earlier works, *Head VI,* is clothed in Papal robes. The screaming Pope of 1953, therefore, was not the first example.[75] The 1953 *Study,* however, is compositionally closest to the original source. This scream deranges Velàsquez's original work in the same way that Bataille's *Atheological Summa* topples Aquinas's idealized argument for God's existence. The painting opposes reason, figured in the person of Innocent X, with the unbearable doubt of the unknown. The formerly infallible Pope no longer communicates the rationale of Aquinas's theological

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72 Fig. 8. Francis Bacon, *Study After Velàsquez's Portrait of Innocent X*, 1953, oil on canvas, 153 x 118 cm, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Nathan Emory Coffin Collection, Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Fig. 9. Diego Velàsquez, *Pope Innocent X*, 1650, oil on canvas, 140 x120cm, Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome;
73 Innocent X is advanced in years but he is not an elderly frail Pope. Compare, for example, the portraits of Pope Julius II by Raphael.
74 The pince-nez spectacles have their basis in the Eisenstein nanny still.
75 Francis Bacon, *Head V1*, 1949, oil on canvas, 93 x 76 cm, Hayward Gallery, London.

philosophy, but is shown as a desolate picture of incomprehension.

Bataille and Bacon also share an interest in the scream as an act of non-verbal communication in anguished and erotic experience. This can be demonstrated through an analysis of Bacon's 1953 painting *Two Figures* (Fig. 10).[76] Bataille used *Two Figures* as an illustration in his last work *The Tears of Eros*.[77] This fact establishes an irrefutable link between the writer and the artist.

First it is necessary to place *The Tears of Eros* in context with Bataille's elaboration on the close relationship between eroticism and death. Bataille raises the concept of the continuous and discontinuous in his study *Eroticism*.[78] Humans, as discontinuous beings, live with an awareness of their isolation in the continuum of existence.[79] Subsequently, people yearn for the continuity they are separated from. Although the finality of death restores the individual to this state, the dying moment results in a loss of consciousness: it is an enigmatic and incommunicable experience.[80] People experience a survivable foretaste of death and the return to continuity, however, in activities which disrupt their sense of individuality and isolation.[81] In *Inner Experience* and the following two works of the *Summa,* Bataille explores the idea that states of non-knowledge – such as eroticism and laughter – are intense moments of communication.[82] In acts of eroticism the participants share a death-like experience. Bataille calls these instances "lacerating."[83] Erotic states, especially the moment of orgasm and the loss of control that accompanies it, allow a profound connection beyond language to occur between beings in their shared awareness of continuity.[84] Laceration causes a wound that enables non-verbal communication and these metaphorical wounds can be situated

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76 Fig. 10. Francis Bacon, *Two Figures*, 1953, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 116.5cm, Private Collection. Bataille, *Tears*.
77 Bataille, *Eroticism*.
78 Bataille, *Eroticism,* 15. The key quote is: On the most fundamental level there are transitions from continuous to discontinuous or from discontinuous to continuous. We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is.
79 Bataille, *Eroticism,* 16. Death also represents the moment when the connection of the individual to the continuum will be restored.
80 Bataille, *Inner,* 97.
81 Bataille, *Eroticism,* 17.
82 Bataille, *Inner,* 93-98.
83 Bataille, *Tears,* 18, 55.
84 Georges Bataille, *Guilty,* trans. Bruce Boone (Venice CA: Lapis, 1988,) 27, 1988, *Guilty* p.27, 30, 159; Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche,* trans. Bruce Boone (London: Continuum, 2004), 18-19, 55, 64.

on parts of the body. *The Tears of Eros* applies these concepts to visual imagery. The book depends substantially on illustrations of largely figurative paintings, drawings and prints sourced from prehistory, antiquity and European art up to the mid-twentieth century. As expected from the title, most of the illustrations are erotic and many also portray suffering and anguish. Traditional themes of the erotic, such as Death and the Maiden, appear along with graphic and sadomasochistic representations of torture and execution. *Two Figures* appears in the penultimate twentieth century art section of the book.

Bacon painted *Two Figures* early in his career in 1953. The oil painting shows two nude male figures lying on what appears to be a bed. The figures are derived from a stop-motion photographic sequence of naked wrestlers published in Eadweard Muybridge's series *The Human Figure in Motion*.[85] The figures and bed are painted in a rough grisaille technique in white and purple on a thinly painted purplish-black ground. The rudiments of an interior enclose the scene, which is book-ended with the head and baseboard of the bed. The deep perspective of the diagrammatic walls of the room and broad brush-marks fanning out from under the bed convey a feeling of disequilibrium. The figures appear to be engaged in anal sexual intercourse.

Two Figures can be approached through Bataille's proposal that discontinuous beings are violently lacerated by erotic acts in which they briefly experience a shared continuity. The painting depends on the rendering of a scream to convey this experience. Like all bodily orifices, the mouth is a rupture in the physical integrity of the whole being. It is a passage and a permeable boundary between the interior and the exterior. In Bataille's theory of communication the connective participants are wounded. In this case, the mouth in *Two Figures* is the visible wound; it is the culminating point of release in an anguished experience of ecstasy. The lower figure in the painting opens his mouth in what could be interpreted as either a cry of extreme pleasure or pain – two equally wounding experiences in Bataille's thought. Sexual union, especially erotic sex where reproduction is not the goal, enables communication through laceration.[86]

The erotic is a time of release from the world of work. Bataille argues that work reduces

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85 Eadweard Muybridge, *The Human Figure in Motion,* (London: Dover Publications, 1955).
86 Bataille, *Eroticism,* 102.

the being that labours – whether man or domesticated animal – to the status of a "thing." The figures in *Two Figures* have been temporarily liberated from work by engaging in an erotic act. Bataille states:

Animal nature, or sexual exuberance, is that which prevents us from being reduced to mere things.

Human nature, on the contrary, geared to the specific ends in work, tends to make things of us at the expense of our sexual exuberance.[87]

Work marks man as a thing, but certain activities, such as erotic sex, provide a brief respite from this condition. Work also produces goods which society amasses, whereas non-reproductive sex is a form of expenditure that dissipates energy. Expenditure plays an important role in Bataille's concept of economy. Erotic activity is one form of expenditure where man is released from the useful world of work. The arts are yet other forms.[88]

The Swiss installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn is a reader of Bataille and specifically produced *Bataille Monument*; a work addressing expenditure, the economy and the status of man as a thing. Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois veer away from the political in Bataille, and politics in general, much like they exclude the figurative painting of artists like Francis Bacon. Thomas Hirschhorn, however, actively embraces the political and critically utilizes aspects of Bataille's thought in his goal to "work politically."

87 Bataille, *Eroticism,* 158.
88 Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure" in Bataille, *Visions*: 116 -129, 118.

Chapter 3

On March 15, 2009 the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, widely known for his hyper-saturated installations composed principally of everyday materials, exhibited the work *Poor-racer* on a Christchurch street as part of the *One Day Sculpture* series of public artworks organised by the Litmus Research Initiative of the College of Creative Arts at Massey University (Fig. 11).[1] The piece was comprised of a four-cylinder sedan car which had been customised with a variety of Hirschhorn's signature materials including card, aluminium foil, plastic, tape, stickers, marker pen and spray paint. The work had been constructed with the help of a number of assistants over the previous day.[2]

Poor-racer is a celebration of car tuner culture. Hirschhorn comments in a radio interview that the work is a "statement" on how people creatively "personalise normal things."[3] *Poor-racer*'s choice of materials alludes to car tuning as a practice of expenditure with negligible pragmatic gains, as the personal modifications – the chroming, lighting, lowering of the chassis and augmentation of the exhaust system – usually has negligible or no performance benefits for the vehicle. Instead, Hirschhorn views the alterations as an act of individual expression.

In the same interview Hirschhorn proclaims that he intends *Poor-tuner* to function as a "resistance gesture." This is an interesting comment when considered with reference to Bataille's writing on economy. Bataille's notion of general economy differs from the ordinary conception of fiscal economy in that it addresses the energetic network of relationships in everyday life as a turbulent "play of forces."[4] General economy is the term that Bataille employs to refer to the operation which encompasses every manner of activity on the globe.[5] In this particular case, the play of forces is the confrontational

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1 Fig. 11. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Poor-racer,* 2009, mixed media. Commissioned by The Physics Room in association with Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. Supported by Pro Helvetia and Canterbury Community Trust, Christchurch.

2 Cheryl Bernstein, "Thomas Hirschhorn Poor Racer: A Critical Response by Cheryl Bernstein, 2008" *One Day Sculpture Critical Responses Online.* Accessed 19 May 2011, http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz/assets/images/reading/Thomas%20Hirschhorn.pdf p.3.

3 Hirschhorn in Radio New Zealand interview with Lyn Freeman, *The Arts on Sunday* 15 March 2009. Accessed 22 May 2011 http://static.radionz.net.nz/assets/audio_item/0012/1889967/art-20090315-1240-Thomas_Hirschhorn-m048.asx

4 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volume One, Consumption,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1991), 12.

5 General economy is an indefinable operation that frames all other economic transactions. In this sense

relationship between car tuners – represented as either car enthusiasts or "boy-racers" – and the wider civic community.

Christchurch is an intensive example of a community experiencing a problematic relationship with elements of car tuner culture, and in light of the frayed relationships within the community, Hirschhorn's celebratory work is provocatively confrontational. In order to confront what is colloquially referred to as the boy-racer – stereotypically, a young, male, tuned-car driver or occupant that participates in illegal street racing – the New Zealand government, compelled by desperate and intimidated communities, introduced the *Land Transport (Unauthorized Street and Drag Racing) Amendment Act 2003*.[6] The act gave police wider powers of prosecution and the ability to confiscate vehicles in an effort to curb undesirable social behaviour in the boy-racer community. The work provides a space for uncomfortable encounters between intersecting cultures: the conservative and normative community who experience boy-racers as a social nuisance; the art community, conscious of the civil problem, yet having this concern mediated safely through its representation as difficult art; and the car enthusiast, tuner or racer amused at Hirschhorn's obvious and intentionally poor attempts to "tune" a car with non-automotive budget materials. The humour in Hirschhorn's work gives pause – it is a light-hearted reference to a serious concern within the Christchurch community that provides time for reflection.

Georges Bataille's writing, in particular, his economic theory, can be used to demonstrate how Hirschhorn's work functions politically in this context. Hirschhorn's practice has its roots in Bataille's writing on expenditure and the play of forces between general and restricted economy.

In *Poor-racer* Hirschhorn stages a confrontation between the regulative values of normative society and an unruly subset of the wider community. This antagonistic situation results in either the censure of the errant group and its assimilation into the norm or, if it resists, its forcible ostracization and exclusion though legislation. The civil tendency toward imposed homogeneity and the prohibitive regulation of heterogeneous groups can be examined through the fundamental relationship between the profane and

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it is analogous to the operational quality of the *informe.*

6   *Land Transport (Unauthorized Street and Drag Racing) Amendment Act 2003.*

the sacred and how this evolves in Bataille's thought.

If *Poor-racer* is evaluated from Bataille's conception of the homogeneous and the heterogeneous it poses vexing socio-political questions. Homogenous society is normal and productive; it is regulated in order to reproduce its own values. In contrast, heterogeneous elements are those that threaten stability. The homogeneous world, therefore, attempts to exclude the disruptive heterogeneous in order for it to produce, although these ungoverned groups continue generally to antagonistically co-exist within it.

Poor-racer is a statement on how the heterogeneous group is viewed by the broader homogenous community. Car tuning cannot be categorized simply as boy-racer culture, although this forms one of its more heterogeneous elements in an amalgam of different participating groups. For example, while some car tuners proudly identify themselves as boy-racers, others explicitly disassociate themselves from this label, while yet others broadly belong to a cross-section of the car tuner community. The categorization of a young male driver in a tuned car as a boy-racer is a dangerous fallacy if that decision is predicated on appearance rather than anti-social activity. A person owning a tuned car is not necessarily a boy-racer. It is the boy-racer group, however, as the most outlawed, radical and heterogeneous element of car-tuner culture, that animates the confrontational and challenging aspects of *Poor-racer.*

In his 1929 essay "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)" Bataille explores the relationship between the profane and sacred domains.[7] He examines this principally through concepts sourced from psychology and the physiological processes of the human body. The corporeal functions he scrutinises are then utilised to invoke a political agenda toward the end of this essay.

In the early stages of his essay Bataille criticises how apologists have made safe the scandalous proposals of the Marquis de Sade by considering them within the conventional framework of literature.[8] Bataille thought that admirers of de Sade had betrayed the writer because they read with the intention of gleaning something useful

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7 Georges Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade" in Bataille, *Visions*: 91-102.
8 The essay was, in part, a criticism of the disjuncture in orthodox surrealism's hypocritical (in Bataille's view) acceptance of de Sade and their particular insistence on conventional morality.

and beneficial out of his work.[9] Furthermore, their ultimate pleasure was invested in the moralistic and violent rejection of the books themselves after removing a particular redeeming aspect. In this sense, they appropriated a part of de Sade's output, making it homogenous and acceptable, while excreting the offending unassimilable remainder.

The assimilation and excretion of de Sade is associated by Bataille in his essay with the physical, psychological, and social body.[10] His thought is structured around the relationship between the assimilative homogenous and the heterogeneous excretive.[11] Bataille cites a passage from de Sade where the rhythmic cycle of assimilation and excretion is manifest:

Verneuil makes someone shit, he eats the turd, and he then demands that someone eat his. The one who eats his shit vomits; he devours her puke."[12]

In this example, eating is not the simple physical consumption and assimilation of food: the body immediately or eventually disposes of ingested matter. That which is excreted can also be re-eaten, although this may exact an even more violent excretion. Excretions are associated by Bataille with a number of conditions that cause psychological distress. Activities and incidents which disturb us in such a manner are rejected because they are connected with the foreign body which cannot be assimilated.[13]

That which is unable to be appropriated is also connected with the sacred. As previously discussed, Bataille's understanding of the sacred is grounded in Émile Durkheim's sociological study *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.* Durkheim argued that belief in the sacred is a core component of human experience.[14] The sacred world is opposed to profane quotidian existence, but communal interactions between the two dominions are essential because these occurrences strengthen social bonds.[15] Because

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9   Bataille, "Use Value," 92-93.
10 The processes of appropriation and excretion are manifested in a social and political context in a number of Bataille's essays from the late 1920s to the mid 1930s, including "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades,)" "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," and "The Notion of Expenditure."
11 Bataille, "Use Value," 94.
12 Bataille, "Use Value," 95.
13 Bataille, "Use Value," 94.
14 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 38.
15 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 38. Durkheim is emphatic on this point. The opposition is fundamental and "absolute." "In all the history of human thought there exists no other example radically opposed to another." Durkheim, Elementary, 46-47, 209-314.

the two are opposed, this precarious contact has to be mediated through religious rites.[16] The time for ritual is set aside in a manner that also maintains the space necessary for temporal work, thereby ensuring the ongoing physical survival of the community. Furthermore, the bonds ritualistically created allow the community to exist as a cohesive and distinctive entity in the profane world.[17]

Bataille gives an example of the association between the sacred and profane in his analogous discussion of oral consumption in "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade." Bataille affirms that food can be "sacramental (sacrificial) or not depending on whether the heterogeneous character of food is heightened or conventionally destroyed."[18] Food considered as sacred, however, to the extent it still nourishes physically, benefits the temporal body. Similarly, the profane world gains from sacred contact because it ingests, transforms and homogenises the energy from the sacred in order to build the bonds of the homogenous community. Food passes through the body, but is never part of it – sacred food especially so. The bulk of food, even when consumed as sacred offerings, is excreted as faeces. Bataille believed that the reaction toward faecal matter is comparable to the fearful reverence of God, although conventional religious communities have lost sight of this significance.[19]

Bataille, following Durkheim, states that religions have divided the sacred into two distinct and antagonistic categories: one composed of high and divine elements, such as God and celestial beings; and an equally sacred world of the demonic, sacrilegious, decomposed and repellent.[20] Religions worship the high sacred, but in doing so homogenise it by depriving it of unseemly and dark qualities (the sacred as shit). In the case of Christianity, Bataille contends that the terrifying features of God as a "decomposing cadaver" (the heterogeneous aspects of His character) have been downplayed in favor of a "simple (paternal) sign of universal homogeneity."[21] The low and impure elements of the sacred – unable to be appropriated by the normative

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16 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 41.
17 Durkheim, *Elementary,* 209-214.
18 Bataille, "Use Value," 95.
19 Bataille, "Use Value," 94.
20 Durkheim, *Elementary*, 409-414. Bataille is referring to developed religions such as Christianity and Buddhism. See Bataille, "Use Value," 102. The antagonistic boy-racer, which Hirschhorn refers to in *Poor-racer*, exists in an analogous relationship to the low sacred because the group is an asocial and outlawed force that refuses assimilation into the norm.
21 Bataille, "Use Value," 96.

religious and homogeneous community – are rejected.[22] These debased elements, however, have a sacred power that religion neglects. Bataille proposes that the terrifying force removed from the sacred by religion can be reinstated by reconnecting the "holy" with its "soiled" counterpart in an areligious system of heterology.[23]

Appropriation is related to the homogeneous characteristics of "civil, political, juridical, industrial, and commercial organization," whereas excretion is linked to the heterogeneous religious "prohibitions, obligations, and the realization of sacred action." Toward the end of his essay, Bataille considers the role of heterology and excretory forces in a political context.[24] The violent excretory impulses of the sacred have the power to overturn what Bataille views as tendencies within modern society to homogenise and exploit workers in the interests of pure fiscal accumulation.[25] In this sense, the employer has disregarded any sacred function in order to focus on commercial gain. If the worker, however, celebrates by spending accumulated wages on excretory impulses, that is, on expenditure with no profitable or useful outcome, rather than in a manner that ensures a refreshed return to work and ongoing production, the potential exists for an orgiastic revolution.[26] Bataille will expand on this political provocation in economic terms in his 1933 essay "The Notion of Expenditure."[27]

Bataille's critical approach to economics is grounded in the pre-eminence of expenditure, rather than accumulation. This theoretical development can be traced principally through two works: "The Notion of Expenditure" written in 1933; and the first volume of *The Accursed Share* published in 1949.[28] Each of these works has a different emphasis: "The Notion of Expenditure is a polemical ultra-left essay that

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22 Bataille, "Use Value," 94.
23 Bataille defines heterology at the end of his essay. Bataille, "Use Value," Endnote 2. "The science of what is completely other. The term *agiology* would perhaps be more precise, but one would have to catch the double meaning of *agio* (analogous to the double meaning of *sacer*), *soiled* as well as *holy*. But it is above all the term *scatology* (the science of excrement) that retains in the present circumstances (the specialization of the sacred) an incontestable expressive value as the doublet of an abstract term such as *heterology*."
24 Bataille, "Use Value," 99-102. Bataille aligns the Marxist critique of exchange value with the conflict between the homogeneous forces of the profane and the sacred heterogeneous. He states that the homogeneous world seeks to deny "our universe's sources of excitation" in preference for the "development of a servile human species, fit only for the fabrication, rational consumption, and conservation of products." Bataille, "Use Value," 97.
25 Bataille, "Use Value," 99.
26 Bataille, "Use Value," 99-102.
27 Bataille notes "heedless expenditure" as an excremental force. Bataille, "Use Value," 94.
28 Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure" in Bataille, *Visions,* and Bataille, *Accursed. The Accursed Share* is comprised of three volumes; the first volume is subtitled *Consumption.*

expands on the political issues addressed, for instance, towards the end of "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade;" while the much later *The Accursed Share* is a theoretical study and survey of what Bataille names "general economy." *The Accursed Share* has its origins in the earlier essay.

The roles of appropriation and excretion, originally sourced from Durkheim's sociological analysis of the profane and the sacred, are reprised in "The Notion of Expenditure" as an economical critique of the bourgeois social, cultural and political body. "Appropriation" is allied with the "accumulation" of wealth, and "excretion" becomes the spending of it as non-productive "expenditure."[29] In this sense, accumulation is related to the profane world of production, and expenditure to the sacred and immoderate consumption of resources.

Bataille's criticism of modern economy hinges on the neglect of expenditure as a form of sacrifice that unites communities.[30] He draws on the work of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss to contrast the role of non-productive expenditure as a form of sacred economic transaction in "primitive" society with the modern economic state's emphasis on production and accumulation.[31] Bataille viewed the hoarding of wealth, whether in the form of capitalist private enterprise, or alternatively, the communist consolidation of production, as a fundamental flaw which denied the explosive exuberance of ancient sacrificial festivals and tribal practices such as *potlatch*.[32] Additionally, the deliberate destruction and disposal of wealth in *potlatch* not only humiliated a rival, but also bestowed social rank on the donor, thereby uniting the propitiatory community in their shared experience of sacrifice.[33] Bataille notes that collective bonds were sustained in primitive societies because the populace recognised that wealth accumulated by the rich was destined to be sacrificed for all in sumptuous and exorbitant communal festivals.[34] Art is given as one example of how excess wealth was consumed in pre-modern societies.[35]

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29 Bataille, "Notion," 119. Excretion is specifically linked to expenditure in Bataille's discussion of jewels.
30 Bataille, "Notion," 123.
31 Bataille, "Notion," 121.
32 Bataille, "Notion," 124-126, Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction,* (London: Pluto, 2000), 106.
33 Bataille, "Notion," 121-122.
34 Bataille, "Notion," 123.
35 Bataille, "Notion," 118.

In contrast to the social and sacred motivations of *potlatch*, Bataille singles out the modern bourgeois tendency to privately display acquired luxury goods, symbolically representative of commercial wealth, as evidence of how expenditure has degraded in modern society to "vain efforts tied to tiresome rancor" and greed.[36] The bourgeois world is characterised by a "meanness" that "has consented only to spend for itself, and within itself."[37] Furthermore, this accumulation and refusal to part with wealth in the middle class is connected with perceptions of superiority attained through privilege.[38] Political unrest, however, resides in the potential for a proletarian insurrection that would defy the humiliations imposed on the worker by the affluent bourgeois employer. Bataille provocatively instils the idea that a class war – an orgy of human lives that would rival the *potlatch* – is imminent.[39]

The germ of *The Accursed Share* appears toward the end of "The Notion of Expenditure" where Bataille states: "matter, in fact, can only be defined as the nonlogical difference that represents in relation to the economy of the universe what crime represents in relation to the law."[40] The accursed share is the non-logical difference – the excess in the system that requires sacrifice – and the book *The Accursed Share* is Bataille's attempt to account for how this excess operates in the general economy.

Bataille develops his thoughts on the role of expenditure in society into a distinct economic theory in *The Accursed Share.* Bataille's sense of economy is not based on the traditional delineation of fiscal policy, regulations and transactions, but instead, distinguishes between two categories of economy: restricted and general.[41] Restricted economies view themselves as self-sufficient entities. This ideological confinement sets up perimeters where emphasis is placed on what can be appropriated and accumulated within individual economies to aid their growth. In other words, each restricted economy ingests, but does not consider how it functions in a system that encompasses, permeates and extends beyond it. Bataille deems that the conventional monetary

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36 Bataille, "Notion," 124.
37 Bataille, "Notion," 124.
38 Bataille, "Notion," 125.
39 Bataille, "Notion," in *Visions,* 127-128.
40 Bataille, "Notion," in *Visions,* 129.
41 Bataille, *Accursed,* 23-25.

economy, as well as the economies of politics and art, are examples of a multitude of restricted economies that function within an all-encompassing general economy.[42]

There is an aspect of economy that can be associated with the relationship between the sacred and the profane that underpins Bataille's oeuvre. In comparison to restricted economy, general economy is that which informs and envelopes each economy. Restricted economy interacts with general economy in the same manner that the profane engages with the sacred; that is, the influence of the general economy, like the power of the sacred, is manifest in the restricted economy, but this powerful influence itself is unlimited, ungovernable and indefinable.

Bataille significantly departs from conventional economic theory in his proposal, developed from "The Notion of Expenditure," that general economy – the circulation of energy on the globe – is characterised by consumption rather than accumulation.[43] Bataille bases his theory on the principle that the sun gives energy without compensation; it is an example of absolute expenditure.[44] The sun, however, provides an excess of energy far above that required for the basics of life on earth. Solar energy promotes growth; plants bloom, animals eat and are eaten, but a surfeit inexorably accumulates.[45] Bataille terms this excess the "accursed share."[46] Man is at the apex of this pyramid of consumption and is therefore duty-bound to spend the most.[47] Failure to expend causes energy either to slowly dissipate or, alternatively, to rupture in a violent cataclysm of which the most commonly experienced is war.[48] Bataille proposes that the only viable alternative is to spend the abundant remainder gloriously and sumptuously in non-productive activities and celebrations.[49]

The second half of *The Accursed Share* is an attempt to account for the accursed share in various historic civilizations. The English academic Benjamin Noys, however, argues that this is precisely where Bataille's book fails, as Bataille is attempting to give

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42 Bataille, *Accursed,* 19-20.
43 Bataille, *Accursed,* 9.
44 Bataille, *Accursed,* 28. The sun is also significant as a sacred entity, for example, in Aztec and many
     other cultures. This is another association of general economy with the sacred.
45 Bataille, *Accursed,* 21, 27-28.
46 Bataille, *Accused,* 37.
47 Bataille, *Accursed,* 23, 40.
48 Bataille, *Accursed,* 31-32, 37.
49 Bataille, *Accursed,* 25.

concrete examples of a principle based on the operation of non-logical difference developed in his earlier essay.[50] Any attempt to *define* general economy is therefore doomed by fixed circumscription to the category of restrictive economy, because the general economy is *a priori* unable to be defined. Bataille can only allude to general economy via ultimately unsatisfying historical examples.[51] The situating of the sun as the origin of energy emission is also problematic, as Bataille is viewing this from the restricted economy of the earth – in reality, the sun forms part of the broader economy of the universe.[52] Noys does not consider that Bataille's argument for general economy is invalid per se, but he redirects the focus from solar energy onto, to use Bataille's phrase, a "play of forces":

Bataille is concerned with a play of forces and it is the play of these forces which generates the accursed share rather than one supposedly stable energy source. In his desire to prove the existence of the accursed share Bataille has reduced the accursed share to a perception from a restricted economy.[53]

Noy's argument is based soundly in Bataille's text as throughout the first half of *The Accursed Share* – where Bataille establishes his economic theory – regular reference is made to the *operational* and *fluid* nature of the general economy. The whole process is mobile, characterized by the "play of forces," the "*general* movement of the economy," and the "movement of energy on the globe."[54] Although Bataille considers that expenditure is at its most effective when the "accent is placed on a loss that must be as great as possible," pure expenditure itself is unattainable.[55] He admits this in the following passage: "But real life, composed of all sorts of expenditures, knows nothing of purely productive expenditure; in actuality it knows nothing of purely non-productive expenditure either."[56] Noys argues that general economy is the "fleeting and effervescent effect of the swirling turbulence of energy flows that constantly puncture limits, create openings and new limits."[57] It has an operational quality.[58] With reference

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50 Noys, *Bataille,* 116.
51 In fairness, perhaps these examples are meant to infer rather than define and circumscribe. Bataille is renown for leaving such problems unresolved.
52 Noys, *Bataille,* 114. This objection of Noys has a more concrete basis. The solar system is scientifically proven to be only part of the universe.
53 Noys, *Bataille,* 115.
54 Bataille, *Accursed,* 12, 19, 20.
55 Bataille, "Notion" in Bataille, *Visions,* 118.
56 Bataille, *Accursed,* 12.
57 Noys, *Bataille,* 115.
58 As an operation of forces, the general economy has the same indefinable energy that Bataille argues does the *informe*. The *informe* disrupts and brings rational thought down. In a similar manner, the inner experience is beyond rational comprehension. The sacred is also a illogical heterogeneous realm. It can be argued that general economy, like all of these notions in Bataille's work, stems from Bataille's anti-idealist insistence that all experience of existence is ultimately beyond rational

to the proposal that general economy, though unable to be definitively pinpointed, is a "play of forces" in everyday life, Hirschhorn's work can be appraised with the view that it actively participates in this process of accumulation and expenditure.

As demonstrated, Bataille's thought on economics evolved out of his concern with the sacred and the profane. Like the sacred, he maintained an ongoing interest in the role of the economy and Thomas Hirschhorn's oeuvre can also be considered within this theoretical framework.[59] This proposition has a concrete basis in Hirschhorn's own admission to be a "fan" of Bataille and in the value he invests in his economic theory.[60] Whilst he does not claim academic or specialist knowledge, Hirschhorn is an avid reader of Bataille.[61] Hirschhorn also recounts to the art historian Benjamin Buchloh that when he "encountered Bataille's concept of expenditure, I had the feeling that I had never read such a thing before" and that he "instantly felt in total agreement."[62]

Energy drives Hirschhorn's practice in a manner that is allied with and emphasises the process of energy accumulation and its subsequent expenditure in the "play of forces" of the general economy. The artist's focus on energy is summarised in his pithy dictum "Quality *no,* energy *yes*!"[63] This pronouncement embodies different aspects of his art: firstly, the myriad of cheap material components that the artist feverishly incorporates into his displays; and secondly, the deliberate insertion of his work into the protean stir of everyday life. Hirschhorn uses the phrase "working politically" to consciously situate his art within a leftist agenda of egalitarianism.[64] The two dicta are interconnected in his work, as the option to focus on energy, rather than quality, is also the choice to work politically.

Hirschhorn's production has an egalitarian socialist basis which stems from the artist's
understanding.

59 Although various aspects of Hirschhorn's practice could be argued to be characterized by Bataille's economic theory, for instance, the hypersaturation of the works and the artist's rapid manner of execution, this chapter will specifically address the political role of expenditure and how the artist inserts his work into the everyday play of forces of the general economy.

60 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 37. Hirschhorn states that his 2002 work *Bataille Monument* was grounded in these texts.

61 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschorn*, 37, 114. *The Accursed Share* (as the French original La part maudite) and *The Tears of Eros* (Les larmes d'eros) feature among the artist's thirty-seven most important books in his work *Emergency Library*, 2004.

62 Benjamin Buchloh, "An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn" in *October* 113, (Summer 2005), 93.

63 Buchloh, "Interview," 92.

64 Pascaline Cuvelier, "Weak Affinities – The Art of Thomas Hirschhorn," in *Artforum International* Volume 36, May 1998, 134.

choice of commonplace materials and this situates his practice within Bataille's notion of expenditure. He uses cheap everyday materials in his work in a deliberate manner that destabilizes established value notions of artistic quality. As he states in an interview with Alison Gingeras:

These are materials that don't require any explanation of what they are. I wanted to make 'poor' art, but not Arte Povera. My work has nothing to do with Arte Povera. Because it's poor art, the materials must be poor too: quite simply, materials that make you think of poverty. To make poor art means to work against a certain idea of richness. To make rich art means to work with established values; it means to work with a definition of quality that other people have made. I want to provide my own definition of quality, of value and richness. I refuse to deal with established definitions. I'm trying to destabilize them. I'm trying to contaminate them with a certain non-valuable aspect of reality. The value system is a security system. It's a system for subjects without courage. You need values to ensure yourself, to enclose yourself in passivity and anxiety. You need the idea of quality as a kind of ghost who helps you escape the real. To make poor art is to fight against this principle. Quality, no! Energy, yes!"[65]

Bataille censures the bourgeoisie's acquisition and private display of artistic objects as evidence of wealth in "The Notion of Expenditure" because it is tied to the humiliation of the working class. Hirschhorn likewise condemns conventional artistic values because they are exclusive. He expresses this clearly: "What I keep saying is precisely that I want to make my work political in the sense that I do not exclude anyone."[66] His work is usually composed of familiar materials that could be acquired easily in the home, the supermarket, the hardware store or the street, rather than at a specialist art supplies stockist. This is a political choice because this prosaic affinity enables the inclusion of a viewer who may otherwise be alienated by the high culture of the art gallery or museum. Hirschhorn's materials, unlike marble or gold, are not loaded with an established and traditional aura.[67]

Hirschhorn deliberately inserts his ordinary looking art into the ebb and flow of daily

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65 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 15.
66 Buchloh, "Interview," 87.
67 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 16. 15. The choice of everyday materials is also partly pragmatic – the pragmatic and the political are intertwined in Hirschhorn's practice. Pragmatics determines that those materials closest at hand are most likely to be used. Hirschhorn states: "What I've got around me is some packing tape; there's some aluminum foil in the kitchen and there are cardboard boxes and wood panels downstairs on the street." Small graphic works are often a combination of cardboard, prints, aluminium foil, packaging tape, plastic and marker pen; while Hirschhorn's larger displays and environments require more planning, but commonly use greater quantities of these products, with the additions of books, recycled timber, shop manikins, video and other electrical components.

life in a number of early works that rely on the performative role of the unaware participants, plus Hirschhorn's relative anonymity at the time. The relationship between Hirschhorn's practice and daily societal conventions can be thought through the role of art and commerce as restricted economies.

The disposal of Hirschhorn's art in environments where its status as art is compromised by the ordinary use value of the objects displayed is evident in his piece *Souvenirs du XXème Siècle* (Fig. 12).[68] The work was realised as a manned stall selling a number of commercial souvenir items such as scarves, mugs, and hats that Hirschhorn had emblazoned with the names of famous artists and philosophers. The cheaply made products were available for purchase at modest prices and the stall sold out. As Hirschhorn recalls, the status of the objects seemed to change depending on the knowledge of the purchaser. He estimated that the vast majority of buyers were art collectors who procured them with the full knowledge of Hirschhorn as artistic producer. The second highest number of purchases were attributed to buyers unaware of Hirschhorn's practice, but who recognized the names of the artists and philosophers represented on the goods. Only a very few were genuinely acquired as cheap utilitarian objects. Despite selling all the products, Hirschhorn ultimately considered that work which relies on this kind of audience participation is "delusional."[69] This is due to the uneasy relationship that the piece, as part of the restricted economy of art, has when aping a purely functional commodity in the commercial economy.

Hirschhorn often works with waste products and a similar example of incognizant audience participation and the relationship between art and labour forms a problematic feature of his early waste performance *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit* (or *Somebody Takes Care of My Work*) (Figs. 13-15).[70]

Hirschhorn strategically placed a number of paper, card and wood collages up against a wall adjacent to the street and in close proximity to ordinary rubbish bins. He then

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68 Fig. 12. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Sovenirs du XXème Siècle.* 1997, Prints, paper, photocopies, aluminium foil, golden paper, adhesive tape, fabric, plates, t-shirts, glasses, caps, decanters, scarves, clothes pegs, rope, plushs, video tape; 'Ici et Maintenant', market, Pantin, France. Organised by APSV, Parc de la Villette, Paris.
69 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn*, 28.
70 Figs. 13-15. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit,* 1992, Wood, cardboard, paper, prints, adhesive tape, sponge, Paris.

filmed what happened to these objects over the course of the day. To those unaccustomed to the artist's practice, the collages resemble an ordinary, if somewhat unusual, pile of rubbish. The English translation of the title, "someone takes care of my work," can be interpreted in at least two ways: either as Hirschhorn's express desire that passers-by would find the work valuable and take it away; or as an ironic "taken care of" as rubbish activity eventually performed by the city sanitation service. Hirschhorn remarks that he videotaped proceedings in the same manner as if documenting a conventional gallery show.[71] Sanitation workers arrived and duly disposed of the assemblage as part of their daily routine.[72]

Although an outstanding example of the active "play of forces" in the general economy, *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit,* is ethically flawed. From the perspective of general economy it cannot strictly be identified as either art or labour, but instead oscillates between the two. As the performance was enacted, the nominal boundary between art and labour is transgressed. This is because, as a post-object performance, the art involved the deliberate manipulation of the unwitting workers going about their routine in order to actualise the piece.[73] This feature also makes the work ethically problematic.

The work *Souvenirs du XXème Siècle,* which blurred the boundary between art and commerce, was rejected by Hirschhorn as "delusional" because some of the audience were aware that the piece was art while others were not. *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit* faces a similar predicament because the arrangement with its participants was not contractual.[74] In these examples, Hirschhorn, operating secretively in a public space, manipulates unaware contributors in order to produce his art. He seeks to rectify this problem in later works where the audience is given an informed and active role.

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71 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn*, 17. The artist did not consider the video was the piece. It functions as documentation.
72 Although Hirschhorn expresses a wish that passersby would find the pieces valuable and retrieve them, the eventual removal of the items by the workers constituted the final piece. The film records the simultaneous destruction/creation that the work becomes. In this sense, the work exhibits an element of *informe.*
73 With reference to Bataille's early essay "The Notion of Expenditure" the piece also resembles the tribal practice of *potlatch* because the collages are given value through their removal and consequent destruction.
74 One has to wonder if the audience were ever given due acknowledgement of their participation? Hirschhorn does not comment on this.

In *Bataille Monument*, a work constructed for the prestigious 2002 Documenta XI art fair in Kassel, Germany, Hirschhorn involved his collaborative assistants from the outset (Figs. 16-19).[75] He positioned *Bataille Monument* away from most of the fair near the Friedrich Wöhler-Complex housing estate which is located in the midst of a predominantly Turkish-German immigrant community in the working class suburb of Nordstadt.[76]

The installation was comprised of three large and rickety outbuildings: one housing a television studio broadcasting a short daily show; the second, a library of books and videos enabling people to research various themes pertinent to the display; and the third, an environment specifically addressing Bataille and his work. In the vicinity of the three buildings, Hirschhorn displayed a wooden, card, plastic, and brown packaging tape sculpture and installed a locally-run bar and snack kiosk. He also arranged for a Turkish-German taxi company to ferry visitors between the installation and the other main venues. Additionally, the taxis provided a service for any inhabitants of the housing estate who wished to visit the rest of the Documenta. *Bataille Monument* was dismantled at the conclusion of the one-hundred day event.

Some quarters of the cultural establishment have accused Hirschhorn of exploiting the Turkish-German residents of Nordstadt whose assistance he sought in constructing and maintaining *Bataille Monument,* although he has insistently denied this, commenting that his "collective work" does not exclude anyone.[77] In this case, Hirschhorn's defence is valid because, unlike the previous public site works where the unaware participants were excluded, the Wöhler-Complex community was consciously consulted with and actively involved from the start.[78] Hirschhorn formed a personal social contract between himself, as the artist, and the community who helped build, maintain, and occupy his installation on a daily basis. Once *Bataille Monument* had opened as an exhibit, Hirschhorn, who had been living in a nearby rented apartment, elected to remain in the neighbourhood for the duration of the Documenta.[79] He assertively maintains that his presence was not a didactic one, but that he functioned in a "caretaker" role to ensure

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75 Figs. 16-19. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument* 2002, Mixed media, Documenta 11, Kassel.
76 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" in *October*, Vol.110, Autumn, 2004. Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 106.
77 Buchloh, "Interview," 86-87. Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 104.
78 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 104, 108.
79 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 39.

that any acts of vandalism, which had previously marred his other public displays, did not occur.[80] He also insists that as an independent artist, rather than social worker, he had no requirement to "subscribe to a shabby contract" concerned with the betterment of communities through edification and education by art.[81] He deems his practice and the artwork to be autonomous, but with the potential for social activation.[82]

Hirschhorn's main hope was that *Bataille Monument* would activate a space where a cross-section of people could meet, converse and share the experience.[83] The form of experience, however, was entirely dependent on the audience and visitors were furnished with a wide range of resources for consultation and inspiration. The challenge for the Documenta tourist and the international art community was less aesthetic and intellectual and more cultural and social. They were required to hire designated taxis to transport them to the work and mingle there with the relatively impoverished local immigrant community.[84] This engineered interaction between two distinct groups was especially uncomfortable for the art audience, because they felt like outsiders prying into the lives of people they generally only encountered in other circumstances.[85] Some criticism of the work focused on the supposed lack of understanding that the Turkish-German immigrants would have for the difficult work of Bataille; however, Hirschhorn believes that such opinions are presumptuous and elitist.[86] Hirschhorn wants his work to be confrontational and to ask questions.[87] The desire to challenge a community, especially its relationship to the immigrant in society, is evident in another work that was met with widespread criticism in his native Switzerland.

Hirschhorn adopts a provocative critique of anti-immigration legislation and posturing in his country of origin, Switzerland, in his 2004 work *Swiss-Swiss Democracy*.[88] The unsettling convergence of cultures, which is one of *Bataille Monument*'s most salient features, had its genesis in Hirschhorn's committed socialist stance on state immigration

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80 Buchloh, "Interview," 87.
81 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn*, 29.
82 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 26, 29.
83 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 86.
84 Bishop, "Antagonism," 62.
85 Bishop, "Antagonism," 62.
86 Buchloh, "Interview," 86; Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 84. Buchloh also questions the ability of a young Muslim audience to gain anything from an encounter with Bataille's works.
87 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 26-27.
88 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss-Swiss Democracy* 2004, mixed media, Swiss Cultural Centre, Paris.

policies.[89] Swiss culture, values and history have consistently drawn Hirschhorn's opprobrium and he has assertively expressed this in no fewer than eight major works.[90]

In 2004 Hirschhorn announced that he would temporarily cease showing in Switzerland as a protest against the anti-immigration agenda of the nationalist Swiss People's Party and, in particular, the Party's far-right outspoken member Christoph Blocher. Blocher held the ministerial portfolios of Justice and Police in the coalition government at the time.[91] Hirschhorn believed Blocher representative in general of Swiss xenophobia. He had been invited to show at the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris two years preceding the opening of *Swiss-Swiss Democracy*. His intent was that the work would promote "a boycott of Blocher's election, an echo outside the country, and a discussion of democracy itself and how it is idealized."[92]

 A typically confrontational Hirschhorn installation, *Swiss-Swiss Democracy* was comprised of the artist's usual combination of materials and features, including a controversial, vituperative and politically motivated burlesque rendition of Friedrich Schiller's play *William Tell*. Hirschhorn lambasted the ultranationalist Blocher by having an actor urinate on a poster depicting him. In another scene, the same actor pretended to vomit at the thought of free democracy in Switzerland.[93] Representatives of the Swiss People's Party were particularly incensed that $200 000 of Swiss funds had supported the exhibition. With their political leverage the parliament voted to cut about three percent of the annual budget for Pro Helvetia, the official organisation responsible for the international advancement of Swiss culture.[94]

Hirschhorn's collaboration with immigrant communities and opposition to xenophobia promotes the immigrant as a distinct individual whose place in society should not be circumscribed by the occupational tasks they perform. This is evident in the artist's

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89 Hirschhorn is a Marxist. See Buchloh, "Interview," 89.
90 Jeff Rian, "Swiss Diss: Jeff Rian on Thomas Hirschhorn's "Swiss-Swiss Democracy"" in *Artforum International,* Volume 43, February, 2005: 68.
91 Rian, "Swiss Diss," 68. Hirschhorn stated that he would cease showing while Blocher was in the government.
92 Rian, "Swiss Diss," 68.
93 The choice of Schiller's *William Tell* is itself provocative. In the tale the fourteenth-century mythical figure frees Switzerland from foreign domination, thus striking a chord with the current nationalist fear that growth and naturalization of the immigrant population will irrevocably and detrimentally alter Swiss demographics.
94 *Swiss-Swiss Democracy* was funded by Pro Helvetia.

explicit criticism of the anti-immigration stance of Blocher in *Swiss-Swiss Democracy* and in his decision not to exhibit in Switzerland while Blocher was in office. He comments to Pascaline Cuvelier that he wants his art to highlight political issues, including "forgotten people" and intends that his "work is a struggle against intimidation."[95] *Bataille Monument* demonstrated similar concerns about the relationship of the German polity and a substantial proportion of Germany's indigenous population towards immigration. Despite his nuanced declaration that he makes art politically, rather than makes political art, Hirschhorn's concerns are emphatically political.[96] *Bataille Monument* raises unsettling political questions.

It is obvious that Hirschhorn intended the work to scrutinize the difficult and polarizing topic of immigration in contemporary Germany. Bataille's writing is particularly useful in articulating his concerns. In his preparation for Documenta the artist noted that two of his intentions were to "make a mental plan of the city of Kassel" and "a mental plan of and about the work of Georges Bataille." These plans would allow "links" to be discerned and help "create space for ideas, reflections, for positions, for questions."[97] Benjamin Buchloh suggests to Hirschhorn that his choice to situate *Bataille Monument* within a Turkish immigrant community was deliberately and extremely confrontational. Buchloh's comment is made with the general awareness that Germany, like Switzerland, has an historic and ongoing difficult relationship with its growing immigrant population.

Bataille Monument was particularly influenced by Bataille's book *The Accursed Share* and it is in this study, plus in *The Theory of Religion,* that links between Bataille, Kassel and immigrant labour can be traced.[98] A link forms along Bataille's evaluation of Calvinism as the ideological seed-bed of capitalism and the Calvinist heritage of Kassel. Another appears when Bataille addresses the status of man as a "thing" when considered from the utilitarian perspective as labour and the status of the Turkish-

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95 Cuvelier, "Affinities," p.134.
96 Hirschhorn's continually indicates that his work should be approached politically. This can be demonstrated through frequent statements on his political motivations: See Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 57, 122, 133. "The motor that drives my work is the human condition and my concerns about it. I do not believe that the process of making art can exist without taking a critical position."; "No; what it's about is showing this excess actively, assertively; it's not about all-over, it's about economy, power and a political position."; "I want to make a complex, dense new work with political bite and formal power."
97 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 100.
98 Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1989.)

German immigrant.[99] Kassel provides the exemplary platform for *Bataille Monument* because it is the nexus of these important concerns and is also the location of one of the world's premier art events.[100]

Hirschhorn's proposal to "make a mental plan of the city of Kassel" and "a mental plan of and about the work of Georges Bataille" converges on the topic of Calvinism and its role in the formation of capitalism. Kassel's Calvinist heritage dates from the sixteenth-century German Reformation under the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, William IV. In *The Accursed Share,* Bataille writes that the German political economist Max Weber identified the significance of Calvinist doctrine in the foundations of capitalism.[101] Citing the English economist R.H. Tawney, he recounts that Calvinism maintains that the believer's earthly financial success, brought about through industry, is evidence of the bestowal of God's grace.[102] Bataille proposed that in the quest for spiritual purity, Calvinism, unlike Catholicism, effectively denies any form of non-productive sacred expenditure.[103] As personal wealth is now interpreted as a sign of piety, capitalism is also given a legitimate religious basis.[104] The problem for Bataille was that capitalism, born out of the Calvinist need to separate the sacred from the profane, "could not have had more radical consequences than the relegation of mankind to gloryless activity."[105] This "gloryless activity" was equated with the reduction of man to the designation of "worker" – a state which Bataille argues is that of a "thing."

The proposal that work makes a thing of man has important ethical ramifications in *Bataille Monument*. A person becomes a thing while engaged in work. This concept has its basis in Bataille's interpretation of the sacred and profane which he clearly expresses in his book *Theory of Religion*.[106] Bataille proposes that animals live in a world of immanence. Although forever separated from the condition of animality, humans

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99 Bataille also addresses the spiritual impoverishment of man to a "thing" in *Eroticism* and *Theory of Religion.*

100 *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* "Hesse-Kassel." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Accessed 19 May 2011,* http://www.britannica.com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/EBchecked/topic/264143/Hesse-Kassel ; Simon Green, *The Politics of Exclusion: Institutions and Immigration Policy in Contemporary Germany,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 26, 31.

101 Bataille, *Accursed,* 123.

102 Bataille, *Accursed,* 123.

103 Bataille, *Accursed,* 124, 132.

104 Bataille, *Accursed,* 115, 131.

105 Bataille, *Accursed,* 124.

106 Bataille's conception of the sacred and the profane is based in Durkheim's groundbreaking work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* first published in 1915.

nevertheless yearn for a lost sense of intimacy that they discern in the immanence that characterises the animal world.[107] This intimacy is most closely approached through the sacred.[108] Full immersion in immanence would result in man becoming like the unaware animal, but prescribed rites and passages safeguard moments of access to the sacred and ensure that the consciousness of those moments is retained. These religious ceremonies periodically punctuate the profane world of work, although the regulations of labour are necessary to enable society's material survival. Work is that which separates man from the sacred and during working time it transforms the worker into a thing comparable to the domesticated animal or tool.[109]

Bataille criticises capitalism, which emerged from and blossomed under Calvinism, because it generally reduces people to "things;" while the sacred, which was originally internalized in society as the necessary counterpoint to work, is effectively sidelined to a self-contained religious arena.[110] The sacred, therefore, loses its meaning and the worker in the capitalist system becomes desacralized[111] Furthermore, as this structure evolves and capitalism eventually disposes of religion under the influence of mainstream atheism, the worker becomes a thing without respite. This notion, where the worker is defined as a thing, historically and emphatically underpins the place of the immigrant in modern Germany.

The meeting of the people of Kassel with Bataille's work in *Bataille Monument* raises important questions regarding the historical status of the Turkish-German residents of the city as immigrant labour. Hirschhorn provocatively sets up *Bataille Monument* as a locus of intersection and interaction between the art tourist and the immigrant community, although the usual roles are reversed with the cultivated invitees posited as temporary guests in an alien Turkish-German environment. The notion that the visitors are guests is an important one, because it associates their invitation to the Nordstadt community with the historical categorisation of the initial influx of Turkish labour into Germany as *gastarbeiter* or "guestworkers."[112] Kassel was devastated by Allied

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107Bataille, *Accursed,* 18, 36.
108Bataille, *Accursed,* .36.
109Bataille, *Theory,* p.28, pp.41-42.
110Bataille, *Accursed,* 129.
111Bataille, *Accursed,* 124.
112Green, *Politics,* 32. The Federal Republic Economics Minister Ludwig Erhard developed and introduced this scheme in 1955. Kassel staged the first Documenta art fair in 1955, the same year that West Germany initiated the *Gastarbeiter* (or guestworker) immigrant work scheme.

bombing in the Second World War and the city, along with much of West Germany, began an intensive rebuilding programme in the mid-1950s with the assistance of the United States of America under the Marshall Plan.[113] Germany had a depleted workforce, so had to source workers from poorer southern European states, especially Turkey.[114] The *Gastarbeiter* scheme specifically called for single, young men who were usually isolated from the local population in hostels run by the firms that had contracted them.[115] The migrants employed were viewed solely from the pragmatic and economic perspective that they were a much needed source of labour. The contemporaneous attitude is illustrated by a 1968 West German newspaper article that the German Political Studies scholar Simon Green quotes:

Guestworkers are in demand again by German industry and according to the Federal Labour Office, Turks are particularly popular. This is why they are hardest to obtain. Firms have to wait ten weeks just for auxiliary workers...All in all, the market for guestworkers is extremely buoyant this summer. Italians are practically sold out, except for a small number of artisans. (Quoted in Meier-Braun, 1995: 16)[116]

Phrases describing migrant workers as "hard to obtain," "the market is buoyant" and "Italians are sold out" effectively assigns the person employed to the intended task they perform – in Bataille's terminology the worker is construed as a thing. American anthropologist Ruth Mandel, who has conducted an extensive study of Turkish-German immigrant experience, points out that part of this phenomenon is tied to the etymology of the term "guestworker" because a guest – like a transient worker – is a visitor by definition and is always expected to leave.[117] The migrants were initially retained for a finite period of time then obligated to return to their home country. As the rotating cycle of short-term labour contracts developed, however, employers and labour unions requested longer terms of migrant residence.[118] This demand was motivated entirely by economics as, on the one hand, companies found it expensive to constantly train new

113 Noys, Bataille, 113. Germany at this time benefited from the economic impetus of the Marshall Plan. Although Bataille devotes a section of *The Accursed Share* to the Marshall Plan, using it as a contemporary example of the transfer of excess resources from one economy of profit (the United States) to another of need (Post-war Germany), his analysis is somewhat politically naïve as he fails to acknowledge that the motivation of economic assistance lay principally in maintaining Western Europe as a pro-NATO bloc against the threat of the Soviet Union and its satellite Communist states. The Marshall Plan also enabled the United States to build an export market for its products, therefore it cannot be considered simply as a disinterested act of international benevolence.
114 Green, *Politics,* 32-33.
115 Green, *Politics,* 33.
116 Green, *Politics,* 33.
117 Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 55.
118 Green, *Politics,* 33.

recruits; and on the other, unions wanted to protect German jobs which were under threat from the invariably lower wages paid to a desperate foreign workforce.[119] This commercial rationale devalues the immigrant solely to a commodity.

As legislation was enacted enabling immigrants to reside for longer periods, the contracted workers increasingly began to relocate their families to Germany under a new family reunification scheme (*Familiennachzug*).[120] This influx, along with the rising number of children born to immigrants in Germany, has created one of the most significant problems in modern German domestic politics.[121] As Mandel quotes a line from Swiss writer Max Frisch's short essay *Überfremdung,* "We asked for labour but people came instead."[122] No longer sequestered in an employer's hostel, the immigrant workforce became a legitimate part of the community. The current situation has revealed an ethical dilemma, where immigrant workers and families can no longer be considered as simple commodified entities. [123]

A significant historical problem was that Germany did not have an official policy on immigration before 2000. The word "immigrant" (*einwanderer*) was not used in official discourse, except to reinforce the national anti-immigration stance. German immigration policy could best be summed up in the infamous phrase: "*Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland*" – "Germany is not an immigration country" as recently as 1977.[124] This official position has ensured that many Germans have had difficulty coming to terms with the very real presence of a large resident immigrant community; a national concern which is specifically highlighted as "the foreigner problem" or *Ausländerproblematik.*[125]

The etymology of the term *ausländer* clearly defines the German immigration problem itself, as Mandel states, the word means "unintegratable outsider, alien, rather than any

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119Green, *Politics,* 33.
120Green, *Politics,* 37.
121Green, *Politics,* 1, 4, 6; Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 56. Foreigners were officially entering to reside permanently in Germany to the point where by the early 2000s 15 million inhabitants of the country are of non-ethic German descent
122Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 51.
123Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 51.
124Green, *Politics,* 6. *The Bund-Länder-Kommission* (Federal State Commission)issued a report stating that "the Federal Republic of Germany is not an immigration country." See Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* p.xxiv.
125Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 7.

natural rendering of the English 'foreigner'"[126] Mandel asserts that the choice is deliberate, since if the term *einwanderer* had been used instead this would have entailed an associated array of political, social and economic rights.[127] By the time of Documenta XI, Germany had reformed its immigration policy making it comparable with other western democracies, although the country is still wrestling with a political legacy that dates from the foundation of the modern German state in 1871.[128]

German immigration policy is entwined with the concept of German citizenship formed in the eighteenth century. German romantic intellectuals sought to differentiate themselves from the distinctive and dominating presence of French and other non-Germanic cultural influence in the various German states. This desire found expression in two forms. Firstly, a drive to unify all Germanic speaking peoples in a movement of Pan-Germanism and, secondly, in an associated widespread, and almost mystical belief in the notion of a German *Volk* united through blood-lines of shared ancestry.[129]

It is through the mystical aspect of *Volk* that the exclusion of the immigrant as a citizen developed.[130] The notion of *Volk* was based in the belief that the Germanic community shared a destiny via genetic and biological links. Under this ideological construct, the previous principle of belonging to a people on the basis of shared residence (*ius domicili*) gradually came to be replaced by *ius sanguinis* (the principle of descent through blood-line). Eventually *ius sanguinis* was codified into law in 1913 in the *Reichs-und Staatsangehörigkeitgesetz*.[131] As Green explains, this law "created Germany's first true national citizenship, prescribing *ius sanguinis* as the sole method of ascription of citizenship at birth." Green also remarks that the law in itself was not unusual for its time; the remarkable point, however, was that it remained unchanged for so long.[132] The belief in a pure *Volk* had its most infamous and tragic outcome in the

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126Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 81.
127Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 81.
128Göturk, Deniz, David Gramling, Anton Kaes, eds. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Immigration 1955-2005.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4. Germany revised its immigration policy under the Social Democratic and Green coalition government led by Gerhard Schröder in 2000 when children born of immigrant parents residing in German were no longer classed as foreigners but could receive German citizenship. The various states of Germany were formally unified into a nation state as the German Empire in 1871.
129Pan-Germanism was movement that sought to unify diverse peoples whose languages shared Germanic origins.
130Green, *Politics,* 28. Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 208.
131Green, *Politics,* 29.
132Green, *Politics,* 30.

racist ideology of National Socialism in the 1930s and although the modern German state is neither fascist nor comparable to the Nazi regime, it has nevertheless until only recently based its immigration policy on the same principles of purity of blood represented by *ius sanguinis*. As Mandel argues, the notion of the Aryan was grounded in "the idea of an authentic, pure German essence reflected in the bloodline."[133]

The idea of "pure German essence" continued to prevail in post-war German society.[134] A particularly significant example of this concern with German purity appeared in startling form in what is known as the Heidelberg Manifesto.[135] In 1982 a number of German professors rallied together and published a document, announcing their concerns that the homogeneity of the German people and its culture was under threat from a rising tide of non-Christian immigration. The article led to immediate controversy in the liberal sector of the German community, because, as Mandel disturbingly points out, although blatant right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric was expected from populist positions; "[t]he fact that such a document was composed and supported by leading members of Germany's elite proved highly troubling."[136]

As demonstrated, descent by bloodline is strongly linked to the concept of belonging that has formed the basis of nationalist German immigration policy up until the law was overturned in favour of *ius solis* (right of citizenship by birth) in 2000.[137] *Ius sanguinis* qualified one to belong to the *Volk* through homogeneous descent. As previously demonstrated, the roles of the sacred and the profane are important in Bataille's conception of society, because the sacred liberates man from the world of work, where he is reduced to a thing. The German historical insistence on *ius sanguinis* is a homogeneous principal of citizenship that has denied the Turkish-German immigrant a

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133Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 209.
134Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 209.
135Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 59-60.
136Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 60.
137Also see Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" in Bataille, *Visions.* It has to be stated strongly that the argument in this thesis is *not* implying that either contemporary German politics or the modern state of Germany is fascist or neo-fascist. Although there are what could be loosely described as neo-fascist political parties in contemporary Germany (for instance, the Republican Party, which gained 7.5 percent of the vote in the 1989 West German election), the country has embarked on a systematic programme of "denazification" since the end of the Second World War. The vast majority of the population finds Nazism and fascism morally abhorrent. All the same, the anti-immigration stance in post-war German politics stems from the same nationalistic ideological *völkisch* source as the radical and racist eugenic policies of the Third Reich, albeit in less attenuated form. Neither is there any suggestion that the Turkish-German immigrant population should be thought of as the "new Jews" of Germany. On this Turkish/Jewish note see Mandel, *Cosmopolitan,* 130-131.

rightful place in German society because Turkish-Germans as a community, rather than as labour, pose a heterogeneous threat to the homogeneity of German belonging: the *Volk*.[138]

Bataille Monument provides a creative space where the Turkish-German community can publicly assert the heterogeneous (sacred) richness of their culture, because their presence in the work separates them from their nominal categorisation as "useful" and productive foreign workers. Hirschhorn creates an environment where the immigrant and the art visitor can interact on an intimate level in a manner that emphasises Turkish-German life outside the confines of exchange value in the market place. Non-productive activities are offered to art visitor and the immigrant alike. Both can relax, converse, eat together or read one of Bataille's works from the library.

Thomas Hirschhorn's practice can be approached from a range of perspectives that stem from Bataille's work on economy. Bataille's early essay "The Notion of Expenditure" highlights how excess production as wealth can be sacrificed in non-productive expenditure, thereby giving it political force. *The Accursed Share* postulates how this excess is produced through life's "play of forces" in the general economy. It is in this play that Hirschhorn politically situates his work as an event that enables encounters between communities. In the work, homogeneous society is confronted with the heterogeneous other and questions concerning the relationship between the two are raised.

Two interesting comments can be compared; one by Thomas Hirschhorn on making "art politically" and another by Rosalind Krauss on the lack of aesthetic experience in new media. Hirschhorn remarks on the current global ecological recycling trend, expressing his concern that such activities detract people making them unable to respond to pressing political issues:

A person who cleans yoghurt cartons, collects them and takes them to a dump won't have any energy left to fight against injustice, racism, incipient Fascism. But I want to do that. I want to make my art political.[139]

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138 Although an aspect of *Volk* as pure can theoretically be deemed heterogeneous, it is an exalted heterogeneous. A pure *Volk* society would be homogeneous, any heterogeneity only defined by that which threatens it and is excluded. The concept of purity cannot accept a low heterogeneous and rejects it. In this sense the argument of a pure and actual *Volk* becomes homogeneous.

139 Buchloh (et al.), *Hirschhorn,* 132.

Krauss, on the other hand, states that new media such as installation tends to neglect the specific formal elements of aesthetic experience because it is focused on other criteria.

I happen to think some really terrible thing has happened in the internationalization and academicization of installation art. For me, Documenta 10 was the last straw. Once everything is focused on raising pigs and planting flowers in between the railroad ties, we've arrived at a place that is totally uninteresting. And once again the issue is, where do you find conviction? Is an aesthetic experience important? Do you have to start from your feelings about what culture is? And I think the answer is, yes; and I think this is true for a variety of artists as well.[140]

In Krauss's opinion practices that make overt reference to daily life are "totally uninteresting." Hirschhorn values the autonomy of his practice, but this is because it allows him the freedom to explore a wide range of political issues without having to be defined by any position in particular. His reason is therefore at odds with Krauss restricted conception of autonomy as self-referential aesthetic medium specificity, because the autonomy Hirschhorn promotes is open-ended. In his work he creates a space where confrontational, yet undetermined, interactions occur between audiences and participants in the to and fro of the general economy.

140Newman, *Challenging Art,* 462.

Conclusion

The visual arts had a hold over Georges Bataille that, despite periods of reservation, he could not relinquish. From the clash of disparate photographs in the magazine *Documents,* and the erotic drawings accompanying his fiction, to art's beginnings in the Lascaux cave and the painstaking illustration research for his last book, *The Tears of Eros,* his writing was often accompanied by dramatic imagery. The practice and study of art also has much to gain from Bataille's complex and unconventional thought.

The objections to Rosalind Krauss's use of Bataille revolve around the delimitation of his thought in order to present a structural operation of the *informe* that is ultimately indebted to formalist principles. Her circumscription of Bataille's work is partly due to a methodology inherited from broader principles within formalism to exclude thematization. In Krauss's case, theme is manifested in two types of practice: figurative painting and politics. Artists connected with Bataille's interests, however, work precisely with figuration and politics. One such artist is the figurative painter Francis Bacon; another is the politically motivated Thomas Hirschhorn.

Krauss published a collection of her essays and articles written between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s in the *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths.* This was favourably reviewed by Yve-Alain Bois, the future co-author of *Formless: A User's Guide,* in the *College Art Journal* in 1985.[1] In his praise for the book, Bois identifies some of the problems others may have with Krauss's approach; in particular, her "polemic" stance, the ahistoricity of structuralism, and how she operates in a new paradigm that "annexes" French critical theory.

Pierre Bourdieu has noted that an agent occupying a dominant position in a field tends to defend their particular argument as the only viable model.[2] Other oppositional voices are deemed misguided or erroneous. Polemics necessitates the vigorous maintenance of a position that castigates divergent opinions. The *informe* is utilized by Krauss to justify

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1   Bois, "Review," 369.
2   Bourdieu, "Field," 36.

an alternative art historical canon that can be mapped from surrealist photography, through the horizontality of Jackson Pollock, to the various artistic practices in the 1970s. Her account becomes the widely accepted version, in part, due to the force of her polemic.

Polemics involves matters of principle and of not being "proved wrong." It is deliberately confrontational. This stance, however, also selectively glosses over valid counter issues. The depiction of women in Surrealist photography is particularly pertinent in Krauss's case. To claim surrealist photography as proto-feminist, because it constructs and deconstructs "woman" as a concept, is a polemic position that is highly contentious. Firstly, as "woman as object," this argument discounts the subject or theme. Susan Suleiman points out that the surrealist photographs Krauss utilises depict real women. The humanity in these representations, however, is downplayed in favour of an objective structuralism. Secondly, presenting "woman" as a deconstructed object, rather than as subject, invalidates incisive socio-political feminist criticism of surrealist photographic practice. Once again, Suleiman refers to the actual marginalisation of women in the movement. Instead of these real life incursions of theme, Krauss advocates an aesthetic and rarefied experience of art which is "un-polluted" by historicity. Her choice of various strains of structural and post-structural critical theory is based in apolitical formalism.[3]

As Bois's remarks in his review, Krauss annexes selected French cultural theory from the theorist.[4] One of the portions of territory that she seizes from Georges Bataille is the *informe*. The *informe* is a useful tool because it enables Krauss to account for an alternative modernist art history that is still based on the tenets of formalism. Her selective use of the *informe* is not wrong per se; critics and theorists constantly update and reapply the work of others. An annexation, however, takes a desired part of one whole and incorporates it into another. The whole which the removed part is sourced from is largely disregarded in this process. To insist that the annexed territory is an unproblematic self-sufficient entity, therefore, misrepresents the overall situation.

Krauss confesses that her project is not Bataille's, yet zealously defends her use of his

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3   Bois affirms this in his review of the *Originality.*
4   Bois, "Review," 369.

work in art history and criticism against alternative interpretations. Nobody, however, can claim the real Bataille because his work actively undermines isolated appropriation. He was a rich and heterodox thinker, as demonstrated by the various attempts to categorise his diverse practice, for example; librarian, archivist, numismatist, editor, pornographer, ultra-left activist, theorist, poet, author, mystic, philosopher, anthropologist, ethnologist, and madman. Yet these designations are all somewhat unsatisfying. All that can be said with confidence is that he was a dedicated thinker who strove to think beyond what is able to be thought. As a result, the open-endedness of his writing cannot be funnelled into any one particular argument.

Bataille's work has had a considerable influence on twentieth-century Western thought. He is utilized to numerous ends by a range of critical theorists. Krauss leans predominantly on Roland Barthes's structuralist interpretation, but there are others.[5] Consider, for instance, his bearing on Michel Foucault and the limits of transgression or Jacques Derrida and *différance*.[6] He informs Julia Kristeva's work on the abject, and is the basis of Maurice Blanchot's and Jean-Luc Nancy's discussions on community.[7] Artists who have an interest in these figures and their fields inevitably, even if unconsciously, incorporate a little Bataille into their practice.

Michel Surya presents a thoughtful contrast of two illustrations in his work *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*.[8] One is a manuscript page from Bataille's unfinished project for a "Universal History." (Fig. 20) The opposite illustration is a photograph of Bataille seated, notebook in hand, gazing raptly at the ceiling of the famous prehistoric Lascaux cave. (Fig. 21) The discovery of the cave in 1940 was a vital event for Bataille and this photograph is sourced from Skira, who originally published his study *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or, The Birth of Art*.[9]

5　Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," in Georges Bataille, *The Story of the Eye,* trans. Joachim Neugroschel. (New York: Urizen, 1977.)

6　Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression' in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.) Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: An Hegelianism Without Reserve" in *Writing and Difference,* trans. by Alan Bass. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.)

7　Julia Kristeva, "The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" in Toril Moi (Ed.) *The Kristeva Reader,* trans. by Léon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986,) Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988,) Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.)

8　Surya, *Biography.*

9　Bataille, *Lascaux.*

These illustrations represent firstly, in the photograph of Bataille at Lascaux, his interest in beginnings; and secondly, in the sprawling, complex, and intersecting text of his manuscript for an impossible project, the deliberate lack of closure in his writing. The image of Bataille, seated in the cave staring at the ceiling records how fascinated he was with how art may have functioned in the earliest human societies, whereas the convoluted script in the facing image is an indication of his shifting and open thought. Bataille still has much to offer, as is emphatically and posthumously stated in the words carved on his gravestone: "One day this world will pullulate in my dead mouth."[10] Bataille's work is a breeding-ground for creativity.

If one discounts thematicization as a peculiarly structural and formalist objection to the utilisation of Bataille in art history, numerous artists present themselves for further examination. Georges Didi-Huberman offers a range in his work on the *informe,* including, not least, the figurative work of Pablo Picasso.

As discussed, the painting of Francis Bacon is founded in the quest to capture a sacred and real moment. Bataille identified the artist, in particular, as committed to this pursuit in his essay "The Sacred." This "privileged instant," however, is only able to be evoked. It cannot be seized and this frustrates Bacon to the extent that he considers his efforts to paint a convincing human scream failures. In his undertaking to paint the scream, though, Bacon transforms the image of the Pope as God's authority on earth into an intolerable picture of human doubt and anxiety. This disorientating uncertainty also characterises Bataille's pursuit of "inner experience," which is formulated as a process of infinite questioning or a "movement of contestation" in a world without God, Reason or the Absolute.

Thomas Hirschhorn is particularly interested in a political use of Bataille. He is influenced by Bataille's theory of "general economy," where life is marked as a "play of forces." This "play" is manifested in the way restricted economies interact with one another. A number of Hirschhorn's early works effectively expose this dynamism. Hirschhorn's concern to highlight social and political discrimination is also a feature of Bataille's criticism of the manner in which homogeneous society regulates against

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10 Surya, *Biography*, 489.

threatening heterogeneous elements. Drawing on the concept of the sacred and profane, Bataille argues that modern economic society neglects the sacred aspect of man because it designates the worker as a "thing." Contact with the sacred is fundamental because it enables communal bonds to be established. Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* is an effort to create a challenging environment, where questions can be addressed concerning the relationship between dominant, homogeneous society and its excluded heterogeneous "other."

The "other" is often termed "abject." Abjection can be considered thematically in the output of other self-confessed and indecorous "fans" of Bataille, such as Paul McCarthy and the Chapman brothers. Bataille's theories can likewise be applied to figures who explore the limits of human endurance; for instance, Gina Pane and Marina Abramovic. A world not circumscribed by formulaic applications serving a professional and personal agenda can be opened up via the wide-ranging complexity of Bataille's *oeuvre.*

Bataille's world-view does not appeal to reason or the ideal. It is, therefore, unsurprising that *Inner Experience* has critical chapters on the philosophy of Descartes and Hegel.[11] Bataille rejects Cartesian and Hegelian appeals at unification in either God or the Absolute. If Bataille makes use of Hegel's dialectic, it is without the goal of any resolution as represented by the *aufhebung.* In his constant questioning of what the experience of life is, Bataille embraces the inexplicable nature of existence, instead of attempting to erect a purportedly meaningful facade.

Bataille offers the inquisitive an alternative to the usual paths of thought that are governed by reason and which inevitably lead to self-proclaimed knowledge. As Bataille states, the rational idealist Hegel gets rid of states of non-knowledge in a hurry. This, he also says, is Hegel's "blind spot."[12] This is because life is not always reasonable – it is a rather messy and complex affair. Bataille compels us to approach it differently: to live it with the comforts provided by certainty, reason and idealism stripped away.

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11 Bataille, *Inner,* "Descartes," 105-108; "Hegel," 108-111.
12 Bataille, *Inner,* 111.

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Fig. 1. Man Ray, *Hat,* 1933, silver print, 17.1 x 14 cm, Private Collection, Geneva. 1997, Man Ray Trust, Paris.

Fig. 2. Lynda Benglis, *Untitled,* 1974, colour photograph, 26.5 x 26.5 cm, photographic   advertisement in *Artforum International* (November 1974).
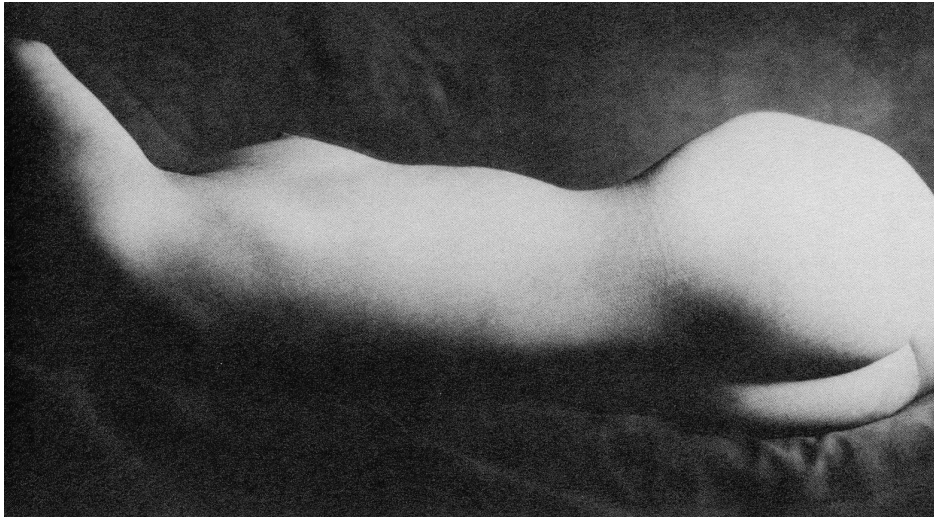
Fig. 3. Brassaï (Gyula Halász), *Nu 115,* 1932-33, silver print, 18.4 x 29.8 cm, Madame Brassaï Collection, Paris.

Fig. 4. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled (Cut-Out),* c.1948-50, oil, enamel, aluminium paint, and mixed mediums on cardboard and canvas, 77.3 x 57 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki.

Fig. 5. Jackson Pollock, *The Wooden Horse: Number 10A 1948,* 1948, oil, enamel, and wood hobbyhorse head on brown cotton canvas, mounted on fibreboard, 90.1 x 190.5 cm, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Fig. 6. Nicolas Poussin, *The Massacre of the Innocents,* 1630-31, oil on canvas, 147 x 171.1cm, Musée Condé, Chantilly.

Fig. 7. Sergei Eisenstein, Director, Still from *The Battleship Potemkin,* 1925.

Fig. 8. Francis Bacon, *Study After Velàsquez's Portrait of Innocent X,* 1953, oil on canvas, 153 x 118 cm, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines. Nathan Emory Coffin Collection. Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust.

Fig. 9. Diego Velàsquez, *Pope Innocent X,* 1650, oil on canvas, 140 x 120cm, Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome.
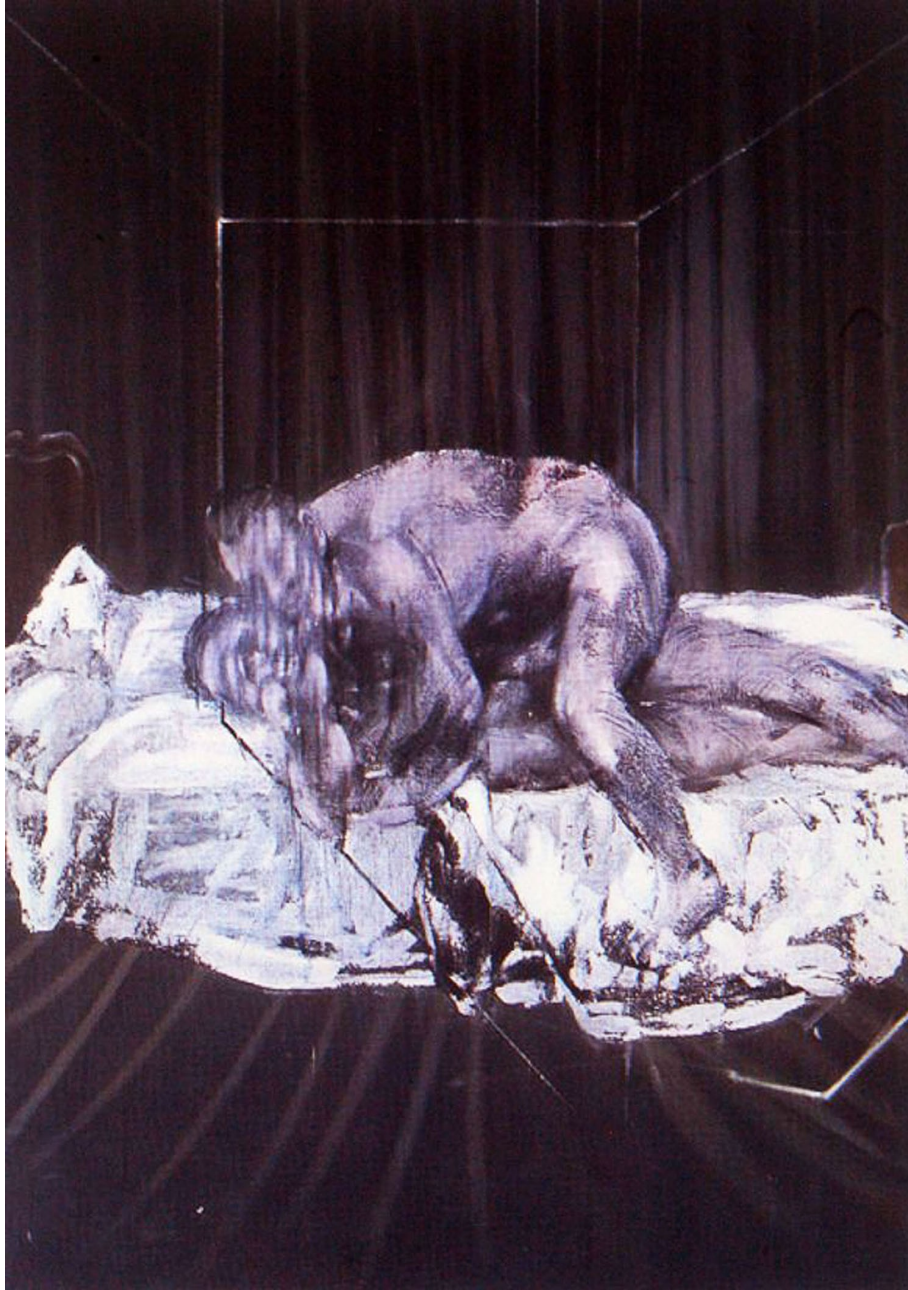
Fig. 10. Francis Bacon, *Two Figures,* 1953, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 116.5 cm, Private Collection.

Fig. 11. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Poor-racer,* 2009, mixed media. Commissioned by The Physics Room in association with Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. Supported by Pro Helvetia and Canterbury Community Trust, Christchurch.

Fig. 12. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Sovenirs du XXème Siècle,* 1997, Prints, paper, photocopies, aluminium foil, golden paper, adhesive tape, fabric, plates, t-shirts, glasses, caps, decanters, scarves, clothes pegs, rope, plushs, video tape; 'Ici et Maintenant', market, Pantin, France. Organised by APSV, Parc de la Villette, Paris.

Fig. 13. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit,* 1992, Wood, cardboard, paper, prints, adhesive tape, sponge, Paris.

Figs. 14. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit,* 1992, Wood, cardboard, paper, prints, adhesive tape, sponge, Paris.

Figs. 15. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit,* 1992, Wood, cardboard, paper, prints, adhesive tape, sponge, Paris.

Figs. 16-17. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument,* 2002, Mixed media, Documenta 11, Kassel.

Figs. 18-19. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument,* 2002, Mixed media, Documenta 11, Kassel.

Fig. 20. *Manuscript page by Georges Bataille relating to the project for a 'Universal history'. Archive Editions Gallimard.* Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography.* Translation by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. London: Verso, 2002.
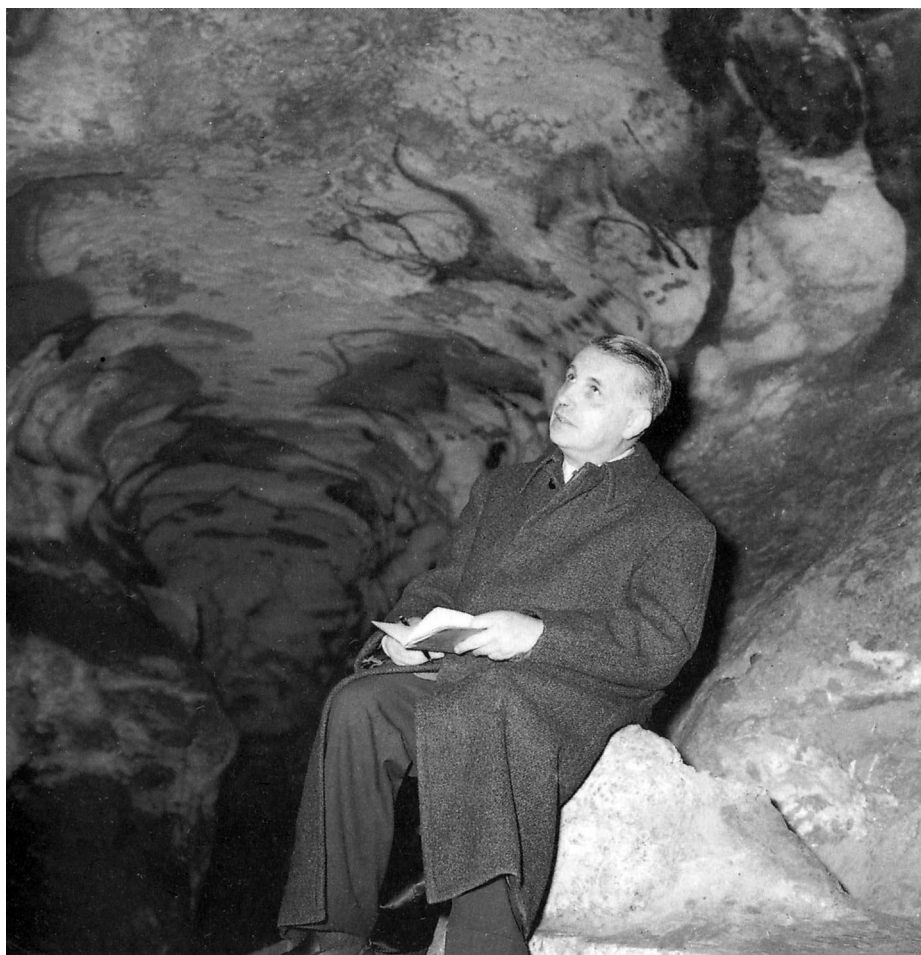
Fig. 21. *Georges Bataille in the Lascaux caves. © Editions d'Art Albert Skira.* Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography.* Translation by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. London: Verso, 2002.