

# **SEARCHING FOR THE POLITICS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE: GEORGES BATAILLE AND THE GESTURE OF LITERATURE**

*A la recherche de la politique de l'impossible : Georges Bataille et le geste de la littérature*

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we will focus on the project of the politics of the impossible, announced by Georges Bataille in one of his letters. This project presupposes a politics that is, in a productive sense, the conversion of violence into institutions. Turning to experience, Bataille characterizes politics as the domain of a project that leads to its completion. At its end, however, he does not find a synthesis of subject and object, but rather a negation of the project as such. Instead of absolute knowledge, non-knowledge. The project of knowledge is inseparably linked to a sovereign experience, which, however, stands beyond its limits. But this experience keeps returning, and its ignorance by politics ultimately leads to wars, fascism and other forms of catastrophic violence. The politics of the impossible attempts to be a response to this sovereign experience. We will try to show that Bataille saw a certain solution in the gesture of literature. This gesture appears to be crucial to the politics of the impossible. We will therefore try to show what this gesture consists in and what consequences it has for politics.

**Keywords:** Politics, Literature, Sovereignty, Bataille, Experience.

**Résumé:** Dans cet article, nous nous concentrerons sur le projet de la politique de l'impossible, annoncé par Georges Bataille dans l'une de ses lettres. Ce projet présuppose une politique qui est, dans un sens productif, la conversion de la violence en institutions. Se tournant vers l'expérience, Bataille caractérise la politique comme le domaine d'un projet qui conduit à son achèvement. À la fin, cependant, il ne trouve pas une synthèse du sujet et de l'objet, mais plutôt une négation du projet en tant que tel. Au lieu d'un savoir absolu, il y a un non-savoir inachevable. Le projet de connaissance est inséparablement lié à une expérience souveraine, qui se situe cependant au-delà de ses limites. Mais cette expérience revient sans cesse, et son ignorance par la politique conduit finalement aux guerres, au fascisme et à d'autres formes de violence catastrophique. Mais cette expérience revient sans cesse et son

ignorance par la politique conduit finalement aux guerres, au fascisme et à d'autres formes de violence catastrophique. La politique de l'impossible tente d'être une réponse à cette expérience souveraine. Nous essaierons de montrer que Bataille a vu une certaine solution dans le geste de la littérature. Ce geste semble être crucial pour la politique de l'impossible. Nous essaierons donc de montrer en quoi consiste ce geste et quelles sont ses conséquences pour la politique.

**Mots-clés:** Politique, Littérature, Souveraineté, Bataille, Expérience.

## INTRODUCTION

In his book *Sur Nietzsche*, Georges Bataille states the following: “[Nietzsche] had no political position: he refused, when asked, to choose one party or another; irritated to be identified with either the right or the left. He was horrified by the idea of subordinating his thought to a cause.” (Bataille, 2015, p. 6). We could make the same claim about Bataille and probably would not be too far from the truth. Still, it would be a mistake to suggest that he held a neutral position, or that he eschewed politics altogether. On the contrary, the tone of his writings against fascism and Nazism is extremely aggressive, far beyond a theoretical level onto a personal level (refusing to shake hands with anti-Semites, for example) (Surya 1987, p. 245). By contrast, his attitude towards communism is far more accommodating but still cannot be labelled as socialist or even affirmative. His critique of communism is different, but it still allows us to claim that Bataille did not “attribute much importance to the difference between fascism and communism.” (Bataille, 1988, p. 90). This is a similar position as the one he attributes to Nietzsche: he leaned neither to the right nor to the left. This is despite the fact that Bataille was aware of his own position and the discourse he was part of. He undoubtedly belonged among the left-wing intellectuals with whom he interacted, publishing in their journals and sharing many of their goals.

Despite this paradoxical but essentially unambiguous position, Bataille’s politics is still a conundrum. Jean-Luc Nancy therefore adds in the 1980s: “[W]hat has not yet been sufficiently remarked is the extent to which [Bataille’s] thinking emerged out of a political exigency and uneasiness.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 16). Many other scholars have raised this question. Michel Surya, for example, has described it from a biographical point of view in his book *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre*, while Francis Marmande or Jean-Michel Besnier have addressed it on a political and philosophical level. The latter, in his

book *La politique de l'impossible*, focuses on the concept that Bataille dealt with towards the end of his life. He himself called it *the politics of the impossible*, and Besnier tries to reconstruct and coherently grasp this concept. In doing so, he reaches a strange conclusion: the politics of the impossible is closely linked to literature. And perhaps even more: politics, in Bataille's sense of the word, is supposed to aspire to what is proper to literature, which is to lead outside of itself. This article proposes to affirm this claim and, in the next few steps, develop this closeness towards a gesture that we find crucial in both literature and in Bataille's conception of politics. I will try to show why this gesture belongs to the domain of literature and that Bataille himself was facing the same problem, that is, the ungraspable character of the object of this gesture. And, subsequently, that this gesture has to be somehow implemented by politics. It will be necessary, therefore, to define politics as a sphere that Bataille calls the realm of the possible, and to then also define the experience literature brings us, which is not exhausted by this possibility. For literature, like for Nietzsche, the idea of subordinating its thought to a cause is horrifying.

### 1.0. System, experience, and politics

To begin with, there is a certain "turn" that is typical of Georges Bataille. Politics in general can be understood as an abstract system, a project that mediates human social existence, and it is in this abstract but omnipresent form that we should analytically and theoretically grasp it – making it the object of our research. In a very simplified way, we could say that this is how Social Sciences refer to their object (Bataille, 1979, p. 68). To this purpose, Marxism developed a theory of base and superstructure that dialectically linked the consideration of politics to the economic base. According to Bataille, however, this is precisely where its insufficiency lies: "Marxism did not undertake any general elucidation of the modalities peculiar to the formation of religious and political society." (Bataille, 1979, p. 64). He therefore proposes a "turn" to experience, which, although it does not abandon "fundamental" duality as its methodological background (like Marxism), its descriptions are able to "refer to actual experiences [*états vécus*] and that the psychological method used excludes any recourse to abstraction." (Bataille, 1979, p. 64). Even earlier, in 1932, he and Raymond Queneau announce this turn in their text *La critique des fondements de la dialectique hégélienne*: "Today a new experimental justification of the dialectic has become necessary. (...) [It only can take place] on the

immediate terrain of class struggle, in experience and not in an a priori fog of universal conceptions.” (Bataille, 1985, p. 107). This focus on experience makes allows Bataille to situate the dialectic of base and superstructure into a single social sphere and to juxtapose the other part of his own duality. He then speaks of the duality of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Although these are elements of social existence, they refer to the psychological structure of society and the construction of subjectivity as such. He then employs this logic in his analysis of fascist ideology, which he says Marxism is unable to explain adequately.

Each half of the duality can be understood as the expression of an experience that takes a particular form within social reality. Homogeneity can be described as a set of elements of society whose productivity always refers to something outside themselves (Bataille, 1979, p. 65). The elements themselves are not the bearers of an immanent meaning, but on the contrary are the producers of meaning in a closed system of equal elements: “The common measure, the foundation of social homogeneity and of the activity arising from it, is money, namely the calculable equivalent of the different products of collective activity.” (Bataille, 1979, p. 65). Thus, these homogeneous elements are productive; they refer beyond themselves, acquiring meaning through their positioning in the system, and at the same time they are calculable, or rather, help the conservation of existing forms (that is, it is possible to make them objects of research). The system that homogeneity constitutes also corresponds to the psychological structure of the productive human being, and this productivity is not only understood in its purest form – work – but also as any relation to any other homogeneous element: “To know is (...) *to know how*.” (Bataille, 1991, p. 228). One might even state that the psychological structure corresponding to homogeneous human existence is, in its most elementary form, a subject-object relationship. On a meta-psychological level (Bataille himself refers to Freud), we could then equate homogeneity with the conscious side of subjectivity. But consciousness must be understood in its dialectical form as a system that corresponds to the social existence of homogeneous forms. In this sense, the base and superstructure are also part of the homogeneous order, simply because their dialectical interrelation makes them commensurable elements.

Consciousness as a phenomenon implies a transition towards discussing heterogeneous elements. If we have identified homogeneity with a system of commensurable and productive elements, then “the exclusion of heterogeneous elements from the homogenous realm of consciousness formally recalls the exclusion of the

elements, described (by psychoanalysis) as unconscious, which censorship excludes from the conscious ego.” (Bataille, 1979, p. 68). Thus, homogeneity is based on the exclusion of elements which cannot be assimilated and which are incommensurable. Homogeneity therefore constitutes a closed system, because it has shut itself from heterogeneous elements – which, by definition, cannot be assimilated. Without shutting out, homogeneity would be impossible. It must exclude all heterogeneous elements. Thus, when Freud claims the unconscious to be a different logic, Bataille states the following: “The reality of *heterogeneous* elements is not of the same order as that of *homogeneous* elements. *Homogeneous* reality presents itself with the abstract and neutral aspect of strictly defined and identified objects (basically, it is the specific reality of solid objects). *Heterogeneous* reality is that of a force or shock.” (Bataille, 1979, p. 70). At the centre of the heterogeneous elements stands an unproductive, unassimilable and ungraspable experience, which on the level of society takes the forms of violence, excess, eroticism, madness, mobs or, for example, the poorest or richest social classes (Bataille, 1979, pp. 69–70). The question of experience thus arises with even more seriousness because, while experience within a homogeneous system is understood as a reference outside of itself (in its most elementary form as a relation between subject and object), the experience of the heterogeneous elements of social existence is, like heterogeneity itself, of a completely different nature. Because it is unproductive, it is also, in the most general sense, an experience of waste (of time, wealth, energy, etc.).

While Bataille does consider the psychological structure of the human in this fundamental duality of homogeneity and heterogeneity, the target of his critique seems to be the human as such, in his modernist and dialectical conception – and the result of a closed system: homogeneity. Therefore, in this “turn” to experience, homogeneity seems insufficient. According to Bataille, this insufficiency is the reason why fascism and Nazism emerged in such a violent way. For this reason, Marxism failed to analyze fascism adequately. Homogeneity, where the system of research and knowledge is possible, is therefore unable to conceive of heterogeneous experience. Bataille thus transposes his consideration of homogeneity to the intersubjective level: to the question of self-consciousness. The “turn” to experience is a turn to phenomenology and a critique of the subject-object relation. The notion of homogeneity is replaced by that of system, knowledge, absoluteness. These have no alternatives and are understood as becoming everything: “*The Phenomenology of Spirit* comprises two essential movements completing a circle: it is the completion by degrees of self-consciousness (of human *ipse*)

and the becoming everything (becoming God) of this ipse completing knowledge (and thereby destroying particularity within it, completing therefore the negation of itself, becoming absolute knowledge).” (Bataille, 2014, p. 110). This circle thus completes all experience. And if it is a domain of knowledge, then all heterogeneous experience must necessarily be overcome. Self-consciousness carries in itself the experience of the Master, which is at last overcome by the Slave. Furthermore, Mastery formally corresponds to the unproductive character of heterogeneity, has no duration and is thus immediate consumption. But how can the unproductive experience of Mastery be assimilated into a homogeneous system of knowledge, and thereby become homogeneous itself? And can there be anything outside the system of *absolute* knowledge?

The Master-Slave dialectic is one of extreme opposition. On the one hand, there is work, productivity, knowledge and realized freedom. On the other hand, there is wasting, immediate consumption and inevitable disappearance. Understood separately, the consciousness of the Slave seems to proceed from nothingness of immanence. Mastery contains its own annihilation and is inseparable from the emergence of Slavery, which it casts into servitude. Just as homogeneity is only possible if it excludes heterogeneous elements. Mastery does not disappear but is rather transformed, or preserved, to the extent that Slavery is able to overcome itself. In simple terms, Mastery becomes part of Slavery through its own disappearance. In this sense, it is part of the dialectic from the very beginning. The assimilation into the logical system occurs through a necessary interdependence, even if this necessity seems contradictory at first. The experience of the Slave is not transferable to the experience of the Master, but it is nevertheless the result of their inseparability. Their experiences are mutually exclusive and therefore extreme – the Master fights for prestige, while the Slave works and serves. From this perspective, violence (the Master experience) is always a productive principle, because it is crucial for the other part of the dialectic. In the logic outlined above, this would mean that homogeneity (the Slave’s consciousness) is capable, if it achieves absolute knowledge, to assimilate all heterogeneity, whereby “there would no longer be anything shocking for reason to confront with.” (Bataille, 1970, pp. 183–4). This also means that even that which appears to be outside of the system is conditioned by it, because even the absence of a relation is still a relation, and thus part of the system (Bataille, 1970, p. 183). This completes the circle.

Like homogeneity, Hegel’s dialectical system is closed. It claims to be everything, which means overcoming all otherness (heterogeneity) (Bataille, 2014, p. 83–4). Bataille

explicitly states that “[i]t was Hegel’s greatness to have made science dependent on its completion.” (Bataille, 2011, p. 64). After all, the influence of Alexander Kojève on Bataille is most evident in the completion of the system and the inevitability of that completion.<sup>i</sup> With Hegel, a system appears not only closed, but also completed and therefore absolutely homogeneous. In a letter to Kojève, Bataille writes the following: “I grant (as a likely supposition) that from now on history is ended (except for the denouement).” (Bataille, 1988, p. 90). All that remains is to bring this absolute system to a practical conclusion. Philosophy after Hegel is no longer necessary.<sup>ii</sup> For, in a certain sense, homogeneity is already absolute: “[M]an as such no longer changes in any essential way, there is no longer any reason to change the laws (truths) of knowledge of the world and of oneself.” (Kojève, 1947, p. 509). To complete History in the practical sense is to realize a project, which means to realize a homogeneous State in which every experience could not be other than conscious and therefore institutionalized. The immediate experience of violence (heterogeneity) has to be entirely part of the absolute system constituted by the institutions under whose authority this violence is situated. The horizon of this project is the horizon of History, which in its realization can be understood as a political horizon (Balibar, 2015, p. 33).

We are thus arriving at a definition of politics that is essential to the understanding of the system; a definition which, in its institutional form and as a project, encompasses all of human existence and has to overcome the subversiveness of violence – which, however, is a condition of politics, as in the case of the Slave. Politics is thus a sphere of collision of system and violence, of system and heterogeneity – but in a productive way. Étienne Balibar wrote the following:

To assert, however, that politics is a conversion of violence is to say that politics is history, or that it finds its means and realizes its ends only in and through history. (...) history is the “absolute” process in which it turns out “in the end” that all seemingly irreducible, inconvertible violence, or all violence initially represented as inconvertible, will necessarily be converted into its opposite (Balibar, 2015, p. 34).

Hegel’s system is absolute precisely in this sense: all otherness is converted into an institution and even the absence of a relation is still a relation. Politics completed with and through History is nothing other than the completion of the human in a homogeneous State where the experience of otherness is not possible. This is precisely the definition of politics that Bataille later refers to. “Nothing happens outside political machines” (Bataille, 2015, p. 93) and also nothing is outside of the system as such. It is thus the

system that is absolute and all-encompassing. All possibilities are realized and exhausted. According to Bataille, this is the experience of the human at the end of History, where there is nothing left to do (Bataille, 1988, p. 90). The politics of the possible is the politics of absolute knowledge.

## 2.0. The impossibility of NOTHING

It seems to me that philosophy generally exhausts its possibility where is an absence of a way out, such as in God, in freedom, etc. This is why I stopped at Hegel's thought, which is situated in these absences of exit in order to overcome itself. But in this way it only reaches an extreme. And what I have done personally is not to prolong an extreme situation but generally to have substituted for a search conceived as a given possibility that of a search conceived from the outset as impossible. (Bataille 1973, p. 485).

This is the basic premise to which Bataille has led us. If we are at the end of History, action and human experience are fully understood as possible to the extent that this possibility is conceived as an absolute system that can encompass even extreme opposites. The only way out of the possible is the impossible.

Our consideration of the heterogeneous elements of social reality now takes on a much stronger significance. Although we have abandoned them quite quickly and unjustly, it is to them that we must now return.<sup>iii</sup> Not to their forms, but to the experience which is in their centre. As previously stated, heterogeneity has the formal characteristics of the unconscious as postulated by Freud. This merely means that the experience within heterogeneity lies, as in the case of the unconscious, outside the consciousness of the subject. However, this applies to Freud. In the case of Bataille, this exclusivity (consciousness/unconsciousness) remains irreducible. There is indeed a place in homogeneity that is dedicated to heterogeneity, but it only takes it as form. The experience of heterogeneity is simply outside its domain, even if we consider an absolute system where every experience has an object (something to refer to), and thus nothing stands outside the system as such. Which means that the place thus institutionalized by the system is insufficient; overcoming that heterogeneous experience is neither an abolition nor an integration, and thus we cannot speak of overcoming. The question remains, however, as to the character and place of such an experience.

It is an experience that Bataille will refer to as a sovereign experience, or as an inner experience which is an essence of heterogeneity as such. Because we have

emphasized the Master-Slave dialectic in the constitution of subjectivity and the system, it is also necessary to proceed from this logic in the case of sovereignty. We have shown that in the “conventional” interpretation, both poles have proved to be productive in a certain sense. This is because, although they are in a contradictory and exclusive position, they are at the same time overcome and thus preserved in the project of History. Because they are productive, Bataille can claim that “[a] man could experience the moments of the Master and the Slave in the same individual” (Bataille, 1988, p. 357) because “the Master commands the Slave, and to this extent he acts instead of being *sovereign*.” (Bataille, 1988, p. 367). Sovereignty only corresponds to a specific experience of Mastery that stands outside the Master-Slave dialectic. It is a matter of the Master in their purest state. Even if such a description is insufficient, we can assume that this is precisely the way Bataille introduces sovereignty, that is, in the horizon of the Master-Slave dialectic, because sovereignty represents a form whose content has no content at all. While this form is transformed by its overcoming its opposite, its content – which is not an objective content – remains unchanged. Mastery is dependent on Slavery, as Slavery is on Mastery, but both are transformed in favour of the Slave. Meanwhile, “sovereignty, in fact, cannot change anything” (Bataille, 1988, p. 354) because it has nothing but itself.

Sovereign experience does not result in a productive relation, nor can it be assimilated into any relation of productivity. Contrary to productive experience, to be “sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time.” (Bataille, 1991, p. 199). Slavery, which is true self-consciousness, is stretched in the horizon of time by its productivity – its constitutive feature. Its project is a project of History and thus stretching from the past, through the present, to the future (Kojève, 1947, p. 432). The relation between subject and object, which is the basis of all possible experience and which is constitutive for both subject and object, is through labour (productive activity) an experience that is temporal in essence. But if that sovereign experience is the domain of present time in its irreducible condition, then the very existence of the subject together with the object is at stake. However, the sovereign moment is this very presence, which is why it has no duration or existence, and it is no exaggeration to think of it as “[t]he miraculous moment when anticipation dissolves into NOTHING, detaching us from the ground on which we were groveling, in the concatenation of useful activity.” (Bataille, 1991, p. 203). Like a miracle, it is in no sense predictable or possible. The relation of subject and object, this productive differentiation in which knowledge and thoughts are possible, is replaced at that moment by this miracle,

which however has no duration, and is therefore impossible and also has no existence because it is NOTHING. At the same time, all subject-object relations are annihilated by its intensity: “The thought that comes to a halt in the face of what is sovereign rightfully pursues its operation to the point where its object dissolves into NOTHING, because, ceasing to be useful, or subordinate, it becomes *sovereign* in ceasing to be.” (Bataille, 1991, p. 204).

This leads to a paradoxical situation. Self-consciousness, or human existence expending its entire being in the realization of the project (that is, the human), is at the same time confronted with the experience that is impossible because it stands irreducibly outside the system as such. And that experience which is NOTHING “is what, in man, is irreducible to project: nondiscursive existence, laughter, ecstasy, that link – in the end – man to the negation of the project that he *nevertheless is – ultimately*, man ruins himself in a total effacement of what he is, of all human affirmation.” (Bataille, 2014, p. 84). Sovereign experience thus essentially shares its non-discursive existence with the moment of death. While the latter represents the negation of the project, in whose horizon and through which the project, and therefore the subject, is possible, Bataille highlights also its irreducible character and its presence. Sovereignty is a moment of death; it is the experience that has no place in the project, but at the same time concerns the project (the human) in an essential way. It is therefore an experience that is the negation of death itself in the sense of its productivity: “Civilisation and language grew as though violence was something outside, foreign not only to civilisation but also to man (man’s being is the same thing as language). (...) a violence belongs to humanity as a whole and is speechless, and thus humanity as a whole lies by omission and language itself is founded upon this lie.” (Bataille, 1986, p. 186). This is why the situation is paradoxical. A system (the human) is only possible on the assumption of a closed system that conceives everything and is founded upon language, but which at the same time excludes violence, which it is unable to assimilate because it has no existence in positive sense. Sovereign experience, which is always inherently violent, is the blind spot of a system which, being a system, is essentially a lie (because it has excluded this violence). And thus a system is either based on a language, or there is no system at all. The domain of sovereignty is a silence outside of every meaning and productivity. Or, more precisely, is neither outside, nor inside, and thus always impossible to attain. The impossibility of the sovereign experience is still “something” belonging to human existence, but its realm begins where the human being ends.

That is why Bataille could state: “The system is annulment.” (Bataille, 2014, p. 48). And in this annulment of all sovereign violence that is not convertible into institutions, it is also false. It has no choice, after all. However, politics is where these two levels collide: “Homogeneity is a precarious form (...) [and] must be constantly protected from the various unruly elements (...). This part [State] is an intermediary formation between the homogeneous classes and the sovereign agencies.” (Bataille, 1979, p. 66). At the same time, politics is a constitutive element of the homogeneous system on the basis of which violence is overcome or converted into the institutions of the State. Aside from the irreducibility and impossibility of sovereign existence outlined above, it is politics (homogeneity) whose domain is violence in its productive form. Fascism, in spite of this, has united both homogeneous and heterogeneous elements in its political dimension. It never made heterogeneity into an institution, instead giving rise to institutions (forms) in the centre of which sovereignty accumulated – to the extent that it negated the institution itself along with all politics. The institution of the omnipresent army embodied, at its centre, the sovereign violence of war. Sovereignty had a place in fascism, in the form of a Führer who justified and gave meaning to the institutions that in their violent experience led precisely to sovereignty: “Fascism was able to use people’s desire for affective exaltation and fanaticism.” (Besnier, 2014, p. 155). The necessity of war and uncontrolled violence was germane to fascism. We can simply say that fascism was successful in uniting the homogeneous with the heterogeneous because it inevitably led to a sovereign experience. It created a system that was unfree, but at the same time it led the human to an impossible experience, annulled by a system based on reason. Since the fascist solution is completely unacceptable and sovereign experience is inevitable, Bataille needs an alternative. He proceeds from the claim that “[p]hilosophy and politics [must] contribute to reconstitute the total existence, in particular by making right to the values and the emotions excluded or judged parasitic by [system as such].” (Besnier, 2014, p. 181). But the question is “[h]ow can one embrace a violence so subversive that it is inevitably a betrayal [of system], without allying oneself with the fascists?” (Stoekl, 1985, p. 93).

### 3.0. From politics to literature: facing the impossible

When Bataille speaks of Nietzsche refusing to be associated with politics as such, it is precisely because of a sovereign experience that is outside of all systems and therefore beyond of politics. In general, “[b]eing is also the excess of being, the upward surge towards the impossible.” (Bataille, 1986, p. 173). And he says this even though he is aware that human existence is necessarily political because it is a homogeneous system (Project): “the existence that seeks to go to the end of the possible is necessarily political.” (Besnier, 2014, p. 181). To go to the end of the possible makes a very essential aspect of impossibility emerge. Because it is the negation of all productive negativity and therefore of the system, the impossible experience seems to be linked to the end of the system as such. Sovereignty is a concern of the human, who is not productive and is therefore the domain of a certain abundance. The politics of the impossible is thus the politics of nonproductive violence; the domain of sovereignty. Bataille argues that the end of History (which was to imply all use of negativity in the sense of its conversion into institutions and thus the completion of the human in absolute knowledge), like any system, leaves aside the negation that we can identify with sovereignty, which he calls “unemployed negativity.” (Bataille, 1988, p. 90). He adds that “[m]ost often, negativity, being impotent, makes itself into a work of art. This metamorphosis, which has real consequences, usually is not a good answer to the situation left by the completion of History.” (Bataille, 1988, p. 91). To go to the end of the possible is thus a request to go to where the system implodes due to its own insufficiency.

It is not surprising that by a work of art Bataille means mainly literature. It is nothing but a system in its purest form: language. Language sets the limits of a system, constitutes it, but is at the same time bound to transgress its limits. (Besnier, 2014, p.136). Literature is a realm which, by its very nature, tends to transgress itself. This transgression leads to an experience that denies everything, including its foundations – that is, language and its productivity. Literature is an intrinsically unproductive activity. It leads us to an experience that philosophy (or a system of knowledge in general) cannot: the object of literature is an impossible experience which has no intellectual depth (Bataille, 1988, p. 314). We have already indicated the way in which the system falls into a blind spot whose experience dissolves the subject-object relation, in this case the relation of signification. Sovereign literature, in its search for the impossible, speaks a language that has silence as its goal. Once this logic is reversed, the language of literature leads to the sovereign experience of silence. The transgression required by literature corresponds to an essential aspect of the human being, namely, its unproductive sovereignty, which desires to step

out of its self-imposed limits. Without this request, literature becomes boring (Bataille, 1988, p. 153).

In order to clarify what kind of literature he is talking about, Bataille divides it into authentic and non-authentic. His obvious interest is the authentic. In general, we could posit the Evil at its centre (Bataille, 1973, p. 3). Furthermore, from the perspective of the system, sovereignty cannot appear to be anything other than Evil. In *Literature and Evil*, he lists authors (Brontë, Sade, Proust, Blake, etc.) in whom he finds this essential aspect. The appeal to authenticity must necessarily arise not from a desire for a homogeneous existence, but from a desire to break out of their limits, even at the cost of losing oneself (one's knowledge, speech, social status, etc.): "It is clear that the authentic writer who does not write for paltry reasons or for reasons too shameful to mention, cannot, without uttering platitudes, form his work so as to contribute to the designs of social utility. Insofar as his writing is useful, it will not partake of sovereign truth." (Bataille, 1990, p. 38). At the centre of authentic literature, then, is both the impossibility of leaving its limits and the desire to reach the impossible. Evil manifests itself in a desire that turns against the homogeneous system of language and the limits of human existence. But even though this is inevitably a failure, because sovereign experience has no duration and cannot be grasped, literature is able to point out these conditions. Because "only an intolerable, impossible ordeal can give an author the means of achieving that wide-ranging vision that readers weary of the narrow limitations imposed by convention are waiting for." (Bataille, 1988, p. 153). Literature as a search for the impossible makes this search its fundamental principle. Still, it belongs to the domain of language, which is knowledge "which always has the possible as its object." (Bataille, 1971, p. 512). By transgressing itself, literature exposes the abyss of "the impossible which is a disorder, an aberration. It is a disorder that only despair and passion can bring." (Bataille, 1971, p. 512). In this sense, literature lies outside of the realm of the possible, and thus "belongs" to the realm of impossible.

But how is such an opening to the impossible even possible? It is not possible in the sense where literature leads to any results. If it does achieve the impossible, then it is outside its domain, but somewhat paradoxically at the same time it is its cause. The experience of the impossible is still the experience of a subject that dissolves together with its object: "To the extent that I effortlessly contemplate what has become for me the object of ecstasy. I can say of this object that it lacerates me." (Bataille, 2014, p. 237). Literature, therefore, is characterized by a gesture that only points to such an impossibility

by turning against itself. The language of literature is not its syntactic or semantic level, but the fact that it does not limit itself to these forms: “The attempt of the system of language thus ends in an experience of limits, as if literature lived by wanting to say what lies beyond words, outside the constraints of syntax – what is expressed in it as an aspiration to silence, to the impossible, to death or to the Being.” (Besnier, 2014, p. 325). Its language is a language that brings its own doom upon itself. With this gesture, however, it points to itself, to its own insufficiency and at the same time to the impossibility about which is condemned to lie:

[The writer] can only form those fascinating images – innumerable and false – dissipated by recourse to the "signification" of language, but where lost humanity rediscovers itself. (...) It is in him and through him that man learns how he himself remains forever elusive, being essentially unpredictable, and how knowledge must finally be resolved into the simplicity of emotion. (Bataille, 1990, p. 37).

But the question still remains: how can politics or philosophy be literature and thus open themselves to impossibility? First of all, the impossibility of this opening up must be emphasized again. It would mean the loss of closure and completeness, which we have tried to show as constitutive. However, we have also already suggested the ways in which the system is capable of shaking its own limits and encouraging the desire for sovereignty. Fascism was able to successfully construct such a system. But fascism made sovereignty into a weapon that led to an even more radical subjugation of the human. The only true sovereign was the fascist leader. Literature, by contrast, is able, through a turn on itself, to open this rupture in a way that is accessible to all. Like sovereignty in its banality, it is accessible to all, and such is its claim. In this sense, Bataille emphasizes Lautréamont’s statement that “Poetry must be made by everyone. Not by one.” (Lautréamont, 1987, p. 386). We can read this as a kind of political statement and derive our first conclusions. A politics that does not want to slide into fascism must open itself to the human’s sovereign demand for the *impossible* experience. It must, on the one hand, be a system and, on the other, create institutions that will lead to transgressive moments of its own. At a conference at the *Collège philosophique* in 1955, Bataille makes a similar demand on philosophy. He states that philosophy too has the potential but faces a fundamental conundrum of how to be both the language of knowledge and a dead language, that is, the language of silence and *non-knowledge* (Bataille, 1986, p. 263). However, this claim, in which philosophy would fall into silence, or be a philosophy that

has silence as its object, is again accompanied by a condition in which this philosophy would be accessible to all (Bataille, 1986, p. 254). This requirement thus responds to the characteristic of sovereignty as such rather than to the system. But to understand to what the attention of politics or philosophy must be directed, we must turn again to their summit, to the ends which justifies them and constitutes their meaning. In its confrontation with them, we will finally be able to speak of the politics of the *impossible* (Bataille, 1971, p. 521).

If we speak of a politics of the possible, it is a politics on whose horizon it is fully enclosed in absolute knowledge. It is also its summit and, because it is a system, it is necessarily exclusive and false. The politics of the impossible thus proceeds from a simple demand – to be open to that which stands beyond all systems – because it is the experience the human inevitably faces. But this demand, which is impossible because a truly open system does not exist, is striving for precisely this impossible opening. Paradoxically, it thus presupposes knowledge of this insufficiency; like literature, it must turn upon itself and question its goal and meaning. At the same time, to be aware that this questioning of meaning cannot just be a new meaning. This movement of the confrontation of the end can be described by words of Michel Foucault: “But what does it mean to kill God [the meaning] if he does not exist, to kill God who has never existed? Perhaps it means to kill God both because he does not exist and to guarantee he will not exist.” (Foucault, 2021, p. 32). After all, that is the gesture of literature. It is itself a closed system of language, but it kills itself for these two reasons. In this movement, the gesture itself falls into the abyss of non-knowledge where the existence of the system is put into play. The meaning of something is brought to its end, where the burst of laughter taking place and the sovereign experience is released.

The politics of the impossible is therefore the politics of this gesture, which is based on the premise that violence that is denied by the system always returns (even with greater intensity, like fascism) and that it is the system itself that suffers, not this violence, which is inevitably a part of human existence (Besnier, 2014, p. 230). It is therefore in the interest of the system not to strive for absoluteness in the form of absolute knowledge, but to keep its eye on what is essential: sovereignty (Bataille, 1991, p. 430). But it is also necessary that “the moment when sovereignty manifests itself (understood not as authority but as agreement with desire without measure) prevails in a decisive manner over the ‘political’ and financial consequences of its manifestation.” (Bataille, 1990, p. 41). The politics of the impossible is therefore a search for this openness in oneself, which

is at the same time an awareness of one's insufficiency and of the inevitable confrontation with sovereignty. It is a search for the possible, on the basis of the impossible, from which it has made its object: "to speak about the impossible is the only way to describe the possible because the possible man must be put in front of the impossible." (Bataille, 1971, p. 519). It must lead to sovereignty by putting its own homogeneous existence into play. The politics of the impossible is therefore a politics that stands between these two paths. It is aware of the irreducibility of its own condition, it is a system and is equally capable of putting this position into play. When Bataille declares that we need a system and also an excess, he means this double demand for politics. He articulates it explicitly in the discourse of philosophy: "I have personally felt it necessary to accept the difficulties of both paths, the path of transgression as well as the path of work" (Bataille, 1986, p. 261). The same necessity should also be raised to politics, whereby the politics of the impossible is a step into inventing the language of silence, the language of violence, of transgression. And instead of a synthesis of the possible and the impossible, this politics must attempt to make them coexist side by side. It has to accept its own disappearance. Bataille illustrates this lucidly in *The Story of the Rats*, where the experience of eroticism passes into the system and vice versa:

"Unfailingly, instantly, the 'little death' exhausts desire (does away with it) and puts us in the state of a man at the edge of a ravine, tranquil, indifferent to the sorcery of the void.

Comical that A. and B. and I, stretched out together, debated the most distant political questions – at night, in the relaxation that followed satisfaction.

I was caressing B.'s head.

A. was holding B.'s foot in his hand-she showing no regard for elementary decency.

We broached metaphysics.

We rediscovered the tradition of the dialogues!" (Bataille, 1991, p. 39).

Even though dialogue is not possible because the system is essentially closed, the politics of the impossible has to search for the gesture that is made from the position of a system but has its end in this sovereign NOTHING. Its aim is to bring about the collapse of the system. In the experience of collapse, as we have already said, the subject lives its own lack and that is precisely what the system of politics has to provide even though it takes the risk of its own existence. It is in the domain of literature that the gesture of this sacrifice takes place. Language is the domain of literature, but even so, the literature Bataille calls authentic is aware of its closeness and impossibility to escape from the system of language. Its authenticity lies in this awareness but also in the inexhaustible

search for the gesture perceived as a wound. That is why Denise Hollier calls Bataille “Hegel’s fool”: Bataille used this very gesture to reach for the impossible experience. He mimetized, even caricaturized the Hegelian system at the level of its absurdity where a burst of laughter leads into NOTHING. This search is the politics of the impossible. From the very beginning, it is doomed to be unsuccessful; nevertheless, it is still a search conceived as a gesture. A gesture that could somehow lead towards sovereignty.

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<sup>i</sup> The fundamental role of Kojève in Bataille's reading of Hegel has often been emphasized. It is agreed that Bataille essentially carries out a kojévian interpretation of Hegel. See Denis Hollier, *La prise de la concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974). or Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the negative* (New York: University of New York Press, 2012).

<sup>ii</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 317. Kojève operates with the idea that History is completed with the arrival of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel's absolute knowledge is not just a compendium of encyclopedic facts, but also explains how philosophy itself is possible, as well as man and phenomenology. The only question that remains is how to complete History practically and, as we know, Kojève expected a prompt success of communism. In this completion, the philosopher, or rather the sage, becomes a bureaucrat who will help complete the project of History. After all, Kojève himself resorted to this direction in his professional life.

<sup>iii</sup> Besnier believes that it is precisely the consideration of heterogeneity developed by Bataille in the journal *La Critique sociale* that makes it possible to develop the question of the impossible. Jean-Michel Besnier, *La politique de l'impossible* (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2014), 243.