

## Friendship<sup>1</sup>

Georges Bataille

I

I wished that the sky split open (the moment when the intelligible order of known objects – that remain inherently strange – becomes a presence intelligible only to the heart). I wished, but the sky did not open. There is something insoluble about this expectation of a ferocious beast, coiled up and eaten away with hunger. Nonsense: ‘Is it God that I want to tear apart?’ As if I genuinely were a ferocious beast – still my sickness gets worse. Because I am laughing at my own hunger. I don’t want anything to eat – I would rather be eaten. Love eats me to the quick and there is no other *way out* for me except a quick death. What I am waiting for, in the darkness where I stand, is an answer. Perhaps for want of being crushed, I would remain like forgotten rubbish! There is no answer to this exhausting restlessness, everything remains empty. But if ... yet I have no God to beg.

To put it in as simple terms as I can: I beseech the one who thinks that my life is a sickness for which God is the only cure to remain silent for just a while, and then, if that person still finds a genuine silence, I ask him not to fear to draw back because he never saw what he was talking about. I, on the contrary, have looked the *unintelligible* in the face, and then I was set ablaze by a love so great that it would be impossible for me to imagine anything that could surpass it. *Happily*, I live my life at a slow pace, and I could not stop laughing. I did not take any responsibility either for the burden or the appeasing servitude that begins at the moment when someone speaks about a God. This world of the living is forced to face up to a lacerating vision of the *unintelligible* (a vision penetrated, transfigured by death and that is yet so glorious); but it is at that very moment that the seductive and reassuring option of theology appears. If man could see his submission, his vanity disarmed between the absence of a solution and the naive solution of the enigma that he is to himself, nothing would remain of him except a distorted form.

Because if there is in the end some immutable satisfaction, why am I cast out? But *I know* that satisfaction is unsatisfying, and that the glory of man pertains only to the consciousness that knows nothing beyond glory and unsatisfaction. One day, I would stop becoming tragic and I would die. Only that day gives its meaning to what I am, because from the outset I have put myself in its hard light. I have no other hope. Joy and love, and unbent freedom are in me linked to the hatred of satisfaction.

Unsatisfaction appears under different guises. Hitler was unsatisfied the very day that he started the war. The vulgar representation of war assumes that satisfaction consists in the glory of conquest; one never supposes that satisfaction is impossible. But, ultimately, one must realize that greatness resides in recognizing oneself as impossible to satisfy.

Angèle de Foligno (Ch. 55) said that God gave to His beloved son a poverty so unparalleled that no one has ever nor ever will have its equal. And yet He is in the possession of *Being*; that is His property. He has substance, and this possession is so much His own that it remains beyond human expression. However, God made this notion so poor, as if the substance did not belong to Him.

It is purely a question of Christian virtues: poverty, humility. The immutable substance is not the sovereign satisfaction even for God. Depravation and death remain unapproachable elements on which depends the glory of whom *is* the eternal beatitude, the glory of anyone who possesses in his own way the illusory attribute of the substance. Such a devastating truth cannot be accessible, naked, for the feminine mystic. And yet, this truth can no longer be avoided from within an ecstatic vision.

There is the universe, and in the midst of its night where man comes to understand himself, he uncovers fragments of this universe. It is always an incomplete discovery. When a man dies, those that survive him are condemned to ruin the things he believed in, to profane that which he venerated. I discover the universe to be such and such, but one thing is sure, those who will come after me will not fail to point out my error. Human science must be founded on its accomplishments, but if its achievement remains incomplete [*inachevée*] then it is not *science*, it is simply the inevitable and fragile product of the will to science.

Hegel's genius consists in the fact that he made science dependent upon completion (as if any knowledge could qualify as such bearing in mind that it is constructed!). But of the edifice that he would have wanted to pass on, nothing remains but the outline of that part of the structure that is anterior to his time (an outline that had never been realized before him, and that has not been re-established again after him). Inevitably, the outline that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* represents is nothing but the beginning of a definite failure: the completion of knowledge is possible only if I admit that human existence is a beginning that will never conclude. Even when this existence reaches its extreme limit, it would not be able to find satisfaction, not even the satisfaction of demands that are alive in us. Perhaps existence will be able to define these demands as false according to the truth that belongs to it in its moment of drowsiness. But in relation to its own law, the truth can be revealed as such only on condition that I die and that everything inevitably incomplete in men dies with me. It is clear that if the cause of my suffering is overlooked, and if the incompleteness in things ceases to undo human sufficiency, life itself will have become remote to man, and with it its own inevitable and remote truth (the only truth that is linked to it and expresses it): the fact that incompleteness, death, the desire that cannot be appeased, are in being the wound that never heals, without which being would be no different from an emptiness devoid of light.

What appears at the extreme point of reflection is that scientific discoveries about the universe are important only in so far as they render every definite representation of this universe impossible. Science has continually caused the ruin of the already established concepts that constitute its greatness and more precisely than its greatness its very truth. Little by little, its movement brings out of an obscurity full of deceptive appearances, a bare image of existence. This means that someone keen to know, realizing that the possibility of knowledge continually escapes him, remains, in the end, in his learned ignorance, as the unexpected residue of the whole operation. And since the resolved question was that of being and substance, it seems to me, with the greatest vividness, that wherever knowledge has sought being, it has only found incompleteness (that which while I am writing makes the ‘depth of the universe’ so open to me that I no longer sense any difference between knowing and the ecstatic ‘loss of knowing’). An identity between subject and object (the known object and the knowing subject) only occurs when a science that is incomplete and that will remain incapable of being accomplished [*inachevable*] admits that its object is incompleteness, and the unaccomplishable. From there the malaise that is caused by the compulsion felt by the unaccomplished (man) to meet up with completion (God) disappears. The ‘ignorance of the future’ (the *Unwissenheit um die Zukunft* that Nietzsche loved) is identified with the extreme state of knowledge, the event that man is to himself is no longer anything but an adequate representation (and therefore also inadequate) of the incompleteness of the universe.

It was only through a representation of the incompleteness of the universe that I found a coincidence between intellectual fulfillment and the movement of ecstatic exhilaration. I am not concerned with the Hegelian operation that suppresses the difference between the known object and the knowing subject (even though what is at stake here is something more than a mere simplification of terms). From the vertiginous slopes that I climb, I now can see that truth is founded on incompleteness, (whereas Hegel founded it on completion) but that foundation is just a semblance! I have given up on that to which every man yearns and have found myself – glorious, intoxicated – carried along by a vivid and unrestrained strong movement. There is what happens [*qui a lieu*] and that cannot be justified nor criticized on the basis of some principle or other. It is an irrefutable (yet unfounded) attitude; it is not a position but a movement that maintains every possible operation of the spirit within particular limits. My conception is an anthropomorphism torn to pieces. It is no longer a question of reducing and assimilating the totality of what is to this paralysed and servile existence, but rather of the savage *impossibility* of our spirit that can neither avoid its limits nor maintain itself at their level. Then, an *Unwissenheit*, an ecstatic and beloved ignorance, becomes the accomplished expression of a wisdom that a vain hope can no longer encumber with debt. At the extreme limit of its development, thought aspires to being ‘put to death’, it is precipitated, as if by a leap into a sacrificial arena, and such as an emotion swollen to the point of tears, its plenitude lifts it to a level where the howling winds knock it down, where the definitive contradiction of spirits is rampant.

Everywhere, in every accessible reality and in every being, it is necessary to seek out the place of sacrifice, the location of the wound. Every being is affected only at the

point where it succumbs: a woman under her dress, a god in the throat of the animal offered for sacrifice.

The one who in his hatred of a selfish solitude demands his own loss in ecstasy takes the immensity of the sky 'by the throat' because it must bleed and cry out. A woman that is suddenly stripped naked opens up a field of delights (while when decently clothed she would leave all undisturbed). Similarly, the indefinite area is lacerated and, once torn apart, is open to the ravished spirit that loses itself in it in the same way that the body loses itself in the nudity that offers itself to it.

If the illusion of completion is not adequately rendered, in its totality and abstraction, in the representation of God, but rather evoked, more humanly, in the presence of an elegant yet partially clothed woman, her animality is glimpsed again and her gaze delivers in me my incompleteness... it is in so far as existences appear to be perfect, complete, that they remain separate and closed in on themselves. Existences only open up through the wound of the incompleteness of being in them. The different beings distinct from one another *communicate* because it is possible to talk about incompleteness, animal nudity, wound, and it is in this *communication* from one to the other that they come alive through losing themselves.

## II

It seems to me that life is equivalent to instability, to imbalance. And yet it is the very equilibrium of forms that makes life possible. When I move from one extreme to the other, from one impulse to the other, from abatement to an excessive tension, the movement may take place so quickly that it becomes nothing but ruin and emptiness. It is for that reason necessary to mark out stable pathways. It is pusillanimous to dread a fundamental stability more than to hesitate about disturbing it. Constant instability is as banal as total order. One can destabilize – or sacrifice – only that which is. Imbalance, *sacrifice*, are even greater when their object is balanced and *complete*. Such principles as these are in contrast to the moralities that resist change and tradition; they destroy the romantic morality of disorder as much as conservatism.

Even the search for ecstasy cannot avoid method. One has to refuse to take into account the familiar objections. They betray a willed inertia that is content with the disordered lassitude to which most beings are dragged. A method means that a war is waged on customary modes of leisure.

It is true that there can be no *written* method. A writing can only leave traces of the pursued trajectory. Other routes remain possible provided that one understands that the ascent is unavoidable and that it demands a struggle against the laws of gravity.

It is not the strictness of the method that is humiliating nor the inevitable artifice. What is called method comes down to going against the prevailing current. It is this very current that is humiliating and makes me lose my patience; the means, without

which it would be impossible to sail up this current, would have seemed more agreeable to me were they worse than they are.

The ebb and flow that occurs in meditation – in the mind, or depending on appearance, outside the mind – are similar to the extreme movements that animate living matter at the moment when the flower comes to take shape. Ecstasy explains nothing, does not shed light on anything, and neither does it justify anything. It is nothing but a flower, being necessarily as unfinished and as perishable as a flower. The only way to approach the lack of an exit is to take the flower and to look at it to the point of harmony in such a way that it can explain, enlighten and justify, *being* [étant] itself unaccomplished, *being* perishable.

The way of ecstasy passes by a region that is necessarily a desert. This region is however a site of apparitions – seducing or disturbing. Beyond that, there is *nothing* more, but a lost and unintelligible movement as if a blind man were staring at the sun with his eyes wide open becoming himself a blinding light. Let us imagine a change that is so quick, a combustion so instantaneous that any representation of substance becomes non-meaning: place, exteriority, image, so many words lacerated by what is happening. The only words that do not betray themselves entirely – *fusion*, *light* – have something in them that cannot be grasped. It is more difficult to talk about *love*, since such a word is burnt and lifeless, because of the *subjects* and *objects* that usually get it bogged down in their inability to love.

To carry on speaking about spirit and God means this: the love that involves two terms, this blazing type of love, is expressed with two terms that appear to be the most rapid. In reality, rapidity becomes then heavier because everything swiftly heads towards monotheistic completion.

I never want to lose sight of the immediate reality: a diesel train arrives at Saint-Lazare station, I am sitting in this train near the window. I exclude myself from the weakness that would consider this moment meaningless in relation to the immensity of the universe; that the universal is the only thing laden with meaning. This is possible only if we attribute to the universe the value of a finished totality. But if the universe is incomplete, then every piece, no matter how small it may be, is as significant as this presumed totality. I refrain from seeking in ecstasy a reality that, when situated on the level of the accomplished universe, would deprive of meaning the fact that ‘a train arrives at the station’.

However, ecstasy is *communication* between terms (these terms can remain as undefined as possible) and communication takes a value that the terms involved did not yet have, it annihilates, in a sense, these terms in the same way as the luminous glow of a star (slowly) annihilates the star itself, as well as the objects that are so close as to be profoundly modified by the constant metamorphosis of the star into heat and light.

It is incompleteness, the wound, misery, rather than completion that are the condition of ‘communication’. But communication is not completion.

In order for ‘communication’ to be possible, one has to find a fault – as in the breastplate – a ‘flaw’. A laceration in oneself, a laceration in others.

What appears to be without a 'flaw', without any fault, is a stable totality, any stable totality (house, person, street, landscape, sky). But the fault, the 'flaw' can occur.

Since it is a question of totalities that need, in order to exist, a mind to perceive them as such, the fault must also be subjective. The totality and its flaw are always made up of objective fragments. However, the flawed totality is profoundly real: the totality being something that is constructed, the perception of defect amounts to realizing that one is in front of 'something that has been constructed', the flawed totality is only 'profoundly' real since it is apprehended through the defect of fiction, a defect that is unreal as fiction, but that allows the return to the profound reality.

There is then:

changing and mobile fragments: objective reality.

Stable totality: appearance, subjectivity.

Flawed totality: change that takes place at the level of appearance, but through that there is a return to objective, fragmented, changing and ungraspable reality.

The return to an incomprehensible reality is usually a complex process. 'Communication' is necessary. When a man and a woman are attracted to one another, it is possible that they do not find one another directly, what links them together is the complicity in lust in which they find themselves. 'Communication' takes place between them through dark slackening, through the nudity of their organs. What is found in the encounter with the other is not the being that wants to persevere in itself, but on the contrary the being that is possessed by the need to lose itself, at least during the time of debauchery. The love that is between them means that they do not recognize in themselves 'being', but rather the 'wound' of the need of their being to be lost: there is no bigger sentiment than the one that attracts one wound to another.

It is more difficult to lose oneself alone.

If a man loses himself on his own, he is before the whole universe. If he has realized that the world was a perfect totality, he is before God. Because God is nothing more than holding steady and putting together all that the spirit perceives (and that becomes the empire of an eternal being). According to the outline that I have drawn, it suffices then to introduce the flaw in this totality, a flaw that will itself be borrowed from the system of appearances and is also an appearance in itself. The death of a God on the cross is the wound through which it is possible for the human mind to communicate with this God.

Beyond that, the 'death of God', as represented by Nietzsche, accomplishes the return to an 'objective, fragmented, changing and incomprehensible reality'. In this case, even in a fictional way, there is no longer communication with the other but a bare and merciless loss.

I have just been looking at the two photographs of torment that are in my possession. These images have become almost familiar to me. One of them, however, is so horrible that I could not help turning pale.

I must have stopped writing. I went, as I often do, to sit in front of the window: as soon as I sat down I felt I was drawn into a sort of ecstatic movement. This time I could no longer put into question, as I painfully did the previous night, the fact that a similar state is not more desirable than erotic pleasure. I cannot see anything: *this* is neither visible, nor intelligible or sensory in any way imaginable. *This* makes it painful, unbearable not to die. If I represent to myself everything that I have loved with anguish, one would have to characterize the stealthy realities, to which my love was linked, as so many clouds behind which was dissimulated *what is here*. The images of rapture are deceitful. *What is here* is more and more on the same scale as terror, terror makes it happen. Such a violent crash was necessary in order for *that to be here*.

Once again, I have been interrupted. This time, suddenly, remembering *what is here*, I must have sobbed. I wake up with my head emptied out – by dint of loving, of being *ravished*. I am going to explain how I reached such an intense ecstasy. On the wall of reality, I have projected images of explosion and laceration. First of all, I have succeeded in creating in myself a great silence. This has become possible to me almost every time I wanted to do that. In this silence, often insipid and exhausting, I was evoking all possible lacerations. Obscene representations, laughable, gloomy, were succeeding one another. I imagined a volcano, or a war, or my own death. I was seeking blindly. I was sure that ecstasy could do without the representation of God. I was experiencing the movements of a mischievous and gay repulsion at the thought of monks or nuns ‘renouncing the particular for the general’.

The first day the wall collapsed I found myself in the middle of a forest and a solitude as bare as no other. During part of the day, I was disturbed by a sexual desire to which I was denied satisfaction. I tried to reach the extreme end of this desire merely by ‘reflecting on’ (without horror) the seductive images to which it is linked.

Obscure days succeed one another. Acute solemnity, happy complicity of celebration, if they are lacking all joy become intolerable: a crowd fidgeted about vainly without anything to eat. It ought to have been necessary for me to shout about the magnificence of life, but I couldn’t. The outbursts of joy I was experiencing were no longer anything but empty excitation. I should have been a million voices crying out to the sky – the movements that go ‘from the tragic night to the blinding glory of the day’ turn a man sitting in his room into a half-wit. A lonely people would be able to endure them, a people hardened by the servitude of glory, living on glories, laughter and dreams that turn into realities.

What a people endure and exalt tears me down and breaks me up between things. I don’t know what I want anymore: excitements harassing me like ephemeral flies, excitements that are yet burnt to ashes from the inside. At the moment when I am most exhausted it seems to me that an extreme result of the different play of forces, after different collisions, isolations and returns, can only be this distraction to the limit of the impossible.

I imagine this form of inevitable distraction. This thirst without thirst, these tears of a child who does not know what he wants nor what he is crying about in his cradle. This must be *ultima verba*, the very last spittle seed, to this world of dead suns satisfied

with a living sun. The one who enters this world of little thirsts and little tears without the naivete of a baby forgets that such an empty sphere cannot accept any words: one does not genuinely enter that sphere if he is still talking. He is contented with the common sphere where every word has a meaning, but *he is boasting*. He believes, by means of a lie, that he is adding *the last word* to what has been said. He does not understand that *the last word* is no longer a word because if there is disturbance nothing is left to be *said*. Crying babies cannot cry in words, nor is it conceivable that they feel the need to do so.

What I am and what I can assert:

There would be no thirst without thirst, without an abundance of drinks, no tears without an extreme joy. But this abundance *wants* the thirst without thirst, the excess of joy *wants* even the inability to cry. If only my excesses were the cause of thirst, tears or the impotency of others; they *want* this thirst, this impotency or these tears. If others crying out their thirst, in tears or with dry eyes, want also to *speak* I laugh at them more than I would laugh at children because they are trying, ineffectually and without knowing it, to cheat. If I shout or cry out myself, I know that my joy flows out again like the persistent roar of thunder of which only a remote peals can be heard. I am not short of memories; that is why I become like a baby rather than like a philosopher living on his soreness or an accursed poet who exists on half or a mere quarter of his memory. Even more, that such a misery, such damp pain, is the last *exhalation* of what we are, this lurks in the deepest part of me like a secret, a secret connivance with the unknowable nature of things, a wail of joy, or puerile laughter, precocious exhaustion: I am made of this, all this delivers me naked to coldness and to chance but with all my strength, I *want* to be delivered, I *want* to be naked.

As the inaccessible has opened up to me, I have given up the first doubt, the fear of a delicious and insipid beatitude. As I easily contemplate what has become for me an object of ecstasy, I can say that this object is lacerating, as sharp as a razor, or more specifically, a howl, blinding, dazzling to the point of screaming. But it is not just a single point; it is pervasive. Provocative nakedness, glinting nakedness is like a strident arrow directed at this point.

What is 'communicated', from this point to a being, from a being to this point, is the searing need to be lost. Through 'communication' beings cease to be closed in on themselves.

The 'searing need to lose oneself' is the part of reality that is the most interior but also the most remote living and turbulent part, but this has nothing to do with a presumed substance.

Particularity is essential to loss and to its abrupt fusion. Without particularity (at one point on the planet a train arrives at the station or something as puerile), there would be no such thing as 'a reality that escapes particularity'. There is a fundamental and easy difference to distinguish between sacrifice (or the sacred) and the divine substance (or rather the theological substance). The sacred is the opposite of

substance. It is the deadly sin of Christianity to have made of that a 'general creator of the particular'. There is no sacred without something that is initially particular even though the sacred is no longer particular. A philosophy that seeks to escape both the particular and the sacred is nothing but a flight that is always incomplete and incapable of being accomplished.

The moment of ecstasy is very different from the moment of sexual pleasure. It is rather closer to a given pleasure.

I don't give anything but I am illuminated by the (impersonal) joy that I feel and in whose presence I consummate myself as if I were filled with wonder by a woman that I kiss: the 'point of crying' of which I talked is similar to the 'point of pleasure' of a woman being kissed, her contemplation resembles the contemplation of this point of pleasure at the moment of its convulsion.

The method of ecstasy is the same thing as that of sacrifice, the point of ecstasy is stripping naked if I break in me the particularity that confines me into myself (similarly, the particular animal gives up its place to sacrifice at the moment when it is destroyed).

In this manner, I repress an image of torment and through repression I close down, repression is one of the doors through which my particularity is closed. If I look at that image again, it opens the door, or rather extracts it.

But this does not necessarily mean that I reach the exterior. Lacerating images (in the strict sense of the word) are continually taking shape on the surface of the sphere where I am enclosed. I can accede only to lacerations. I have done nothing but anticipate a possible exit: and the wounds congeal up again. *Concentration* is necessary. A profound laceration, a stroke of prolonged lightning must break up the sphere; the point of ecstasy is not reached *in its nakedness* without a painful perseverance.

When taking into account the decision to escape the limits of the individual and of the objects that are useful to him, it is natural to look for the way out by multiplying the 'disturbing' images while being involved in their play. These images reveal a lure in their painful and fleeting reality. They make you sentimental, they do not allow the access to the point where the thunderbolt takes place.

First of all, it is necessary to oppose to the familiar movements a state of calmness that equals sleep. One has to refrain from all images, to become in oneself an absorption so complete that any fortuitous image slips vainly to its surface. However, this absorption still needs an image to take place, one single imprecise image of peace, silence, night.

This first movement has something fallacious and irritating about it. The natural movement of life towards the outside is its opposite. The voluptuous or even heavy and painful torpor in which the mind enters is put into question even more in so far as it depends on humiliating techniques. It is necessary to observe the position of the stable body in relaxation without letting it slacken. Necessities are personal but

to begin with some preliminaries are useful such as taking a deep breath and surrendering oneself to the allure of the thorax as it is lifted by a very slow breath. In order to create an emptiness in myself, I have to avoid the infinite procession of ideas by associating them with other ideas and that is why it is better if the flux of images is made to be the equivalent of river beds through haunting sentences or words. These procedures should appear to be unacceptable to impatient minds. However, the same minds are usually tolerant of much more than that, they live at the disposal of mechanics to whom these procedures want to put an end.

If it is true that the intervention is *detestable* (but it is sometimes necessary to love what is detestable), what is more dangerous is not the displeasure involved but the risk of extreme lassitude or seduction. The first sleep is assuaging and ravishing. After that, appeasement becomes sickening. It is insipid; it is intolerable to live for so long a time in rapture.

For some days it is necessary to shroud life in an empty darkness. The result is a wonderful relaxation, the mind feels itself to be a limitless power, and the whole universe seems to be at the disposal of human will, but a troubling element is rapidly introduced.

### III

Behaving like a master means that one is never accountable to anyone, that one is averse to giving any explanation about one's behaviour.

Sovereignty is either silent or disposed. Something is corrupt when the 'sovereign' gives explanations and tries to draw inspiration from justice.

Saintliness that is coming is thirsty for injustice.

The one who talks about justice is himself justice;

He suggests to his fellow men an upholder of the law, a father, a guide.

I could never suggest any justice.

My complicit friendship: here is all my character can bring to other men.

A feeling of wild celebration, licentiousness and puerile pleasures determine my relation to them.

Only a 'sovereign' being can know a state of ecstasy – if ecstasy is not the revelation conferred by the beyond.

The only revelation that is related to ecstasy that I have known is the totally naive revelation of man to his own eyes. This requires lewdness and foulness that morality cannot restrain – and happy friendship with what is naturally lewd and foul. Only man is a law to man from the moment he wants to strip naked in front of himself.

Just like the mystic, that is in ecstasy in the presence of God, must have the attitude of a *subject*, what commands man in front of himself must have the attitude of a 'sovereign' that is accountable to no one.

This idea can be expressed in emphatic terms and can clearly be retained: that existence is not possible wherever men consider themselves in isolation: it begins with conversations, shared laughter, friendship, eroticism, that is to say, that it only takes place when *being is passed from one to the other*. I hate the image of being that is linked to separation and I laugh at the recluse who thinks he is reflecting on the world. He cannot really reflect on it because by becoming himself the *centre* of reflection, he no longer exists, just like the *worlds* that disappear in all directions. But when I realize that that the universe does not resemble any isolated being that is closing on oneself but to what *passes from one being to the other*, when *we* burst out laughing or when *we* love *one another*, at that moment the immensity of the universe opens up to me and I become confused with their flight.

Then myself does not matter to me, it's a presence that no longer belongs to me – even if it was God's presence. I do not believe in God because I do not believe in myself and I am sure that one has to believe in an absurd way in the miserable self that we are to believe in what resembles that self, to believe in God (who is nothing but its guarantor) the one whose life is devoted – I would rather say to itself – to living, to being lost rather than to mysticism, at least this person would be able to open his eyes on a world where what he is can only have meaning when wounded, torn apart, *sacrificed* where divinity would not also be other than laceration (putting to death) and sacrifice.

Someone was telling me that God was no less necessary to someone who is well practised in contemplation than one boundary stone to another; if one wants a long blazing spark to spring up between them. It is true that ecstasy needs an object that triggers it off and that the action of this object, even though it is reduced to a point, is so lacerating that sometimes it becomes inconvenient not to call it God. But the one among my friends who suggested the example of the two boundary stones has added that a danger was likely. Thus named, the weightiness of the boundary stone takes the place of the free intensity. In reality, this object or this point placed in front of me, and that intercepts ecstasy, is exactly what others have seen, what they describe when they were talking about God. But they were nothing but victims of a childish rage to understand: what is clearly stated is what we understand faster. That is how the supposition of an immutable person, a principle that is organizing beings and nature, made it possible to understand quickly what contemplation encounters outside ardour and blinding light, reducing it to a familiar object of thought, and to the particular power that we are ourselves, projected in eternity, in the infinite, to obey a sentiment that is thought of as logical. I even believe that the representation of a power so worthy of obsession was favourable to the position of the object, of a point towards which ecstasy emerges. However, it was at the same time, a limit that is so precise and so stable for contemplation. But in the effervescence that is conjured up by ecstasy, one must remember that the necessary boundary stones, the subject and its object, must be consumed and annihilated. This means that at the moment when the subject dissolves itself in contemplation, the object, the god or God is nothing

more than a victim destined for sacrifice. (Otherwise, everyday life, the subject concentrated on the object that is useful for him, would sustain the servitude inherent to every action, whose rule is utility). It is in this manner that I can choose as object either my God, or even anything as divine but something more human: the young Chinese victim that I could see in some photographs covered with blood, bent back, his lips tightening, his hair standing on end out of horror, while the executioner torments him with a meticulous attention (he inserts the blade in the join of the ankle). To this miserable man, I could only be linked through the links of horror or through simple human friendship. But this photograph if I look at it 'to the point of agreement' it would annihilate in me the obscure and common necessity to be nothing more (or less) than the person that I am: at the same time this object that I have chosen was nothing but a horrible (storm) whose thunder and lightning were being lost in the immense universe.

The most important thing is that every man is a stranger to the universe, he belongs to objects, tools, meals, newspapers that confine him in a particularity ignorant of everything else. The only element that introduces existence in the universe is death; when a man represents death to himself: he no longer belongs to rooms, to relatives, he is involved in the free interplay of the worlds.

If one wants to see more clearly what is at stake, consider the opposition of wave theory and the theory of subatomic particles in physics. The first explains phenomena through undulations such as light, air waves or the ripples in the water. The second constitutes the world out of particles such as neutrons, protons and electrons whose simplest set are atoms and molecules. From love to light waves, and from personal beings to minute particles, the relationship is perhaps arbitrary or imposed. However these problems in physics help us to see how two images of our life are opposed, one is erotic or religious, the other is profane and down to earth (one is open and the other is closed). Love is a powerful negation of the isolated being that we find so natural, and even in a certain sense ideal, that an insect dies of the very embrace that it desired (the female is no less dazzled than the male, the birth of a new being or new beings is perhaps no less contrary to the law of individual isolation that precedes life, than death). The counterpart of these excesses is given in the need for possession of one by the other that does not only alter the only erotic effusions: it organizes the relations of mutual belonging between the devoted and the presence that he obscurely discovers (God for the thing of the devoted like the devoted is God's thing). Why deny that here there is the effect of an inevitable necessity? But to recognize that is not to give important names to the players of the game, the crying and lacerating 'point' that I have talked about radiates life to a great extent (even though it is – or since it is – the same thing as death) that if it is once stripped naked, the object of a dream or of a desire confused with it, finds itself soon animated, even ablaze and intensely present. The divine persons that are related to this presumed 'apparition' are not less available than a loved being, than a woman offering her nakedness to an embrace. The God perforated with wounds or the wife ready for pleasure are nothing more than the transcription of this bottomless 'cry' that ecstasy reaches. The transcription is easy (it is even inevitable) since we are obliged to fix an object for ourselves. But the one who accedes to the object in this fashion does not ignore the fact that he destroyed everything that deserves to be

called real object. And in the same way that nothing more separates it from its own death (that he loves while acceding to this form of intense pleasure that requires its advent); he will still have to link the sign of laceration and annihilation to the figures that answer his need to love.

The destiny that belongs to men has encountered pity. Morality and all forms of miserable feelings, terrified, even hostile: it has only rarely encountered friendship, until Nietzsche...

To write is never anything more than a game played with the ungraspable reality: no one can enclose the world in satisfactory propositions, and I would not want to have tried it. What I wanted: to make accessible to the *living* – happy with the pleasures of this world and disbelieving – the means that seemed most inaccessible to them (and which the acetic ugliness has preserved until now with its morose jealousy). However, as regards the one who does not look for pleasure (or joy) but rather rest, in no way does the presence that I bring forth give him the balance or satisfaction he needs. My present is ecstasy: it is lightning at play. A stranger to peace.

*Translated by Hager Weslati*

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> *Friendship* is an article by Georges Bataille published under the pseudonym Dianus in the journal *Mesures* in 1940. It is a significant essay in providing, in a sense, the germ of his project *La Somme athéologique*, which will ultimately consist of the books *L'Expérience intérieure* (1943), Paris: Gallimard, (translated as *Inner Experience* by Leslie Anne Boldt, 1988. New York: State University of New York Press); *Le Coupable* (1944), Paris: Gallimard, (translated as *Guilty* by Bruce Boone, 1988. Venice, Ca: Lapis Press); *Sur Nietzsche* (1945) Paris: Gallimard, (translated as *On Nietzsche* by Bruce Boone, 1992. New York: Paragon Press); *L'Alléluiah* (1947), Paris: Librairie August Blaizot, (translated by Bruce Boone and published in *Guilty* as above); and *Méthode de méditation* (1947), Paris: Editions Fontaines.) He had intended to develop the article as part of *L'Expérience intérieure* in the chapter entitled 'Antécédents du Supplice'; in the

event he used part of the article as the basis of the chapter 'Le point de l'extase' in *Le Coupable*. The title 'Friendship' is highly significant for the whole project of *La Somme athéologique*, which maybe said to be an attempt to re-think the notion of what friendship is – in the widest possible sense – in the context of a godless modern world. Central to this are questions about how we establish relationships, not only at a personal level, but also across the boundaries of time and space, in terms of our personal interests and involvements. What are the affective determinisms by which we choose certain relationships at the expense of others? How does the process of living itself serve to impel us towards following certain directions that directly have an impact upon our personal identity and sense of values? In what was an experiment with his own experience of the world, Bataille was endeavouring to locate and clarify issues of much more general concern.

**Georges Bataille**, the French philosopher and social theorist, was born in Billon 1897 and died in 1962. A surrealist, pornographer, Nietzschean-Hegelian Marxist and Durkheimian 'poststructuralist' all rolled into one, his major works such as *The Story of the Eye* (1928), *The Accursed Share* (1949) and *Eroticism* (1957), have influenced the writings of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard among numerous others.