

Inverted Surfaces: Bataille's "Pineal Eye" and the Mythopoetics of Augury

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ABSTRACT

Bataille values modern poetic language, along with ritual sacrifice and eroticism, because it is an explosive force which exhausts or "sacrifices" itself and thus can lead or point us toward "the sacred." Yet he feels that poetry, in order to do this, cannot be a total expenditure or self-negation—which traps us within Hegelian discourse by giving us finally the "meaning" of negation—but rather must be a negation of *this* negation. While agreeing with Nancy that Bataille is nonetheless, in his critical writing on poetry (e.g. *Inner Experience*), still trapped within just such an onto-theological/Hegelian mode of thought or discourse, I argue that he can no longer be accused of this in his highly poetic writing in *Visions of Excess*, inasmuch as here a quite different (non-Hegelian, non-Derridean) speech-writing duality is at play. In a close reading of two crucial passages from *Visions of Excess*, "Pineal Eye" and "Solar Anus," and with reference to Kristeva's notions of "poetic language" and "rejection" and Deleuze's "corporeal speech," I hypothesize that here we are dealing with a more primordial and cosmogonic speech/writing polarity. "Poetic speech" is now being understood as the reversible "inner noise" of the body, and "poetic writing" as a kind of pictographic mapping of topocosmic (earth-sky-body) surfaces which seems to work through the force of *inversion*. Suggesting (with allusion to Deleuze's Aion as the "flat surface of time") that this cosmographic writing not only maps the axes of cosmogonic world-space but also maps time "onto" this space by flattening out linear time, I further develop this notion of writing by comparing it to ancient "divinatory writing": in ritual augury the diviner "reads" the inner surface of just-sacrificed animals' bodies—or more properly the outer surfaces of inner body parts—so that writing has now become not the freezing into "meaning" of poetic speech (where this speech is correlated with the "explosion" of life/the living body) but a more extreme manifestation of its self-destructive force. My interpretation of Bataille's "pineal eye" located at the top of our heads—and its correlate, the "solar anus" as aperture in the inner/outer sky-surface—leads to some final reflections on this "anthropological" (or "pre-human") speech/writing polarity: here the writing is no longer human, and the human reader (diviner) of these merely contingent (natural) signs has an interpretive power or authority whose arbitrariness echoes the violent randomness of the "writing."

Keywords

inversion, surfaces, poetic speech, divinatory writing,
cosmogony, topocosmic, sacrifice, augury

Bataille envisions modern *poesis* as an explosive force, a momentary, random and directionless “sacrifice of language,” a violent self-expenditure which accomplishes nothing, reveals nothing. Therefore the *speaking* of modern poetic language (of poetry “since Mallarmé”)¹ will, like the performance of ritual sacrifice and acts of extreme eroticism, offer us an approach to the sacred. For this sacred is itself the feeling of *loss*—of nothingness, negativity, absence, the unknowable, the life/death interface at the moment of murder; it is something we could never actually reach, an experience we could never really have, except perhaps in that momentary, self-exhausting explosion of the sacrifice, of the orgasm, and/or of poetic speech.

But in his “Digression on Poetry and Marcel Proust” (itself a digression on/from “Nietzsche”), Bataille also sees that this poetic form of sacrifice, this “divining of ruins secretly expected” (*Inner Experience* 149),² cannot quite match his “vision” of it. It is already a diminished form—thus its “self-destruction” and “divining of ruins” also take on an ironic sense—for, trapped within language, the poem is forced to *represent* or *imitate* an experience, however non-rational or negative (e.g. the “sense of nothingness”). This distinguishes poetry from the essentially non-verbal activities of ritual sacrifice and eroticism, though even the latter “always ends up limiting its desire to the conjugal possession of its object” (Arnould 89), and ritual sacrifice itself can be, again, only a means of *approach* to an essentially “negative” or “absent” sacred, indeed an “impossible” (unknowable and/or meaningless) one. The problem is that all of these means of approaching it conserve “the possibility of enunciating the meaning of this destruction” (Arnould 89); poetic language not only “conserves the possibility” but actually “enunciates” this meaning.

In fact Bataille is responding to the French symbolist tradition, specifically Mallarmé, and this problem of the “impossible self-sacrifice of poetic language” can be further elucidated by looking at Kristeva’s discussion of Mallarmé’s *Igitur*:

Mallarmé’s *Igitur* [is] a hazardous act of putting into play the disappearances of the symbolic; Mallarmé calls it “chance” (*le hasard*). In order to come about, this practice incorporates the symbolic, but expends itself while bringing it about. Such a practice is neither science nor madness—neither time nor its loss. Indeed the character in this scene is logic itself—*Igitur* [in Latin: therefore]—which has become its interdependent

¹ Foucault, “Madness, the Absence of Work.” See note 36.

² *Inner Experience* will be hereafter abbreviated as *IE*.

opposite—madness—in order to call attention to what is lacking in both: active chance, which cannot be discursively, linearly stated—*A Throw of the Dice* will be its realization in language. (Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* 227)

Like Bataille after him Mallarmé sees modern *poesis*, modern poetic language beginning from the “revolution” of French symbolism, as a praxis, a dynamic process, the actualization of pure chance, a (Nietzschean, Mallarmean) dice-throw. The force behind this modern poetic contingency is really the semiotic freedom or wildness through which virtually *any* possible metaphorical connection between terms may be allowed within *langue*.³ But if this “chance” is the chaotic violence of a *semiosis*, the force of poetic speech which could never be “civilized” as a coherent rational meaning (as by Kristeva’s symbolic operation upon the raw semiotic drives), then while the semiotic explosion of the poem constantly “points toward the future”—in the sense that each successive moment in/of the poem’s “sense” is totally unpredictable⁴—the poem cannot actually “divine” or “predict” the future (as a coherent pattern of meaning). For Mallarmé, Bataille and Kristeva the “problem” of modern poetic language will then be that it in effect threatens to destroy its own original and immediate force of/as pure (linguistic, lexical) randomness, pure contingency, by “becoming sacred” (Bataille) or “becoming a prediction of the future” (Mallarmé, Kristeva); that is, by becoming a symbolic representation, transcendent signified, “meaning” that can

³ In post-romantic French symbolist poetry (mid to late 19th century) and surrealist prose and poetry (early 20th century) the linguistic text’s new energy seems to derive from its extreme wildness, its freedom in connecting or juxtaposing normally (logically) unrelated words, terms, signifiers within the linguistic field or matrix (i.e., Bataille: “the horse teeth of the stars”; Stevens: “the Emperor of ice cream”). It is as if elements that were not “meant” to be yoked together within the system are now joined “by force,” intensifying or laying bare the implicit rifts between them; these metaphoric connections are totally *unexpected* by the reader, so that the force of a rupture within *langue* here is also the shock we experience in reading, its contingency akin to that of random acts of violence perpetrated against us. In a sense the potential energy of this network of totally random connections is actualized as “explosive force” (Bataille’s fiery “expenditure”) in the poem’s utterance (*parole*). However—this is the crucial issue—such explosions are momentary; they burn out. (The “any” of the “virtually *any* possible connection between terms” also may suggest Deleuze’s “pure disjunction” of the “infinite verb” in *The Logic of Sense*.)

⁴ In “Before Sunrise” (*Zarathustra* III) the male speaker sees the female “heaven over me, pure and high! [...] [as] a dance floor for divine accidents [...] a divine table for divine dice and dice players” (Kaufmann 278). Deleuze’s interpretation of the eternal return as “repetition of difference” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy, Difference and Repetition*) takes this “return” as a series of successive dice-throws: each is an opening out into unpredictable possibilities yet there is a certain encompassing “finitude” (given the nature of dice) as well. Rather than look at “the same” and think it as repeating, Deleuze looks at repetition and thinks it as “self-difference” (the explosive “proliferation” of a dice-throw).

be read, interpreted. The “impossibility” of the poem’s “never abolishing chance” is precisely the “theme” of Mallarmé’s *Coup de Dés*,⁵ upon whose last lines Kristeva comments:

This “last point which sanctifies” the throw of the dice is what we have called a thetic moment of the signifying process and is precisely what makes this game a practice. But this practice (this “Act”) is acted upon by “chance”—the nonsymbolic expenditure, the very semiotic game of dice: this is what poetic practice means to Igitur [“therefore” in Latin], the logical madman: In short, in an act where chance is in play, it is always chance which accomplishes its own idea by affirming or denying itself. Faced with the existence of chance, negation and affirmation come to naught. Chance contains the Absurd—implies it, though in a latent state—and prevents it from existing, which allows the Infinite to be [...]. To personify infinity is to deny chance, abolish ruptures, immobilize the infinite, make it exist, and represent it: the infinite, Igitur, is [...] the “madman” who possesses the future: the prophet, “a throw of the dice that fulfills a prediction,” “no chance in any sense.” [...] “The infinite emerges out of chance, which you have denied. You, mathematicians, have died—I

⁵ “UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS quand bien même lancé dans des circonstances éternelles du fond d’un naufrage soit que l’Abîme blanchi étale furieux sous une inclinaison plane désespérément d’aile la sienne par avance retombée d’un mal à dresser le vol [...] s’agite et mêle au poing qui l’étreindrait comme on menace un destin et les vents l’unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre Esprit pour le jeter dans la tempête hésite en reposer la division [...] cadaver par le bras écarte du secret qu’il detient [...] cette conjonction suprême avec la probabilité [...] N’ABOLIRA [...] c’était le nombre issu stellaire existât-il autrement qu’hallucination éparses d’agonie [...] LE HASARD [...] RIEN [...] N’AURA EU LIEU [...] QUE LE LIEU [...] EXCEPTÉ [...] PEUT-ÊTRE [...] UNE CONSTELLATION froide d’oubli et de désuétude pas tant qu’elle n’énumère sur quelque surface vacante de supérieure le heurt successif sidéralement d’un compte total en formation veillant doutant roulant brillant et méditant avant de s’arrêter à quelque point dernier qui le sacre Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés” (Mallarmé, *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’Abolira le Hasard*, Hartley 213-33).

“A DICE-THROW / NEVER / even cast in eternal circumstances / from the depth of a ship-wreck / whether the Abyss whitened at slack tide and furious beneath an inclination hover desperately with wings (its own) fallen back in advance from a difficulty of trimming its flight [...] is brandished and mingles with the fist which might grip it / as a destiny and the winds are threatened / the sole Number which cannot be another / Mind to throw it into the storm and refold its division [...] a corpse kept apart by the arm from the secret it holds [...] WILL ABOLISH [...] CHANCE [...] NOTHING [...] WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE [...] EXCEPT THE PLACE [...] EXCEPT [...] PERHAPS [...] A CONSTELLATION / cold with forgetfulness and disuse—not so much that it does not number on some empty and upper surface the successive shock after the manner of stars of a total addition in formation / watching / doubting / revolving / shining and meditating / before stopping at some final point which consecrates it / Every Thought gives off a Dice Throw” (Mallarmé, “A Dice-Throw Never Will Abolish Chance”).

am projected as the absolute.” (228-29)

Thus Kristeva sees Mallarmé as being preoccupied with something like the same problem that preoccupied Bataille—the impossibility of actually *having* a poetics of pure chance in which “negation and affirmation come to naught,” for there will always be a self-negation and/or self-affirmation of this chance which leads us to (nothingness and/or) infinity, the denial of chance. The “throw of the dice that fulfills a prediction” is, Igitur says, “no chance in any sense”: “The infinite [logical abstraction] emerges out of chance, which you have denied.” We might then say that the pure (contingent, semiotic) force of speech always becomes solidified as a (static) “writing” which is something different from itself (as speech). If Mallarmé realizes he cannot “freeze” the contingent, transient force of modern *poesis* (Kristeva’s semiotic “speech”), its “pure chance,” without destroying it, then Bataille realizes that it is impossible for the self-consuming flame of his *poesis* or poetic speech to fully burn itself out, thereby giving us access to the sacred, inasmuch as its very “burning” will still be represented (frozen perhaps) in “symbolic language” or “writing.”

The sense in which I have just used “speech”/“writing” is obviously not a Derridean one, nor does Kristeva really use the terms (at least explicitly) in this way. My main argument here will be based on an interpretation of Bataille’s *Visions of Excess* in the light of (what I take to be) a rather different sort of *writing/speech* polarity. But the easiest way to clarify this will be by returning to the Bataillan problem of the “impossible sacrifice of poetry” with which we began.

I. Negativity and the Problem of Speech/Writing

Bataille’s problem in his more “critical” writing is that he seems to be caught between Hegelianism and anti-Hegelianism. A well-known site for the latter is the essay “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice.” Here Bataille, noting that for Hegel “it is precisely in sacrifice that ‘death lives a human life’” (the latter is Kojève’s phrase), quotes from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment. It does not attain that (prodigious) power by being the Positive that turns away from the Negative [...] no, Spirit is that power only in the degree to which it contemplates the Negative face to face [and] dwells with it [...]” (Botting 286).

Bataille's critique is that Hegel is caught within the relentless logic of his dialectic: while necessarily facing death (the Negative) directly at one *moment*, at a higher level of synthesis (in a state of "absolute knowledge") he will have transcended it. Hegel is not really speaking here (though he thinks he is) of "common men"; there are "profound differences between the man of sacrifice, acting in ignorance (unconscious) of the full scope of what he is doing"—here we may think of both the performer and victim of ritual sacrifice—"and the Sage (Hegel) surrendering to the implications of a knowledge which, in his own eyes, is absolute" (286). Thus if Hegel's master puts his life at stake he can always "absolutely" recover it through the movement of the *aufhebung*; Hegelian negativity will be incorporated, as *other*, back into an ever-expanding consciousness (Hsiao 58). But for Bataille there is a sort of left-over, remainder or "excess" of negativity:

Bataille suggests that putting negativity to work [as action, the driving force of the dialectic] does not exhaust its power in the positive outcome of the "negation of the negation" [...]: "if action ('doing') is—as Hegel says—negativity, the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has 'nothing more to do' disappears or remains in a state of 'unemployed negativity'" ["Letter to X"]. Bataille inclines toward the latter. Something may be left over, an energy to be expended or consumed, a negativity in excess of work and directed action [...]. The dynamic momentum of negativity is neither contained in a productive system of thought nor expended in exhaustion. It remains at play in the "double movement" of action and questioning or contestation, in which the one is endlessly opposed to the other in a continual "rupturing and disequilibrium of the system." (Botting 15)

The point here is that the "total anti-Hegelianism" of an "absolute expenditure" or "negativity without reserve" remains still, in a sense, trapped within Hegelian discourse. But this endless double movement, in preventing the total expenditure or exhaustion of negativity, prevents us from falling into the (anti-)Hegelianism of a "negativity without reserve" and an "absolute risking of death" (Hsiao 61). For Bataille it is above all sexuality, poetry and laughter which keep us within the double movement, by interrupting (or rupturing) the movement through which negativity absorbs and transcends itself: "But desire, poetry, laughter, unceasingly cause life to

slip in the opposite direction, moving from the known to the unknown” (*IE* 111). The problem with poetic language in particular is, however, that this sort of interruption (of a “self-questioning” or “ironic distance”) can no more allow the poem to fully “burn itself out” (in/as the “sacred”) than can the ultimately Hegelian move toward total self-negation—which implies, again, the expression of a “sense,” a transcendental “signified.” And so we come back to the paradox of the impossible self-negation, or “impossible self-sacrifice,” of poetic language. Responding to what may seem the dead end or infinite regress of such a paradox, Nancy, following Derrida, feels that Bataille’s entire sacrificial model as a way of conceptualizing *finitude*, even his “self-sacrifice” of Rimbaud,⁶ is problematic: this model is the “vehicle of an ‘onto-theological’ appropriation,” for by insisting “upon this finite moment”—of life/death, the sacred—“in order to escape the dialectical comedy that transforms sacrifice into an ideal process,” Bataille still retains the dialectical logic of finite/infinite or immanence/transcendence, he still “remains caught in the logic of the idealist tradition” (Arnould 86-87), caught within a Hegelian, onto-theological mode of thought.⁷

Here I will concede that Bataille does remain, in his “critical” writing (e.g., *Inner Experience* and “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”), unable to escape recursive dilemmas of negativity and impossibility which imply that is he is, after all, still somehow caught within Hegelian thought or discourse. But I will argue that he manages to escape all remnants of Hegelianism (and also “Derrideanism”)⁸ in the much freer, much more

⁶ In the digression in *Inner Experience* which follows “Digression on Poetry” (itself a digression from “Nietzsche”) entitled “On a Sacrifice in Which Everything Is Victim” (152), Bataille suggests that Rimbaud, by abandoning the writing of poetry while still young and thus “sacrificing the very possibility of enunciating (speaking, articulating) his sacrifice,” embodies in effect “a second sacrifice, a ‘sacrifice to the second degree,’ able to present, in its repeated immolation, the abolition of the ‘meaning of destruction’ still conserved in the initial sacrifice” (Arnould 89).

⁷ Arnould’s own argument that Bataille, with his “Rimbaudian self-sacrifice,” does escape Hegelianism seems unconvincing to me—precisely because, like Nancy and indeed (I would argue) Derrida, she still uses an ultimately Hegelian discourse that depends on a “rationalized” view of speech/writing.

⁸ A Derridean speech/writing duality is after all crucial to the Nancian-Arnouldian discourse of Bataille’s “impossible sacrifice of poetry,” that is, the critical discourse of his difficulty in escaping from Western metaphysics or ontotheology. For while supporting Bataille’s move from the “restricted” Hegelian economy to a “general” Hegelian economy with its “excess negativity,” Derrida sees Bataille as being nonetheless still too Platonized (and Hegelianized). Arnould notes that “Derrida in his article on Bataille entitled ‘*De l’économie restreinte à l’économie générale*’ had already noted this complicity of the Bataillan critique of writing with Platonistic writing,” for the “figure of a self-immolating Rimbaud [...] recasts and replays the much-talked-about ‘sacrifice of poetry’ constitutive of the Western philosophical tradition [...]. [T]he emblematic scene of the birth of philosophy in the West has traditionally been represented both by the sacrifice of the poet in the public square and the legendary tale of self-sacrifice depicting young Plato burning his poems. Now, Bataille, it would seem, is reproducing these scenes [...]. Plato’s sacrifices sought to demonstrate that truth, though hidden, is accessible through the sacrificial machination of a philosophical dialectic. Similarly, Bataille asserts that finitude,

directly empirical or materialistic (thus also poetic) writing of *Visions of Excess*; furthermore I will argue that this freedom, tied to a kind of radical materialism, is possible precisely because there is a different duality of speech/writing at work (or play) here. It is a duality much more relevant to the (more empirical) discourse of Kristeva, a thinker directly influenced by Bataille as well as Lacan. Part of Kristeva's psychoanalytic critique of Hegel's totalizing, onto-theological *aufhebung* of negativity in *Revolution* is her notion of "rejection":

Just as the acquisition of language is based on both the fundamental experience of separation in the anal phase and the suppression of anality, rejection is at once the precondition of the establishment of the symbolic and its repressed element [...]. Rejection in [or of] the signifying process of poetic language [...] therefore emerges as one of the forms of the death drive's transgression against "the imperative of survival" (Land 46). It is not, as Kristeva puts it, "a form of murder" (72) that will annihilate the symbolic function. Rather, the *jouissance* derived from rejection represents "the pleasure underlying the symbolic function of expulsion, a pleasure which this function represses but that can return to it [and] [...] disturb, indeed dismantle [it]." Therefore, Kristeva contends, the signifying process of poetic language can be construed as "a reactivation of

though absent, is accessible through the negativity and self-immolation of the experience" (91).

Plato of course (*Ion*) distinguishes the irrational (and mythic) "divine inspiration" of *poesis* from the logical-scientific basis of philosophical thought. But while Plato, for Derrida ("Plato's Pharmacy"), thinks he is "reviving" the living Logos (Speech) of philosophy by rejecting (sacrificing) an ontologically secondary mythopoetic writing, in fact this Logos is always already embedded within the wider field of mythopoetic *écriture*; the latter maintains a certain (still ambiguous) relationship with the discourse of "poetic speech," that is, of (earthly, irrational, feminine) "divine inspiration" spurned in the *Ion*. It is this poetic speech-poetic writing relationship which is at stake in Bataille. Thus on the Nancian reading Bataille wants not just his poetic speech to burn itself out but also the very possibility of expressing the meaning of this speech in writing to be negated; but (Derrida, Nancy) this latter negation is not possible. However, such a critical discourse assumes a certain, essentially post-Platonic context for understanding or defining the terms (poetic) "speech" and (mythopoetic) "writing," one which draws finally from the traditional (and Saussurian) notion of writing as a "secondary" transcription of speech. Derrida does suggest, in *Grammatology*, that Chinese pictographic writing implies a culture which developed to a certain degree "outside of all logocentrism," and his *écriture* will also include "algebra." Yet the key Derridean point is that, as a mode of meaning-expression, speech too is (like writing) always already "deferred" (self-delayed, self-different), is thus in effect one *part* of a "larger" *arche-écriture*, a formal "system" or "chain" of (indefinitely deferred, "spaced out") signifiers—and not, certainly, that writing could either "freeze" speech (making the self-sacrifice of poetry and thus the move to the "sacred" impossible) or be just as active as speech, even like speech explode, self-destruct, burn itself out (making this move possible). On this reading Derrida, and thus too Nancy, become more or less irrelevant to Bataille's "problem" of the impossible sacrifice of poetry.

anality,” which embodies the death drive (149). (qtd. in Hsiao 59-60)

But this force of rejection—as the “expulsion” of an anality closely tied to Freud’s *thanatos* (death drive)—is here also implicitly related to (the *jouissance* of) “baby talk” in/of the semiotic *khora*, that is, to Kristeva’s primordial or pre-Oedipal “poetic speech”⁹ as a sort of semiotic drive. The “transcendental empiricist” Deleuze, drawing from Bataille and the schizophrenic discourse of Artaud in *The Logic of Sense* (186-93),¹⁰ connects thinking to speech and thus to the *mouth* and (by extension) entire alimentary canal (digestive tract), with its more primitive, virtually “reversible” functions of eating and excretion:

[...] we posit eating and speaking by right as two series already separated at the surface. They are separated and articulated by the event which is the result of one of them [...]. The depth is clamorous [...] the shattered sounds of internal objects, and also the inarticulate howls-breaths of the body without organs which respond to them—all of this forms a sonorous system bearing witness to the oral-anal voracity [...] speaking will be fashioned out of eating and shitting, language and its univocity will be sculpted out of shit [...]. (LS 186-93)

Here then I want to suggest that in Bataille’s *Visions of Excess*¹¹ we are dealing, on the most “fundamental” level at least, with a much more empirical (material) speech-writing duality than what we get in the discourse of philosophers from Plato through Nancy—one that is more “primitive,” more “anthropological,” one which directly “embodies” corporeal organs because it is grounded in (or again itself embodies) the primordial, cosmogonic, “mythopoetic” thinking of ancient peoples.¹² For now *poetic speech* becomes a pure, unarticulated flow of sound exploding out from the inner body (a “cry” or “scream,” “laughter,” Kristeva’s semiotic “baby talk,” Deleuze’s inner-body “noise”). The image (meta-anthropological vision, fantasy) of a “pineal eye” at the top of our head which would always “see the sky” can then

⁹ The crucial limitation of Derridean/Nancian discourse is that it cannot really deal with poetic speech.

¹⁰ *The Logic of Sense* will be hereafter abbreviated as *LS*.

¹¹ *Visions of Excess* will be hereafter abbreviated as *VE*.

¹² I will leave open the question as to what degree Bataille, as a 20th-century French surrealist writer, is merely imitating—perhaps through a sort of “mimetic desire” (Girard)—a much older and more primitive “form” or “style” of writing/discourse/thinking.

suggest the other side of Bataille's anthropological poetics here, his cosmographic diagrams and world-axes, his purely visual, topocosmic (body/earth/sky) "copulations" and "inversions" (e.g. the "solar anus"), his *writing*. And yet, if for the early Derrida "speech is also writing" then for the visionary Bataille "writing is also speech"; or perhaps these terms are joined in that Deleuzian biogenetic proximity of mammalian mouth/eye/brain which is simultaneously the violent "explosion" of (modern-ancient) *mythopoesis*:

The eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head [...] [which] instead of locking up life as money is locked in a safe, spends it without counting, for, at the end of this erotic metamorphosis, the head has received the *electric power of points* ("The Pineal Eye," VE 82). [...] When I solicit gently, in the very heart of anguish, a strange absurdity, an eye opens itself at the summit, in the middle of my skull. This eye which, to contemplate the sun, face to face in its nudity, opens up to it in all its glory, does not arise from my reason: it is a cry which escapes me. For at the moment when the lightning stroke blinds me, I am the flash of a broken life, and this life—anguish and vertigo—opening itself up to an infinite void, is ruptured and spends itself all at once in this void. ("The Blue of Noon," IE 77)

Clearly here, and in both passages, any logical-metaphysical discourse (and not just that of the Platonic Logos) which forces the "impossible sacrifice" of poetic speech/writing is being *rejected*; what we have instead is a mythopoetic speech/writing which may seem to cast the whole Platonic-Nancian problematic (or discourse) of Bataille's impossible sacrifice of poetry in a questionable light. This is because now "writing" becomes indistinguishable from (the pineal eye's) "seeing." Virtually identical with the explosion of poetic speech ("This eye [...] is a cry which escapes me"), this seeing/writing/picturing differs from it only in its more extreme self-destructiveness: it is "not a product of the understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration." I now want to develop more fully an interpretation of this speech/writing polarity in *Visions of Excess*, particularly in "The

Pineal Eye” and “The Solar Anus,” which sees writing not as a wider “field” (Derrida) or “freezing into meaning” (Mallarmé) of (poetic) speech but rather as its fuller explosion or self-destruction, where this clearly cannot imply either “absolute negation” in the Hegelian sense or (more obviously perhaps) the double-movement of self-questioning. I take this polarity as functioning here through the active *inversion* or *extroversion* of corporeal and meta-corporeal (topocosmic) *surfaces*.¹³ My aim is finally to show how the terms of the logical-metaphysical problem/discourse of “impossible sacrifice” in effect dissolve into, or are subsumed within, this wider and deeper “anthropological” perspective, context, discourse.

II. Bataille’s Topocosmic Inversions in “Solar Anus” and “Pineal Eye”

Nietzsche is returning to the cosmogonic perspective of the ancient Greeks not just in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where tragic drama is interpreted (in a more-or-less rational, discursive style) in terms of human violence and other chaotic impulses of our deep nature, but also, and more directly, in the strikingly primitive corporeal inversions of *Zarathustra*, a book whose mythopoetic discourse combines Tiresian aphoristic riddle-speech with Cassandra’s wild “lyric voice.”¹⁴ Thus in *Zarathustra*’s

¹³ “Pineal body”: “a small, reddish, cone-shaped *body* on the dorsal portion of the brain of all vertebrates: its function is obscure though in some lizards it is connected to a median eyelike structure on the dorsal surface of the head.” “Dorsal”: “on the back”; (botany) “on the *underside of a surface*.” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 2nd ed, 1986; my emphasis)

¹⁴ Aeschylus’s Cassandra, having seen her own and Agamemnon’s imminent death at Clytemnestra’s hands in a sort of inner vision as she staggers about the stage, cries out “Aieeee! [...] The birth-pangs of the seer!” Surrounded by Clytemnestra’s “smoking victims,” those already-sacrificed creatures that await the ritual celebration of the king’s homecoming, the soon-to-be-sacrificed prophetess recounts the painfulness of Apollo’s prophetic “gift” which has been given her through an act of sexual violation. The pain of always knowing the future as well as past, though no one will believe her prophecies, is then closely tied to the pain of the (foreshortened) rape itself; the metaphorical “gap” here (between bodily pain and the pain of “always knowing”) is bridged by the trope of the seer’s (knower’s) “birth-pangs.” That is, Cassandra gives birth to her prophetic visions, among which we get (iteratively or self-reflexively) the image of the cursed House of Atreus as an “echoing womb of guilt.” She is generating these visions out of herself, out of her own body, and as Kristeva (following Bataille) points out in her theory of “abjection,” childbirth is a shockingly abject process of *inversion or extroversion* of the mother’s body. Likewise, Sophocles’s Tiresias speaks of the suffering of the seer whose truth no one wants to hear, and Oedipus himself seeks the “monstrous birth” of the truth, as if such secrets as incest and patricide were after all the monstrousness of our own inner body—or of the inner body of humankind—now “coming out” through the speech of the seer.

Prologue we are told to value the earth above the “intestines of the unknowable”: to speak of the “intestines” (*Eingeweide*, “inner meadow”) of such an abstract (and phallogocentric) term as the Unknowable (or God) is a paradoxical and shocking trope of inversion, though one which echoes the madman’s claim, in *Joyful Wisdom*, that not only is God dead (for we have killed him, *sacrificed* him with our “bloody knives”)¹⁵ but “his body is putrefying.” We get a more complex, and more overtly mythopoetic or topocosmic, inversion in “The Convalescent” of *Zarathustra III*.

“Up, abysmal thought, out of my depth!” I am your cock and dawn, sleepy worm. Up! Up! My voice shall yet crow you awake! [...] Listen! For I want to hear you [...]. You are stirring, stretching, wheezing? Up! Up! You shall not wheeze but speak to me, Zarathustra [...] I summon you, my most abysmal thought! My abyss speaks, I have turned my ultimate depth inside out into the light [...]. Give me your hand!” (Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* 327-28)¹⁶

Here the speaker’s *abgründlichste Gedanken*, “most abysmal thought,” is the thought of “eternal return,” the fateful, weighty thought that all things, including this life itself, must return again and again exactly as they are now; the conception of the return has already been symbolized in “The Vision and the Riddle” as worm, snake, *uroboros* that bites (like time) its own tail. But what does this signify, that such a fearful thought, now concretized as itself the very “worm” that it “thinks,” should come up (like speech) out of our inner depths, making us turn our own “ultimate depth inside out into the light”? Perhaps speech itself, or the speaker’s voice, has been “inverted” here—or it has been split into two voices, the split-voice of a schizophrenic, one of them speaking “from the head” to the emerging snake and “summoning” it, the other the abysmal, intestinal thought/voice of the *uroboros* itself. Yet thinking of the passage in more fully mythopoetic, topocosmic terms, it is as if the cosmic rhythm of this return, as concept and as the human mind/voice that thinks/speaks it, will itself be reversed, re-inverted, re-folded, recoiled, repeated at an indefinite number of levels, within an indefinite series of “bodies,” each larger than the last—with the universe itself (in that most primordial of cosmogonic images) as the largest “body.”

¹⁵ A striking trope which influences Bataille’s connection of sacrifice to “atheology,” loss, nothingness: normally animals are sacrificed to/for “the gods”; here God is *Himself* sacrificed—to what or whom?

¹⁶ *The Portable Nietzsche* will be hereafter abbreviated as *PN*.

Or could we also read the speaker's "choking on his own thought" here as a sort of self-destructive act, a self-sacrifice? Bataille places his own *poesis* (poetic force, explosion, expenditure) of sacrifice very much within the primitive tradition of a mythopoetic, cosmogonic thinking that is primarily visual, that thinks through tropes of corporeal-cosmic reversal or inversion. "The Pineal Eye" in *Visions of Excess* describes—in a scene of shockingly, revoltingly random (arbitrary) and gratuitous violence—the ritual sacrifice of a female gibbon by burying it alive and upside down:

Once she is trussed up like a chicken—with her legs folded back against her body—the three men tie her upside down to a stake planted in the middle of the pit. Attached in this way, her bestially howling mouth swallows dirt while, on the other end, her huge screaming pink anal protrusion stares at the sky like a flower [...] in the blink of an eye, the horrible beast is buried alive [...] all the stupefied glances are fixed on the filthy, beautifully blood-colored solar prominence, sticking out of the earth [...] contracted by strangulation, and even by death, the beautiful boil of red flesh is set ablaze with stinking brown flames [...]. The sun vomited like a sick drunk above the mouths full of comic screams, in the void of an absurd sky. (85-86)

The reader is of course *meant* to be shocked and (like the vomiting sun itself) sickened by this scene of a female gibbon buried alive and upside down: only through such extreme physical reactions can we reach (mentally, spiritually, though these terms must be qualified as our "heads" are now "cut off")¹⁷ toward that "sacred" which is itself tied to feelings of unknowability, impossibility, loss, negativity, nothingness. But what is most shocking in passages like this is precisely what is most primitive¹⁸—the tropes of corporeal and/or corporeal-cosmic inversion. The physically inverted animal depicts or embodies what may have been implicit in Nietzsche's *uroboros* passage—the reversibility and/or inversibility of a speaking, thinking, expending mouth ("her bestially howling mouth swallows dirt") and expending anus ("her huge screaming pink anal protrusion stares at the sky like a flower"). Our upper-body voice is just as

¹⁷ The allusion is of course to Bataille's "sociological" school and journal, "*Acephalos*" ("headless").

¹⁸ Back behind, that is, Bataille's more immediate context of Breton's surrealism, Artaud's Sadian theater of cruelty, and Mauss's anthropological discussion of the potlatch or "excessive feast"—the "gift" of pure expenditure or waste in primitive societies—and perhaps even underlying the wildly random or "violent" metaphoric jumps and slippages (See note 5).

much a violent force of pure excretion, of random and senseless expenditure—and especially in the case of “poetic speech”—as is our lower-body voice (Deleuze, *LS* 186-93). But on the expanded or projected plane of Bataille’s “topocosmic writing” here, we have the metaphor of the “solar anus”: now we are looking at the sun as an opening in the larger sky-body (or earth-sky-body), of which we are ourselves a small part; we can see it as an aperture in the “inner” surface or the “outer” surface (but this places us further outside) of this cosmogonic body.

This “wedding” and “little copulation,” as Bataille calls it (86) in a phrase that (like the “vomiting sun”) self-reflects on its own poetic technique, “of the stinking hole and the sun [...],” is a recurrent “theme” in *Visions*. The earlier section entitled “Solar Anus” explicitly ties, self-reflexively again, the perspective of the “pineal eye,” the primitive cosmogonic vision of the sun as an orifice of the human body—thus of sky as the outer or inner *surface* of another, much vaster body—to the wildness, violence, randomness, freedom of a “modern *poesis*” in which virtually any metaphoric connection or “copulation” is possible:

It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form. Ever since sentences started to circulate in brains devoted to reflection an effort at total identification has been made, because with the aid of a *copula* each sentence ties one thing to another; all things would be visibly connected if one could discover at a single glance and in its totality the tracings of an Ariadne’s thread leading thought into its own labyrinth. But the copula of terms is no less irritating than the copulation of bodies. And when I scream I AM THE SUN an integral erection results, because the verb to be is the vehicle of amorous frenzy. Everyone is aware that life is parodic and that it lacks an interpretation. Thus lead is the parody of gold. Air is the parody of water. The brain is the parody of the equator. Coitus is the parody of crime. Gold, water, the equator, or crime can each be put forward as the principle of things. And if the origin of things is not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base, but like the circular movement that the planet describes around a mobile center, then a car, a clock, or a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle. (VE 5)

Here the sexual energy imputed to a totalized metaphoric language by the play on “copula” is really one function of the cosmogonic view implicit here; mythopoetic cosmogony is an engendering because in the first place a *gendering* of the world/cosmos. Thus Hesiod says: “First was Chaos, then came Mother Earth and Father sky to cover her, and Eros”; the gods were engendered from the copulation of Earth and Sky. The later Milesian philosophers (*circa.* 500 B.C.) sought the “generative principle” of all things in a single material element (water for Thales, air for Anaximenes); Anaximander, in what Heidegger (*Early Greek Thinking*) calls the “oldest fragment of Western thinking,” claims that the “first principle” is *eteran tina phusin apeiron*, “some other *apeiron* nature,” the “unlimited” or “indefinite” (Kirk 117); but this *apeiron* may well be an hypostasis of Hesiod’s (neuter, or androgynous) personification of Chaos. While the Milesian Heraclitus speaks of the constant flow, change or *circulation* of all things and thus, in effect, of the identity of opposites, the Eleatic Parmenides (forerunner of Plato) speaks of the logically necessary One Being of all things/ideas. Bataille’s “worldview” above is arguably more Heraclitean than Parmenidean, at least if the “totality” of “all things” (all possible meanings) toward which he is thrusting here, whose “tracings” he is seeking, be taken as open-ended rather than as a closed One Being. But it may be fundamentally more Anaximandrian, i.e. more Hesiodic.¹⁹

For the “parodic” qualification here—which may seem to reinforce Bataille’s sense

¹⁹ Bataille’s fascination with Hegel (mainly *via* Kojève’s reading in terms of desire) and Hegelian “negativity” does not at all preclude reading him “cosmogonically.” For Hegel begins his *Science of Logic* with Heraclitus and Parmenides: the initial generation of the dialectic comes from our trying to think “Being,” a term so abstract (it can mean “anything,” even equators and sewing machines) that by “thinking” it we are forced to think its opposite, “Nothing”; the attempt to think both of these “terms” then forces us to the third one, (Heraclitean) “Becoming” or “Change,” and now the dialectic is (in its most fundamental or “ontological” sense) underway. Heraclitus was crucial to Nietzsche and by extension to Bataille; see e.g. Hussey and Stubbs.

Of course, in some way Bataille’s reduction here of metaphorical identity to mere “parody” (the term suggests “parallel” rather than “identical”) debases this whole mythopoetic world-picture, rendering it not serious, comical and/or impossible: such speculations are finally playful, a kind of pure expenditure and waste of thought. This understanding qualifies the fact that “Air is the parody of water” alludes to Anaximenes and Thales; the first “serious” philosophers are also being parodied. “Lead is the parody of gold” refers to later (medieval) alchemy, whose search for a “philosopher’s stone” is already a sort of debasing or “parody” of classical philosophy. Thus on the one hand “The brain is the parody of the equator” suggests a cosmogonic worldview in which “man” (as “god”) is perhaps as large as, or on the same ontological plane with, the earth itself: that is, it is a variation on the “inverted” cosmogonic image of a “solar anus” (human or animal orifice in the sky-surface, sky-body) or “pineal eye” (eye at the top of the head, always seeing the sky directly [VE 79 ff.]); on the other hand it also parodies such a view, or casts it in a “comical” light, and indeed literally or actually to juxtapose an image of the earth’s equator (what would such an image be?) with the image of an equally large and round human brain would be comically absurd.

of poetry as “hopeless loss,” if not also the Derridean-Nancian discourse of the “impossible sacrifice”—need not preclude foregrounding a *positive* force, that is, a self-generating, self-(en)gendering *sexual* force of mythopoesis in Bataille’s thinking/writing. Ancient myth is also infinitely light, playful; the gods do not have to die—it is the mortals who are so deadly serious—and Bataille’s “sacred” is tied, not only to the poetics of sacrifice but also the poetics of laughter, the play of chance and eroticism.²⁰ Thus that image in “Solar Anus” of the folding of thought into its own inward labyrinth—“all things would be visibly connected if one could discover at a single glance and in its totality the tracings of an Ariadne’s thread leading thought into its own labyrinth”—is also (as Ariadne too suggests) a “sexual” image. If it suggests the disappearance, exhaustion (as in “flushing down the drain”), self-destruction, self-sacrifice of thought, and/or its sacrifice at the hands of the Minotaur at the very heart of our thinking, it also lets us *see* the movement of this thought “at a single glance and in its totality”: but in cosmogonic terms this implies the totality of sexual energy. The trope actually does not so much “invert” thought as “unfold” thought’s indefinite infoldedness or inwardness (or, the same thing perhaps, concretize thought as mythic image); a more totalized and sexualized unfolding (uncoiling) would be a *flattening-out*, and “Solar Anus” gives us a *horizontal* topocosmic mapping of earth/sky which thus becomes quite graphic (or “literal”).²¹

²⁰ The “lightness” of the gods and indeed of the whole mythopoetic or cosmogonic worldview is something Nietzsche knew well, though paradoxically this “levity” is really the other side (or the “same side”) of his tragic view, life as pure contingency and *amor fati*, love of our fated (Homeric) human finitude. Back behind the earlier Freud of “Three Essays on Sexuality” (begun in 1905)—and so, I would suggest, behind the inevitable (*for post-Freudians*) interpretations of Bataille’s “mad discourse” in *Visions of Excess* in terms of oral, anal and genital stages, bi- and/or homo-sexuality, sado-masochism—lies, we might say, Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* (1883-85) with its ultimately playful and exuberant tropes of inversion, themselves (as acts of *mythopoesis*) expressions or embodiments of Nietzschean “superhuman” overflow, Bataillian pure expenditure or waste.

²¹ “[...] the great coitus with the celestial atmosphere is regulated by the terrestrial rotation around the sun. Thus even though terrestrial life moves to the rhythm of this rotation, the image of this movement is not the turning earth, but the male shaft penetrating the female and almost entirely emerging, in order to reenter. Love and life appear to be separate only because everything on earth is broken apart by vibrations of various amplitudes and durations. However, there are no vibrations that are not conjugated with a continuous circular movement; in the same way, a locomotive rolling on the surface of the earth is the image of a continuous metamorphosis. Beings only die to be born, in the manner of phalluses that leave bodies in order to enter them. Plants rise in the direction of the sun and then collapse in the direction of the ground [...]. From the movement of the sea, uniform coitus of the earth with the moon, comes the polymorphous and organic coitus of the earth with the sun [...]. The sea continuously jerks off [...]. The terrestrial globe is covered with volcanoes, which serve as its anus. Although this globe eats nothing, it often violently ejects the contents of its entrails [...]. The earth sometimes jerks off in a frenzy, and everything collapses on its surface [...]. Love, then, screams in my own throat; I am the *Jesuve*, the filthy parody of the torrid and blinding sun” (“Solar Anus” 7-9).

Bataille thus longs to “copulate (with)” all terms/ideas/things in the universe through his mythopoetic force: the more encompassing “inversion” is that by which his body/sexual desire, and/or “the god”’s desire, becomes outwardly objectified, “turned inside out” and “flattened out” as this topocosm, this earth/sky map. Whereas in Hesiod’s *Theogony* Mother Earth, Father Sky (to cover her) and Eros (to join the two) come first out of Chaos, here in effect Pre-Socratic metaphysics (i.e. proto-science) is graphically, literally eroticized: “[T]he great coitus with the celestial atmosphere is regulated by the terrestrial rotation around the sun [...]” But within this “scene” we have a more specific inversion of the Hesiodic vertical hierarchy: rather than male sky over female earth (impregnating her with rain), it appears to be male earth on the bottom, its “volcanoes” erupting or “jerking off” (as the sea also “jerks off”)²² in a wild frenzy of bodily inversion or “exhaustion”: “the globe [...] often violently ejects the contents of its entrails.” Thus we picture the male phallus (or “volcano”) on the bottom, as ejaculatory force of a male earth/globe, when “the great coitus with the celestial atmosphere is regulated by the terrestrial rotation around the sun” and “the image of this movement is not the turning earth, but the male shaft penetrating the female and almost entirely emerging, in order to reenter.”²³

Thus we can say that this topocosmically mapped-out desire, this essentially mythopoetic desire, is in the first place the active ejaculatory force of (corporeally

²² Of course Bataille could be accused here, and not only by “feminists,” of an extreme androcentrism or solipsistic male chauvinism: rather than real sex with the female sky/moon/sun (?) the male earth merely masturbates into the (face of the) sky. In certain ways this calls to mind Irigaray’s critique of Nietzsche’s male solipsistic tendencies (grounded in fear of females, or of real heterosexual copulation) in *Amante Marine*. Irigaray sees Nietzsche as obsessed with high mountains (philosophical abstraction), afraid to come down into the sea of “amniotic fluids”: philosophy as (again) mental “masturbation.”

²³ Fruitful comparisons might be drawn with classical Hindu tantric mythopoesis. For instance: “In the central foreground is Siva [...] become Sava, also a ‘corpse,’ split into two inert bodies [...]. The first [...] is the Siva Niskala, ‘without parts’ [...]. Lying on him [...] is another Siva, the Mahakala, ‘Great Time,’ the destroyer, whose posture mimics the contracted immobility, the quasi-nothingness, to which the universe comes in the period separating two cosmic cycles. Yet the fact that he is fixed in such an apparently deathlike position does not prevent Siva-Sava from having an erection. Seated on the god [...] so that he penetrates her, Kalika [...] achieves pleasure and triumph. Another image: The frame is a vast eight-petaled lotus, in the center of which is an entwined couple. Here too the man is lying on his back, his penis penetrating the young woman sitting astride him [...]. She is leaning forward; their faces and breasts are touching [...]. The man is Kama, Desire; the woman is Rati, Pleasure [...]. The normal procedure is for the man to lie on the woman, as the masculine sky covers the feminine earth [...]. The inversion of the positions of the bodies is also a sign of the reversal of [...] the normal hierarchy of the sexes [...] here it symbolizes the triumph of the active feminine *maya* [...] iridescent multiplicity of appearance over the undifferentiated, immutable Absolute [...]. Of all the dramatis personae of the sacrifice [...]. the one whom the texts present most emphatically as feminine is Speech” (Malamoud 75-88)

reversible/inversible) poetic speech. And we are struck by the writer's/earth's (neuter or androgynous?) "scream": "Love, then, screams in my own throat," for "I am the *Jesuve*, the filthy parody of the torrid and blinding sun";²⁴ the self-destructive or self-sacrificing force of this "parody" (which is also the volcano's blind masturbatory ejaculation)²⁵ causes the sky (and/or "everything") to "collapse" on "earth's surface"; if copulation is after all merely masturbation then the explosive force of Bataille's poetic outburst is, like that of a sexual one, a pure expenditure which momentarily expends, exhausts, wastes, "sacrifices" itself. But the point to emphasize here is that this desire as force of poetic *speech* is really mapped out as or within a cosmographic *writing*, an encompassing visual design, scene, diagram whose corporeal/earthly/celestial coordinates, vertical and horizontal axes are roughly set forth by Bataille (in the "mad frenzy" of his "surrealistic" writing) in relation to the perspective of the "pineal eye" at the top of our head, an eye which, like that of a seer or diviner, "reads" the inverted topocosmic surface. For if the normal human eye already expresses the fusion of speech/writing precisely because it is itself caught between the evolutionary thrusts toward (mammalian) horizontality and (vegetable, human) verticality, the "projected" pineal eye is an idealization or glorification of the "fully human".²⁶

Thus the pineal eye, detaching itself from the horizontal system of normal ocular vision, appears in a kind of nimbus of tears, like [...] a human tree. At the same time this ocular tree is only a giant (ignoble) pink penis, drunk with the sun and suggesting [...] the sickening despair of vertigo. In this transfiguration of nature, during which vision itself, attracted by nausea, is torn out and torn apart by the sunbursts into which it stares, the erection ceases to be a painful upheaval on the surface of the earth and, in a vomiting of flavorless blood, it transforms itself into a vertiginous fall in celestial space, accompanied by a horrible cry.²⁷ (VE 83-84)

²⁴ "Woman on top" again; man as the degradation, debasement, "parody" of woman, as is lead of gold? Or, while sky seems to be female here and moon is traditionally female, does the "sun" (as "solar anus") remain "male"—a projection or outer inversion of the male volcano, just as the crowing "cock" is a "solar animal"? Bataille's volcanic "male shaft penetrating the female" tends to point away from taking this as a fundamentally a homoerotic "scene" in which both earth and sky are "male"—a scene which then would also embody "inversion" in this sense.

²⁵ See note 4.

²⁶ Just as Descartes's (17th-century) "pineal gland" in the brain was the point of intersection of purely mental (non-extended in space) and purely spatial (extended) substances. See note 13.

²⁷ The preceding passage reads: "The distribution of organic existence on the surface of the earth takes place on two axes: the first, vertical, prolongs the radius of the terrestrial sphere; the second,

I want to suggest then that this “transfiguration of nature,” this tension of the human eye’s paradoxical situation between horizontality and verticality now exploded or rather projected into an idealized and “purely vertical” future, does not take “writing” (seeing, writing, reading) as merely the “completion” or “freezing” of the erotic force of an explosive speech. Rather now the erotic (oral-anal, pre-articulatory) explosion of speech is *already* formed as the vision, writing, reading of the pineal eye; speech is absorbed into (consumed by) a writing that is (has been) already “active”—and definitive of that which is/will be most essentially “human.” Here I am taking the subsequent “absorption” and “(self-)destruction” of pineal vision by its object and counterpart, the “solar anus”—“vision itself, attracted by nausea, is torn out and torn apart by the sunbursts into which it stares”—not as a paradox or cycle of destruction which exhausts or transforms speech into seeing/writing and the latter back again into speech, but rather (and the image of sun/solar anus itself suggests this) as the exhaustion, expenditure, transformation of seeing/writing into a “sun” that is itself (not Platonic Logos but) a still higher degree of (self-destructive, self-inverting) *writing*.

Of course, and as with the (quite different) Derridean speech-writing duality, we can only suggest the identity or fusion (in the “pineal eye”) of the Bataillian forces of speech and writing because we initially assume their difference. If the sky-vision of the “pineal eye”—whose object or correlate is the “solar anus”—implies or embodies cosmographic world-writing in *Visions of Excess*, world-pictures which are themselves formed through the cosmogonic force of *inversion*, then this primitive “writing,” a function of the cosmogonic thinking of early peoples, is not yet the mere transcription of an already articulated (poetic) speech but rather the graphic correlate of the unarticulated sound-flow that is “primordial” poetic speech (Deleuze’s inner-body “noise,”

horizontal, is perpendicular to the first. Vegetation develops more or less exclusively on the vertical axis; on the other hand, the development of animal life is situated [...] on the horizontal axis. But [...] animals are never completely foreign to the axis of vegetal life [...]. Their skeleton, even in the most regular cases, is not perfectly adjusted to a horizontal trajectory: the skull and thus the orifice of the eyes are situated above the level of the anal vertebra. However, even if one refers to the position of the male in coitus [...] a complete verticality is never attained [...]. Only human beings, tearing themselves away from peaceful animal horizontality [...] have succeeded in appropriating the vegetal erection and in letting themselves be polarized, in a certain sense, by the sky. It is thus that the Earth [...] releases to the disappointing immensity of space the totality of laughing or lacerated men. But, in this liberation of man, which leads to a suffocating absence of limits on the surface of the globe, human nature is far from surrendering without resistance. For if it is true that his blood, bones and arms [...] his senile laughter and his insipid hate are endlessly lost and rise toward a sky as beautiful as death [...] his eyes continue to fetter him tightly to vulgar things, in the midst of which necessity has determined his steps [...]. The horizontal axis of vision, to which the human structure has remained strictly subjected, in the course of man’s wrenching rejection of animal nature, is the expression of a misery [...]” (VE 83-84).

Kristeva's purely semiotic "baby talk"). As such it is closely tied (even if metaphorically) to another primitive form of writing which also expresses the inversion of surfaces, or rather *is* a naturally inverted surface now *read* as writing. This more properly mythopoetic or divinatory writing is itself the inverted inner surface of a just-sacrificed animal body, and/or the outer surface of its inner organs: the completely natural and contingent markings on this surface, the closest representation of the Bataillan life/death interface, are what is "read" by the diviner once the animal has been killed.

In effect I am thinking of such inner-body-sign augury as a continuation or consummation of the destruction which began with the act of sacrificial murder: now the body has not only been killed but also torn open, so that its inner parts may be "read." Such a notion of reading brings sacrifice, a violent act more readily associated with Bataille's "force of speech,"²⁸ into a close relationship with its "other side," divinatory writing. It thus implies, as does the Bataillan notion of a totalizing "parody of parodies"²⁹ and, correlatively, the priority-to-the-reader of Barthes's *scriptible* (postmodern) writing, the essential absence or nothingness at the "heart" of such writing. This divinatory writing, as an inversion and topocosmic flattening-out of the dynamic, sexual force of corporeal-cosmic, reversible (oral-anal) "speech," thus appears to be opaque, indecipherable (to all except the "seer" and perhaps to him as well), a mere empty surface-design or pre-existing "configuration"—whether its signs are read on the inner surface of the earth's outer-body-sky (as Homer's Calchas reads the pattern of bird-flight)³⁰ or on the outer surface of inner organs of animals (as in ancient Chinese cattle-scapula and turtle-shell augury and the hepatoscopy of ancient Greece and Rome).³¹

To read then, like ancient diviners who predict the future, the inner surfaces of freshly-killed or still-dying animal bodies, or more precisely the outer surfaces of violently-extracted inner parts of these "bodies-NOW-without-organs," would be on our Bataillan model to read the "surface of the sacred," the life/death "interface" as

²⁸ And especially if the victim is killed by having its throat bitten (as by subhuman mammals).

²⁹ See Boldt-Irons.

³⁰ "Calchas rose among them, Thestor's son, the clearest by far of all the seers who scan the flight of birds. He knew all things [...]" (*Iliad* 79-81; Robert Fagles' translation).

³¹ "Diviners who judge from the behaviour of birds and in particular their flight are, strictly, augurs. Diviners who extract the liver from a barely sacrificed animal and read its zones practice hepatoscopy [...]. The Greeks learnt [had] a bronze model liver [...]" (Dowden 245-47). Both liver-reading and sky (bird-flight) reading involved first an arbitrary marking off of "zones": this seems to reinforce my interpretation of augury as essentially a visual marking or drawing of topocosmic axes.

absence or (perhaps, though we want to avoid putting too Derridean a spin on it) as indefinitely-deferred difference. But such a projected topocosmic surface-map, with its vertical and horizontal axes, would depict a flattened-out (cosmographed) *time* as well as space, that is, at time which has also been “inverted,” not front-to-back on a linear or dynamic model but in the sense of being stretched out, “uncoiled” onto a surface. This flattening-out of time is already directly tied to chance in Nietzsche’s mythopoetic discourse of inversions: the “light”³² into which Zarathustra would “turn inside out” his inner worm of time’s eternal return, that circular, self-consuming, indefinitely recursive “most abysmal thought,” that worm which wants to emerge as “voice” from his mouth, is also his/their “dance floor for divine accidents” (*Tanzboden für göttliche Zufälle*), a table for rolling the dice of existence.³³

This “dance-floor of Chance” is then Nietzsche’s childlike and prankish Aion-time as “pure surface” and “empty form” of time, the circular *uroboros* uncoiled. Deleuze develops the notion of Aion as Sky-Chance in *The Logic of Sense*. Here *Aion* (“*aeon*,” “ever” or “always” in Greek) is associated with the “unlimitedness” or “indefiniteness” (neither finitude nor infinity, but something closer to Anaximander’s *apeiron* as “chaos”) of the pure, contingent *event* (the disjunctive “infinity” of “the Verb”), and thus with that *surface* where pure logical disjunctions (either/or) take place: “Whereas Chronos was inseparable from circularity and its accidents [...]. Aion stretches out in a straight line, limitless in either direction. Always already passed and eternally yet to come, Aion is the eternal truth of time: pure empty form of time, which has [...] unwound its own circle. It is [...] this other movement [...] only at the surface [...]” (*LS* 165-66). Thus we come back to Bataille’s “pineal eye” as an eye that reads or projects time (the past/future) by projecting or “flattening” it, that is, topocosmically “mapping” it. If the Bataillian/Deleuzian, reversible inner-body speech

³² This sky-light and earth that it covers are given more properly Greek-mythopoetic genders in the “Before Sunrise” chapter of *Zarathustra* III. Here the male speaker as “earth”—inverting the standard Hesiodic male sky/female earth duality—praises the female sky/dawn above him as his own (inverted) “abyss of light”: “O heaven above me, pure and deep! You abyss of light! Seeing you, I tremble with godlike desires. To throw myself into your height, that is *my* depth. To hide in your purity, that is *my* innocence [...]. Before the sun you came to me, the loneliest of all [...]. Are you not the light for my fire? Have you not the sister soul to my insight? [*Hast du nicht die Schwester-Seele zu meiner Einsicht?*] [...]” (Nietzsche 276-77; *KSA* 4:207-09). We might also consider again, in this context, the Hindu “Great Time,” that “destroyer, whose posture mimics the contracted immobility, the quasi-nothingness, to which the universe comes in the period separating two cosmic cycles” (See note 17).

³³ “O heaven over me, pure and high! This is what your purity is to me now [...] that you are to me a dance floor for divine accidents [*Tanzboden für göttliche Zufälle*], that you are to me a divine table for divine dice and dice players [*Göttertisch für göttliche Würfel und Würfelspieler!*]” (Nietzsche 278; *KSA* 4:209-11).

(with its “oral-anal voracity,” its raw force of desire) correlates with a (reversible) linear time, then Bataille’s topocosmic writing suggests the flattening out of time itself through projection onto the “inverted surface.”³⁴

Now therefore we are giving to *writing*—the writing of the (earth/sky/corporeal) inverted surface—the force of a self-infolding or flattening out of time which allows it, in effect, to absorb (encompass, consume within its greater “blankness” or “emptiness”) the praxis of *poesis* as explosive speech. If divinatory writing can only be “read” on the inverted surface of the inner-world-body (of *langue*, of earth/sky, of animals) once this body itself is “dead” then this writing has (at the moment of life/death interface) in effect *become* the body—or rather, the body has become this writing. The body-without-organs is the body-as-writing.³⁵

III. Divinatory Writing/Divinatory Reading

Thus I am claiming that in the context of *Visions* the Hegelian-Derridean-Nancian problematic or discourse of Bataille’s “impossible sacrifice”—a sort of self-destructive *aporia* or regress to which he himself undeniably “submits” in his own critical writing—simply dissolves, is no longer at issue or “at stake.” For here poetic speech directly *enacts* its self-destruction or self-sacrifice as an explosion-into-writing; this writing as the further explosion, expenditure, exhaustion of speech becomes “sacred” at the limit-point where it moves beyond what is human and also what is living. Once poetic speech explodes and burns itself out its only “trace” lies in this flattened-out projection of the power of *poesis*; the pineal eye is a projection onto the inverted horizontal surface of the vertically extended head, thus a projection of the future of human evolution as the force of a “writing” which is now (has now been) always already “read”; and yet as the inner surface of a body that has already been

³⁴ Which must then bear some relation to Deleuze’s “metaphysical surface” in *LS*. One could also pursue, by placing it in roughly the same context, a reading of Kristeva’s distinction of two “female times” (in “Woman’s Time”) from the male-Kronos-chronological “linear time”: namely, a “cyclic” time and “monumental” time. Insofar as the latter bears comparison with the Deleuzian-Nietzschean *aion*, the eternal return as a flattening-out of time’s “temporal force” rather than as (mere) circle or cycle, it arguably can recontextualize the Kristevan terms of “chance” and “infinity” which guide her own “impossible sacrifice of modern *poesis*” in “*Igitur*.”

³⁵ And in what seems clearly to be a pre-poststructuralist (pre-Derridean, pre-Cixousian, if not also pre-Deleuzian) sense.

inverted, ripped apart, so that we have here a more total manifestation of self-destruction and nothingness, this writing upon a no-longer-living surface now becomes a purely objective, contingent, *natural* writing. We have now moved beyond human reflection or self-reflection into the praxis, force, drive of nature itself. Or perhaps we could say that in the ancient-and-indefinitely-projected-future (as pure contingency) of ritual sacrifice-and-augury, divinatory writing has absorbed as its inverted surface³⁶ all “speech,” all “life,” all “subjectivity”: writing is itself the only praxis, there is now only writing, writing is all that “remains,” for as the purely contingent pattern of natural signs this writing has become the remains or remainder of the corpse of speech, has absorbed the death and nothingness of speech; it is the “divination of ruins.”

The night is my nudity / the stars are my teeth / I throw myself among the dead / dressed in white sunlight / [...] the widow laughs to the skies / and rips the bird to pieces / At my death / the horse teeth of the stars / whinny with laughter I death / blank death / [...] I imagine / in the infinite depth / the deserted expanse / [...] formless abstraction striated with fractures / heap of inanities / of things forgotten / here the subject I / there the object universe littered with dead notions / where I throw out the rubbish / the impotent gestures / the gasps / the shrill cock-crows of ideas / o manufactured nothingness / [...] like a trunk full of false teeth / [...] My heart spits you out star / [...] I laugh but I’m cold. (Bataille, “Poetry” 105-07)³⁷

But these “impotent gestures,” this “manufactured nothingness” (Bataille’s sense of loss, mere parody, the impossible sacrifice of poetry) have been flung against the inner/outer surface of the sky as “my teeth”: the “writing” of these star-teeth is the laying-out, or laying-bare, of the explosive force of corporeal-cosmogonic inversion. The “horse teeth” (even the “false teeth”) are also the dice³⁸ which have been and are

³⁶ And thus apparently in a quite non-Derridean (or “pre-Derridean”) way.

³⁷ “The excerpts are from ‘I throw myself among the dead’ and ‘To be Orestes’ in part 3 of *The Impossible*, tr. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Light, 1991) 147-64. *L’impossible* was published in France in 1947 by Editions de Minuit under the title *La Haine de la poesie* [*The Hatred of Poetry*]” (Botting’s note 105).

³⁸ In ancient Greece dice for gambling were made from animal bones, especially the knuckle-bones. The messenger or announcing god Hermes—progenitor of Heidegger’s *hermeneuein*—had a special connection to these dice; one thinks of the hermetic in terms of the occult, the truth “hermetically sealed” within the (dead) body. “Afterwards, the Thriae showed Hermes how to foretell the future from the dance of pebbles in a basin of water; and he himself invented both the game of knuckle-bones and

still being cast, and (Mallarmé) “A dice-throw never will abolish chance [...] nothing will have taken place except the place”—the surface, dance-floor of chance—“except perhaps a constellation.”

I am suggesting then that this polarity of a (corporeal, reversible) poetic speech and (infra- and extra-corporeal, inversible) writing recontextualizes or indeed “dissolves” the terms of speech/writing assumed by the Nancian-Derridean “impossible sacrifice of poetry,” or even by the Kristevan semiotic/symbolic dichotomy insofar as the latter is still driven by Hegelian “negativity” and “thetic moments.” In this divinatory model of pineal writing we see writing as a further degree, further extreme of that force of self-expenditure and self-destruction which is poetic speech; yet at this limit-point all that remains human is the *reading* of a writing that has now (once the world-body has been torn apart) become non-human. Writing is now itself the utmost form of absence, loss, nothingness precisely because there *is* no (human) writing here, there is only (human) reading. Whether we speak of the signs read on the inner-surface of the outer-world-body—e.g. the pattern of bird-flight across the sky— or those read on the outer surface of inner-body-organs, these signs are not human writing but, like the diagrammatic topocosmic axes of cosmogonic bodies within bodies, the axes of the extra-corporeal (exploded corporeal) “body” of man-earth-sky, the merely contingent visual manifestations of nature.

Thus at last writing disappears and there is only reading, (human) interpretation of a writing in effect suspended (at a sort of threshold or limit-point) between the human and non-human.³⁹ The early Foucault of *Histoire de la Folie* is concerned with the problem of interpreting or understanding Mallarmé and modern (French) poetry, given the tenuous and perhaps permeable boundary between sense/nonsense and poetry/madness (or really poetry/nonsense/madness). Foucault seeks here to place the virtual (but not quite actual) “nonsense” of modern poetic discourse in relation to (real) “madness,” itself “the other form of reason,” or perhaps the *other side*.⁴⁰

the art of divining by them” (Graves 65). “Their [the Thriae’s] divination by means of dancing pebbles was also practiced at Delphi [...] Athene was first credited with the invention of divinatory dice made from knuckle-bones [...] but the art of augury remained an aristocratic prerogative [...] Apollo’s ‘long-winged bird’ was probably Hermes’s own sacred crane” (66-67n3).

³⁹ In a certain way this also fits computer “code” and the “writing” of cyberspace. Perhaps we are now in a “third age” of writing/reading which is in some sense a reversion to the first, cosmogonic age. Perhaps the cybernetic “post-human” era we are now supposedly entering is scarcely distinguishable from the “pre-human” one?

⁴⁰ “Literature itself (undoubtedly since Mallarmé) is in the midst of becoming in its turn, step by step, a language of which the utterance enunciates [...] the linguistic code that renders it intelligible as utterance [...]. By the end of the 19th century [...] literature had become utterance that inscribed in itself

In so doing he anticipates Kristeva's own discussion of poetic language and madness in the *Igitur* chapter of *Revolution*, and more specifically her notion that

it has become impossible, beginning with a rupture that can be precisely situated in history [late 19th century, French symbolism], to make writing an object that can be studied by any means other than writing itself (its exercise, under certain conditions). In other words, the specific problematic of writing breaks decisively with myth and representation to think itself in its literality and its space. Its practice is to be defined on the level of the "text," a word which henceforth refers to a function writing does not "express," but of which it *disposes*. A dramatic economy whose "geometrical locus" is not representable (it is performed [*il se joue*]). (*Revolution*, 232)

Foucault's "self-inscription" of its "own principle of decipherment" within the poetic utterance is also (in another formulation that comes closer to encompassing the discourse of madness) a "subjecting the utterance, which appears to conform to the accepted code, to another code whose key is contained within that same utterance so that this utterance becomes divided within itself" (Foucault 294). Or as Mallarmé puts it in the *Coup de Dés*, "*cadaver par le bras ecarte du secret qu'il detient*," "a corpse kept apart by the arm from the secret it holds," taking now this arm as that of the critical intelligence of a reader struggling and therefore failing to "understand" the poem. Thus in that form of ritual augury which involves the reading of inner organs or bones of sacrificed animals (as a continuation or completion of the destructive praxis of sacrifice) we only get a "writing" that can be "read" (as it is no longer concealed in the depths or *khora* of the inner body) once the living body or life-force of poetic speech as been exploded, extroverted, torn apart; the "reader" of a modern poem also explodes or rips apart the poem (as living speech) in order to interpret it as

its own principle of decipherment. Or [...] it implied [...] in every word, the power to modify [...] the values and significations of the linguistic code to which [...] it belonged; it suspended the reign of that code in one actual gesture of writing [...]. Hence, too, that strange proximity between madness and literature [...]. Once uncovered as a language silenced by its superposition upon itself, madness neither manifests nor narrates the birth of a work [...]; it outlines an empty form from where this work comes, in other words, the place from where it never ceases to be absent [...]. There, in that pale region, in that essential hiding place, the twinlike incompatibility of the work and of madness becomes unveiled; this is the blind spot of the possibility of each to become the other and of their mutual exclusion [...]" ("Madness, the Absence of Work" 296-97).

“writing,” yet now the interpretive code (once alive within the body) is itself dead, illegible, incoherent. Yet in ancient augury (and perhaps too in modern poetic interpretation) this “dead writing,” into which living speech has been emptied out, is after all still “read,” still “interpreted”—but no longer as something written by a human subject. For in this primordial speech/writing polarity there *is* no (human) writing, there is (or remains) only the purely contingent writing (surface marks, signs) of nature and the (human, pineal) reading of its inverted topocosmic surfaces.

Therefore the real question raised by *poesis* seen as (historical and future) anthropological *praxis*, as a *praxis* of (divinatory) writing/reading, is the (Marxist and Foucauldian) question of power. Inasmuch as the readers of inner-body “signs” are in fact reading nothing but the original corporeal surfaces—which have no actual (human) writing on them, but are merely “marked” by nature (and/or by the gods)—the question of the total (and, it may seem, totally *arbitrary*) power of the “reader” or “interpreter” to “create meaning” inevitably arises here. Such arbitrariness, which may be just the “other side” of the radical contingency of the writing itself⁴¹—and I am suggesting we now read as just such a contingency the Bataillian contingency, as “explosion,” of modern poetic speech—may then also share in the essential violence of this speech, if not also of this writing. The question then becomes: can the perceived randomness and thus violence of inner-body writing be said to be there “originally,” and not merely a projection of the seer or diviner who “reads” it by quite arbitrarily destroying the body that contains it?

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⁴¹ Of course, this whole perspective can also be read as that of proto-science: contemporary physics (more or less like Nietzsche) sees *physis* (nature) as “essentially” a contingent (violent, wild, free) combination of forces with no final ground of explanation [...] something more or less like “modern poetry.”

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