<u>Negative faith:</u>

<u>the heretical writings of Valéry, Bataille and Laruelle</u>

by

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Submitted on September 30th, 2021

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Department of French.

Preface

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Modern Languages Degree Committee.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to outline a new concept: negative faith. Negative faith is an unsayable, unknowable faith without an object, a form of *energeia* that explains the existence of what can be called impossible texts. Negative theology, Valéry's *Cahiers*, Bataille's more mystical works and Laruelle's non-philosophy all revolve around non-referents such as God, the One or the Real. Nothing can be said or known about these non-referents, and yet this *corpus* is written almost exclusively around them, creating a seemingly unsolvable paradox. This thesis argues these texts are completely empty in an epistemological sense, but that their essence resides beyond the words themselves, the texts undergoing a form of self-destruction upon being read. They are radical heresies that disregard the traditional framework of reason, logic and scientific positivism to explore what in humans does not belong to the World. Taking root in both theological and philosophical traditions, from Pseudo Denys to Meister Eckhart, from Plotinus to Derrida, this thesis attempts to translate into academic terms the mystical and unfathomable role of this negative faith that unites these authors in what can be called an idempotent, immanent community.

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Introduction

"Mais conscients de nos propres forces, nous savons bien notre impuissance devant l'intelligence des intelligibles divins, notre incapacité à dire ou à exprimer tout ce qui peut se dire de la connaissance de Dieu."[1] This *constant d'impuissance* Pseudo-Denys makes in *Les Noms divins* is, quite like negative theology itself, highly paradoxical. Confronted with a God that is not only inaccessible but is nothing, a non-referent, on which nothing can be said that will not be totally false, what is named "negative theology" makes a strange choice: rather than simply *say nothing* and simply live a pious and spiritual life, theologians that are close to this vague category of theology choose to speak and write using the *via negativa*. On a surface level, what seems to be a discursive technique is often considered as a corpus consisting in repeated negations, saying what God is not and somehow, though a language that is powerless in front of Her, eliminate all attributes to attain the purity of this negative God.

This thesis, however, chooses to read "negative theology" very differently, and to do so it is first important to resituate historically both the term and its apophatic approach. This approach was, in our Greek-Occidental tradition, inaugurated by Plato in the *Parménide*, where he explains that science can know nothing of the divine: "Si c'est du côté du divin que se trouve la Maîtrise en soi absolument exacte et la Science en soi absolument exacte, il s'ensuit […] que nous ne pouvons rien connaître de ce divin par notre science".[2] This explains the apophatism of the Neoplatonists and one in particular, Plotinus, that will feature at length in this thesis. Of course, neither Plotinus nor Plato identify as negative theologians. The term "negative theology" is in itself highly problematic because it corresponds to no historical reality and in truth precedes the main texts that are subsumed in that category. Even the story of its founder or at least, leading figure, is a convoluted and strange one: Pseudo-Denys, as we will call him in this thesis, wrote under the name Dionysus the Areopagite, portraying himself as an Athenian convert of Paul the Apostle from the first century AD. Later studies have shown that this was entirely impossible, and that he was most likely a Syrian monk and pupil of Greek Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus, placing his authorship between 485 and 518. Pseudo-Denys himself never used the term negative theology, and it is only about a thousand years later, in Nicolas de Cusa's *De la docta ignorancia*, published in 1440 that the term is finally used in a systematic and repeated way. This is why the term negative theology, or negative theologian is used loosely in

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[1] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, trans. and ed. by Maurice de Gandillac (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1943) p.93
[2] Platon, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. and trad. by Luc Brisson, 2nd edn. (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), p.1116

this thesis as referring to both Pseudo-Denys and the second theologian that will be explored in depth, Meister Eckhart. Meister Eckhart's theology, in both its ideas and its forms, is far more radical than Pseudo-Denys, to the point to which he was eventually condemned by the Pope John XXII in the bull *In agro dominico* in 1327. Eckhart, despite of course still being affiliated to the Catholic Church, is more extreme in his challenge of Catholic dogma, and is closer to Rhenan mysticism than to the strict theology of the Church.

The new approach to negative theology offered here consists in not mistaking the essence of negative theology for the text itself. The negations contained in the text, and for that matter the affirmations that often follow them are not to be construed as having any epistemological or even spiritual value. These texts are completely empty, built on a non-referent that *is* nothing. This makes these texts literally impossible, as in a number of theories of language such as embodied cognition or Peirce's theory of signs, language necessitates a signifier, a signified and most importantly a referent to hold any kind of legitimacy and certainly any kind of epistemological value. It is seeing negative theology as a corpus of *impossible texts* built around a non-referent that initially brought together this seemingly heterogeneous constellation of 20th century authors and thinkers. When brought together with the lens of negative theology they offer a radical understanding on the notions such as the impossible, selfhood, the mystical experience and allow the discovery of a new form of faith that bonds these authors immanently: negative faith.

Valéry might be the most surprising inclusion to this line-up, given that he is remembered today as a rather classical, perhaps archaic poet whose work occupies little space in the modern academic landscape. However, one major part of his work remains largely unexplored: his *Cahiers*,[3] written every morning for over 30 years as from 1894. In these *Cahiers*, he aspires to give life to his life's project, *le Système*, by which he would be able to explain the way in which our mental life operates, using a quasi-phenomenological method: "Tout réduire à ce qui apparaît et à ce que je puis" (C, IV, 112). From the outset, he constantly asserts that the Self is empty, and yet uses "je" on nearly every page, making "je" a non-referent and thus opening the door for a whole new way of reading Valéry. This approach seems

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[3] Paul Valéry, *Cahiers* [1894-1914], ed. by Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri and Judith Robinson-Valéry (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). All subsequent references will be made as following: (C, volume of the *Cahiers*, page) as is conventional

especially interesting when applied to the early *Cahiers*, from before Valéry became famous. As he writes himself, "Ici, je ne tiens à charmer personne" (C, II, 36), there is no intended reception for theses *Cahiers* which allow Valéry to explore not only the emptiness of the Self, but to contemplate ideas and intuitions surprisingly close to Plotinus, negative theology and even to some extent Bataille and Laruelle. The *Cahiers*, due to its sheer length and the fragmentary, quasi-cryptic writing it contains have not been the subject of varied critical approaches. Nicole Ceylerette-Pietri's *Valéry et le Moi*[4] remains to this day *l'ouvrage de reference*, exploring Valéry's complex relation to the notion of Self through diverse angles such as mathematics. No mention is made, however, of the apophatic tendencies shown by Valéry. The other main voice in research around the *Cahiers* is Michel Jarrety[5] who lay the grounds for a huge amount of genetic and biographic work, using the *Cahiers* as sketchbooks of Valéry's later masterpieces, rather than considering their singularity in itself. It is thus safe to say that this thesis is taking the *Cahiers* in an entirely new and exciting direction, revealing its metaphysical potency and the mysticism hidden behind the rigorous scientific appearances of Valéry's prose. It is not only that the "je" is a non-referent, but that his theory of the Moi turns out to be quite complex and quasi-mystical: it is nothing, an *ego zero* as Gusdorf[6] puts it, and yet is incredibly fertile, as it is both the subject's only point of contact with the World and the place from which ideas, the unit of *la vie mentale*, emerge inexplicably. The way in which his Moi functions is, if on another scale, very close to the of the God of negative theology.

Bataille's relation to negative theology is relatively well documented, especially in *L'Expérience intérieure*[7] where he openly draws inspiration from Christian mysticism and directly quotes Pseudo Denys and Meister Eckhart. In the more mystical part of his works this thesis focuses on, in particular *L'Expérience intérieure*, *Le Coupable*[8] and the central erotic *récits Histoire de l'œil*[9] and *Madame Edwarda*,[10] he uses a string of non-referents, from "la nuit"[11] to "LE FOND DES MONDES",[12] all ultimately pointing towards the absolute negativity

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[4] Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, *Valéry et le Moi: des cahiers à l'œuvre* (Paris: Librairie Klinksieck, 1979).
[5] Michel Jarrety, *Paul Valéry* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).
[6] Georges Gusdorf , *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie (*Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991).
[7] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).
[8] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).
[9] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).
[10] Georges Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *Œuvres complètes III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp.9-31.
[11] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.39.
[12] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, P.59.

on the horizon of his work. This thesis aims to add a new kind of contribution to Bataille scholarship. Whilst the structuralist and poststructuralist readings of Bataille such as Barthes[13] and Ffrench[14] are of course essential, this thesis will aim to examine Bataille's work in a more metaphysical and theological manner. This of course is not an entirely new undertaking: Andrew Hussey,[15] Michael Richardson,[16] Amy Hollywood,[17] Ian James,[18] and many others have all in their respective ways approached Bataille from a relatively similar angle, the notion of *simulacrum* developed by Ian James in relation to Klossowski being of particular interest. However, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*[19] by Peter Tracy Connor appears as the most complete attempt at reading Bataille through the lens of mysticism. Although there may be initial similarities between his project and that of this thesis, his vision of mysticism as a whole is ultimately very different than the one developed here, as will hopefully become apparent. The goal here is not to read Bataille and his relation to mysticism *from the outside*, with a rational and historical approach, but rather to examine his relation to negative theology specifically by applying a brand of radical hermeneutics, a reading of the impossible that allows his texts to express their metaphysical and spiritual power and not drown them in an ocean of 20th-century theory references. This starts by rereading his erotic *récits* through the negative light provided by negative theology, that allows a reading of Bataille by which *Histoire de l'œil* and *Madame Edwarda* are perhaps the most important texts in his whole body of work. Furthermore, the idea of the inner experience will also be confronted with different accounts of the possibility of a mystical ecstatic instant in an attempt to determine what the modalities and implications of such an impossible instant could be.

The most radical and challenging author in this thesis is undoubtedly François Laruelle, creator of what he has named non-philosophy or non-standard philosophy. The starting point of his work is that non-philosophy is the One, a non-referent that is the positive condition of the

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[13] Roland Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'œil', *Essais critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), pp.248-257.

[14] Patrick Ffrench, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[15] Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar: the Mysticism of Georges Bataille* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

[16] Hollywood, Amy, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

[17] Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

[18] Ian James, 'From Recuperation to Simulacrum: Klossowski's Readings of Bataille' in *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed by Andrew Hussey (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006).

[19] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

World, understood as the phenomenal world and the systems of representation it produces, including of course philosophy. The One is separated-without-separation from the World and has no history or genealogy; nothing can be said about the one, at least not in normal language. Laruelle's goal in creating non-philosophy is first and foremost to point out the tyrannical way in which philosophy works: it is an all-appropriating force, that sees itself in everything it considers and objectifies. Philosophy works on the basis of a *décision philosophique*, the production of any given philosophical system automatically implies that it is the only functional system, thus discrediting all that has come before and that will come after, in an infinite roll of differentiated hierarchies. In the eyes of Laruelle, philosophy has been incapable of treating the One correctly and constantly making it interact with Being, creating what he calls *le mixte*. It is for all these reasons that he created non-philosophy, by which he creates a new language and way of thought that recycles the material from philosophy into something totally new. Non-philosophy is founded on the basis of axioms that have no rational justifications and are not rooted in science or philosophy: they are the result of what he calls the *vision-en-Un*, the fact of thinking from the position of the One outward rather than thinking about the one from a position where it cannot be understood. The Real is the axiomatic decision of non-philosophy and is indivisible by concept, unrepresentable and irreducible to all, completely and utterly immanent. There are a number of non-philosophical operations that flow from this: *dualysation*, which is the process by which words or *énoncés-monde* are taken from philosophy and exposed to determination-in-the-last-instance, which is the causal mode of the Real. They then become material for the *noms premiers* of non-philosophy and generally of an entirely non-referential language that allows Laruelle to speak and write from the Real rather than about the Real. Another important operation to understand is unilateralisation, whereby the material or the effect of non-philosophical causality is present, but its cause, without being entirely absent, is not present or immanent-in-One. It goes without saying that because of this, reading Laruelle can be quite difficult, and this thesis will aim to be as pedagogical and explicative as possible. Whilst reception of his work was slow at first, there has been an increase in interest around his work, in particular in the Anglo-Saxon world. Major critical works on Laruelle, however, tend to use him *in relation* to other disciplines or approaches: Alexander Galloway with the digital in his book *Laruelle: Against the Digital*[20] and Katrina Kolozova with poststructuralism in *The Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy*[21] constitute representative

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[20] Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[21] Katerina Kolozova, *The Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

examples of this tendency. There is a sense that Laruelle's work is too radical to be read on its own, and must be softened by more familiar approaches, closer to the World. The dominant way of reading Laruelle is to consider his work as experimental, as he pushes the limits of thought to their paroxysm by posing these self-standing, arbitrary axioms. This thesis attempts, with the help of negative theology, to on the contrary read Laruelle for Laruelle, in his total radicality, thus unleashing the full force of one of the most important forays in contemporary modern thought and spirituality. Laruelle's work, especially the later non-theological works including *Le Christ futur*,[22] *Christo-fiction*,[23] and *Mystique non-philosophique*,[24] should not be seen as experimental but as reflecting an immanent negative faith that fuels the heretic energy of his writing.

As a whole, this thesis aims to show that these authors not only share a form of apophatic kinship, but that these *impossible texts* reveal a shared heresy, denouncing the World and paving a way for the subject to emancipate himself or herself from the World to be One with the One, God, the Real, *la nuit* or any of these non-referents. There is arguably a *negative faith* at the origin of every one of these works, and this is what this thesis aims to argue, and by doing so subvert the notions of transcendence and immanence, of selfhood and of truth. What one would usually write at this stage of an introduction is that the concept of negative faith will reveal itself throughout the thesis, will be explored and explained, analysed and precisely defined. However, this is not a promise that would be possible to keep: negative faith is, very much like the God of negative theology, unfathomable, unsayable. This thesis can only weave its way around it, attempt to talk about its non-relational relation to the texts it caused. Negative faith is the *energeia* behind the existence in these impossible texts: it is a faith in *nothing*, a faith without an object, an unidentifiable force that allowed these authors to go where rationality would not allow them to go. It is the main discovery or contribution this thesis hopes to make, and the immaterial foundation that is shared by all the authors. It is in their negative faith, more than in their philosophical, metaphysical and discursive approach that these authors form what we will call an *immanent community*. It is this faith that has made them defy the impossible, write texts that have no epistemological foundations, that are entirely empty. One of the many paradoxes evoked in this thesis is the fact of writing about something unfathomable or, maybe in more accurate terms, nothing at all, a *Dieu néant*, is a *de facto* betrayal. The very act of

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[22] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur: une leçon d'hérésie* (Paris: Exils, 2002).
[23] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).
[24] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007).

writing immediately places these authors in an act of self-contradiction, a performative paradox clearly described by Connor in *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*:

> The mystic, in advance of his critics, readily avows the contrariety of his position as author, a position that involves him in both a compromise and a contradiction. A compromise in that, by descending into the labyrinth of rhetoric – to the tropes that allow language to conceal its own rhetoricity – only contributes to the appearance of deceptiveness and trickery that his texts seek to deny. Mystic discourse is in fact engaged in a contradiction that is prior to language: it is self-contradicting in and by its sheer existence. Not only the "lone witness" to his experience, but the mystic is also, and inevitably, a hostile witness; a liability unto its author, his testimony can only be used against him. In the mystic's text, language functions as an expletive, both in the sense that the language used is, in its entirety, nothing more than a filler, contributing nothing toward the ultimate meaning the text aspires to reveal, and also in that mystic speech is a profanity it hurls at itself, decrying its own impotence to achieve a goal that always eludes it.[25]

Connor perfectly summarizes the clear logical problems that appear whilst considering the written *corpus* of mysticism, and by extension of negative theology. However, this very literal reading of writing around the One or a negative God is precisely what this thesis will attempt to deconstruct, without ignoring these paradoxes. The goal is to show how this negative faith allows these authors to defy the impossible without having to ground their writing or their spiritual life in any rational epistemological frame. On the contrary, with different degrees of radicality, they uproot their writing and their thought from the cultural, philosophical and religious shackles of the World to access what should not, what cannot in rational terms be accessed. Ultimately, this negative faith is a necessary condition to the inner experience, to becoming God in God, One with One and becoming a *Sujet-Christ*.

The term radicality in another key to this thesis, as it is often used to describe the thoughts, ideas and practices of these authors. Radical is understood in the conventional way as uncompromising, extreme, but not only: radical here signifies emancipated from the World, heretically confronting and overcoming what reason would call impossible. Radicality implies the ability to think from somewhere else than the World, in Laruellian terms *penser et vivre*

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[25] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, p.49.

selon la vision-en-Un, to think, write and experience things from the One instead of from the World. This is the epitome of the heresies united by this elusive negative faith. These authors are of not all equal in the face of this radicality: Laruelle clearly stands as the most radical of them as it will be made abundantly clear, whilst Valéry and Bataille are torn between the World and the One, between positive knowledge and a mystical, inner experience. There are even different shades of radicality within the *corpus* of negative theology, Pseudo Denys being far too attached to the teachings and the artificial dogmas of the Church to be considered as radical as his Rhenan counterpart Meister Eckhart, that comes close in many regards to the radicality of Laruelle. This radicality often causes at the least an impression of disorientation whilst reading these texts, Laruelle in particular: their extreme divergence from the epistemological norm can be seen as a form of insanity. Despite the negative connotations of the word, this is another central aspect of this thesis: to show that this insanity is not only virtuous but necessary if we want to open ourselves to new spaces of thought and radically new ways of thinking.

This thesis must then, too, adopt a form of radicality to attempt to truly comprehend these texts, to think not only from the World but from the One. It will not however leave all rational justification behind, and will attempt to balance the academic and the irrational, the spiritual and the philosophical. To do so, a slightly unorthodox structure has been chosen: there are nine chapters that each cover a notion, that is put through the matrix of negative theology, Valéry, Bataille and Laruelle in that order. The idea is to not isolate the authors from one another, but on the contrary allow them to interact both textually and in the reader's mind. There is also, despite the seemingly fragmentary structure, a certain linearity to the way in which the thesis is presented, which is made clear by the small synthetic paragraphs at the beginning and at the end of each section. As the thesis goes on, the ideas become more radical, and it dives deeper into more opaque and mystical territories. In doing so, this thesis accepts to go further than the academically acceptable and might sometimes cross the line between reason and faith, not to reflect any hypothetical personal experiences on the author's behalf, but rather to respect the essence of the texts and to bring thought where it shouldn't go, where everything seems to be against it, and maybe to where it is made irrelevant and powerless.

This thesis will first look at the question of how to approach these non-referents, what strategies and methods, if any at all, are put into place to circumvent the discursive and intellectual difficulties that stem from writing *ex nihilo*. It will then pivot to examine the categories of the possible and the impossible and how they are challenged and perhaps even

made irrelevant by the radicality of these authors. The emphasis will then move onto exploring the notion of heresy, that unites these authors, although the degree to which they follow their heretical intuitions differ. The question of fiction will then be evoked, as it plays an absolutely central role in understanding how these texts function as *simulacra* and parodies, with the exception of Laruelle who resists this qualification on account of having his own, self-standing non-representative writing he calls *philo-fiction*. The notion of Self will then be explored and dissected, as well as the idea of individual identity itself; as it will become clear, the mystical experience challenges the notion of selfhood, as the subject's fundamental oneness with God or any form of radical immanence is revealed and actualised. God, the *néant* and *la nuit* will then be considered in themselves, although they resist all definitional attempts. The question of the writing and the reception of these texts will then be treated, with two main questions: why write when you are destined to fail, to say absolutely nothing and produce an empty text? And is a reading experience even possible if the text is empty? The thesis' final movement will be to directly confront this negative, non-relational faith that unites these authors, this *energeia* that allows them to go beyond the impossible and perform a radical heresy through the production of texts that, like the subject, do not belong to the World.

It must be noted that it is delicate to explore these texts in an academic manner. The first difficulty of course is the use of multiple non-referents. Although different authors use different words, they are all semantically empty and theoretically interchangeable. Practically, however, this is not the case, except in a few particular circumstances: Meister Eckhart uses both "the One" and "God" indifferently, as does Laruelle with "*l'Un*" and "*le Réel*", although "*le Réel*" is far more common his more recent works. In Bataille there are numerous non-referents but that despite their quasi-equivalence, hold certain specificities that will be explained. This is also a thesis about impossible texts that are written around non-referents, and it will do its best to guide the reader through the numerous paradoxes that emerge from that complex reality. The ideas and concepts that will be explored are, for some, unjustifiable from a rational point of view: this thesis offers an opportunity for these ideas to express themselves without being forced through the matrix of scientific positivism.

1.Method

Negative theology

Using the word method in the context of this thesis is immediately problematic. Method is traditionally associated with rational, systemic, scientific approaches, evoking for instance Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*. It is also something that is often explicit, explained, that unfolds for the reader the process behind what he or she will be reading, how for instance data was collected and used, and how the author arrived at any given conclusion. It is a key part of any scientific process, where developing a method is as important, if not more important, than the results it may or may not yield. In other words, method is the centrepiece of any given epistemological undertaking, at the very least in the context of scientific positivism. The way in which this concept applies to the texts being examined in this thesis is far more ambiguous. As it will become clear, negative theology, Valéry, Bataille and Laruelle offer varying degrees of methodological rigour; however, what links them together is the object, or rather the non-object that they attempt to approach and experience. It is this very non-object, this non-referent, that seems problematic as the horizon for any given epistemological undertaking, as it is precisely that of which nothing can or should be said, something about which there can be no knowledge. Any attempt to approach such a non-referent, let alone in a methodological manner, seems destined to fail, as it escapes the classical framing of scientific positivism, epistemology and even to a certain extent philosophical reason. And yet these texts still try, despite knowing that they are destined to fail: therein lies the mystery this thesis attempts to comprehend. None of the methods described in this chapter can be deemed successful in any traditional way, as they all fall short of describing the unfathomable One, God, *néant* or whichever of these interchangeable *noms premiers* are used. However, one must consider not only what happens in the language of these texts, but also what happens beyond language, once the text is destroyed and annihilated by its epistemological voidness.

In the context of negative theology, it is hard to determine if there is a given method due to the highly heterogeneous nature of this hypothetical corpus. An overly simplified and naïve

way of reading negative theology would be to see its negative discursive appearance as its essence. This is the most common way negative theology is perceived: its method would be a purely discursive one, whereby each negation relating to God (God is not x) would enable the reader to approach and comprehend the absolute purity and oneness of a God that has no attributes. Negative theology is often reduced to what we will call its *textual apophasis*, and understandably so given the content of the texts themselves, especially that of Pseudo-Denys, which gives multiple illustrations of what a stereotypical negative theology text should look like, for instance in his *Théologie mystique*:

Nous élevant plus haut, nous disons maintenant que cette Cause n'est ni âme ni intelligence; qu'elle ne possède ni imagination, ni opinion, ni raison, ni intelligence; qu'elle ne se peut exprimer ni concevoir; qu'elle n'a ni nombre, ni ordre, ni grandeur, ni petitesse, ni égalité, ni inégalité, ni similitude, ni dissimilitude; qu'elle ne demeure ni immobile ni se meut; qu'elle ne tient se tient au calme, ni ne possède de puissance; qu'elle n'est ni puissance, ni lumière; qu'elle ne vit ni n'est vie; qu'elle n'est ni essence, ni perpétuité, ni temps; qu'on ne peut la saisir intelligiblement; (…) qu'elle échappe à tout raisonnement, à toute appellation, à tout savoir; qu'elle n'est ni ténèbre, ni lumière, ni erreur, ni vérité[1]

Negative theology's content and *raison d'être* would thus be a purely discursive operation: these serialised negations would by gradual exclusion of all things bring us closer to the non-referent that is God. One could even, in this perspective, reduce negative theology to an epistemological technique relying on negation as the exclusive tool enabling us to approach the ineffable. This way of thinking and perceiving negative theology is however hugely flawed, as it omits the very nature of what a non-referent is in relation to language. If a word has no referential and thus no epistemological value, then whatever is said about it, positive or negative, has no value either. In this sense, viewing the word 'God' as a non-referent, as negative theology does, has an impact that reaches further than the pseudo-corpus of negative theology itself: it means that all theology, both apophatic and cataphatic, as soon as it uses the word 'God', is not only destined to fail but is completely void epistemologically. Nothing can be said about

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[1] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, trans. and ed. by Maurice de Gandillac (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1943) p.183-184.

God, and there is no logic to believing we can say what God isn't when the word God itself signifies nothing and refers to nothing. In *L'idole et la distance*[2] Jean-Luc Marion suggests that negative theology is precisely this *mise à l'épreuve* of the impossibility of saying or knowing anything about God, creating an inevitable distance between humans, language and knowledge on one side and an unfathomable God on the other. The fact that we cannot say anything about God, he asserts, is the closest we can get to proving his "existence":

> Puisque nous ne pouvons penser la distance, ni parler d'elle, parce qu'elle n'offre 'rien' à l'énoncé, faut-il en maintenir la légitimité, même problématique? Faut-il seulement penser à penser l'impensable? [...] Loin que l'impossibilité, de fait et théoriquement incontournable, de penser l'ab-solument impensable termine l'entreprise de le penser, elle l'authentifie et, en un sens, l'inaugure. La vérification expérimentale que l'impensable n'est pas chimérique, consiste précisément en ce que la pensée ne parvient pas à le penser. La pensée se renforce à défaillir devant l'impensable. Cette défaillance lui devient son premier recours, et une nouvelle incitation. – Nous disons donc: non seulement il faut dire la distance, mais l'impossibilité de la dire sur le mode d'autres énoncés la garantit comme telle, et même, l'accomplit.[3]

Marion thus sees negative theology as a corpus that by experimenting with and constantly reactualising the failure of thought in the face of the unthinkable renders explicit this *distance* between the subject and God. Once again, negative theology's essence is deemed to reside in language, although perhaps a language used against itself, to show its own powerlessness. Negative theology would thus be an experimental and discursive method that is useful insofar as it confirms the unthinkable in its unthinkability.

Marion's approach, however interesting, seems to omit what this thesis will argue is the central aspect of negative theology and the Neoplatonic tradition it stems from, what we will call *spiritual apophasis*. As we will explain in more detail in chapter 6, *spiritual apophasis* is the process by which a subject becomes one with the One or to be "Dieu en Dieu"[4] as Meister Eckhart writes in *De la connaissance de Dieu*. To do this, an individual must get rid of

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[2] Jean-Luc Marion , *L'Idole et la distance: cinq études* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1977).
[3] Jean-Luc Marion , *L'Idole et la distance: cinq études*, p.185.
[4] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, trans. Paul Petit, 5ᵗʰ edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p.77.

everything that is not God in a form of reverse kenosis, by which the subject must empty himself or herself to the point where he or she stops being a subject (and, for that matter, a he or she) and simply becomes one with God, undistinguishable from the One. This is what Plotinus describes in one of the most famous and widely discussed passages of his *Enneades*:

> Reviens à toi-même et regarde: si tu ne vois pas la beauté en toi, fais comme le sculpteur d'une statue qui doit devenir belle: il enlève une partie, il gratte, il polit, il nettoie, il essuie jusqu'à ce qu'il dégage de belles lignes dans le marbre; comme lui, enlève le superflu, redresse ce qui est oblique, nettoie tout ce qui est sombre pour le rendre brillant, et ne cesse pas de sculpter ta propre statue jusqu'à ce que l'éclat divin de la vertu se manifeste, jusqu'à ce que tu voies la tempérance siégeant sur un trône sacré. Es-tu devenu cela? Est-ce que tu vois cela? [...] Te vois-tu dans cet état? Tu es alors devenu une vision; aie confiance en toi; même en restant ici, tu as monté; et tu n'as plus besoin de guide; fixe ton regard et vois.[5]

"Ne cesse pas de sculpter ta propre statue" is not an injunction for us to cultivate our own singularity but rather to keep ridding ourselves of everything until we take the shape of the One, until we are able to become the One (which is not a permanent state, as will be discussed in chapter 6). However, it would be a gross oversimplification to consider any of these texts, Neoplatonic, Christian or otherwise, as containing a method to achieve this state of being undistiguished from God. None of them offer anything in terms of prescriptive instructions to the reader (other than in a metaphorical form), precisely because this experience, like the One or God, is completely unsayable and unthinkable, and is not achieved by any given method. Although it is clearly related to the apophatic gesture considered on an individual, spiritual level, it would be a glaring mistake to attempt to reduce it to a method that would be contained in this corpus.

<u>Valéry</u>

Given the fragmented, hybrid and quite frankly massive nature of the *Cahiers*, trying to narrow its 29,000 pages down to a certain set of goals and methods, let alone to a single goal, will always be a perilous and rather approximative undertaking. Over the thirty years in which

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[5] Plotin, *Ennéades*, I, 6, 9, trans. and ed. by Emile Bréhier, 5th edn. (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres,1989), p.105.

Valéry wrote the *Cahiers*, he covered an enormous amount of subjects and questions, from architecture to physics, from pure maths to the cultural policy of the French government. Arguably, however, and especially in the earlier *Cahiers*, there is arguably one overarching goal whose importance and ambition surpasses all others: to create a system that would allow us to understand how the human mind and human consciousness work. This is what Valéry would refer to for the rest of his life as *le Système*, which he saw as being the ultimate finality of his work; it would remain a fantasy that he never gave up on but never lived up to, leaving only fragments behind, having failed to establish a stable, clear and systematic way to represent and explain the way in which the mind works.

This dream, however, is very much alive in the early *Cahiers*, as Valéry lays out the groundwork for what he believes will be his life's work. This *Système* is something he wants to build through the observation and classification of what he calls *faits mentaux*, the smallest denominator of this system, whose successive appearances determine the trajectory, behaviour and state of any given human mind. The term itself *fait mentaux* is ambivalent and hard to define as its precise meaning can vary from one *Cahier* to the next, sometimes even from one page to the next, adding an extra layer of difficulty to the hermeneutics of an already hermetic corpus. As Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri notes in *Valéry et le Moi*, " Rien n'est moins clos que ces *définitions* s'accumulant au fil des ans sans qu'on puisse y saisir un vrai progrès de la recherche, qui juxtaposent et mêlent, dans le glissement des associations, des notions parfois incompatibles".[6] Our understanding is that a *fait mental* is a mental event, for instance the appearance of an idea, or even a micro-event, that could be infinitesimally small but that, put in a causal chain with other micro-events, would still have a role in determining the mental state of a given individual. It is the succession of mental states that determines what the individual's self is, or at least what it is perceived as: "Le moi est déterminé par l'*ordre* des états qui se succèdent à partir d'un état quelconque dans un individu. Plus le nombre des états nécessaires pour déterminer est grand plus l'individu est particularisé, plus, aussi, il est rare. On peut admettre qu'il y a des individus à plusieurs solutions à partir d'un état." (CIII, 95).

In the third *Cahiers*, Valéry offers an enlightening account of what he is trying to achieve:

Trouver.

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[6] Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, Valéry et le Moi: des *cahiers à l'œuvre* (Paris: Librairie Klinksieck, 1979), p.27.

Aller à la limite.

Pouvoir écrire sa pensée. La soustraire à la particularité d'un de ses points. Voir les ensembles.

Remplacer chaque fait mental par sa loi plus quelque chose.

Pouvoir opérer, transformer.

Trouver – le lien sans cesse du formel et du signifié.

Remplacer chaque chose par sa formule ou expression d'une suite d'opérations intellectuelles.

Résistances. Difficulté. Symétrie.

Mesures.

Pouvoir –

Représentations diverses, conformes etc. Transformations. (CIII, 158)

The ambitions Valéry exposes here are very obviously scientific: "soustraire [la pensée] à la particularité d'un de ses points" is highly representative of his tendency throughout the early *Cahiers* (and even in the *Cahiers* as a whole) to departicularise everything, to attempt to neutralise the singularity or individuality of any given mental event or person to make way for generic, general considerations. Here he is not interested in the given thought of a given person but in *la pensée* as a whole. This is made even more explicit when he writes "Remplacer chaque fait mental par sa loi plus quelque chose"; his goal is thus to be able to explain the emergence of each and every *fait mental* with general laws that his research will allow him to find. Valéry knows this epistemological project is a massive, maybe even impossible undertaking, and for that reason constantly reasserts the radical nature of his work, for instance when he writes "Aller à la limite" or in the second *Cahiers* where he states his intentions "TO GO TO THE LAST POINT celui au delà duquel tout sera changé" (C, II, 61). He wants to push himself to the very edge, and perhaps even beyond the edge of human knowledge. However, instead of positioning himself as a successor of other prominent figures who might have attempted similar things, Valéry firmly believes in the complete originality of his work: "Je présente ces travaux comme une tentative et cette tentative même comme le signe de l'étonnement que j'ai eu lorsque je me suis aperçu qu'on ne l'avait pas encore tentée." (C, III, 51). This also entails the creation of a new language that would allow us to adequately represent the succession of *fait mentaux* we

call thought: "Remplacer chaque chose par sa formule ou expression d'une suite d'opérations intellectuelles." It is interesting to note that Valéry's research is not only speculative and discursive but, especially in these early *Cahiers*, it is also mathematical: equations and algebra take up hundreds of pages of his work. Whilst most of these are hermetic even to the trained mathematical eye, this "fascination mathématique",[7] in the words of Nathalie Celeyrette-Pietri, shows the lengths to which Valéry will go to achieve his goals, here learning a whole new language, despite mathematics having been one of his worst subjects from a young age. It is an illustration of Valéry's relentless exploration of all possible means of systematising the appearance of the *faits mentaux*.

The method Valéry uses to attempt to create his *Système* is perhaps even more surprising than the initial ambition itself. The only way of defining it properly, despite the anachronism attached to using such a term for works starting in the late nineteenth century, is to call it a phenomenological method. Valéry wants to observe these mental phenomena as they are, without applying any preconceived theoretical model, in order to achieve pure observation, "Tout réduire à ce qui apparaît" (C, IV, 211), and use only pure, untainted data to draw conclusions that will then serve to build his *Système*. This phenomenological method is made both necessary and quasi-impossible by one of the central concepts Valéry develops in the *Cahiers*; namely what he calls the "présent absolu" (C, II, 122). To explain this complex concept, it is simpler to let Valéry himself present its precepts:

> Dans le domaine de la pensée, tout ce qui est apparent, est. Tout ce qui apparaît
> n'est que ce qui apparaît. Tout approfondissement d'une chose qui a été pensée, est
> autre chose. On ne se trompe jamais sur ce qu'on a pensé. On n'a jamais cru penser
> telle chose au lieu de telle autre. « Au lieu de » n'a aucun sens. Creuser une idée,
> on ne la creuse pas dans le même trou. (C, II, 101)

For Valéry, thought is a succession of instants that have no link to each other. The only true thought, the only one that has any value whatsoever, is the thought that emerges and exists in the space of an instant only to be abolished in the transition to the next instant. Valéry's

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[7] Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, *Valéry et le Moi: des cahiers à l'œuvre* (Paris: Librairie Klinksieck, 1979), p.9.

ontology of thought is an ontology of immediacy: the true 'being' of a thought or a mental phenomenon is altered as soon as it seems to be prolonged into the next instant. This is why he writes "Creuser une idée, on ne la creuse pas dans le même trou", precisely because an idea is unable to remain the same from one moment to the next: outside of the instant it emerges in, it becomes other than itself. The *présent* is thus *absolu* precisely because no thought, *fait* or *phénomène* mental has an authentic relationship of identity to itself beyond the instant when it emerges in the mind. This is why Valéry also writes "La seule chose continue est la notion de présent" (C, II, 246), given that if nothing survives the transition from one instant to the next in the mind, the epistemological primacy of the present is constant and undeniable. An observation can thus only have a value if it is made in the instant and instantly represented.

One can only begin to imagine the problems Valéry faced in the light of the *présent absolu*: how can you observe an instant without taking into account the preceding instants and the following ones? Do we even have the mental capacity to isolate one instant from all the others? And even if we were able to do so, how could we then capture what we observed - with what instruments, and how could we adequately represent such observations? In the third *Cahier*, Valéry seems to draw the outlines of an answer to these questions:

Le premier et le plus délicat des secrets consiste à s'écouter soi-même – et à saisir en même temps que laisser faire – les formations autochtones de l'esprit. S'obéir...

Cela suppose qu'il y a des cas où l'on trouble quelque chose de précieux – On trouble en effet un développement naturel, une loi une, en y mêlant d'autres conditions.

Il faut laisser se faire et se prononcer les associations naturelles dans l'esprit, s'écouter – car ce développement est une fonction aussi claire que possible de tout ce que l'on est.

D'où problèmes:

vraie valeur de cette « inspiration »

justification de l'entraînement

+ détermination de la différence entre la suite dite naturelle et la

suite troublée   plus complexe. Possibilité –

+ Ce développement peut surprendre, apporter de l'inattendu – c'est sa marque, au lieu que les autres sont connus d'avance – – –

Cet inattendu nous apprend, par DEFINITION, quelque chose – (C, III, 215)

Valéry seems to suggest a method by which he would observe himself within himself, letting himself be carried by the specific temporality of thought, achieving the seemingly impossible balance of capturing the instant and not interfering with it "saisir en même temps que laisser faire – les formations autochtones de l'esprit". The expression "S'obéir" is also very interesting, as it suggests a separation between the reflexive pronoun "se" and the self of the observing party; "s'obéir" would therefore mean obeying the laws of the mind, the "s'" thus being depersonalised. This theoretical method thus relies on a fragile balance between passivity, *laissez-aller* and observation. But as he points out himself, this observation risks troubling the initial order of the mind and the state of the observed phenomena: "Cela suppose qu'il y a des cas où l'on trouble quelque chose de précieux – On trouble en effet un développement naturel, une loi une, en y mêlant d'autres conditions" (C, III, 215); this is only one of the problems that make this method more of an ideality than anything else.

Bataille

It would seem almost disrespectful to claim to be able to isolate a "method" in Bataille's more mystical writings. Even in *L'Expérience intérieure*, which is probably the most structured book of this particular section of Bataille's work, the goal of what he is trying to do is precisely to free his writing of any intellectual and philosophical injunction, including rationalism, and thus the need for a "method". Having a "method", for instance in *L'Expérience intérieure*, would mean admitting there is a goal and thus a utility to Bataille's undertaking, as it would be a method to achieve a given result; method is one of the tools that allow the construction of projects, scientific or otherwise, an idea that Bataille vehemently rejects:

> J'en arrive à cette position: l'Expérience intérieure est le contraire de l'action. Rien de plus. | L'« action » est tout entière dans la dépendance du projet. Et, ce qui est lourd, la pensée discursive est elle-même engagée dans le mode d'existence du projet. La pensée discursive est le fait d'un être engagé dans l'action, elle a lieu en lui à partir de ses projets, sur le plan de la réflexion des projets. Le projet n'est pas seulement le mode d'existence impliqué par l'action, nécessaire à l'action, c'est une façon d'être dans le temps paradoxale: *c'est la remise de l'existence à plus tard.*[8]

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[8] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p.59.

His rejection of the positivist notion of project, as well as the capitalist *remise de l'existence à plus tard*, means that his writing should be formed in some sort of organic immediacy, with a valorisation of the present that in a way is not too far removed from Valéry's *présent absolu*. This is reflected even stylistically in both *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Le Coupable*, where the writing is often fragmented, only pretending to have any form of linear structure. Bataille himself seems to thrive in this chaos, taunting the reader: "Je veux décrire une expérience mystique et ne m'en écarte qu'en apparence, mais qui discernerait une voie dans le chaos que j'introduis?"[9] There is a strong sense of theatrality in his writing, where his je, his moi, his *ipse* is constantly *mis en scène*, sometimes in an almost excessive, parodic fashion. This leads Sartre, in his rather incendiary article "Un nouveau mystique",[10] to call *L'Expérience intérieure* "un essai-martyre"[11] which has a certain merit: it is Bataille's supplications, his fears, the sudden changes of his mood from optimism to complete nihilism, which are offered to the spectator in *L'Expérience intérieure*, which to some extent is as much about *l'Expérience intérieure* itself as Bataille's relation to this experience, something that will be even more explicit in *Le Coupable* that came out only a year later. Bataille for instance shows himself, begging God in a desperate, martyr-like tone:

> Sens de la supplication. – Je l'exprime ainsi, en forme de prière: – « O Dieu Père, Toi qui, dans une nuit de désespoir, crucifias Ton fils, qui, dans cette nuit de boucherie, à mesure que l'agonie devint *impossible* – à crier – devins l'*Impossible* Toi-même et ressentis l'*impossibilité* jusqu'à l'horreur, Dieu de désespoir, donne-moi ce cœur, Ton cœur qui défaille, qui excède et ne tolère plus que Tu sois![12]

The only real method or process at work is that of *simulacrum*, which will be explored in chapter 4 and during the *Interlude*. However, there are a few methodological elements that can be pointed out amid the rather chaotic, impulsive writing. Firstly, there is a form of voluntary porosity between the *Expérience intérieure* itself and the way it is written about. Unlike in negative theology, although this applies slightly less to Meister Eckhart, Bataille writes with the freedom afforded to him by the absence of all dogma and constraints. There are

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[9] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), p.35.

[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Un nouveau mystique', *Critiques littéraires; Situations, I* (Paris, Gallimard, 1947), pp.133-175.

[11] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Un nouveau mystique', *Critiques littéraires; Situations, I,* pp.133-175, (p.134).

[12] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.45-46.

no grotesque series of negations in *L'Expérience intérieure*, but his apophatic tendencies are still apparent in the way in which he starts his discussion around the inner experience, taking a quasi-exclusively negative approach, rejecting one by one the notions of project, action, God and all *moyens extérieurs*. The main axiom of his writing and perhaps the most subversive element of what could be called a hypomethod is placing the experience itself as the only authority, assuring *L'Experience intérieure*'s complete autotelicity. This experience is that of an absolutely negative *non-savoir* that is the ultimate negative horizon of Bataille's work:

> Les présuppositions dogmatiques ont donné des limites indues à l'expérience: celui qui sait déjà ne peut aller au-delà d'un horizon connu. / J'ai voulu que l'expérience conduise où elle menait, non la mener à quelque fin donnée d'avance. Et je dis aussitôt, qu'elle ne mène à aucun havre (mais en un lieu d'égarement, de non-sens). J'ai voulu que le non-savoir en soit le principe.[13]

He also attempts in multiple ways to approach both the inner experience itself and the God, the nothingness that the subject becomes one with in the ecstatic instant of the inner experience. One of the interesting techniques he uses is constant shifting between a number of non-referents that signal the same thing in the text: *la nuit, le rien, Dieu, le non-savoir.* This somewhat destabilizes the reader, who is used to philosophical texts where words have a stable, universal meaning and are not replaced arbitrarily by other words that are supposed to mean the same thing. However, this is not just Bataille switching the textual avatars of absolute negativity merely for fun or for dramatic effect: he is mimicking the complete semantic instability, if not emptiness, of these non-referents. His opposition to any kind of systematic method is also due to the incompatibility of such methods with the non-object or non-referent at the centre of his writing. Even writing itself, language itself, is inadequate, and implies a sort of betrayal of the inner experience and of God: "Donc parler, penser, à moins de plaisanter ou de..., c'est escamoter l'existence: ce n'est pas mourir mais être mort. C'est aller dans les monde éteint et calme où nous traînons d'habitude: là tout est suspendu, la vie est remise à plus tard, de remise en remise..."[14] Writing and thinking are activities that belong to the realm of human *sufficiency*, shields somewhat from the deep anguish caused by the *ipse*'s knowledge of its own death and the potential subsequent inner experience. This is perhaps why he allows his writing to be completely subjective, sometimes almost sounding like a flow of consciousness. Unlike in

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[13] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.15-16.
[14] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.59-60.

Valéry, there is no kind of pure observation or desire to think completely objectively, using the "je" as a generic gateway into the *Tout*. Bataille's textual space is *une zone de non-loi*, where even the most prominent intellectual figures can be used somewhat against their will. Descartes, ironically the author of the *Discours de la Méthode*, falls victim to Bataille's total freedom when Bataille parodies the stage of hyperbolic doubt of the *Médiations Métaphysiques*:

> Mais cet esprit de contestation, qui fut le génie tourmenteur de Descartes, s'il nous anime à notre tour, ne s'arrête plus à des objets secondaires: il s'agit moins désormais du bien ou mal fondé de propositions reçues que de décider si les propositions les mieux entendues une fois établies, le besoin infini de savoir impliqué dans l'intuition initiale de Descartes pourrait être satisfait. En d'autres termes, l'esprit de contestation en arrive maintenant à formuler l'affirmation dernière « *Je ne sais qu'une chose: qu'un homme ne saura jamais rien* »[15]

One could even be tempted to say that Bataille's method is an excess of non-method, somehow echoing his stance on excess and asceticism in regards to *l'Expérience intérieure*: "Mon principe contre l'ascèse est que l'extrême est accessible par l'excès, non par défaut./ Même l'ascèse d'être réussi prend à mes yeux le sens d'un péché, d'une pauvreté impuissante."[16] His idea might be to mimic this very excess that allows access to the inner experience, to parody it to the extent that the reader cannot think his writing is truly representation but that it is a parodic *simulacrum*.

It is worth mentioning that these mystical texts do not function on their own, are not hermetic pieces locked in their own non-logic. *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Le Coupable*, at the very least, form a network with Bataille's two central erotic *récits*, *Histoire de l'œil* and *Madame Edwarda*, where explicit forms of fiction allow Bataille to break free from the constraints of reasoning and create a poetic world in which the simulacrum becomes more extreme and more powerful. This will be explored in chapter 4 and especially in the *Interlude*. This might lead to some confusion amongst readers and critics alike, as pointing to a network of collaborating works in an author's *œuvre* would indicate the formation of some sort of coherent unit, one may even say a system. There have indeed been attempts in this direction, for instance Robert Sasso's *Georges Bataille, le système du non-savoir: Une ontologie du jeu*;[17] but, as Connor very

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[15] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.125.
[16] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.34.
[17] Robert Sasso, *Georges Bataille, le système du non-savoir: Une ontologie du jeu*, (Paris, Minuit, 1978)

eloquently explains, any attempt to take Bataille's heterogenous thought and make it into a coherent philosophical unit comes at a costly price:

> It is entirely possible, for example, as Robert Sasso demonstrated in *Georges Bataille: le système du non-savoir*, to represent Bataille's thought as making up a "system" and to argue the overall "unity and coherence of [Bataille's] thinking. The price to be paid for such an approach, which emphasizes Bataille's place in the history of philosophical critiques of reason, is, however, an underestimation of the importance of the nonrational in Bataille's works; any argument that might give credence to the existence of a mystical dimension to his thought must be summarily discounted. […] Yet in denying the mystical, which Bataille opposes to philosophy and to the operations of the intellect, and in limiting Bataille's writing to an enterprise "internal to rationality", Sasso effectively "neutralizes" Bataille's critique of rationality. […] The mystical in Bataille's thought represents precisely the part unassimilable to "system", "unity" and "coherence": it is what gives his "insubordination" its edge and its bite.[18]

Interestingly, this is the very issue Sasso places at the center of his book: the struggle between Bataille's perceived rationality and the more unstable, unpredictable, radical element of his thought. Sasso's attempt to resolve that paradox results in a form of domestication of Bataille that, it could be argued, has a certain pedagogical value: it is far more difficult to access certain of Bataille's key concept in the midst of the chaos of *L'Experience Intérieure* or worse even of *Le Coupable*. Moulding Bataille's mystical works into a system would thus have the virtue of making them accessible to a category of reader that would otherwise be scared off by the sheer complexity and obscurity of his ever-shifting non-referents. But it is precisely this semantic *tremblement*, this almost performative instability that constitute the essence of Bataille's work. Trying to force the notions of method or of system onto Bataille is thus undeniably a betrayal and an epistemological mistake, imprisoning a radical thought inside the very confines of what it is attempting to escape.

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[18] Peter Tracey Connor*, Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, p.9.

Laruelle

To try to isolate one or a few methods in Laruelle's work seems both impossible and perhaps a betrayal of the very nature of his work: method is associated with reason, logic, positivism, is a means to an end, a systematic way of proceeding, whilst Laruelle's work from all angles seems to elude these connotations. His work is not only non-philosophical insofar as it asserts the radical separation-without-separation of the World (and Philosophy as one of its components or one of its extensions, its actualisations) and of the Real, thus making philosophy's constant mixture of the World and the Real in its discourse profoundly false and problematic, but also in term of the way he proceeds in his writing. The axiomatic nature (or structure) of non-philosophy could be seen as both a method and a non-method; this is where many philosophers and scientists will stop with Laruelle's work, considering that a corpus based solely on what they may see as arbitrarily chosen/written axioms is simply ludicrous. And if they look at Laruelle through the lens of science and philosophy, their reluctance is more than understandable, especially when Laruelle tosses aside centuries of thought and culture in one of his radical, axiomatically fuelled moments, as he does in *Le Christ futur*: "Par décision de nature axiomatique, nous mettons donc entre parenthèses les protestations de la suffisance rationnelle et la croyance de l'opinion philosophique et théologique."[19] However, if one agrees to have faith in Laruelle's work, to have a *faithful* reading of it (in both the old sense, as in close to the original intention/meaning, and in the new one developed in this thesis, accepting that these texts are epistemologically and semantically empty and yet allow one to go beyond thought, beyond reason, the text self-destructing upon being read and giving way to a form of mystical experience, a brief instant of contact or of proximity with the One/Real), these axioms can be seen as discovered or perhaps dictated by the Real in the final instance. That is to say that normal reflexes such as the justification of statements, the need for proof in any given epistemological context, are abolished as rules imposed by Philosophy and the World arguably limit the scope of our experience as Humans and stop us from cloning ourselves into subjects and becoming Future-Christs. This in a way is very close to Bataille's idea that the development of intelligence - seen here not as an attribute but rather as one of the main goals and components

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[19] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.27.

of modern culture, especially in the context of science and academic thought - has led to a spiritual impoverishment of the Human, leading him or her to be as far removed as possible from the states that would allow any kind of access to *l'Expérience intérieure.* Laruelle must thus perform a paradoxical act of faith in writing about and around the Real, which given its radical separation *sans-événement* with the World cannot be described or even evoked in any correct way by language, insofar as it is the most obvious actualisation of the Philosophy-World, every word carrying historical and cultural implication; as Barthes writes in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, "écrire est un acte de solidarité historique".[20]

Laruelle thus seems confronted with a choice, the very same that Pseudo Denys evokes in *Les Noms Divins* "Et tu remarqueras que maints théologiens ne l'ont pas louée seulement en l'appelant invisible et indescriptible, mais encore inexplorable et indépistable, car ils n'ont laissé aucune trace, ceux-là qui ont pénétré jusqu'à sa secrète infinité";[21] either write and betray the Real, or at the very least write something with no epistemological or spiritual value, or forever remain silent. Here, Laruelle makes the same choice as Pseudo Denys, Meister Eckhart and Bataille: write despite the rational impossibility of his discourse, in an act both of faith and of generosity, attempting to make known the nature of the Real to the world. Out of all the authors evoked in this thesis, Laruelle's approach to language is the most explicitly radical, and this radicality is expressed through a method called *abstraction axiomatisante* (here, given the clarity and the systematic nature of the way in which he proceeds to write and invent new words/expressions of the Real, the word 'method' seems inevitable). This method is of course a compromise, somewhere between the fantasy of a return to some sort of *langage premier*, untainted by the World at least in the historical sense, a sort of linguistic apocatastasis and an ecology of language, where all the waste produced by Philosophy and the World over centuries is put to use and melted together to produce non-philosophy. The method is the following: take what Laruelle calls *énoncés-monde*, meaning the concepts and words produced by the world, and associate them with other words, mostly adjectives such as "radical" and prepositions such as "en","sans", "non", "en-personne" that are in his own words "expressions ou les effets du Réel";[22] in doing this, he empties the word of any given historical or cultural connotation and recycles it into something completely new; this is the axiomatic and necessary operation that allows him to create *noms premiers* which, using the *langage-monde* as a *matériau* enable him

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[20] Roland Barthes, 'Qu'est-ce que l'écriture', *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture,* 2nd ed, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), p.18.
[21] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.69
[22] 9François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.9.

to talk about the Real in a non-philosophical, non-epistemological context, thus overcoming the initial rational impossibility of writing about the Real. An obvious example for this would be the word 'Christ' and how it becomes *Christ Futur*, given that its cultural and religious connotations are extremely strong and difficult to circumvent. In the expression *Le Christ futur*, he is not referring to some sort of second coming of the Christian, biblical Christ but rather to the radical possibility for every Human to become a *sujet-Christ*, through emancipation from the World to become a Messiah, the same as all other Humans in a form of idempotency: *"Il ne s'agit pas d'un Christ historique ni d'un Christ idéalisé par la religion ou platonisé par le philosophie, mais du Christ comme sujet-Etranger ou Fils de l'Homme-en-personne."*[23]

This method is of course not perfect, especially when factoring in the question of the reception and reading of these texts, given that a word, even if adjunct to a term that expresses the Real's immanence, will still have in the mind of the reader all its historical connotations. The ideal reader would be one so invested in non-philosophy, possessing a faith so strong that he or she would been able to perform a form of verbal emptying of the self by which words no longer retain any significance outside of their non-philosophical usage. Although this cannot be seen as a viable or serious horizon for the reception of Laruelle's text, as we will see in later chapters, especially chapter 8, the words themselves and for that matter the text can be seen as something that holds no intrinsic value and rather self-destructs if read in the correct, *faithful* manner.

Whilst the *abstraction axiomatisante* seems to be the clearest form of method in Laruelle's work, insofar as it produces as result visible to all, namely his written work and the expressions created to enable his writing, there are several ways in which Laruelle operates in his texts that could be assimilated to methods. It is important however to point out how counterproductive it would be to try to force the notion of method onto Laruelle's texts and non-philosophy as a whole, simply because it would be using a concept that is external to non-philosophy, that is part of the very same establishment that it attempts to shun, and using it artificially to shed light on more obscure processes that the philosophy-influenced mind fails to grasp in an academic, explainable way. Unilateralisation, cloning, dualysis or the use of the quantum model all seem to be viable candidates for what one would want to call the Laruellian method, but all of these operations, which are to some extent consubstantial or coextensive, seem to surpass the definitional limits of what a method is. Dualysis is a perfect example of

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[23] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction*, p.52.

this: Laruelle himself describes it, in the glossary at the beginning of *Le Christ futur*, as "[la] Méthode générale de la non-philosophie sur le matériel philosophique".[24] It is the process by which the *énoncé-monde* is cloned by/in the Real by subjecting it to the non-philosophical causality that is determination in the last instance. The problem with calling this process a method is that a method is something that is created: there are no natural methods, only natural processes. A method is put in place to achieve a goal, to analyse something, to understand something. The problem here lies in the fact that dualysis, although the term was coined by Laruelle, is a process independent from him, perhaps at the most discovered by him. Cloning, for instance, is the work of the Real itself: "Le clonage est l'œuvre du Réel"[25] by which the immanent or non-philosophical identity of philosophical material or even a Human is revealed. The same goes for determination in the last instance, which is not something that is strictly applied by any given Human but rather by the Real. In this sense, dualysis, as well as cloning, for instance, appear as matrixes rather than methods, insofar as they arguably exist independently from Laruelle's creation - that is, if one has faith in Laruelle's work. Non-philosophy is an axiomatic structure but not an artificial one, created as the result of a methodological approach using the precepts of philosophy and reason. Laruelle is not the creator of these matrixes, but has discovered and named them, without any sense of property or of generation. One could of course argue that these texts have a strong performative power, by which in the verbal transformation operated by the *abstraction axiomatisante* lie the actual consequence of the Real on the transformed or cloned material. This however would be forgetting the complete inadequacy of language, however twisted and emptied from the meanings invested in it by the world, to say anything of value about the Real. These verbal operations that Laruelle performs in his texts are rather simulations of the actual operations of these matrixes, but that, as we will see, perhaps allow the reader to go beyond the text and to experience the Real, just for an instant, or to simply be able to consider the impossible possibility of these matrixes and the Real-universe he attempts to uncover or literally unveil for the eyes of the reader.

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[24] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.12.
[25] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.11.

2. Impossible / possible

<u>Negative theology</u>

"Nous disons ce qu'il n'est pas, nous ne disons pas ce qu'il est. Nous parlons de lui en partant de choses qui lui sont inférieures. Pourtant, rien n'empêche que nous le saisissions, sans l'exprimer par des paroles."[1] At the heart of Plotinus' apophatism, there is of course the One, more or less the equivalent of God in negative theology: the One is the source of everything but has no attributes, no intentionality, no temporality, no being; nothing can be said about the One, and yet Plotinus' whole body of works is built around this concept of the One. This excerpt encapsulates that paradox perfectly: here "nous parlons de lui" does not signify that we are saying anything of value, but rather that the One is an object of discourse. And yet he then asserts that we can in fact *seize* the One, point towards it, but not through language. The mere existence of "the One" as a signifier is problematic: it is a non-referent, does not refer to anything tangible or that has a form of being. The word 'One', in the same way as the word 'God' in negative theology, is an empty signifier. This is the first and perhaps most obvious relationship Plotinus and negative theology have to the notion of the impossible: there must be a signifier (the word), a signified (idea/concept) and the referent (actual being) for language to hold any epistemological value (in the context of fiction, for instance, the absence of a referent is of course completely normal and tolerated). Negative theology as a corpus should thus be impossible, given that it is impossible to write *ex nihilo*; the signifier 'God' is absolutely empty, has no referent and is in fact neither an idea nor a concept, it is radical immanence and even nothingness, which is something that Laruelle develops in great detail about the Real. One must not mistake the God of negative theology for a philosophical concept or an idea, as God is the radical nothingness that is the necessary condition of the existence of all beings. The fact that these texts are written about God is thus completely impossible, at the very least if they have any epistemological ambition, as they have no referent on which to rely. And yet these texts exist, and their mere existence is an ontological anomaly that it is important to try to understand. As will be discussed in later chapters, these texts that we choose to identify as belonging to the very loose "category" or "filiation" of negative theology are in fact, at the very least in their more stereotypical parts (where there are series a negations concerning God), completely empty. This emptiness is revelatory of the complete powerlessness of language in front of God, and yet these empty signs are aware of their own deficiency, as will be discussed more extensively later on. Negative theology as a corpus is thus completely impossible if

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[1] Plotin, *Ennéades*, V, 3, trad. and ed. by Emile Bréhier (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1924) p.68.

looked at through a philosophical, logical or scientific lens, because it emerges *ex nihilo* and is itself completely empty, null; as Derrida succinctly puts it in *Sauf le nom* "Elle [théologie négative] naît de rien et se tend vers le rien".[2] The existence of these texts introduces the impossible into the realm of the possible, leading to a double impossibility - of the impossible itself by essence, and of its introduction into its contrary, the possible, " La possibilité de l'impossible, du « plus impossible » qui en tant que tel est aussi possible (« plus impossible que l'impossible »), marque une interruption absolue dans le régime du possible qui pourtant reste, si on peut dire, en place."[3] insofar as these texts are part of our reality and can be read in the World. Impossible by nature, negative theology as a corpus thus introduces a double impossibility by existing in a World defined by the unquestioned and absolute axioms of the possible and the impossible, which Valéry, Bataille and Laurelle also, in their more or less radical ways, set ablaze.

<u>Valéry</u>

The first and perhaps more obvious encounter Valéry has with the notion of the impossible is in his attempt to actualise his utopian or at least idealistic project of creating *Le Système*, which would be able to explain and systematise the way in which our consciousness and our general mental life works. A number of problems arise immediately, the first being the subject of study he chooses to be at the centre of this rather ambitious epistemological enterprise: himself. Paradoxically, it seems he does not have any other choice, given that solipsism is a central and unavoidable limit of human experience and that he cannot become someone else for the sake of his undertaking; however, this means that he is both the observer and the observed: "Observer en laissant faire et en regardant passer – : la géométrie, l'intellect**.** /Être ce qui se passe; ou le rattacher étroitement à son être, sentir l'importance du moment, regarder comme unique ce moment, – ne pas observer mais obéir: le reste." (C, III, 299). Using himself as the subject of his research, despite his constant attempts to neutralise the personal pronoun 'je' to consider himself not as Paul Valéry but as an example of a generic human, creates an insurmountable problem that renders his ambition impossible. This problem is very similar to the one described by Heisenberg in microphysics called the uncertainty principle, namely that the mere act of observing will change the state of what is being observed, making the subject of the observation impossible to observe outside of this state caused artificially by external intervention. As Valéry writes himself, "il y a des cas où l'on trouble quelque chose de précieux – On trouble en effet

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[2] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom,* 2nd edn. (Paris, Galilée, 2006), p.28.
[3] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.31.

un développement naturel, une loi une, en y mêlant d'autres conditions." (C, III, 215). He seems to admit that it is thus impossible for him to devise any form of method by which he could observe himself in a scientific manner. And even if he could, he is confronted with another problem that seems impossible to surmount and that he will not manage to overcome in the 29000 pages of the *Cahiers*: the fact that there is no way of representing these mental events adequately. For Valéry, language is much too far from the purity of instant thought to be considered a rigorous means of translating it: "Il est impossible de remonter du langage à la pensée, autrement que par des probabilités" (C, I , 247). This is partially why the *Cahiers* explore so many different modes of representation: from the general paratactic, fragmented writing to the poems and drawings, and especially the hundreds of pages of algebra that attempt to understand these mental events by integrating them into a more logical, perhaps scientific system than language, where cultural, social and historical interferences abound. Lastly, perhaps the most complex of these more pragmatic, methodological problems that makes the whole undertaking of the *Cahiers* impossible is that of the *présent absolu*, by which thoughts or the infinity of micro events that constitute them only have truth-value in the moment when they are thought: outside of that immediacy, the same thought continued is changed, modified, there is no ontological persistence possible for any given thought. Observing these thoughts, let alone representing them is entirely impossible, given that the activity of representing itself is something that takes time, that cannot be immediate (drawing, writing, talking, typing on a computer, however quickly, all take a certain amount of time). In fact, Valéry openly questions whether the *fait mental* that he places at the centre of his system is not itself a translation of something else, the inscrutable thought placed in the *présent absolu*; this seems logical given that the mere fact of having to translate it into an expression, "fait mental", means there is a translation into language: "Mais où commence la traduction? et quoi est traduit? Il ne s'agit pas d'aller inventer un fond inexistant. Mais le criterium sera = Si tel fait mental est une traduction ou une représentation – il y a une relation entre ce phénomène et le phénomène traduit –) Mais si ce dernier a été traduit c'est qu'il était presque impossible de le connaître en lui-même (C, IV, 62). *Connaître la chose en elle-même*, this impossibility is central in the history of philosophy itself, and here finds quite an original iteration: the limit of our knowledge, at least if we adopt a scientific, positivist viewpoint, that Valéry initially seems to adopt himself, is here not only epistemological but also temporal; he even goes as far as to discreetly question the existence of such phenomena ("il ne s'agit pas d'aller inventer un fond inexistant"), which opens the possibility of his whole system being built around nothing, not having any actual referent - which should, philosophically, scientifically and logically, lead it to collapse on itself, making the mere existence of the *Cahiers* impossible.

En un mot peut-on distinguer ici de l'acte mental la représentation de cet acte mental ? Y a-t-il une différence ? C'est important, car c'est une des bases de l'expérience interne – on ne peut étudier que le représentable et jamais la chose même (entre certaines limites). (C, IV, 139-140)

The other main way in which the *Cahiers* is confronted with the impossible is much closer to the aforementioned impossibility of negative theology as a corpus. One of Valéry's main theories, as mentioned in chapter 1, is the fact that the Self, the 'je' is nothing, or rather, to be more precise, that it is empty. A consistent self-identity that persists through time is something that humans hypostatise to reassure themselves and avoid deep existential crisis, whilst for Valéry our *modus operandi* is in fact what he calls *self-variance,* a succession of states all different from one another that are caused by infinitesimal mental events. Whilst the details of this 'je' and its complexities will be evoked in more detail in chapter 5, it is important to understand its paradoxical nature: it is simultaneously nothing ("Le « moi » n'est rien. C'est un point fixe fictif – fondé sur la différence infinie des états et sur le petit nombre des opérations." (C, I, 339)) and an empty space (or non-space, a utopia in the etymological sense of the world, a place that has no place) that contains *en puissance* all the possibilities of being, that is our only way of accessing the World and thus connecting to the *Tout* (in Laruellian terms, to the Real). What is interesting here is that, similarly to the word 'God' in negative theology, 'je' is a non-referent, as it designates nothing, and yet is omnipresent throughout the *Cahiers*, the first person being often used as one would expect of a form of writing of the Self. The *Cahiers* are thus written around a personal pronoun that is essentially a non-referent, and thus perpetuates the aforementioned paradigm of the impossible text. They are built on nothing, produced *ex nihilo* and, to a certain extent, knowingly so, something that will be evoked in the next chapter, in a surprisingly heretical gesture. The prolixity of the *Cahiers* thus seems even more paradoxical, as it could be construed as 29000 pages of an empty text. Here, the key to unlocking this paradox is Valéry's negative faith, that will be examined more fully in later chapters: despite knowing that his text would be epistemologically void, there is a more or less conscious radicality at work in Valéry's *Cahiers* in the sheer relentlessness of his writing. Whilst his relation to the impossible is not always one of defiance, as he still is torn between knowledge and his own brand of godless mysticism, Valéry also provides an illustration of the possible hiddenness of negative faith, virtually undetectable without a close reading of the *Cahiers*.

Bataille

Bataille's work interacts far more openly and obviously with the notions of the possible and the impossible. Whilst Valéry seems to confront them rather indirectly, through the impossible ambition of his *Cahiers*, they are a centrepiece of Bataille's thought, used to challenge the limits of human experience. In *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Le Coupable*, it is in his attempts to describe the inner experience, which as we will see is very close to the spiritual apophatism of negative theology, that this confrontation is the most obvious. While negative theology mainly uses the non-referent 'God' as a form of epistemological black hole, emptying the surrounding text from any possible epistemological value, Bataille expands this non-referential vocabulary into a constellation of words that serve a similar purpose. These words are all quasi-consubstantial insofar as they have no positive value, no referent and are knowingly failed attempts to signify the absolute negative horizon of Bataille's thought, "what" is experienced immanently in the *Expérience intérieure*. Similarly, to what Laruelle does in his *abstraction axiomatisante*, these words are stripped of their usual meaning and yet retain an almost undistinguishable particularity. 'La Mort', for instance, is both used in its traditional sense, the event of someone's life coming to an end, of his or her total empirical disappearance, and in a more complex sense: 'La Mort' is a non-referent in which the impossible and the possible violently collide and conflate, seemingly pushing Bataille and the reader to redefine the limits of both notions. Death is on one hand an absolute certainty, the most possible of the possibles, insofar as it is what brings life to its unavoidable conclusion. Humans must live with this knowledge, which fuels anxiety and denial: Bataille illustrates this perfectly in *Histoire de l'œil,* where Simone and the narrator's increasingly extreme sexual interactions are, as we will argue in more depth in the *interlude*, a desperate attempt to escape their own mortality, his erotic *récit* embracing the oracular structure of Greek tragedies. On the other hand, death is sheer impossibility, something that is totally closed off to human experience: nothing can be said about death ("La mort est une disparition, c'est une suppression si parfaite qu'au sommet le plein silence en est la vérité, tant qu'il est impossible d'en parler. Ici, le silence que j'appelle, évidemment, n'est approché que du dehors, de loin."),[4] as it is sheer nothingness; no one can experience or even say anything about the sudden end of all possible experience. Bataille clearly evokes this ambivalence of death in the very first pages of *l'Expérience intérieure*: "Comme une insensée merveilleuse, la mort ouvrait sans cesse ou fermait les portes du possible."[5] Attempting to say anything about death is as impossible, touches the same strain of impossibility as any discourse on God, as Derrida suggests in *Sauf le nom*: " Toutes les mystiques

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[4] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable,* p.14-15
[5] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.11.

apophatiques peuvent aussi se lire comme de puissant discours sur la mort, sur la possibilité (impossible) de la propre mort de l'être qui parle, et qui parle de ce qui emporte, interrompt, nie ou annihile sa parole aussi bien que son propre *Dasein*".[6] Ultimately, both La Mort and Dieu are one with and within La Nuit, another non-referent that seems to point towards a (non-)place of absolute negativity, of pitch blackness; La Nuit is the discursive avatar of the total negativity that seems to be the horizon of Bataille's work. Bataille himself struggles to describe it and ends up giving in to the temptation of tautology in *Le Coupable* "En dehors de l'apparence, il n'y a rien. Ou: en dehors de l'apparence, il y a la nuit. Et: dans la nuit, il n'y a que la nuit. Si il y avait dans la nuit quelque chose, que le langage exprimerait, ce serait encore la nuit."[7] This will be explored in more depth in chapter 7, and is another example of a non-referent in which the possible and the impossible coexist: while the semantic value of the word "nuit" is not totally abandoned ("nuit" being the timeframe in which the light of the sun no longer shines on a part of the world, plunging it into darkness, although pitch darkness is a very rare occurrence due to the proliferation of artificial lighting), it is introduced into the realm of the impossible, removed from the empirical world into absolute negativity.

Bataille also seems to abolish the traditional radical distinction between the possible and the impossible with regard to human experience and the inner experience itself. One might expect Bataille to put the possible on the side of science, rationality, logic and positivism and the impossible on the side of the inner experience, but he approaches both concepts far more subtly. The rise of intelligence and reasons as the core values of our society, he argues, have reduced the scope of human possibilities: "Le développement de l'intelligence mène à l'assèchement de la vie qui, par retour, à rétrécit l'intelligence. C'est seulement si j'énonce ce principe: « l'Expérience intérieure elle-même est l'autorité », que je sors de cette impuissance. L'intelligence avait détruit l'autorité nécessaire à l'expérience: par cette façon de trancher, l'homme dispose à nouveau de son possible et ce n'est plus le vieux, le limité, mais l'extrême du possible."[8] The reopening of the full range of human possibilities through the destruction of the cultural, philosophical and all other parasitical authorities that preside over human experience thus allow what may have been perceived as impossible from a positivist standpoint to be recuperated into the realm of human possibility as an extreme, an extremity: "J'appelle expérience un voyage au bout du possible de l'homme.",[9] in an excerpt reminiscent of Valéry's desire to go to "l'extrême nord humain" (C, I, 277). As we will see, the impossible does

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[6] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.34.
[7] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.129.
[8] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.8.
[9] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.19.

come into play, but as the ultimate experience conditioned by pushing the possible to its paroxysm, to the extreme. It is first important to understand more precisely what is meant by *l'extrême du possible*:

> Par définition, l'extrême du possible est ce point où, malgré la position inintelligible pour lui qu'il a dans l'être, un homme, s'étant dépouillé du leurre et de crainte, s'avance si loin qu'on ne puisse concevoir une possibilité d'aller plus que loin. Inutile de dire à quel degré il est vain (bien que la philosophie ferme cette impasse) d'imaginer un jeu pur de l'intelligence sans angoisse. L'angoisse n'est pas moins que l'intelligence le moyen de connaître et l'extrême du possible, par ailleurs, n'est pas moins vie que la connaissance. La communication encore est, comme l'angoisse, vivre et connaître. L'extrême du possible suppose rire, extase, approche terrifiée de la mort; suppose erreur, nausée, agitation incessante du possible et de l'impossible, et, pour finir, brisé, toutefois, par degrés, lentement voulu, l'état de supplication incessante, son absorption dans le désespoir. Rien de ce qu'un homme peut connaître, à cette fin, ne pourrait être éludé sans déchéance, sans péché.[10]

For Bataille, *l'extrême du possible* seems to be the final state in which a human can put himself or herself through self-emptying, a reverse kenosis akin to that of spiritual apophatism ("dépouillé du leurre et de la crainte"), although the notion of *angoisse* in relation to death is here a key part of the process that differentiates it from negative theology. It is not, however, illogical: in order to proceed towards the very edge of existence, of the possible, the subject must be inhabited by this *angoisse* presented as a form of violent lucidity without which one cannot pretend to approach any kind of extreme state. As he asserts in *Le Coupable*: "plus que la vérité, c'est la peur que je veux et que je recherche: celle qu'ouvre un glissement vertigineux, celle qu'atteint l'illimité possible de la pensée."[11] Fear allows the subject to transition into a state of openness, that in turn allows her/him to be confronted with what Bataille himself calls the impossible. This impossible is, unlike the *extreme du possible*, indescribable, unfathomable, and yet it is what is experienced in the ultimate stage of the *Expérience intérieure*, which is synonymous with La Nuit, La Mort, Dieu and all the other non-referents. This experience is only made possible by going to the extreme of the possible; in other words, the human possible pushed to its paroxysm is the only way to experience the impossible, thus once again introducing a relationship of contiguity between the possible and the impossible: "Là toute

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[10] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.52.
[11] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.12.

possibilité s'épuise, le possible se dérobe et l'impossible sévit. Être face à l'impossible – exorbitant, indubitable – quand rien n'est plus possible est à mes yeux faire une expérience du divin; c'est l'analogue du supplice."[12] In a way, one could argue that the possible is limitless insofar as it leads to the impossible or at least to the experience of the impossible. There is also the question of Bataille's attempts to describe l'*Expérience intérieure*, especially when he switches to a first-person narrative to denounce and short-circuit the representational and epistemological limits of language, thus attempting to overcome the impossibility of such representations; this paradigm also applies in a different way to his works of fiction. All these questions, that are also strongly related to the possible and the impossible, will be addressed in later chapters.

Laruelle

From the point of view of traditional epistemology and rationality, in Laruellian terms, from the point of view of *la pensée-monde*, saying Laruelle's work is impossible would be a euphemism. Whilst negative theology, Valéry, Bataille seem to transgress the impossible, in doing so they acknowledge it, adopt discursive and spiritual strategies to overcome it. Laruelle, on the other hand, seems to disregard the categories of the possible and impossible completely. There are of course similarities with the other authors' studies in this thesis, most notably that his work is built around a non-referent, *l'Un* or le *Réel* in his later works, that is completely inaccessible: "aucune réduction, aucun doute, aucune opération-de-transcendance, de surmontement, de tournant, etc ne peut nous ménager un *accès* à l'Un, qui ne connaît rien de tel."[13] In that sense, it falls within the category of these impossible texts. No operation, intellectual or otherwise, can be made on the One: all attempts to define it or any proposition made about it outside of the realm of non-philosophy will inevitably cause it to be *mixed* with the World or with Being, from which it is radically separated-without-separation. As mentioned in chapter one, non-philosophy preserves the Real from the *mixte* by using the terms of philosophy and making them go through dualysis, semantically cleansing the words that retain only their shape. This method itself, from a scientific or philosophical standpoint, has no value and is entirely impossible, given the immateriality of the process through which the philosophical material goes, which is entrenched in complete immanence and completely absent from the phenomenal world, to the point where it could seem as little more than a belief or - as many critics have chosen to interpret it - an experiment. This notion of experiment is, in a way, the easy way out: Laruelle is simply pushing

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[12] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.45.
[13] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence: introduction critique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), p.173.

thought to its limits by creating his own universe with impossibly arbitrary rules and axioms. In *Le Christ futur*, for instance, when he evokes *les Vivants*, subjects who have been persecuted or assassinated for heresy, he writes: "Les Vivants, révélés par la persécution, nous les mettons hors-ciel-et-terre, hors-monde par décision et par axiome, comme témoignant d'une Vie non-naturelle".[14] This is only one example of a repeated process by which he takes seemingly arbitrary decisions and simply inscribes them in the text without justification. Such abrasiveness, surely, can only be the reflection of radical experimentation that is not to be taken fully seriously. Critics often try to pull Laruelle back towards the World, reality, and do so by finding an entrance point into him through another discipline, like Rocco Gangle with mathematics.[15] Another even more striking example is Jonathan Fardy with his book *Laruelle and Art: The Aesthetics of Non-Philosophy*[16] in which he writes: "The aim is to show how Laruelle's work is less strange than it might at first seem by showing its similarities with well-established patterns of "modernist" and "postmodernist" work".[17] Without commenting on the success or relevance of his approach, this is an example of how Laruelle is often treated by critics, who apply a form of *normalisation* to his work. This however denotes a refusal to confront what could arguably be seen as its essence: its innate, fascinating, impossible strangeness. It is much easier to write about Laruelle in comparison to something, to study his work in relation to another set of texts or another discipline altogether. The theory of the simple experiment flounders when confronted with the sheer prolixity of Laruelle's production. This prolixity is also something that sets it apart from the other bodies of work examined in this thesis (apart perhaps from Valéry, but the *Cahiers* were not finished works made to be published) and deepens the impossibility of Laruelle's work. Whilst as previously evoked, negative theology somewhat *breaks the silence* of those who have been God in God, One in One, it does no more than that, and stops its empty babble quite quickly as the text self-destructs, as will be explained in chapter 8. Laruelle, on the other hand, seems to *create-reveal* a whole non-universe of astounding detail whilst openly claiming to be writing something purely fictional he calls *philo-fiction.* From the outside, for whatever reader or critic who has not embraced or at least does not understand the vision-in-one, this seems not only impossible but literally *insane*. However, even from a rational standpoint, the fact that the categories of the possible and the possible do not apply to non-philosophy makes perfect sense: they are the epitome of the philosophical dyad, exemplifying the way in which philosophy appropriates and conquers the World through opposition and concepts. Possible and impossible were categories made by the World and its

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[14] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.37

[15] Rocco Gangle, *François Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[16] Jonathan Fardy, *Laruelle and Art: The aesthetics of non-philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

[17] Jonathan Fardy, *Laruelle and Art: The aesthetics of non-philosophy*, p.15.

pensée-monde and can only be used from the World, making them entirely irrelevant to Laruelle's work within non-philosophy and the vision-in-One. This explains why these words, despite their central role in modern and postmodern thought and theory, appear so little in Laruelle's work: they are not concepts he has to contend with as they are created and marked by the World. Laruelle seeks to emancipate not only the subject but his work and his writing from the World, and a radical application of that heretic desire is actualised in the disregard of the possible and the impossible, in the absence of justification for his axiomatic decisions, that we will argue are not experimental but caused by a form of negative faith.

In the rare instances where the word 'impossible' does appear, Laruelle tends to use it in a quasi-ironic way, as if to underline his knowledge that, from the position of the World, the whole body of his work can be seen as nothing else than impossible, not only in its method but in its content and claims, for instance his theory of heresy in *Le Christ futur*: "Quand commencent les hérésies? Avec la décision apparemment impossible de déclasser le Tout, de dévaloriser l'Eglise, l'Etat, le Monde et l'Histoire, de leur retirer leur autorité et leur puissance. La décision hérétique est ce geste historiquement impossible et pourtant réel."[18] The adverb "apparemment" seems to be referring to the *doxa* of the World and the way in which he anticipates anyone with a *vision-du-Monde-en-Monde* to react to his theory of heresy. The expression "historiquement impossible" is an interesting one too: Laruelle's work, even in *Le Christ futur* when he evokes the Church, martyrs and heresies, is never historically informed (not in a precise, documented way), nor does it claim to be. The heretical decision he is evoking is historically impossible precisely because it is taken outside of the World, removed from the hallucinations it causes, and is not coherent with the way in which the World and its *Logos* are organised. And yet Laruelle continues to write about it, and this heresy, the actualisation of the subject's deepest and only essence, his or her oneness with the Real or the One, arguably find its way into the World against the World through, for instance, his writing.

From the point of view of the World, what Laruelle does is make the World betray itself, turn against itself by taking its material and through dualysis making that material a weapon in his struggle again the World. This is, in very simple terms, what he seems to describe in more detail in *Mystique non-philosophique* when he writes:

Loin de « possibiliser » la mystique existante comme on avait prétendu « possibiliser » la

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[18] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.18.

phénoménologie, nous demandons ce qu'elle devient lorsqu'elle est « impossibilisée », rendue *impossible mais non inexistante* par sa cause ou le Réel. Ce Réel, l'Homme-en-personne disons-le une première fois, est le Vécu (d') impossibilité *pour* la mystique entre autres disciplines philosophiques. Justement parce qu'il est forclos à la mystique existante ou « donnée », il la transfigure en mystique-fiction qui n'est que la réalité de l'impossibilité des possibilités contenues dans son expérience religieuse.[19]

The expression "*impossible mais non inexistante*" seems to encapsulate what Laruelle wants to do when he creates this *mystique-fiction* and in his work as a whole: ascertain, against the World, that the impossible is a meaningless concept fabricated by the World to conceal the Real from the subject. In this, Laruelle is close to the Gnostics, who saw the World in its materiality as flawed and evil; Laruelle himself maintains an ambiguity regarding his ethical judgement of the World, which he equates in *Le Christ futur* to hell: "Nous croyons à un Dieu qui a prétendu se substituer à l'Homme-en-personne et qui est en Enfer. A un Enfer dont l'autre nom est « le-Monde » dominé par le principe d'Eglise Suffisante. Mais aussi à un Christ « non-chrétien » plutôt qu'un Anté-Christ. Voilà l'humaine trinité que nous opposons aux religions divines-trop-divines."[20] He does not however argue for a transcendent salvation after death via the goodness of a God but rather an absolutely immanent messianic salvation by which the subject becomes a *Christ futur*. Doctrinal details aside, this excerpt shows that he introduces mysticism to its cause, the Real, and thus transfigures and transforms it into something potentially able to contain or express a true "religious" experience of the Real, written from the Real. Whilst the complexity of these operations makes them sometimes impenetrable to even the most experienced Laruelle reader, the degree to which his work both disregards the impossible and completely belittles any other attempt to transgress it is what constitutes the frightening radicality of his work, which critics have tried to tame by naming it experimental and tugging it gently toward the World and the possible.

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[19] François Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique*, p.12.
[20] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.48.

3. Heresy

<u>Negative theology</u>

The greek *hairesis*, from which the word 'heresy' stems, at first carried no negative connotation whatsoever. It was used to signify a selection, either concrete - for instance naming an official - or abstract, in other words a decision. It also meant "line of thought" and was used by Diogenes Laertius to describe the ten different schools of ethical philosophy. It was only in the second century that two early Christian theologians, Justin Martyr and Iranaeus, used "hairesis" to name ways of thinking that deviated from the traditional Christian doctrine, which was the starting point of the concept we now know as heresy. It is interesting to draw a parallel between this appropriation of the word *hairesis* by Christian theology and the way in which the concept itself works. In the present day, 'heresy' signifies a deviation from a set of dogmatic rules or beliefs; something can be called a heresy only in relation to something else. The most common use of this word is of course within the Christian theological and ecclesiastical tradition, when the Church decides that a movement, a theologian or any given entity follows ideas that deviate from the official doctrine of the Church. This mostly leads to excommunication, the heretic being a marginalized figure who has wronged God by his or her beliefs and assertions. Early examples of heresies include gnosticism, which Bataille and Laruelle in particular draw from in their works. It is thus not surprising that Laruelle himself in *Le Christ futur* clearly explains the dynamic between the Church and heresies:

> L'hérésie est habituellement déclarée « chrétienne » par une théologie et une Eglise devenues dominantes qui la jugent cependant contraire à leurs dogmes. […] Il suffit qu'une Eglise, c'est-à-dire la matérialité d'un certain nombre de dispositifs destinés à produire et à assujettir une croyance, s'identifie à une variante doctrinale différente, et qu'elle se proclame la vraie et unique religion selon un geste archaïque d'epekeina commun à la religion et à la philosophie pour qu'elle pose l'extériorité et la dissidence des autres variantes comme hérésies et qu'elle se donne le droit de les réduire et de les soumettre.[1]

The simple act of naming a doctrinal variation a heresy allows the Church to

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[1] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.45.

reappropriate any given movement by naming it as a deviance that originates from the Church, thus both legitimizing the absolute authority it claims to have and nullifying the potential subversiveness and novelty the said heresy may have had. What the word itself signifies depends who is using it: for the Church it is an instrument of power and the verbal actualisation of a self-proclaimed totalising stronghold on the cultural and spiritual lives of humans. However, it is interesting to attempt to reappropriate this word and the concept of heresy from the side of the heretics, which is very much what Laruelle does in his later, more theologically orientated works, and what this thesis strives to do. In the case of negative theology, both meanings of the word 'heresy' seem to apply: the *corpus* of negative theology, in its aforementioned diversity, still exists for the most part in relation to traditional, cataphatic and canonical theology; however, it can be argued that it also attempts to create, produce, actualise something completely new through the writing of texts that, despite having no epistemic value, can be seen as irreducible acts of faith.

Negative theology has always been regarded suspiciously by the Catholic Church for an almost instinctive reason: wouldn't the constant negation of God, the subtraction of his every attribute eventually lead to atheism? This is what Jean-Luc Marion seems to argue in *L'idole et la distance*: "La négation, si elle demeure catégorique, demeure idolâtrique. Quand donc, à force de négations, elle dissout proprement ce que ce que ces négations censément visent, et élimine l'Absolu, ce n'est qu'au prix d'une idolâtrie – celle de la « théologie négative »."[2] This way of thinking about negative theology resurfaced in the 1970s in France, as negative theology made a slight comeback in philosophical discussions due to the work of Derrida, Deleuze and Jean-Luc Marion, leading to sometimes vehement reactions from more conservative theologians such as Claude Bruaire, who asserts in *Le Droit de Dieu*: "la théologie négative est négation de toute théologie. Sa vérité est l'athéisme."[3] This kind of defence mechanism stems from a profound misunderstanding of negative theology. The first and most common mistake is to believe that negative theology is not only reducible to a series of negations, thus placing its essence in the texts themselves, but that these negations aim to defy, to destroy the affirmations of cataphatic theology, denouncing them as false, naïve, and even potentially dangerous. As perfectly explained by Denys Turner in his article "Apophatism, idolatry and the claim for reason", both negative and cataphatic theology coexist and collaborate in a dialectics of failure, in which neither side succeeds in saying anything remotely adequate about God:

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[2] Jean-Luc Marion, *L'idole et la distance*, p.192.
[3] Claude Bruaire, *Le Droit de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974), p.21.

An adequately apophatic theology has to be unremitting in its denials of theological language, for all talk of God is tainted with ultimate failure. But this is because an adequate cataphatic theology has to be unremitting in its affirmations of theological language, for everything about the world tells us something of its creator. You cannot understand the role of the apophatic, or the extent to which it is necessary to go in denying things of God, until you have understood the role of the cataphatic and the extent to which it is necessary to go in affirming things of God. And the reason for this, as I see it, logical interdependence of the negative and the affirmative ways is not the true but trivial reason that logically until you have something to affirm you have nothing to negate. The reason is the more dialectically interesting one that it is in and through the very excess, the proliferation, of discourse about God that we discover its failure as a whole.[4]

It would be easy, however, to contradict this argument by claiming that this is a modern, *a posteriori* interpretation of texts, at least in the case of more canonical theologians, who do not in any way intend to collaborate with negative theology in their claim for absolute legitimacy. However, an interesting example of a theologian revered by the Church who seems to discreetly agree with this dialectic of failure in which negative and cataphatic theology both partake is Thomas Aquinas. "Once you know whether something exists", he writes, "it remains to consider how it remains to consider how it exists, so that we may know of it what it is. But since we cannot know of God what he is, but [only] what he is not, we cannot inquire into the how of God['s existence], but only into how he is not. So, first we must consider this 'how God is not', secondly, how he is known by us, thirdly how he is spoken of."[5] Confusingly for most readers and even most scholars, Aquinas then goes on to enumerate a number of positive attributes of God, such as perfection and goodness, and sets out to prove the existence of God by rational and logical reasoning, in a passage considered by many scholars as surprisingly weak in its argumentative tenure. One way of understanding the apparent incoherence of this succession of assertions is precisely that Aquinas himself is alluding to this dialectical cooperation of the negative and the positive: he is showing the reader both sides of the

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[4] Denys Turner, 'Apophaticism, idolatry and the claim for reason' in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* ed. By Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.11-34, (p.16).

[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ia q3 prol, trans. by Denys Turner in 'Apophaticism, idolatry and the claim for reason' in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, p.27

discourses on God, of this "excessive babble" that ultimately fails in the face of God's unfathomability. This also explains why his version of the classical scholastic proof of God is so weak: his goal is not actually to prove God exists, but rather to give a generic example of canonical, cataphatic theology. If his argument was more strongly and convincingly constructed, it would have made no difference: it would have absolutely no epistemological value other than emphasising the impossibility of talking about God. His exploration of the *via negativa*, in turn, has exactly that same value, and these two components are two sides of a valueless coin.

It is thus unsurprising that that Aquinas, as well as for instance Saint Augustin, do not reject negative theology dogmatically or in its totality. There are varying degrees of heresy within negative theology, some texts and theologians being more compatible with the official doctrines of the Church than others. Pseudo Denys, for instance, is often seen as an acceptable inspiration, as he was for the two aforementioned Church Fathers, despite some of his ideas being considered too radical or simply being ignored. This is also because his work conforms to a lot of traditional norms: his insistence on the transcendent *superessentiality* of God, as well as his very vertical organization of divine hierarchy in *La Hiérarchie céleste*, that also comprises numerous passages detailing the prominent role of priests and of the Church as a whole, as well as evoking in very explicit terms angels, seraphs and all the creatures anchored in the Christian dogma. The succession of negations, which is often what is exclusively remembered from Pseudo Denys' work, coexists with series of affirmations about God, for instance in *Les Noms Divins*:

C'est ainsi, par exemple, que, selon l'unité de la divine Surressentialité, on doit attribuer à l'Unitrinité fondamentale, comme attributs unitaires et communs: la Substantialité qui dépasse toute essence, la Déité qui est au-delà même de Dieu, la Bonté transcendante à tout bien, l'Identité universellement transcendante d'une propriété entière, elle-même transcendante à toute propriété, l'Unité qui est au-delà du principe d'unité, l'Ineffabilité, la Multiplicité des noms, l'Inconnaissable, l'universelle Intelligibilité, l'Affirmation totale, la Négation totale, l'Au-delà de toute affirmation et de toute négation, la Subsistance et le Fondement pour ainsi dire mutuels des principes personnels de l'Unitrinité, au sein d'une unité totale

supérieure à toute unité, sans aucun mélange de parties.[6]

This might seem suprising in the eyes of most readers; Bataille himself, in l'*Expérience intérieure*, points out the apparent internal contradiction between Denys' apophatic statements of intent and the cataphasis that characterises large parts of his discourse "Quelques pages après avoir évoqué ce Dieu que le discours n'appréhende qu'en le niant, Denys écrit: « Il possède sur la création un empire absolu..., toutes choses se rattachent à lui comme à leur centre, le reconnaissant comme leur cause, leur principe et leur fin...»[7] However, there are two non-exclusive explanations for this cataphasis: firstly, Denys had to make his work acceptable for the Church, and including such passages has probably been one of the factors that enabled it to survive and even thrive in classical theology. Secondly, in the same fashion as for Aquinas, these affirmations collaborate with the negations to prove the absolute failure of approaching God through discourse. This is what Meister Eckhart seems to hint at in *De la perfection de l'âme:* "*Un* saint dit: Tout ce qu'on peut dire de Dieu, Dieu ne l'est pas. Un *autre* dit: Tout ce qu'on ne peut dire que de Dieu, Dieu l'est aussi. Sur quoi un grand maître décide qu'ils ont *tous deux* raison! Dans le même sens que ces trois saints je dis ce qui suit: Quand l'âme s'est, avec sa raison, approprié le divin, celui-ci est à son tour repassé à la volonté."[8] There might also be another solution to explore: this alternation of affirmations and negations could be a metadiscursive reflection on the nature of Denys' God, ridden with paradox, as reflected in this seemingly aphoristic assertion from *Les Noms divins*: "Il n'est rien de ce qui est et on ne peut donc le connaître à travers rien de ce qui est, et il est pourtant tout en tout. Il est rien en rien et il est pourtant connu par tout en tout en même temps qu'il temps qu'il est connu par rien en rien."[9] God, despite his absolute transcendence that does not allow him to be identified with anything in the Human world, is both absolutely negative and absolutely positive. In this God, the categories of positive and negative could be seen as colliding and cancelling each other out, thus explaining why Pseudo Denys seems torn between the Church and his apophatic inclinations, dogma and heresy. More than ten centuries later, however, Meister Eckhart's theology appears as freed from this desire to be acceptable in the eye of the Roman Catholic convention, as if with time the *via negativa* and indeed the God it so openly failed to evoke had fallen away from the Church's dogma, digging itself into a deep pit of negation and heresy.

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[6] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes,* p.681
[7] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.16
[8] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.71.
[9] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.145

Unlike Pseudo Denys, Meister Eckhart was himself revoked by the Vatican in Jean XXII's bull *In Agro Dominico* on 27 March 1329, for a number of reasons. As we will explore in chapters 5,6 and 7, Meister Eckhart abolishes all transcendence and hierarchy between the subject and God, in a far more complex, subversive and perhaps convincing heresy.

Valéry

For most modern readers, the suggestion that Valéry's work is even slightly heretical seems absurd, and understandably so: he is remembered as a very classical poet, whose emphasis on form and symmetry made him as popular at the height of his fame as he is seen as archaic today. Even from a biographical standpoint, his work was recognized by his peers and institutions alike, as he was elected to the rather conservative *Académie Française* in 1925 and given the *Légion d'Honneur* in 1931. His life, and that part of his work, seem very conventional indeed, and far from any possible subversion or even simply contestation of a given dogma. At first glance, the *Cahiers* do not seem to diverge from this image of Valéry. The elaboration of his *Système*, placed under the inspiration first of Descartes then Leonardo Da Vinci, seems to be first and foremost a rational, even scientific ambition. In the very first volume of the *Cahiers*, his enthusiasm towards what he construes as the beginning of his life's work is apparent. His ambition is to go further than anyone had ever has within the limits of rationality:

> Personne ne va au bout – à l'extrême nord humain – ni au dernier point intelligible – imaginable – ni jusqu'à un certain mur – et la certitude que là commence vraiment l'infranchissable. Je me parcours indéfiniment. Je me regarde me parcourir – et ainsi de suite.
>
> […]
>
> Seule, la recherche – vaut la peine. Immense. Décrire une nuit de travail. La grandeur du système pensé qui se transforme, le roulement des transformations. Le travail dans un intervalle de temps fini. La descente de Boulogne sur l'Autriche. L'ivresse de la précipitation des pensées dans un bref moment. Tout, considéré comme matière à calculs, ici; là, comme aliment de rêves." (C, I, 277)

A very young Valéry thus believes he can work his way to the very limit of knowledge, to the frontier of this "infranchissable" through hard work and research. His reference to "La descente de Boulogne sur l'Autriche", a huge victory of the Napoleonic wars, also points towards his fascination with military strategy and the figure of Napoleon. This excerpt also gives us a glimpse of Valéry's "fascination mathématique", as he expresses his intention to carry out this research purely by calculating, which he does to a certain extent in the *Cahiers*, where hundreds of pages of quasi-indecipherable algebra and equations are as many symbols of an ultimately failed attempt to convert *la vie mentale* into mathematics. This was just one of the leads he followed in an attempt to find an adequate language to represent his research, one that would be completely rational and unchallengeable from an epistemological viewpoint: "Mon but serait d'établir une représentation *rationnelle* de la connaissance, de façon à pouvoir en écrire les états à la façon analytique" (C, III, 477). His almost obsessive quest for this new language ("Peut-être trouvera-t-on, trouverai-je ! ce langage sans métaphores matérielles qui produira la vie mentale – vraie – ????" (C, IV, 44)) that would be able to express the objective truths of the *faits mentaux* he hopes to observe is coupled with a rather strong criticism of conventional language. He sees it as the first and perhaps the biggest obstacle to the Système, and more generally to any given epistemological undertaking: "Les mots ne désignent pas les faits de connaissance eux-mêmes. Ils désignent *déjà* une opération à faire sur un fait brut de connaissance. Ils éveillent *plus* ou *moins* qu'il ne faut, – donnent beaucoup trop et le tout, par le développement de ce qu'ils éveillent et se réduisent au nécessaire par leur emploi." There is an irrecuperable distance between language and true knowledge, with language already signalling several stages of mediation between itself and the object of knowledge; he even rather vehemently states that "le language n'a jamais vu la pensée" (C, IV, 329).

It would be disingenuous to claim this *mise en accusation* of language makes the *Cahiers* even remotely heretic. These ideas are rather classical and well inside the dogma of science and rationality. However, his prolonged inability to find an adequate way of representing the observations he claims make gradually leads him to slightly more radical considerations: realising how flawed language is as a system of representation eventually pushes him to question the solidity of the very knowledge he holds as his ultimate goal: "*Tout* est bien dans l'observation rigoureuse mentale – et dans l'expérience mentale – Mais alors il faudrait la rendre clairement scriptible. Et puis j'ai peur que si on opérait aussi rigoureusement, alors ce qu'on appelle connaissance générale serait attaquée et critiqué sans remède. Toute connaissance générale n'est forcément qu'une représentation imparfaite d'un état – et d'autre part nous ne sommes que par états." (C, IV, 225) The *Cahiers* paint a fascinating picture of

Valéry's gradual disillusionment regarding science and the possibility of true knowledge. He is torn between on the one hand his scientific aspirations and his desire to see himself and be seen as a purveyor of a rational truth obtained by hard work and a rigorously applied newly discovered method, and on the other the truth he is confronted with in his research, that the epistemological limitations of our representational systems, both language and algebra, are seemingly insurmountable obstacles. At the beginning of the fourth *Cahier*, he finally acknowledges that his ambitions cannot be sustained in a scientific context:

> Vie mentale. Enfin. – Je viens à ne plus confondre la vie mentale avec la science, le savoir, et le don. C'est autre chose et c'est une chose injugeable par des résultats – Car les résultats sont ici niables et d'ailleurs invisibles. Ici pas de proportion entre le travail conceptuel et un produit quelconque – ici, infirmité de la langue.
>
> C'est le trafic mental considéré sans objet – sans application et qui diffère du reste de la théorie formelle de la connaissance en ce qu'il n'est pas formel – (C, IV, 59)

He goes even further than this and attacks the very core of what science is in a rather vehement fashion:

> On ne peut édifier une connaissance quelconque que par un sacrifice (manifeste ou non) de l'exactitude rigoureuse. Il est rigoureusement impossible d'établir des règles universelles et constantes sur n'importe quel objet – et des liaisons entre des objets divers – sans altérer ces objets ou tout au moins sans les exprimer fidèlement.
>
> Cela est impossible – car (entres autres raisons) deux ou n états quelconques de la connaissance – pris comme l'on voudra et définis ad libitum, – ne peuvent jamais être remplacés par un seul, intégralement.
>
> L'imperfection est donc la condition du savoir – La généralité est une de ces imperfections –
>
> Mais – si + on le sait – si on cherche à opérer le savoir méthodiquement de façon à lui assurer un avenir – ou une vérité indéfinie – à le considérer comme une approximation dont il faut, au moins, fixer la marche symétrique – alors l'édification devient possible –
>
> La marche d'approximation doit, je pense, être constituée ainsi: division des

éléments aussi nette que possible.

Pureté et honnêteté des relations irrationnelles.

Mythe de la Science. (C, IV, 326)

This form of massive criticism of the very foundations of scientific rationality seems far removed from the very conventional figure Valéry cuts in later life. This is why these early *Cahiers* are so interesting: they are a textual space in which Valéry seems completely free from the weight of the constraint of exteriority, and allows himself to explore radical ideas and perhaps express intuitions and beliefs that would otherwise have never been recorded. It is with this complete rejection of science that the *Cahiers* arguably start to offer symptoms of a certain form of heresy, as he radically rejects the dogma that caused him to formulate the ambition of the *Système*. This ideological transformation is something Valéry often struggles to accept, as is shown by his frequent use of a variety of different literary forms and stylistic devices, which create a distance between himself and the ideas evoked. This is the case for instance in the fourth *Cahier* when he writes:

Le démon me dit: Écoute – je suis le démon de la vérité –

Jamais – jamais – les préceptes ne valurent.

Jamais un grand projet ne s'est mûri.

Certes ! Il y eut de vastes desseins et l'on a vu de grandes choses mais jamais ces desseins ne furent accomplis – ni ces choses préméditées.

Écoute encore ! Jamais une démonstration ne démontra rien ni jamais une vérité ne fut prouvée.

Ce furent toujours les petits hommes qui ont exécutés les grandes affaires. (C, IV, 304)

This one of many fictional interludes that punctuate the *Cahiers*; here, he uses the character of the "démon de la vérité" to express his fear that any kind of epistemological project is destined to failure, and that the very idea of truth is chimeric. Truth is a demon, meant to seduce humanity into searching for something that can never be found. Much like the idea of the stable Self, truth is hypostasised to give a meaning to the subject's existence in the world. This contributes to a larger, surprisingly modern and Laruellian-sounding paradigm that Valéry calls "la construction suffisante de l'homme" (C, II, 112). This *suffisance* is precisely these hypostasized ideas that are never challenged because of how easy and comfortable they make

it to be human. It is far easier to believe that we have a core identity, that our work and research will yield valuable results, and that the notion of truth is the eternal, unbreakable foundation on which all of our knowledge relies. In Laurelle's terms, this *suffisance* is a symptom of the subject being hypnotised by the World, unable to emancipate itself from the laws put forth by science and philosophy. This *suffisance* also means we do not explore what cannot be integrated into the circuit of rationality because it does not fall in a category that is representable in a rational way, for instance spirituality: "Suivre ces métaphores dans le langage ordinaire – algèbre –?? Le domaine spirituel est encore inconnu à cause de ce manque –" (C, IV, 44). This is in a way reminiscent of Bataille's idea in *L'Expérience intérieure* that the increasing place taken by 'intelligence' in modern society - and by 'intelligence' he means rational, positivist intelligence - has led spirituality and the space given to any kind of inner experience to be drastically reduced, to the point where such things are simply dismissed as irrational and thus valueless.

The consequences Valéry draws from his realisation of the fundamental flaws of the positivist conception of knowledge and truth thus bring him close to more explicitly heretic figures such as Bataille and Laruelle. What is most interesting is to consider that, despite reaching these conclusions in only a few years, he continued to write the *Cahiers* over several decades. Surely this rejection of science and knowledge as *suffisants* would lead to the Système to collapse on itself before ever being erected? This is where the heretical nature of the *Cahiers* is the most apparent. There could be no rational reason for Valéry to continue his research when he knew its core principles were flawed and that the language he used was incapable of conducting any serious epistemological inquiry. In a rather amusing twist, he even calls himself a heretic for doing so: "Hérésie! que traduire dans le langage ordinaire c'est-à-dire fait par usages sales, mêlés et indistincts – les résultats d'observations pures." (C, IV, 337) If "tout ce qui s'écrit est fictif" (C, IV, 287), then why write at all? The *Cahiers' modus operandi* is in fact a form of negative epistemology: everything that is written about the Self, but also about *la vie mentale* is false, every affirmation (and negation, for that matter) gradually exhausting the possibilities of discourse on said non-referents, in the same way as negative theology does for God. Whilst keeping the appearance of rational discourse, simulating scientific research (this will be explored in more depth in chapter 4), Valéry attempts to say as much as possible about these non-referents that cannot be approached in any way by the conventional epistemological paths. This suggestion is not purely speculative, as it is what Valéry himself, casting a retrospective glance at his younger self, seems to hint at in a much later *Cahier* when he writes "La passion me vint, vers la vingtième année, de consumer [le vague des pensées importées],

et, quant à mon exercice propre, de le mettre à *épuiser* de mon mieux les possibilités de mon esprit sans m'inquiéter des conséquences de cette volonté pour mon avenir extérieur" (C, XXVII, 23). It is in this sense that there is something inherently heretic about the *Cahiers*: these 29,000 pages were written despite the apparent rational uselessness of doing so. These pages are traversed by a form of negative faith that allowed Valéry to continue waking up as early as 5 every morning to write for hours for over twenty years. In a sense, Marion's concept of distance evoked earlier applies to the *Cahiers* just as well as it does to negative theology. The repeated failure of affirmations and negations pertaining to non-referents are, if not proof, the radical actualisation of a form of faith. In the tenth *Cahier*, Valéry seems to suggest that the only things that are useful are mistakes, false statements, openly siding with the heresies of the world: "considérer l'erreur dans son utilité, de ne retenir que les résultats des démarches mentales – s'oppose à la malédiction portée sur les hérésies.". This unfathomable Self, that is both nothing and holds *en puissance* in itself all the possibilities of the *Tout*, is a non-referent in the same way as God, Bataille's la Nuit or Laruelle's Réel. It might even be an avatar behind which a more mystical conception of the world is hidden, as will be discussed in chapters 6 to 9.

Bataille

Bataille's heresy is immediate, frontal and spectacular. Its most obvious manifestation is in his desire for a complete *tabula rasa*: he wants to create a space, both textual (inside of *L'Expérience intérieure*) and spiritual, that is completely free from the parasitical influence and actions of the outside world. While Valéry stays within the limits of science and reason at first, thus experimenting and discovering their numerous flaws, Bataille knows from the outset that his ambition, his non-project is wholly incompatible with such arbitrarily chosen epistemological paradigms: "On a cru aux réponses de la raison sans voir qu'elles ne tiennent / debout qu'en se donnant une autorité comme divine, en singeant la révélation (par une sotte prétention à *tout* dire)."[10] It is not only reason and the logical forms of thought implied by the use of reason as an axiomatic paradigm but all forms of exterior authority and hierarchy that are viewed as a hindrance to the possibility of the inner experience. His choice, his strong gesture to make experience itself the only authority is a huge shift, with Bataille turning his back on philosophy (as an institution, as he will freely use and evoke a few philosophical

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[10] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.37-38.

figures) and rational thought as a whole:

> J'en arrive au plus important: *il faut rejeter les moyens extérieurs*. Le dramatique n'est pas être dans ces conditions-ci ou celles-là qui sont des conditions positives (comme être à semi-perdu, pouvoir être sauvé). C'est simplement être. […] La difficulté – que la contestation doit se faire au nom d'une autorité – est résolue ainsi: je conteste au nom de la contestation qu'est l'expérience elle-même (la volonté d'aller au bout du possible). L'expérience, son autorité, sa méthode ne se distinguent pas de la contestation.[11]

The expression "*les moyeux extérieurs*" is not an exaggeration or a stylistic effect meant to create any kind of *effet d'annnonce*: this rejection allows Bataille to extract himself and his work from a circuit of logic and intelligibility that controls and composes almost everything in his physical and intellectual environment. This is also a warning to all the critics who would undoubtedly read this in an academic perspective. As he puts it himself: "Je vis d'expérience sensible et non d'explication logique";[12] he does not only position experience as the only authority of *L'Expérience intérieure*, but ineffable, unintelligible experience. This decision in a way leads to the implosion of the very concept of authority, as authority can be seen as hierarchical reference, and l'*Expérience intérieure* is a non-referent, which cannot be adequately represented. From the outset, *L'Expérience intérieure* is an impossible and heretical text insofar as its authority is not any given principle, God or reason, but ineffable experience. One of the concrete repercussions of this is the rejection of all figures of authority, however important they may be to Bataille's thought: a textual space parasitized by academic and philosophical references, at the very least on their own terms rather than on the terms of the *Expérience intérieure*, would allow the reintroduction of the very same principles that Bataille rejects. This is for instance what Sartre does not understand in his article "Un nouveau mystique" where he leads a frontal criticism of the way in which Bataille seems to use philosophers, and Heidegger in particular: "L'erreur de M. Bataille est de croire que la philosophie moderne est demeurée contemplative. Il n'a visiblement pas compris Heidegger, dont il parle souvent et mal à propos".[13] His way of using philosophers in *l'Expérience intérieure* is not to use them *tel quel*, explain and explore their systems, respecting their axioms; on the contrary, and perhaps in a

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[11] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.24.
[12] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.45.
[13] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Un nouveau mystique', *Critiques littéraires; Situations, I*, p.145.

similar way to what Laruelle might do, Bataille brings philosophers onto his textual plain and recycles them, sees what they say in the light of the inner experience, away from the traditional values of reason and logic. It is not, as Sartre asserts, that he does not *understand* these philosophers, but rather that under the authority of experience he can do what he wants with their work, now unburdened from rational and philosophical conditions. This explains why these references are irregular, sometimes absent for more than twenty pages before reappearing *en masse* later on, not in the form of a systematic explanation of the system but rather as characters in an inner dialogue between Bataille and Bataille in the context of inner experience. Even the Christian mystics he often quotes in the beginning of *l'Expérience intérieure* are seen as not radical enough, weighed down by God and the dogma of the Church: "pour finir la mystique est subordonnée, l'attitude chrétienne est domestiqué: dans la piété vulgaire Dieu lui-même est domestique achevé".[14] It is not the possibility of faith or even an unfathomable God that is rejected here, but rather the concept of God itself, as a hindrance to the experience of the unknown: "De même, je tiens l'appréhension de Dieu, fût-elle sans forme et sans mode (sa vision « intellectuelle » et non sensible), pour un arrêt dans le mouvement qui nous porte à l'appréhension plus obscure de l'*inconnu*: d'une présence qui n'est plus distincte, en rien d'une absence."[15] To name the unknown, at the very least in one, stable way, is the World attempting to appropriate and hallucinate what is radically separated from it. Here, Bataille is waging an attack on the historical and political institution of the Church, of course, maybe even a form of provocation, but also an attack on the positivist tendency to want to name, to explain everything.

This is precisely why Bataille is against any form of system: unlike Valéry, whose initial ambitions were at the pinnacle of rationalism (albeit in a perhaps naïve fashion), Bataille's heresy is vehemently anti-systemic. A system is seen as something closed in on itself, searching for the satisfaction of an exhaustive explanation for the World and the human spirit, hoping to obtain some form of self-satisfaction and leaving no room for any kind of openness to the inner experience and the absolute nothingness that it reveals both in the subject and behind the World. This is part of what leads him to brush Hegel aside in one swift movement in *l'Expérience intérieure*: however influential he is for Bataille, and however accurate he was, it is the structure of his thought as an enclosed system that made him *persona non grata* in Bataille's *Expérience intérieure*:

Hegel, je l'imagine, toucha l'extrême. Il était jeune encore et crut devenir fou.

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[14] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.134.
[15] Georges Bataille, L'Expérience intérieure, p.17.

J'imagine même qu'il élaborait un système pour échapper (chaque sorte de conquête, sans doute, est le fait d'un homme fuyant la menace). Pour finir, Hegel arrive à la *satisfaction*, tourne le dos à l'extrême. *La supplication est morte en lui.* Qu'on cherche le salut, passe encore, on continue de vivre, on ne peut être sûr, il faut continuer de supplier. Hegel gagna, vivant, le salut, tua la supplication, *se mutila*. Il ne resta de lui qu'un manche de pelle, un homme moderne. Mais avant de se mutiler, sans doute il a touché l'extrême, connu pour la supplication: sa mémoire me ramène à l'abîme aperçu, *pour annuler*! Le système est l'annulation.[16]

It is Hegel's belief in the exhaustivity of his system, in particular after the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia,* that closed him off from the unknown, mutilating the part of himself that does not belong to the World, that led him to anguish and supplication. The system, in Bataille's eyes, cancels out the possibility and the past experience of l'*Expérience intérieure*. It is also interesting to consider what Bataille means when he writes "Il ne restera de lui qu'un manche de pelle, un homme moderne".[17] It seems to point towards a certain *suffisance* of humans that is found both in Valéry and Laruelle. The modern man cannot access the extreme, nor can he even fathom the idea of inner experience. In Valéry, this *suffisance* is manifested by a number of things: the use of conventional conceptions of knowledge and science without ever challenging them, and also hypostasizing the Moi to be saved from metaphysical anxiety and to be able to enter into a global system of thought and communication. This is partially echoed in Bataille when he writes just before evoking Hegel: "Je refuse d'être *heureux* (d'être sauvé)";[18] "être sauvé" here equates to the choice enforced by the World and the political and economic structure of our society to ignore the unknown in order not to experience the extreme, anguish, or clear knowledge of one's own mortality, all these things deemed as ethically negative and an obstacle to a good, happy life.

Whilst Valéry's gradual rejection of science and rationality, although rhetorically less spectacular, can be likened to Bataille's in *L'Expérience intérieure*, this implied notion of sufficiency cannot be discussed in Bataille without briefly evoking political and economic considerations. In his essay *La Souveraineté*, Bataille explains how capitalism has turned most individuals, namely the working class, away from their *souveraineté*, where the subject can access the limitless possibilities of his or her life. The subject is locked inside a system where

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[16] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.56.
[17] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.56.
[18] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.56.

he or she is always doing something productive to satisfy future needs: "Nous pouvons dire en d'autres termes qu'il est *servile* d'envisager d'abord la durée, d'employer le *temps présent* au profit de *l'avenir*, ce que nous faisons quand nous travaillons."[19] The idea of the system is also transposable to society: the subject is trapped in a locked circuit where he or she is led to believe that his or her value can be indexed solely on what they are able to produce for the future. This constant utilitarian projection, coupled with the reign of utility as a value, means that the subject is amputated and distracted, unable to access what is extreme, impossible, in other words any form of inner life or of *Expérience intérieure*. This is quite close to Laruelle's perception of the subject as being hypnotised forcefully by the World into forgetting it does not belong to the World. To understand Bataille's heresy, it is important to understand that it also has political implications that this thesis will not discuss in more detail. It is however interesting to note how he manages to connect the abstract ideas he develops to the phenomenal world and its socio-political organisation, something the politically conservative Valéry would have never dreamt of. Bataille's heresy also lies, and perhaps even more strongly, in his use of writing and fiction and ways of defying the impossible. This will be explored in more detail in chapter 4, the *interlude* and chapter 8.

Laruelle

The most obvious place to start in evoking Laruelle's alleged heretical tendencies is his never-ending conflict with philosophy. His invention of non-philosophy has often been seen as a radical rejection of philosophy, and there are certainly strong grounds for such a position. In one of his early major works *Les philosophies de la difference*,[20] written in 1986, Laruelle sets out to massively criticise both philosophy as a whole and what he names the philosophies of difference, namely the philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Deleuze. One of his main points of contention with these enemies is how they approach and consider what he then called *l'Un*, a term progressively replaced with *le Réel* due to the first term's hefty historical and philosophical baggage. *L'Un* is always considered in relation to the World or to being, both discursively and by thought, thus not respecting the radical separation-without-separation

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[19] Georges Bataille, *La Souveraineté* (Paris: éditions Lignes, 2012), p.14

[20] Laruelle, François, *Les philosophies de la différence: introduction critique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986)

between the One and the World or Being and creating what he calls *le mixte*. He wants to produce "une critique radicale du mixte de la Différence et de son style aporétique, style gréco-occidental ou judéo-occidental. Une critique qui ne soit plus un complément, une rectification, une déconstruction, un supplément, l'une de ces innombrable « épreuves » (par l'Être, le Texte, le Pouvoir, le Désir, la Politique, l'Ethique) que l'Occident aurait inventées pour se laver de sa tare congénitale".[21] His main targets are these so-called philosophies of difference because they claim to think about the One differently, the problem being that despite their best attempts, they never manage to go as far as theorizing a total lack of relation between the One and Being, and always evoke movements of division, scission or consider the One in a dialectic of positivity and negativity: "La Différence épure l'Un (par exemple l'*Ereignis* de Heidegger où il apparaît mais masqué comme et par la division ou le néant), mais en le rapportant, sans pouvoir l'en détacher entièrement, à l'Être. C'est cela qui doit maintenant devenir problématique: cette intrication de l'Un et de l'Être, cette amphibologie qui est la plus longue errance occidentale."[22] These philosophies proclaim their ability to climb out of philosophy, to call out its inner contradictions, but they cannot do so insofar as they use exclusively philosophical material: they are a philosophical criticism of philosophy, in an game of mirrors in which philosophy can contemplate infinite versions of itself without ever being able to escape its own paradigm. This is one of the criticisms, along with his lavish use of aporetic language, that Laruelle throws at Heidegger: "Ce sera déjà beaucoup si l'on peut faire apercevoir qu'il n'y a pas de « critique » de Heidegger ou de « sortie » réelle hors de la Différence en général qui emprunteraient une nouvelle fois des schémas déjà mobilisés par celle-ci et, en particulier, le schéma d'une « critique » de type philosophique."[23] For Laruelle, these philosophies of difference are symptoms of philosophy's incapacity to radically challenge itself, which constitutes part of what Laruelle calls *le principe de philosophie suffisante*. Philosophy is seen as an all-conquering logocentric force that sees its reflection everywhere, including in the One, and believes in its ability to explain everything in what is both an appropriation and a manifestation of the World. It is, as John Ó Maoilearca explains, why philosophy can never see anything else but itself and there is thus never any true *remise en question*:

> It is a prediction of the "principle of sufficient philosophy" that philosophy will always riposte that its worst failings are *still* eminently philosophical all the same.

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[21] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.14.
[22] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.34.
[23] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence,* p.35

Such is philosophy's narcissism that it sees itself mirrored in everything it looks at: in its *own rejection*, it sees philosophy, and even where it falls short of being *itself* (consistent), it sees another philosophy.[24]

This also accounts in part for philosophy's failure to understand the One: its tyrannical desire to appropriate every object, to see itself in every object, means that the One, whilst resisting these repeated assaults, has been presented in a near infinite number of iterations, all creating different *mixtures* that of course all fail to identify the One's complete and radical separation-without-operation. For Laruelle, this is the *basse continue* that leads the history of metaphysics:

> La métaphysique, y compris les tentatives contemporaines de son débord ou de sa destruction appropriante, est l'histoire de l'encombrement interminable de l'Un et de la vérité par des objets et des buts qui ne sont pas nécessaires à leur essence. Toutefois « faire le vide » dans l'Un, achever de dégriser l'essence de la vérité, cela ne peut signifier, une fois de plus, que l'Un devrait être pensé avec le néant, et le néant *avec* l'Un. Ce serait rejoindre un type philosophique encore de solution qui a ses modes divers chez certains néo-platoniciens et précisément dans la Différence. L'Un a un contenu absolument positif: et c'est l'Un lui-même comme indivision.[25]

This is both a result and the cause of another associated phenomenon he calls *l'oubli de l'Un*, responsible for the way in which Greek-Occidental thought, characterised amongst other things by rationality and reason, has forgotten a heretical way of thinking that he aims to bring back to life (if there ever was a time where this thought was "alive"):

> Du même geste, donc, on montre comment la problématique de la Différence, y compris Heidegger ou Derrida, accomplit et rassemble le style gréco-occidental du penser, et comment celui-ci n'a pu se constituer que par un *oubli absolu* – plus qu'un « refoulement » – d'une autre manière de penser, authentiquement scientifique, qui a eu des effets, *seulement des effets*, mal engagés et vite anéantis, chez les dualistes

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[24] John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal: Laruelle and nonhuman philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015) p.66

[25] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.170.

et les gnostiques. Oubli sans reste, sans rejeton ou « lapsus », d'un mode de pensée spécifiquement « hérétique », ou dénoncé comme « hérétique » par l'ontologie et la théologie réunies.[26]

However, and despite appearances, Laruelle's position towards philosophy is not one of total rejection, as philosophy in fact plays a key part in non-philosophy by providing the material that will be dualysed, the concepts of philosophy and its associated disciplines being used as *termes-supports* for the *noms premiers*, the non-referents symbolising the Real and the way in which its radical immanence functions. Furthermore, one must not mistake the "non-" of non-philosophy as a sign of the negation of philosophy or as an opposition to it. As John Ó Maoilearca explains:

> modelling the name "non-philosophy" on an analogy with "non-Euclidean geometry", Laruelle proposes a broadened, pluralistic science of thought and philosophy as well as a major reworking of philosophical concepts. Crucially, the *non-* in *non-Euclidean* is not a negative: non-Euclidean geometries do not negate the principles of Euclid's *Elements* but affirm them within a broader or amplified paradigm that allows other, apparently opposed geometries to coexist while also explaining where and in what respects they are still relevant.[27]

It is also difficult to talk about non-philosophy as a heretical response to philosophy because it would imply that non-philosophy comes from the philosophical tradition, that it is yet another failed attempt by philosophy to take itself out. The argument could be made that Laruelle himself, as an individual, comes from a the purest of philosophical backgrounds, as he graduated from the Ecole Normale Supérieure, writing his doctoral thesis on French spiritualist Ravaisson before becoming Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the Université Paris X Nanterre. However, there is no relation of identity between non-philosophy and Laruelle. Instead, non-philosophy can only be seen as stemming from the One with the vision-in-One as its sole principle: that is what makes it so radically different and why it has been a major challenge for philosophers to understand. This difficulty is reflected in a rather heated public debate debate between Laruelle and Derrida after a conference at the Collège International de Philosophie that embodies in an almost cinematic way the difference between philosophy and

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[26] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.11.
[27] John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal: Laruelle and nonhuman philosophy*, p.8

non-philosophy. After being asked by Derrida what the essence of the new way of thinking, the *science* that he evoked in his lecture was, Laruelle answered in the following, defiant manner:

Laruelle: […] La vraie réponse que je dois vous faire – elle vous paraîtra peut-être un peu cavalière – mais finalement elle est aussi simple que la question elle-même:

D'où je tiens ceci ? »

Je tiens ceci de la chose même. Il n'y a pas d'autre réponse que je puisse en toute rigueur vous faire. Parce que le critère de mon discours était un critère rigoureusement immanent ou transcendantal, je ne peux pas vous faire d'autre réponse sans me placer sur le terrain de l'effectivité et que je ne peux ni ne veux penser la science depuis l'effectivité transcendantale.

Derrida « Je ne comprends pas ce que veut dire « transcendantale » en dehors de la philosophie. Mais quand vous nous dites: ma réponse, c'est la chose même, alors, je vous pose deux questions: n'est-ce pas un mouvement philosophique que celui-là: la chose même? Quoi, laquelle, *qu'est-ce* que *la chose même*? »

Laruelle « L'UN est la chose même. »

Derrida « Le rapport à l'UN comme la chose même vous paraît être un rapport, une expérience non philosophique ? »

Laruelle « Oui, parce que ce n'est pas un rapport justement. Tout le malentendu est là, c'est-à-dire que vous persistez à vouloir faire une lecture philosophique, à travers le prisme ou l'optique de la décision philosophique, cette décision fût-elle travaillée, vous persistez à vouloir lire ce que je fais à travers la philosophie. »[28]

This debate also leads to another question: the etymology of heresy, *hairesis*, means a decision, a choice, yet the way in which Laruelle presents non-philosophy here is not as

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[28] Jacques Derrida and François Laruelle, 'Controverse sur la possibilité d'une science de la philosophie', *La décision philosophique*, 5, 1988, 63-76, (72).

something spurned by an intellectual decision, but something that comes from *la chose même*, the One itself, with no further discursive explanation. On the contrary, philosophy implies making a decision, what Laruelle calls *la décision philosophique*. In simple terms, it is the act by which every philosopher or philosophical system must assert that it is the *only* correct way of explaining or understanding the object about which it is thinking, immediately excluding what came before and what will come after. Non-philosophy, on the other hand, is non-decisional and imposes itself as an evidence:

> Le vrai pouvoir de l'Un est de nous donner l'affect de ce savoir: que nous n'avons pas à « sortir » de la Différence ou à y mieux rentrer et de manière « plus pensante », parce que nous n'y sommes jamais entrés et que nous n'avons jamais appartenu à une décision philosophique quelconque, sinon par une illusion et peut-être même une hallucination qui est le propre de la philosophie.[29]

However, and unlike the other authors dealt with in this thesis who only evoke the term marginally, heresy is at the centre of Laruelle's more recent non-theological, more mystical works. In *Le Christ futur* in particular, he sketches the outline of a radical heresy as his transformative project to emancipate the subject from the World and ultimately perhaps the World from itself. This heresy takes on both a radically new and a traditional meaning: he ascertains that Christianity and the way it is practised has been corrupted by a *Principe d'Eglise Suffisante.* This principle, both a concept and partial avatar of the Catholic Church as an institution, functions similarly to philosophy in that it sees its reflection in every religious and spiritual practice whilst limiting Christianity to meaningless rituals and idioms:

> Sous ses formes théologiquement armées, elle [la pratique chrétienne] est restée de l'ordre d'un spontanéisme théorique sans rigueur ni radicalité […] Ce qui s'est autoproclamé « le-christianisme » ne serait donc que celui des chrétiens? De même que le Dieu des philosophes et des savants n'est peut-être pas le Dieu de la foi, il se pourrait que la théologie des théologiens ne fût pas celle des... *non-théologiens* et des *non-chrétiens* que nous voulons être.[30]

Laruelle wants to return to a true, authentic form of Christianity (to be taken here as a

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[29] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.35
[30] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.15.

symbol for the spiritual practice of life in general and not exclusively symbolising the Christian religion) by a radical heresy, that of the *Christ Futur*. This is where we find an intuition that is common to all of the authors in this thesis, and that we will argue is the condition of their negative faith: there is something in every subject that does not belong to the World: "Il y a « un quelque chose » de radicalement hors-nature dans les humains et le Monde est un volonté fondamentale de persécuter cette hérésie".[31] This is actualised by an immanent struggle between the subject and the World: "On a raison de faire la guerre, c'est la thèse des philosophes, de se rebeller contre le maître, c'est le mot d'ordre des gnostiques, de lutter de manière immanente avec le Monde, c'est le théorème du Christ-futur."[32] This struggle is led by what he calls the Heretics: "Les Hérétiques sont vivants d'un vie invisible vers laquelle ne peut se tourner aucun regard de quelque nature qu'il soit, même spirituel."[33] They are heretics only in their immanent struggle with the World, which is punished by death or persecution; the World is seen almost as an invisible force whose wrath strikes down anyone who dares to emancipate themselves from it through the heresy of the Future Christ (what becoming a Future Christ implies will be evoked in more detail in chapter 5). This heresy is a non-choice, the subject potentially becoming a heretic from the moment he or she no longer believes in the World's hallucinations and uncovers the sufficiency at the heart of the World's operations. In this sense, every human is a heretic *en puissance*, as he explains in *Mystique non-philosophique*:

> « l'anéantissement » de la suffisance philosophique dans la non-suffisance de l'Un suppose l'Homme hérétique déjà *donné* a priori, *l'hérésie comme a priori humain.* On imagine le procès philosophique « en hérésie » dont est passible la mystique future et *que peut-être elle admet de telle manière que ce procès soit identiquement la preuve de sa vérité c'est-à-dire de son témoignage en faveur du Vrai-sans-vérité.*[34]

Laruelle thus redefines the notion of heresy and proceeds to an *abstraction axiomatisante* that sees it become the central driving force for the subject, in the form of the Future Christ, and for Laruelle's *mystique future* or *mystique-fiction*, without even mentioning his reinvention of Christology in *Christo Fiction,* in which heresy occupies a central role.

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[31] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.37.
[32] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.18-19
[33] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.36.
[34] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.90.

Laruelle's heresy is far more radical than any other form of heresy explored in this thesis, as he forms a heretical and importantly performative project that aims to have a practical impact on the World and humans as well as an immanent one. Laruelle's heresy is not exclusively spiritual or immaterial in the sense that it aims to change the World and the way humans live, as John Ó Maoilearca explains concisely:

> what non-philosophy aims for is something more akin to a "Marxist practice" – one that Laruelle depicts as "the transformation of the situation of humans in the world" (who are left undefined and so unpurified) rather than as the transformation (through becoming or reeducation) of humans themselves. In no way does it rely on an "authoritarian materialist position." It is the situation – the miserable places – that requires change, not their inhabitants. [35]

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[35] John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal: Laruelle and nonhuman philosophy,* p.75-76.

4. Fiction

<u>Negative theology</u>

 As already stated, the ontological status of the *corpus* of negative theology is extremely problematic, given that these texts are built around non-referents, making them void of any epistemological value. They do not correspond to any kind of preconceived category or genre of text. It would be easy to be misguided into believing that negative theology has a prescriptive dimension: after all, these series of negations could and have been seen as simple indications for the subject to apply this repetitive apophasis to himself or herself, thus initiating the process of self-emptying leading to God. In this case, one could argue that there would be a performative dimension to these texts, by which the negations, when read, acted as a trigger to this inner, self-suppressing mechanism. Alternatively, one could interpret them not as prescriptive injunctions but rather as testimonies, depending more or less directly for example on the use of a first-person narrative or of more scholastic/academic discourse. However, both of these suppositions are false. Firstly, asserting that negative theology's negations have a performative function would be forgetting the complete powerlessness of language in the face of spiritual life: this self-emptying is precisely non-discursive, non-intellectual and is by no means something that can be voluntarily triggered by any given thought, let alone by negations read in a text. Furthermore, what would then be the reaction caused by the affirmations that are present in a number of these texts? Would they reverse the process? This way of conceiving negative theology is far too naïve and simplistic. The hypothesis of the *corpus* of negative theology as testimonial seems slightly less absurd, but is nonetheless just as false: the mystical experience is just as unfathomable as God himself/itself, as it is literally being God in God, becoming undistinguishable or, as will be explored in the next two chapters, experiencing the subject's oneness with God. Furthermore, a testimony implies a subjective perspective; in other words, the subject must be present at least as a perceiving entity to be able to relate his/her experience. This is why, for Plotinus, consciousness and reflexivity are what turn you away from the One, which would logically imply that no true narrative of this experience should be possible. And yet, Plotinus included, these first-person narratives do exist; not only that but Plotinus, Pseudo Denys and Meister Eckhart all seem to describe the conditions necessary for the mystical experience. And if not performative, and if language is utterly powerless in the

face of the one, what is the use of these series of negations?

The key to answering this question is to consider negative theology as a specific kind of fiction: these texts are fictional simulations, *simulacra* of the actual process of spiritual apophatism. One could even more strongly suggest these texts are parodies, explaining the near-grotesque and exaggerated repetition of these negations. These texts, by their parodic nature, constantly denounce their own deficiency: it is obvious that the mystical experience of being One with the One is not reached exclusively by negating everything that is positive; this is merely the discursive, fictional avatar or symbol found to signify this process whilst also signalling language's, and perhaps even the intellect's profound inadequacy faced with such an irrational event. This is what Derrida seems to suggest in *Sauf le nom*:

> Par là, elle serait non seulement un langage, et une mise à l'épreuve du langage, mais avant tout l'expérience la plus pensante, la plus exigeante, la plus intraitable de l' « essence » du langage: un discours sur le langage, un « monologue » (au sens hétérologique que Novalis ou Heidegger donnent à ce mot) dans lequel le langage et la langue parlent d'eux-mêmes et prennent acte de ce que Die [sic] Sprache spricht. D'où cette dimension poétique ou fictionnelle, parfois ironique, toujours allégorique, dont certains diraient que c'est seulement une forme, une apparence ou un simulacre... Il est vrai que, simultanément, cette aride fictionnalité tend à dénoncer les images, les figures, les idoles, la rhétorique. Il faut penser à une fiction iconoclaste.[1]

Negative theology thus uses language against itself, parodying its usual epistemological use and creating a fictional simulation that should not be mistaken for an authentic attempt to represent. This is also why negative theology can use both negations and affirmations, that both parody different things, affirmations parodying those who believe language can actually evoke and even represent the divine. Another thing that can be explained by this parodic fictionality is the use of very diverse images and even levels of images in negative theology, such as Meister Eckhart's recurrent use of the example of the fly whilst evoking the perfect equality of all creatures before God. Pseudo Denys himself in *La Hiérarchie céleste* justfies this equality of

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.54.

all images in their inadequacy, and thus in their fictionality:

> C'est ainsi qu'il advient aux Écritures, dans leurs révélations mystiques, de célébrer la véritable béatitude de la Thérarchie suressentielle sous les noms de Raison, d'Intelligence, d'Essence, manifestant ainsi ce qu'il convient d'attribuer à Dieu de rationalité et de sagesse; de la définir également comme Substance subsistant par soi, comme Cause véritable de la subsistance de tous les êtres; ou encore de la figurer comme Lumière et de l'appeler Vie. Ces représentations sont assurément plus saintes et paraissent en quelque manière supérieures aux images matérielles. En réalité elles ne sont pas moins déficientes que les autres lorsqu'il s'agit de signifier en toute vérité la Théarchie même, qui est au-delà de toute essence et de toute vie, que ne caractérise aucune lumière, dont aucune raison ni aucune intelligence ne peuvent donner une image authentique. C'est pourquoi il arrive aussi à ces mêmes Ecritures de célébrer la Théarchie en la représentant, selon un mode qui n'est pas de ce monde, par des images qui ne lui ressemblent d'aucune façon. Elles l'appellent invisible, illimité, insaisissable, ne signifiant pas ce qu'elle est mais plutôt ce qu'elle n'est pas. A mon sens, cette seconde manière de la célébrer lui convient mieux, car, suivant la tradition secrète et sacrée, nous avons raison de dire qu'elle n'est rien de ce que sont les êtres et nous ignorons cette indéfinissable Suressence qui ne se peut penser ni dire.[2]

The logic of this excerpt is pushed to its limits in what could be called Pseudo Deny's dissimilar image method, that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, by which one intentionally misrepresents the divine with images that are as far removed from the divine as possible, implying trivial images and, if pushed to the paroxysm, perhaps even vulgarity; this is an opening Bataille will exploit in brilliant and violent fashion in his *récits érotiques*.

The question of fiction in negative theology is also to be considered simply from the point of view of referentiality. A work of fiction is by essence openly non-referential, creating characters, places, dialogues that, although they may draw inspiration from the real, do not belong to it and have no referent in it. Negative theology is similar in the sense that the word 'God' is non-referential, there is nothing in the World that it points towards. To assert that God

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[2] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.190-191.

is a fictional creation is not as unreasonable as it seems: the God of negative theology, as she is embedded in discourse, is a necessary fictional creation that is sure to signify its deficiency. As shown in the previous excerpt, virtually anything, any image can be used to represent this God, that has an infinite potential number of discursive avatars that are all equally inadequate. Compared to most theological texts, it must be said that these texts do not shy away from using literary techniques, creating vivid images and using parabolas for instance, leading Jan Miernowski to call them "fictions poétiques".[3] Understanding negative theology is also understanding that its grasp is not limited to its own texts, but that it can also be used as a hermeneutic tool to read other texts. The Bible, for instance, seems a good example of a text that can be read in such a way: it is a work of fiction, with scenes that are obviously, to some degree, parodic or at least made to be unbelievable, so that no one will literally believe what is narrated (apart from the Creationists). This way of thinking about all representations of God as fiction opens the door to seeing the Bible as a highly ironic text, mocking itself for taking on so many attempts to represent the Divine or even the experience of the divine. A radical reading of the precepts put forward by Denys (far more radical than Denys himself would ever be) would thus construct a paradigm in which the whole of the theological corpus would be subsumed into/under fiction, in an epistemological equalisation of all attempted discourse on God.

Valéry

The *Cahiers* are written entirely by Valéry, and can largely be considered as non-fiction, with the exemption of a few literary experiments. However, there is an implicit fictionality at work at the very centre of the *Cahiers* construction. Positionally speaking, the *Cahiers* are written from an empty Self, meaning that the personal pronoun 'je' is a non-referent. Consequentially, everything written from and about this 'je' is purely false and fictional: as Valéry himself constantly argues, the Self is a fiction that humans accept to hypostasize as a general, consensual convention. As argued in chapter 3, Valéry even accepts that his *Système*, as well as his research, will never lead to anything and that his goal is strictly impossible to achieve in the conceptual framework of rationality. Language itself cannot hold any truth-value and is at best in Valéry's eyes an approximation of the truth, although this latter idea is probably the result of his inner struggle to reject rationality completely rather than one coherent with the actual, honest negative

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[3] Jan Miernowski, *Le dieu néant: théologies négatives à l'aube des temps modernes* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) p.14.

revelations he has concerning science. In this sense, "Tout ce qui s'écrit est fictif" (C, IV, 287), including the entirety of the *Cahiers*. If this stance is to be applied radically, it is the existence of Valéry himself, of his voice and of his person that seems to be endangered, as Gusdorf explains:

> Contestation radicale: la graphie de Valéry consacre son inlassable activité à la négation de l'Autos et du Bios, résorbés dans le fonds commun de l'intelligibilité universelle. A suivre Valéry jusqu'au bout de sa rigueur, il faudrait conclure que Valéry n'existe pas, n'a jamais existé; ou plutôt que Valéry est une fiction créée par Paul Valéry. Valéry n'est pas l'auteur, la « cause » des écritures de Paul Valéry, mais bien plutôt « l'effet » de celles-ci, un personnage mythique dont la stature se profile sur l'arrière-plan du Moi inconnaissable.[4]

The 'je', although absolutely necessary to write and think, is purely fictional, and thus so is Valéry himself, at least in the way he is embedded in the *Cahiers*. Even if the Self were not empty, this would still at least partially be the case, as language could translate only an approximation of what the Self would be, in a form of involuntary autofiction. The *Cahiers* as a whole is not only fictional but arguably a form of simulacrum: despite Valéry being fully aware of the epistemological voidness of his work, he still undertakes this philosophical and even algebraic research that he knows will fail, thus simulating a serious scientific or at least rational project. The *Cahiers* keeps the form of these disciplines and the rhetoric of rationality, but not their goals, rejecting their very fabric, his only intention being to undertake the impossible task of exhausting the possibilities of discourse, both apophatic and cataphatic, around the *Moi* and *la vie mentale*.

This implicit fictionality of the *Cahiers*, which is in effect its main *modus operandi*, is linked to the more obvious explicit fictionality at work in the creation of Monsieur Teste. This character, which he describes as "Mon idéal" (C, X, 23), is created by Valéry as an idealised projection of himself, what he would have been if he had been able to successfully lead his impossible research to its conclusion. M.Teste is born out of Valéry's frustration over not managing to create a pure, interior space in which he could explore mental life without the parasitical interference of all that is exterior:

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[4] Georges Gusdorf , *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie,* p.178.

J'essayais donc de me réduire à mes propriétés réelles. J'avais peu de confiance en mes moyens, et je trouvais en moi sans nulle peine tout ce qu'il fallait pour me haïr; mais j'étais fort de mon désir d'infinie netteté, de mon mépris des convictions et des idoles, de mon dégoût de la facilité et de mon sentiment de mes limites. Je m'étais fait une île intérieure que je perdais mon temps à reconnaître et à fortifier. […] M.Teste est né quelque jour d'un souvenir récent de ces états. C'est en quoi il me ressemble d'aussi près qu'un enfant semé par quelqu'un dans un moment de profonde altération de son être ressemble à ce père hors de soi-même.[5]

M.Teste is a vessel with which Valéry can actualise the impossibility of his own work. Only a fictional, somehow superhuman character could ever finish what Valéry attempted to set in motion in the *Cahiers*:

l'existence d'un type de cette espèce ne pourrait se prolonger dans le réel pour plus de quelques quarts d'heure, je dis que le problème de cette existence et de sa durée suffit à lui donner une sorte de vie. Ce problème est un germe. Un germe vit; mais il en est qui ne sauraient se développer. Ceux-ci essayent de vivre, forment des monstres, et les monstres meurent. En vérité, nous ne les connaissons qu'à cette propriété remarquable de ne pouvoir durer.[6]

M.Teste is an impossible character not only because he has led to its term the research that, in reality, is impossible even to initiate, but because he has internalised it. He is not depicted as some kind of savant, filled with erudition and wisdom, but rather as an embodiment of this research that he has applied radically to himself, as described by the narrator in *La soirée avec M.Teste*: " Il était l'être absorbé dans sa variation, celui qui devient son système, celui qui se livre tout entier à la discipline effrayante de l'esprit libre ".[7] M.Teste is thus not only an intellectual ideal, but a personal ideal for Valéry, who aspires to find the perfect symbiosis between his work and his *être-au-monde*. This is why M.Teste frequently appears in the *Cahiers* throughout the years as a sort of figure of authority that Valéry looks up to: "Mr Teste est mon croquemitaine, quand je suis pas sage, je pense à lui " (C, I, 248).

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[5] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p.9-10.
[6] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.10.
[7] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste,* p.20.

What is most interesting is how Valéry uses Teste to experiment with applying the ambitions of the Système practically, to see how a subject could function if he were to accept and obey the principles set forth in the *Cahiers*. An insight into this is given in the *Préface à la soirée avec M.Teste*:

Pourquoi M.Teste est-il impossible? – C'est son âme que cette question. Elle vous change en M.Teste. Car il n'est point d'autre que le démon même de la possibilité. Le souci de l'ensemble de ce qu'il peut le domine. Il s'observe, il manœuvre, il ne veut pas se laisser manœuvrer. Il ne connaît que deux valeurs, deux catégories, qui sont celles de la conscience réduite à ses actes: le possible et l'impossible. Dans cette étrange cervelle, où la philosophie a peu de crédit, où le langage est toujours en accusation, il n'est guère de pensée qui ne s'accompagne du sentiment qu'elle est provisoire; il ne subsiste guère que l'attente et l'exécution d'opérations définies. Sa vie intense et brève se dépense à surveiller le mécanisme par lequel les relations du connu et de l'inconnu sont instituées et organisées. Même, elle applique ses puissances obscures et transcendantes à feindre obstinément les propriétés d'un système isolé où l'infini ne figure point.[8]

This description carries all the traces of the *Cahiers*'s main themes: criticism of philosophy ("la philosophie a peu de crédit"), of language ("le language est toujours en accusation") and most of all the présent absolu ("il n'est guère de pensée qui ne s'accompagne du sentiment qu'elle est provisoire"). But is not only M.Teste's mind that is deeply altered, to the point of being impossible, by the impact of his research, but also his physicality. As Valéry points out numerous times, our need for exteriority and communication is one of the main obstacles to his "observations pures" and their transcription. M.Teste, on the other hand, does not have to obey the laws of reality, and his *être-au-monde* is reduced to a bare minimum, his near-spectral presence suggesting the unimportance of the body and all that is exterior: "Tout s'effaçait en lui, les yeux, les mains. avait pourtant les épaules militaires, et le pas d'une régularité qui étonnait. Quand il parlait, il ne levait jamais un bras ni un doigt: il avait tué la marionnette. Il ne souriait pas, ne disait pas bonjour ni bonsoir, il semblait ne pas entendre le « comment allez-vous » ".[9] *Tuer la marionette* is what Valéry is unable to do in the *Cahiers*, unable to rid himself completely from the conventions of the World in order to become a pure

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[8] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* , p.11.
[9] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.18.

being, focused on the rigorous observation of his interiority. M.Teste does not bother with social niceties or what other people think of him, something that Valéry, given his incredibly large circle of friends and acquaintances in the intellectual and artistic *milieu*, has never been able or willing to do. M.Teste is also depicted as perhaps having found the language that Valéry knows that he will never be able to find: he speaks incredibly rapidly and nearly incomprehensibly ("sa parole était extraordinairement rapide et sa voix sourde"),[10] as if to match the unfathomable quickness of the présent absolu and of these ideas that exist only for an instant. His language is entirely personal, not turned towards any form of communication or transmission: "Je suis chez MOI, je parle ma langue, et je fais les choses extraordinaires."[11]

M.Teste is not only an actualisation of the obvious, explicit ideas and concepts that populate the *Cahiers*, but perhaps even more interestingly of Valéry's apophatic tendencies. As Gusdorf describes, he refuses the influx of all that is positive and exterior to him, in one of the first gestures of spiritual apophatism: "Le Robinson métaphysique de Valéry {Teste}, cantonné lui aussi à la source première de la connaissance, refuse l'afflux des informations qui lui viennent du monde extérieur; l'unique nécessaire auquel il se consacre de toute application de son être, est ce moi pur qui fonde sa présence à lui-même avant d'orienter sa présence au monde."[12] The reference to apophatism appears in M.Teste far more explicit than it ever is in the *Cahiers*. This is best shown in the *Log-book de M.Teste*, where Valéry gives a first-person voice to M.Teste (it will be a surprise to no one that Valéry himself called one of his first journals included in the *Cahiers* "Log-book" as well, reinforcing the already very obvious parallel between himself and M.Teste):

> Il y a des personnages qui sentent que leurs sens les séparent du réel, de l'être. Ce sens en eux infecte leurs autres sens.
>
> Ce que je vois m'aveugle. Ce que j'entends m'assourdit. Ce en quoi je sais, cela me rend ignorant. J'ignore en tant et pour autant que je sais. Cette illumination devant moi est un bandeau et recouvre ou une nuit ou une lumière de plus... Plus quoi ? Ici le cercle se ferme, de cet étrange renversement: la connaissance, comme un nuage sur l'être; le monde brillant, comme taie et opacité.
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> Ôtez toute chose que j'y voie.[13]

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[10] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.18
[11] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.27
[12] Georges Gusdorf , *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie*, p.165
[13] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* , p.56

Everything in this excerpt seems almost undeniably inspired by Plotinus, whom according to Michel Jarrety he discovered around 1892 (" La sublimation de la Beauté qui s'exacerbe alors doit sans doute beaucoup à la découverte, il y a un an, de Platon – puis Plotin –, qui confirme l'idéalisme de son ancienne esthétique mystique").[14] From the rejection of everything that is positive, with a focus here on the empirical sensations as parasitical hurdles to true knowledge (or in this case probably non-knowledge, nescience) to the metaphorical use of vision, everything here is reminiscent of Plotinian vocabulary and near-poetic prose. The fact that Valéry would depict an idealised version of himself as going through the process of spiritual apophatism can only help reinforce the suggested apophatic reading of the *Cahiers*. It does however lead us to two contrasting conclusions: first, as previously mentioned, that the apophatic model he discovered through Plotinus is something he feels close to, and something that an ideal version of himself would be able to embrace completely – and not only that but that somehow the result of his research would lead him to this apophasis, thus underlining the paradoxical connexity between two seemingly opposite paradigms. However, it also shows, especially in comparison to Bataille, Laruelle and even a negative theologian such as Meister Eckhart, a relative lack of radicality on Valéry's behalf: it would appear that he considers this inner experience of spiritual apophasis as something impossible, fit only for his fictional *alter ego*. He seems trapped by the categories of the possible and the impossible, his argument perhaps being that the aspiration to *tuer la marionnette* is impossible in the real, physical world, and that no human can resist the constant cacophony of positive sensations and information that being in the World implies.

Bataille

As the *interlude* will cover the two central erotic *récits*, this subchapter will attempt to explain why there is an implicit fictionality in all of Bataille's mystical works, and *L'Expérience intérieure* in particular. There works can of course be considered as impossible texts, in the sense that they are built around numerous non-referents, not only God, *la nuit* and all those words that serve a similar function, but, as we will see, the 'je' for instance that is considered as an empty convention that fails to signify the innate essential emptiness of the subject. His aforementioned criticism of language also means that he gives no epistemological or even

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[14] Michel Jarrety, *Paul Valéry*, p.110

spiritual value to the words themselves. He even retrospectively comments on his assertions within the same book to point out their inadequacy, for instance in *L'Expérience intérieure:* *"*J'ai dit (dans la seconde partie): « Le non-savoir communique l'extase. » Affirmation gratuite et décevante. Elle est fondée dans l'expérience — si on la vit... Sinon elle est suspendue."[15] The comparison with the *Cahiers* is interesting: they are a simulacrum of a scientific, epistemological undertaking, whilst rejecting those very same values and authorities. Bataille openly rejects these and proceeds in a slightly different way to approach the ineffable, using a more chaotic, emotional, impulsive non-method. And yet both methods are just as inadequate: representation of the ecstatic instance of the *Expérience intérieure*, as well as God, is completely impossible and any kind of attempt will fail. The epistemological value of what Bataille is writing is the same as the *Cahier*: completely null. And yet he keeps writing, with the energy afforded to him by a form of negative faith. How is it possible to understand, characterise these texts? Like for the *Cahiers*, it seems logical to consider them as *simulacra*, merely simulating, pretending to be a textual attempt to describe and give life to the inner experience. If "Le monde des paroles est risible. Les menaces, la violence, le pouvoir qui envoûte, appartiennent au silence. La profonde complicité n'est pas exprimable en paroles."[16] the only reason to write is to create a parodic simulation, which Bataille does perhaps more openly than Valéry, given the intentionally excessive nature of his writing, which becomes even more so in his erotic *récits*. A simulacrum is the only way to textually affirm the impossible as impossible, and still, in doing so, refuse the silence imposed by the unfathomable, as Ian James explains:

> It enters into an impossible play within the limits of the self, of thought and of meaning in order to affirm the impossible as impossible. In so doing simulacrum founds existence in its very absence of foundation. In this impossible movement the simulacrum, miming that which is not, always maintains its lack of self-identity, and remains suspended in its difference from itself. It withdraws identity, disputes the primacy of the concept, and refuses the closure of the didactical circle.[17]

As will be made clear in the *interlude*, it is by pushing fiction and simulacrum to its absolute limits that Bataille manages to transgress the categories of the possible and the

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[15] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.134
[16] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.66
[17] Ian James, 'From Recuperation to Simulacrum: Klossowski's Readings of Bataille' in *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, p.99

impossible in his works, which operate like a form of matrix in which the ideas of *L'Expérience intérieure* are suddenly incarnate.

Laruelle

Laruelle's work and writing are entirely non-representative: neither *le Réel* or any of the *noms premiers* are referents. Laruelle pushes using non-referents to the extreme, with nearly every other word being a non-referent that the reader must decipher, which generally means understanding operations such as dualysis and *abstraction axiomatisante.* This means that the text, in conventional, positivist terms, should be empty. However, unlike in the three other bodies of work this thesis explores, the notion of *simulacrum* does not apply to Laruelle's work as it does not *pretend* to be anything else. Negative theology parodies spiritual apophasis, the *Cahiers* pretend to be a serious epistemological undertaking and Bataille simulates a desperate search for a way of describing the ecstatic moment of the inner experience. Laruelle's use of fiction, on the other hand, is not implicit or hidden, nor is it symbolic or even literary: every text written into non-philosophy must be considered as fiction. Laruelle names this *philo-fiction* when writing non-philosophy, but the terms of Christo-fiction and *mystique-fiction* are also employed depending on the material he is using. This fiction affords him a form of absolute freedom from all rational constraints, but obeys its own rules and laws, as he underlines in *Le Christ futur:* " La rigueur de l'hérésie universelle est à sa manière à la fois celle d'une science par le respect des causes, des règles et des procédures, par la référence nécessaire aux données de l'expérience, celle d'une philosophie par le rapport au Monde que suppose le sujet-Christ transcendantal, enfin celle d'une fiction par la liberté des décisions, le travail sur le langage et l'imagination des formulations".[18] Whilst his fiction is total, it is not delirious or outrageous: it is simply a result of the vision-in-One, and thus from the point of view of academia or even simply the reader can be considered as nothing else than fiction. The category of fiction is rooted in a philosophical distinction between reality and itself, a distinction and a dyad that non-philosophy would probably dualyse and clone into something entirely different. Fiction is nevertheless a necessary tool for Laruelle, who tries to separate his work from the World as much as the World will allow him to. Obviously, the language he has to write in, the words he has to use, despite them undergoing a complete dualysis, still carry at the very least the visual

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[18] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.91-92.

and audio identity of their worldly counterparts. The notion of a completely new language, as dreamt up by Valéry in the *Cahiers*, is of course impossible, at least insofar as Laruelle wants his work to be read and *act*. However, it is interesting to mention that, apart from in his earlier works such as *Les philosophies de la différence*, where he is still concerned with explaining to philosophers what is so wrong with philosophy, there are very few direct references taken from the World at all. Laruelle seldom mentions a philosopher or a theologian, and when he does it is to demonstrate his or her inability to understand the One. He also rarely mentions any historical events, or for that matter trivial, everyday situations. There is not even room for any thought experiments: Laruelle's fiction is locked inside the Real, never wavering from its posture within or from the vision-in-One.

In this sense, although the traditional notion of fiction does in a way apply to Laruelle's work, in the context of non-philosophy and in this case of *mystique-fiction* it takes on a very different, although not entirely incompatible meaning:

Ce que nous appelons la mystique future, en quoi mérite-t-elle ce titre de fiction, une fois écarté évidemment le sens banal ou imaginaire, par exemple littéraire, de la fiction. Il faut comprendre qu'elle ne décrit pas un phénomène religieux au sens d'une réalité en soi, ensuite affaiblie ou idéalisée par l'imagination. C'est parce qu'elle est elle-même réelle, ce Réel fût-il ou justement parce qu'il est intrinsèquement immanent et impossible et pas seulement absent ou manquant « à » la représentation, qu'elle n'est pas « réaliste » au sens ordinaire mais radicale fiction.[19]

The kind of reality evoked here by Laruelle is clearly not phenomenal reality, and neither is it pointing towards any kind of epistemic reality: future mysticism is *real* because it is completely immanent to the Real, and for that matter not only unrepresentable but impossible in the strongest of senses, something that cannot even be fathomed from the position of language as being made-in-world. This fiction is thus not parodic, not representational, but *real.* What could be suggested is that the *reality* of this fiction could pertain to the fact it is somehow caused by the *Réel*, not directly but immanently nonetheless, as a result of Laurelle's negative faith. This faith is the only thing that is allowing him to hold this impossible, massive fiction together, and it is also the condition for reading Laruelle in an appropriate way. If one interprets

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[19] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.19.

these fictions as experiments, then they are utterly valueless in themselves, by themselves and for themselves, which is why most readings, which could be called *unfaithful* or, worse even, *philosophical,* have always tried to recuperate them into other disciplines and ideas. It is hard for any academic discourse to go further here, as justifying why these fictions are Real, caused by the Real in-the-last instance, are not simply empty, is very challenging. They are certainly empty from an epistemological standpoint: not only are all of the *noms premiers* he uses non-referents, but the axiomatic nature of his work as already mentioned estranges him from any kind of rational thinking. The *philo-fictions* he creates or conjures up are also pure fiction, as shown for instance by the lack of historicity of his theory of Heresy in *Le Christ futur.* One possible way to define his fictions is via the notion of utopia, as he does himself in a excerpt where utopia and fiction are to be read as synonymous:

> Les hérésies sont la recherche et la pratique d'une utopie, et l'hérésie radicale de Homme-en-personne est la découverte du Réel comme utopie *déterminante.* L'utopie n'est pas toujours un délire de l'imagination, elle peut être aussi une pauvreté radicale en représentations, plus profondément déterminer une imagination et une fiction qui changent la vie, qui *expriment* le Vécu-sans-vie tel qu'il détermine la vie. Que serait une vie selon l'utopie de l'hérésie? Sans les nier simplement, invalidant leur suffisance, elle ferait des moyens du conformisme – l'obéissance et le projet, la foi et le dogme, le consentement et le renoncement – des moyens de libération du sujet c'est-à-dire de sa constitution comme Christ Futur.[20]

Laruelle names it an *utopie déterminante* because it comes from the Real and wants to performatively have an impact on the World and on the reader insofar as he or she is *Sujet-Christ en puissance.* What he is writing about cannot be written about in any other way because of the powerlessness of representation and of philosophy; it is a utopia only insofar as it not in the World and has no physical place. It is, however, immanent to the Real, and these texts, as will be explained in chapter 8, are equal cause and part of the Real.

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[20] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.92-93.

Interlude

This *interlude's* goal is to explore in more depth Bataille's erotic *récits*, to show how the notion of *simulacrum* can appear and work on a microtextual level. Whilst these texts were initially less studied, or simply tossed aside as the literary manifestation of the perversion of a troubled mind, they have with time come to the forefront of Bataille studies. This has been helped by the rejection of a purely biographical and personal interpretation of these texts led by a number of critics, including for instance Benjamin Noys in *Georges Bataille, A Critical Introduction* when he asserts that: "while Bataille intimately relates his life to his work his work cannot be completely explained by his life history. Bataille's writings on eroticism cannot be explained as the result of his own 'perversions' or as some attempt at self-justification for his own desires. It is important that we recognise the limits of biographical explanation and its assimilation of an author to the stability of an identity".[1] This *interlude* will thus aim to underline the essential importance of these *récit* that can be seen as an almost concrete application or illustration of the driving concepts and ideas contained in Bataille's more mystical work. There is a form of freedom in the overt use of fiction (and also perhaps of pseudonymity) that allows Bataille to push the boundaries of language and representation, putting into motion a complex network of *simulacra* that use language against itself to radicalise the apophatic intuitions of negative theology, and in particular Pseudo Denys. This *interlude* is thus also an attempt to show that it is wrong to limit the scope of Bataille's use or relation to negative theology or more largely mysticism to his non-fictional works, which is the case for instance in Peter Tracey Connor's *The Mysticism of Sin* or in Amy Hollywood's *Sensible Ecstasy* where *Histoire de l'œil* is in fact discussed at length but with a heavy emphasis on psychoanalytical analysis.

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[1] Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.11.

"Bien que l'*Histoire de l'œil* comporte quelques personnages nommés et le récit de leurs jeux érotiques, Bataille n'a nullement écrit là l'histoire de Simone, de Marcelle ou du narrateur."[2] The publication of Barthes's article "La métaphore de l'œil" in *Critique* in 1961 has greatly oriented and influenced critical readings of Bataille's fictional works. Disregarding any possibility of psychological depth in the characters, Barthes's article encourages one to read *Histoire de l'œil* in a "horizontal" way, to consider the narration and the characters as a mere excuse for the migration of the image of the eye throughout the *récit* (Barthes himself chooses to call it a poem), all erotic scenes being analysed in a purely formalist way, each object having a metonymical value. This interpretation has been dominant in most of the more contemporary criticism on the *récit*. Patrick Ffrench, author of *The cut: Reading George Bataille's Histoire de l'œil*, probably the most remarkable and complete exploration of the récit to this date, even asserts that "one cannot read *Histoire de l'œil* except in relation to Barthes, today".[3] This does not mean there has been a total critical consensus around Bataille's controversial narration of Simone and the narrator's erotic games: questions have arisen on the degree of seriousness with which to interpret the excessive nature of the erotic scenes, or for that case the *récit* as a whole, that sometimes seems to play with more or less archaic stereotypes. The figure of Sir Edmund, for instance, could be seen as a parody of the British nobleman *voyeur*, it the inevitably comedic *decalage* between his social status and the sexual acts he encourages, without of course ever actively participating in them. The last part of the book, called "Coïncidences" or "Réminiscences" depending on the edition, in which he describes the link between the recurring images of *Histoire de l'œil* and his childhood lived with his syphilitic and paralysed father, is also subject to an ongoing debate concerning the truth-value of the assertion he makes. Susan Sontag[4] and Andrea Dworkin[5] for instance have advocated for a psychological interpretation, giving credit to Bataille's assertions linking the obsessive motifs and imagery in *Histoire de l'œil* to the trauma of his childhood. In *Pornography, Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin describes "Coïncidences" as a "personal essay on his own life, in which he describes some probable origins of the symbols in *Story of the eye*".[6] This would signify that *Histoire de l'œil* would indeed be some kind of almost cathartic or therapeutic writing, by which Bataille would exorcize the ghosts of his past, encouraging a more literal or at least psychoanalytic

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[2] Roland Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'œil', *Essais critiques*, p.282.
[3] Patrick Ffrench, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil*, p.6-7.
[4] Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination.' in *Styles of Radical Will*, (London: Vintage, 1994).
[5] Dworkin, Andrea, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press,1983).
[6] Dworkin, Andrea, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, p.175

interpretation of the *récit*. This interpretation has however largely been contested since: there is a general consensus amongst critics that "Coïncidences" is at least partially parodic, especially in the way it which it almost hyperbolically, tauntingly suggests a biographical reading, as Benjamin Noys underlines: "Bataille parodies the idea of direct causal connections between his early life experiences and his work in the afterword to his novel the Story of the Eye (1928) called 'Coincidences'".[7] Instead of making *Histoire de l'œil* easier to read by providing a logical explanation to how and why it was written, it adds a layer of complexity to the epistemological value of the text. For Patrick Ffrench, "'Coïncidences' is neither wholly autobiographical nor wholly fictional. It complicated the framing of the text and situates its subject in a strange position as if on the limit between 'fiction' and the real".[8] The question is not to confirm or deny entirely the statements made by Bataille, but rather to understand if and how they can help us read the text. It is impossible from a purely logical standpoint to assert with certainty that it is entirely parodic or entirely true; as Martin Crowley aptly writes in his article 'Bataille's Tacky Touch': "What, then, if the literalism of "Coincidences" were not just parodic? What if it were, also, literal? I have argued that this hypothesis can simply not be dismissed: unverifiable, it is also indelible".[9] What is certain however is that "Coïncidences" adds to the *brouillard narratif* surrounding *Histoire de l'œil*; as Amy Hollywood writes:

> Bataille tells stories about (fictional) selves in order to mask and dissolve the self (the letter might itself be a further incidence of this). "Coincidences," then, is as much a therapy of the dissolving subject as is "The Tale" and demands equal analytic attention. Rather than providing a key to the narrative, it doubles and decenters it in crucial ways.[10]

Whilst effectively appearing as the component of a complex narrative game, where fiction and reality seem increasingly undistinguishable from each other, "Coïncidences" seems to both justify and participate in the excessive, extreme, often parodic aspect of the *récit* as a whole.

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[7] Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*, p.11.
[8] Patrick French, *The Cut: reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil*, p.157
[9] Martin Crowely, 'Bataille's Tacky Touch', *Modern Language Notes*, (2004), pp.766-780, p.774
[10] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p.47

There are a number of reasons to question the structuralism-infused reading of *Histoire de l'œil.* Judging by the text itself, it is difficult to understand how the characters, especially the narrator and Simone, have been seen as simple narrative agents. The narration clearly points towards a form of psychological depth that is ignored by most critics and seems to contradict any form of purely aesthetic reading of Bataille's *récit*. One could in fact argue that their psychology is the key to understanding *Histoire de l'œil*, both in its narrative structure and in its excessive eroticism. The aim of this essay is to show that *Histoire de l'œil* is in fact the story of two charactersin denial about their own mortality, constantly trying to escape the reality of their own inevitable death by using eroticism as a form of *divertissement pascalien*. This will also lead to rethinking the *récit*'s relation to the notion of parody as a *simulacrum*, surprisingly linking *Histoire de l'œil* to the very specific linguistic and metaphysical mechanisms of negative theology and opening the door to a new way of reading Bataille's fiction both on a microtextual and a metatextual level.

The first sentence of the *récit* arguably confronts the reader with both eroticism and death: "J'ai été élevé seul et, aussi loin que je me le rappelle, j'étais anxieux des choses sexuelles".[11] Whilst the narrator's anxiety seems oriented exclusively towards sex, one can argue than any form of anxiety relates to the knowledge of our own mortality, and even without using this perhaps excessively general argument, the rest of the *récit* seems to support the claim that the narrator is prone to different formsof existential anxiety (an idea that Bataille was largely familiarised with though his reading of Kierkegaard). What is important here is that Simone, who is introduced immediately afterwards, shares this anxiety: "Je commençais à deviner qu'elle partageait mon angoisse",[12] and that their erotic interaction is a way to both express and rid themselves of this shared concern. In this sense, the narrator's relationship with Simone could be seen as having a quasi-therapeutic function, as theirconstant erotic games and obsessions are explorations of the different ways in which they can erase their death-related anxiety together. The intimacy allowed by eroticism is a way of overcoming each character's fundamental solipsism; this is why Simone attempts to prevent the narrator from returning to his solitary erotic experience: "Je ne veux plus que tu te branles sans moi",[13] as the other is absolutely necessary to this defiant confrontation with death. Every erotic scene could thus be seen as an attempt to negate the reality of death, insofar as the erotic act can be seen as the polar

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[11] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.7.
[12] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.7.
[13] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.9.

opposite of death: whilst death is absolute nothingness, which is absolutely impossible to experience in any way, eroticism is the space in which the empirical possibilities of life are pushed to their paroxysm. As Benjamin Noys suggests:

> perhaps any interaction with another carries with it erotic possibilities if it involves individuals willing to put themselves at risk in the encounter. If, as Bataille says, the world of work and calculation—the profane world of discrete individuals, of tools, of rational consciousness—is destined to maintain the upper hand, moments of sacred communication will require an attitude of thought that includes a decision to put oneself at risk, to risk the rupturing, if only for a moment, of one's discontinuous identity. Erotic communication opens up to those who willingly maintain a desire that cannot be fully satisfied, a desire for an experience at the level of death.[14]

This experience is precisely "at the level of death" and its positive counterpart. Bataille's emphasis on the sense, smell and touch in particular seem to indeed point toward eroticism as a form of total empirical experience. Interestingly, this conception of eroticism as an attempted negation of death goes against Bataille's later, more theoretical work *L'Erotisme*, in which he asserts that "L'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort est défi, aussi bien dans l'érotismedes cœurs que dans celui des corps, elle est défi, par indifférence, à la mort."[15] In *Histoire de l'œil* the characters seem to fail in their attempt to defy death, eroticism being used as a way of denying the reality of death rather than overcoming and becoming indifferent to it. On the contrary, each erotic act inevitably and paradoxically references its negative counterpart. The analysis of the role of Marcelle in the book is a perfect illustration of this point: as she is forced by Simone and the narrator into their erotic games despite her initial reluctance, she loses what one may call her *metaphysical virginity*. Her mortality is revealed to her through these erotic encounters. When Simone and the narrator come to rescue her from the "maison de santé" in which she is locked up following the orgy Simone and the narrator organised with some of their classmates, they are both paralysed at the sight of a white sheet hanging from the bars of her window: "le drap [blanc] qui s'étalait dans le vent avec un bruit éclatant était souillé au centre

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[14] Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*, p.165.
[15] Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2011), p.28.

d'une large tâche mouillée qu'éclairait part transparence la lumière de la lune."[16] This sheet sullied by urine, that of course sends the reader back to Simone and the narrator's erotic obsession for liquids, seems to symbolize this loss of innocence: Bataille in a way revisits the topical fantasy of the virgin led to debauchery by a more experienced counterpart, but in a far more macabre manner. The superposition of the moon and of the stain could also be interpreted as a way of linking this loss of innocence to more cosmological imagery, underlining the metaphysical roots of this revelation. However, another image of this scene points even more explicitly towards this interpretation of eroticism as being an attempt to negate death: after seeing each other from opposite sides of Marcelle's cell window, Marcelle and Simone start masturbating simultaneously, and as Simone and the narrator's gaze are fixed on Marcelle, she falls down with pleasure and out of sight:

Il sembla qu'un invisible monstre arrachait Marcelle au barreau que tenait fortement sa main gauche: nous la vîmes abattue à la renverse dans son délire. Il ne resta devant nous qu'une fenêtre vide, trou rectangulaire perçant la nuit noire, ouvrant à nos yeux las un jour sur un monde composé avec la foudre et l'aurore.[17]

Despite the rescue being a success (they manage to extract Marcelle from her captivity), Marcelle is in a way metaphysically imprisoned forever; unable to cope with the knowledge of her own mortality, she chooses suicide as the ultimate way of escaping. The *leitmotiv* of the hole, omnipresent in *Histoire de l'œil*, here shows how once the paroxysmal moment of pleasure is passed, the two characters stare into the nothingness of death. This empty window opening the narrator and Simone's eyes to "la nuit" can of course be linked to Bataille's use of the term as a non-referent in which all other non-referents seem to melt in a form of consubstantial absolute negativity. This hole, this *nuit* is very much at the centre of *Histoire de l'œil*, like a vortex pulling in the objects and the characters of the narration, as Patrick French suggests: "The narrative is thus threatened by a centrifugal pull towards a single instant, a singular object which would be the annihilation of all objects in the hole of their own total contiguity. The ultimate principle of *Histoire de l'œil*, the force which threatens its readability but also determines it, is a maelstrom, a hole."[18] This hole is death as well as it is *la nuit*,"LE FOND

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[16] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.33.
[17] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.39.
[18] Patrick French, *The Cut: reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil*, p.86.

DES MONDES",[19] or even the eye itself, as it is paradoxically unable to see, unable to stare at the negative sun without being permanently burnt and is ultimately dislocated from its socket in bullfight.

Another aspect overlooked by most critics that chose the more horizontal reading of *Histoire de l'œil* is that the *récit* does in fact have a linear progression. Far from being a simple succession of chains of images, its narrative structure seems to correspond to one of the oldest literary genres: tragedy. Following the oracular structure, both the narrator and Simone know from the start of the *récit* (the first page evokes their shared anxiety) that they are destined to die. One could thus argue that they spend the rest of *Histoire de l'œil* attempting to escape that reality, much like tragic heroes desperately and absurdly try to escape the oracle's predictions. This is reflected by the fact that the characters are constantly on the move, changing locations and even identities, as exemplified in thisexcerpt that comes just after their murder and rape of the priest: "Sir Edmond et moi, décorés de barbes noires, Simone coiffée d'un risible chapeau de soie noire à fleurs jaunes, nous quittâmes Séville dans une voiture de louage. Nous changions nos personnages à l'entrée d'une nouvelle ville."[20] This passage seems to indicate a propensity not only for a form of geographical escape but also escape from the Self through disguise. The most obvious actualisation of this linear structure however comes through the increasing obscenity and excessiveness of Simone and the narrator's erotic interactions. Not only is eroticism an attempt to negate death, but their increasing difficulty to do so results in an increase of the intensity of their erotic intercourses. When Marcelle commits suicide, for instance, Simone and the narrator proceed to have actual sex with penetration for the first time: "Je coupai la corde, elle était bien morte. Nous l'installâmes sur le tapis. Simone me vit bander et me branla; nous nous étendîmes par terre et je la baisai à côté du cadavre. Simone était vierge et cela nous fit mal, mais nous étions contents justement d'avoir mal."[21] In order to compensate for this first empirical experience of the death of the Other (making their own mortality even harder to deny), Simone and the narrator have to go even further in their erotic games. The narrator's erection seems to be a form of subconscious defence mechanism, immediately triggered by the physical confrontation with the dead body. As Simone proceeds to urinate on Marcelle's corpse, the narrator himself explicitly recognizes their actions as proof of denial:

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[19] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.59
[20] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.93.
[21] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.64.

"Que Simone ait pissé sur elle, par ennui, par irritation, montre à quel point nous étions fermés à la compréhension de la mort."[22] This form of compensation explains why the erotic scenes in *Histoire de l'œil* are so excessive: this excess for both characters is necessary to prevent the increasingly powerful idea of their own deaths from surfacing. This linearity is even tangible in the chains of images and symbols whose importance is heavily emphasized by the structuralist interpretation. The underlying knowledge of their own discontinuity is arguably weaved into the narrative of their sexual intercourse following the murder of the priest, in the last *déclinaison* of the image of Marcelle's eye that appears to the narrator in Simone's vulva: "Mes yeux, me semblait-il, étaient érectiles à force d'horreur; je vis, dans la vulve velue de Simone, l'œil bleu pâle de Marcelle me regarder en pleurant des larmes d'urine. Des traînées de foutre dans le poil fumant achevaient de donner à cette vision un caractère de tristesse douloureuse."[23] This image is important on two levels: firstly, Marcelle's eye, on a more obvious level, represents the knowledge of death and the ensuing sadness and ill-being resulting from the loss of what we have called *metaphysical virginity*, and is furthermore juxtaposed with Simone's vulva, the other embodiment of the motif of the hole referring to the nothingness of death. But most tragically it means that the narrator is unable to escape the idea of death anymore, even through eroticism. For the first time, urine is equated to tears, showing a shift from the purely erotic connotation liquid forms have throughout the *récit* (urine, sperm, blood, even vomit) to a form of lucid misery and sadness, the very same thing that pushed Marcelle to her death. Like the characters in any tragedy, the narrator is ultimately unable to escape his inevitable fate. Furthermore, this apparition of Marcelle's eye in Simone's vulva marks an important step in the migration of the eye. There is an opportunity to reconcile the structuralist approach pioneered by Barthes and the more linear approach that is being developed here. As Patrick French suggests:

> *Histoire de l'œil* could be read as a narrative of this regression, in various phases: first, the eye not as that which sees but that is looked at (whence the privileging of the fixed, fascinating stare of the text); second, the refusal of the eye as organ of knowledge and phenomenological orientation; third, the annihilation of the eye as a 'window' to the soul of the living body (which can see in the scene where Simone is haunted by the open eyes of the dead Marcelle – 'Les yeux ouverts de la morte');

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[22] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.65-66.
[23] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.99.

fourth, the ejection of the eye for its socket (the death of Granero) and ultimately
the eye displaced downwards to the sexual parts[24]

The migration of the eye, that gradually loses all its value before leaving or becoming a hole, seems to mirror the character's attempt to escape the ultimate negativity of death. Marcelle's eye looking at the narrator from Simone's vulva whilst crying symbolically marks the symbiosis in their destinies. The eye, once an instrument of vision and knowledge, becomes the ultimate avatar of non-knowledge, unknowability and one could suggest the tragic fate of the characters:

> The two image of Marcelle's dead eyes, and the priest's eye, in Simone's sex are eyes disconnected from their capacity to operate as receptors for perception which can then be translated into knowledge. They are images of the eye as hole in which the hole does not offer access to an interior realm or a space beyond. The eye as hole is also no longer able to operate as part of any dialectic of looks or strategy of recognition. It is, however, an eye which looks, in the sense that Lacan writes of the blindspot, the *tâche aveugle*[25]

Not only is this erotic excess necessary for the characters, but one can also argue that it is necessary on a metatextual and even metaphysical level. As mentioned in the introduction, critics of *Histoire de l'œil* have often argued about the extent of its parodic nature, as the erotic scenes are often dismissed as grotesque and near-comical. However, using both Klossowki's reading of Bataille's fiction and Ian James's subsequent work on Klossowski's vision of Bataille, it is possible to reconcile our more psychological and metaphysical interpretation of *Histoire de l'œil* with the notion of parody. As he explains in his article "From Recuperation to Simulacrum: Klossowski's Readings of Bataille" in *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, the parodic aspect of Bataille's fiction resides precisely not in a comical value of any sort but in this constant use of excess. The excessive nature of these erotic scenes actually implies a form of reflexivity by which the text denounces its own inability to represent the erotic act and in a way to represent death itself. Parody in this sense is

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[24] Patrick French, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil*, p.30.
[25] Patrick French, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil*, p.129-130.

thus a necessity, as the text is presenting itself to its reader as a deficient sign, completely unable to represent anything: "The simulacrum marks excess as excessive, by affirming itself as the simulation rather than the re-presentation of an already absent instant."[26] The use of parody is thus an affirmation of the powerlessness of languagein front of an ineffable object, creating images that are completely dissimilar to what they (falsely) attempt to describe, or rather what they attempt to *simulate.* These erotic scenes thus have a negative value and contain within themselves the affirmation of their own falsity. They are what in Plato's epistemological system are considered as the only form of good images, those that denounce themselves as completely artificial and separate from what they are supposed to represent.In this sense, Bataille's fiction seems to operate in a very similar way to negative theology, which recognizes that nothing can be said about God through language and thus only proceeds to affirm what God isn't. This comparison is especially relevant with respect to the specific works of Pseudo- Denys and his use of what he calls *dissimilar images,* by which he only represents God through images that are so grotesque (God being drunk, for instance) that the reader will immediately know that the representation itself is as far away from God as possible; elaborate images of the Divine, he argues, trick people into believing that these images have an actual link to God, whilst of course that is completely impossible

> Que, d'autre part, des métaphores sans ressemblance soient plus aptes à élever spirituellement notre intelligence, je pense qu'aucun homme sensé puisse en disconvenir; des figures sacrées de nature plus relevée induiraient vraisemblablement en erreur plus d'un homme, car elles pousseraient à imaginer les essencescélestes comme des figures d'or ou comme des êtres lumineux lançant des rayons, de belles stature, revêtus de somptueux vêtements, resplendissant de feux inoffensifs, ou toutes les autres formes du même genre dont la théologie à fait usage pour représenter les intelligences célestes.[27]

One must not, however, think of Bataille's use of simulacrum (or for that matter negative theology) as a way of expressing doubt over the existence of what he is openly failing to represent. On the contrary, the use of parody and simulacrum creates a *distance* between the

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[26] Ian James, 'From Recuperation to Simulacrum: Klossowski's Readings of Bataille' in *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, p.97.
[27] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.191.

writer and the ineffable object (or non-object, at least in the case of negative theology) that allows one to paradoxically evoke this non-referent. Epistemologically, in this sense, they can be seen as completely empty signs, language exposing its own flaws and the fact that, as Derrida puts it, "Il n'y a que du bord dans le langage... C'est-à-dire dela référence. Du fait qu'il n'y ait jamais que de la référence, une référence irréductible, on peut aussi bien conclure que le référent – tout sauf le nom – est ou n'est pas indispensable".[28] In this sense, as Ian James suggests, the transgressive nature of Bataille's erotic fictions, especially *Histoire de l'œil*, is not rooted in the ethical considerations surrounding erotic representation, as has been suggestedby critics like Habermas or Susan Suleiman, but rather in its metaphysical transgression of representing something impossible to represent using simulacrum as a means of creating a distance with the object of discourse but also as a powerful negative epistemological tool.

Interestingly, this idea of simulacrum links both the metatexual and the more microtexual aspect of the text through the character of Simone. She is in a way obsessed by exteriority and needs the presence and the attention of others for the negation of death by the erotic *divertissement* to be actualised. This might explain her attachment to the narrator, which despite appearances and the general critical consensus that they are simply erotic partners seems to stem from something deeper:

> Elle me donna un coup de pied pour rire. Le pied heurta le revolver dans ma poche. Une effrayante détonation nous arracha un cri. Je n'étais pas blessé et me trouvai debout, comme dans unautre monde. Simone, elle-même, était pâle et défaite. Ce jour-là nous n'eûmes pas l'idée de nous branler. Nous nous embrassâmes longuement sur la bouche, ce qui ne nous était pas encore arrivé.[29]

This scene shows a relationship that goes beyond exclusively erotic interaction, as the fear of death caused by the gunshot leads the narrator and Simone to the realization that their bond is nearly ontological in a sense, a way to escape their mutual metaphysical solipsism. One could suggest however that this affection or at least this codependency, which formally resembles the bond between two lovers, is created by Simone so that she will always have

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[28] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.64-65.
[29] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.25.

someone else by her side to watch her and be present in the moments she attempts to negate death (the suggestion here is not that Simone manipulates the narrator, but that this operation is a more subconscious one). In the second part of the *récit*, the presence of Sir Edmund may also be explained by this need *du regard d'autrui*, as he is a rather monolithic character whose sole purpose is to watch her erotic debauchery and even on occasion to push her further into it. The transgressive nature of her actions,for instance when she urinates on her mother, need someone to be there for there to be any transgression, as transgression always negatively signifies the presence if not the acceptance of certain rules or codes. In this sense she can be seen as the textual avatar of this process ofsimulacrum, as a constant assertion of artificiality, excess and the primacy of the surface. This is also one of the keys to understanding the importance of the famous *corrida* scene:

> Ce qui suivit eut lieu sans transition, et même apparemment sans lien, non que les choses ne fussent liées, mais jeles vis comme un absent. Je vis en peu d'instants Simone, à mon effroi, mordre l'un des globes, Granero s'avancer, présenter au taureau le drap rouge; puis Simone, le sang à la tête, en un moment de lourde obscénité, dénuder sa vulve où entra l'autre couille; Granero renversé, acculé sur la balustrade, sur cette balustrade les cornes à la volée frappèrent trois coups: l'une des cornes enfonça l'œil droit et la tête. La clameur atterrée des arènes coïncida avec le spasme de Simone. Soulevée de la dalle de pierre, elle chancela et tomba, le soleil l'aveuglait, elle saignait du nez.[30]

Firstly, one must underline the fact that it is once again the empirical experience of the death of the Other that pushes Simone towards one of her most obscene acts, as she pushes the testicle into her vulva and has an orgasm at the same time as Granero's eye is taken out and he dies. It is also worth pointing out the rather obvious link between Granero's eye and the bull's testicle in a paradoxical form of asymmetric mimicry: Granero's eye comes out of the socket whilst the testicle goes into Simone's vulva and disappears, both images linked to death, as the testicle disappears into a hole while Granero's blindness evokes Simone's own blindness by which she refuses to see the reality of death, also symbolized here by the blinding power of the sun ("le soleil l'aveuglait"). However, one of the most important and overlooked aspects of the

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[30] Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, p.78.

scene is that the intensity of Simone's orgasm isdue to the spectacular aspect of the scene (in the etymological sense, from the Latin *specere*, tolook), the fact that it is a public event happening under the astounded gaze of thousands of people. This hypermediatisation of Granero's death and of her erotic transgression leads to an orgasm so powerful that her body cannot cope with the extraordinary erotic experience, even by Simone's rather extreme standards; her nose even starts bleeding, as if her body was too full of this erotic pleasure and is thus overflowing. One must remember however that the simulacrum works by denouncing its own epistemological shortcomings, its own artificiality. Simone in this sense is the avatar of simulacrum *gone wrong*, as this artificial relation to eroticism as pure exteriority, as a means of existing and denying the reality of death through others, eventually becomes her essence. She loses any form of reflexivity and does not realize that her erotic excessiveness is in fact a form of denial. In this sense, rather paradoxically, her psychological depth resides in the fact that she is a being only of surface, in which the surface takes over any form of interiority. She can thus onlylook at the world through the prism of eroticism, blinded by denial and the fear of her own mortal destiny.

Histoire de l'œil cannot thus be reduced to a chain of images that migrate from one scene to the next. It is a *récit* that finds its matrix in the deep thanatophobia of Simone and the narrator, that constantly strive and fail to negate death through eroticism. The interpretation of the title itself can thus be both as Barthes suggests the story of "la migration de l'œil" and the story of the necessity of the *regard d'autrui*, or alternatively of the hole left by the once the eye is removed from its socket, the unfathomable void of death. It is also important to consider *Histoire de l'œil*'s excessive eroticism on two different levels: a necessary excess for the characters that try to compensate the growing certainty of their own mortality by furthering the intensity of their erotic interactions, but also a necessary excess for these scenes to be simulacra that signify their own lack of epistemological accuracy, and point the reader towards a crisis of representation, potentially solvable by the negative dialectic pioneered by negative theology and the Neoplatonic tradition it stemmed from. This dialectic is used in even more direct and spectacularly used in another of Bataille's textual matrixes: *Madame Edwarda*.

Madame Edwarda starts with a warning addressed to the reader "(Mon entrée en matière

est dure. J'aurais pu l'éviter et rester « vraisemblable ». J'avais intérêt aux détours. Mais il en est ainsi, le commencement est sans détours. Je continue... plus dur...)",[31] explicitly stating than there is no intention here of adequately trying to represent the events that unfold or the non-referent that stands at the very centre of the text, God. The *simulacrum* is thus openly embedded in the text from the outset, signalling to the reader that what Bataille is going to represent is impossible; like in *Histoire de l'œil,* all the signs that compose *Madame Edwarda* constantly denounce themselves as dissimilar. At the beginning of Madame Edwarda, the narrator is depicted walking in the night streets quite obviously sexually aroused and heading to a brothel:

> la nuit était nue dans des rues désertes et je voulus me dénuder comme elle: je retirai mon pantalon que je mis sur mon bras; j'aurais voulu lier la fraîcheur de la nuit dans mes jambes, une étourdissante liberté me portait. Je me sentais grandir. Je tenais dans la main mon sexe droit.[32]

That is when he meets Madame Edwarda, who immediately strikes him as extraordinary:

> Je serrai Edwarda dans mes bras, elle me sourit: aussitôt, transi, je ressentis en moi un nouveau choc, une sorte de silence tomba sur moi de haut et me glaça. J'étais élevé dans un vol d'anges qui n'avaient ni corps ni têtes, faits de glissement d'ailes, mais c'était simple: je devins malheureux et me sentis abandonné comme on l'est en présence de DIEU. C'était pire et plus fou que l'ivresse.[33]

This feeling, this intuition could easily be attributed to the narrator's drunkenness. But then something happens that could perhaps by considered as the most seminal scene in the whole of Bataille's works:

> De mon hébétude, une voix, trop humaine, me tira. La voix de Mme Edwarda, comme son corps gracile, était obscène:
> – Tu veux voir mes guenilles ? disait-elle

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[31] Georges Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *Œuvres complètes III*, p.19.
[32] Georges Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *Œuvres complètes III*, p.19.
[33] Georges Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *Œuvres complètes III*, p.20.

Les deux mains agrippées à la table, je me tournais vers elle. Assise, elle maintenait haute une jambe écartée: pour mieux ouvrir la fente, elle achevait de tirer la peau des deux mains. Ainsi les « guenilles » d'Edwarda me regardaient, velues et roses, pleines de vie comme une pieuvre répugnante. Je balbutiai doucement:

   – Pourquoi fais-tu cela ?

   – Tu vois, dit-elle, je suis DIEU...

   – Je suis fou...

   – Mais non, tu dois regarder: regarde !

Sa voix rauque s'adoucit, elle se fit presque enfantine pour me dire avec lassitude, avec le sourire infini de l'abandon: « Comme j'ai joui ! »[34]

At first glance, this scene may be interpreted as a desire to go further into subversion and blasphemy. Representing a prostitute opening her legs, enjoining the narrator to look at her bare vulva while she declares she is God is initially very comical. But there is a choking, impossible legitimacy in Edwarda's claims: being what is the furthest away from God and openly declaring that she is, in fact God, she comes closer to God than any other sign. She is the supreme, the ultimate dissimilar image or dissimilar sign, and thus inside this textual, fictional space she is God and impossibly represents God. Bataille here takes Pseudo-Deny's dissimilar images and propels them into far more radical territory, pushing them to their paroxysm. In his article 'Recognition in Madame Edwarda', Allan Stoekl, without mentioning Pseudo Denys or apophatism at all, points out this inversion of the high and the low, of the sacred and the erotic:

In this case the divinity of the genitals, through a metonymy, comes to be associated with the person who displays them (just as the faithful are often elevated in sanctity metonymically through the display of divine wounds—St Francis's stigmata, etc.); they in turn are the lowest of the low, the most wretched things imaginable (guenilles are defined by the Petit Robert dictionary as, in addition to rags, 'contemptible things, of no importance whatsoever [d'importance nulle]'). But the rite is also a Communion: the narrator first puts his lips on the guenilles, on GOD,

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[34] Georges Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *Œuvres complètes III*, p.20-21.

and then, a little later, engages in another ritual with Mme Edwarda, one in which the traditional mirrors of the bedroom multiply the animal image of a coupling[35]

It is also interesting how, in order to make this image as spectacular as possible, Bataille plays with the codes of Christianity. One could suggest, for instance, that in this scene a sort of reverse Immaculate Conception takes place, whereby Madame Edwarda is touched by no one, and yet has an orgasm, experiences the empirical pleasure of sex, contrarily to Mary who has no sexual pleasure whatsoever but without being touched births God's child. This would perfectly illustrate Kristeva's take on Bataille's relation to Catholicism she sets out in *Tales of Love*: "'One might be inclined to attribute Bataille's erotic experience to a Catholicism that was taken on to the limit of its sin-laden logic and would lead to its internal reversal".[36] It is precisely this paroxysmic internal reversal that is at play in this *récit*. Stoekl even suggests *Madame Edwarda* in its entirety is structured by Catholic codes and processions:

While Madame Edwarda contains no singing (at least not until a film version is made), it does have three sections, each of which contains a sort of procession and entails, if not a formal prayer, then at least a conclusion, a denouement, that gives the section a rough narrative coherence—but a conclusion which is, nevertheless, questioned within the narrative itself. In fact the second of the three sections explicitly poses the problem of the narratability of Mme Edwarda's divinity. The first section, then, corresponds roughly to the Entrance Rite in the mass. Catholics (lapsed or otherwise) will recall that this first section is called the 'Mass of the Catechumens' because it originally was open to the non-converted (those undergoing instruction). The faithful are called, the priest enters in a procession, welcoming prayers are offered, instruction is given. It is a 'gathering' (Synaxis) in the most straightforward sense of the term.[37]

Another scene in *Madame Edwarda* seems to confirm this Christian, negative reading:

[35] Stoekl, Allen, 'Recognition in Madame Edwarda', in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.77-9, p.82.

[36] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 365.

[37] Stoekl, Allen, 'Recognition in Madame Edwarda', in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, p.81

A cette heure de la nuit, la rue était déserte. Tout à coup, mauvaise et sans dire un mot, Edwarda courut seule. La porte de Saint-Denis était devant elle: elle s'arrêta. Je n'avais pas bougé: immobile comme moi, Edwarda attendait sous la porte, au milieu de l'arche. Elle était noire, entièrement, simple, angoissante comme un trou: je compris qu'elle ne riait pas et même, exactement, que, sous le vêtement qui la voilait, elle était maintenant absente. Je sus alors – toute ivresse en moi dissipée – qu'Elle n'avait pas menti, qu'Elle était DIEU. Sa présence avait la simplicité inintelligible d'une pierre: en pleine ville, j'avais le sentiment d'être la nuit dans la montagne, au milieu des solitudes sans vie.[38]

The narrator himself is incapable of contradicting Madame Edwarda, as if hypnotized by the impossible event he witnessed. In this second excerpt, the *leitmotiv* of the hole that had been omnipresent in *Histoire de L'œil* reappears, as Madame Edwarda in the middle of the arch seems ready to become one with *la nuit*, and this process has seemingly already started "Elle était noire, entièrement, simple, angoissante comme un trou" and perhaps even completed "sous le vêtement qui la voilait, elle était maintenant absente", this motif of a person physically disappearing to the world whilst undergoing a mystical experience reminiscent of that of M.Teste. Bataille once again uses fiction to falsely represent the unrepresentable, a human turning into the absolute nothingness of God, into something non-human, that does not belong to the World. As Stoekl writes: "the nature of Edwarda's radical absence […] is not a contemptible one, a degrading one, but simply one is not human, that is not a function of interiority or knowledge".[39] It is instead both beyond and beneath any possible understanding Following Pseudo-Deny's idea of dissimilar images, one could argue that these érotic *récits* are sacred texts, insofar as they impossibly represent God through dissimilarity, and do so far more excessively than canonical texts like the Bible. Whilst many it would be possible to follow a literal reading of the Bible, Bataille's *récits* are impossible to mistake for actual representations of erotic acts or of God; but that is what gives them this miraculous negative epistemological or rather spiritual potency. The transgression in these *récits* is not to be put on the side of the ethical, but on the side of the spiritual and the sacred. *Madame Edwarda* and *Histoire de l'œil* are the two centrepieces of Bataille's where, unburdened from theory, intellectual history and

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[38] Georges Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *Œuvres complètes III*, p.19.
[39] Stoekl, Allen, 'Recognition in Madame Edwarda', in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, p.83-84

references, he creates a tragic, poetic world that is a perfect simulacrum, operating in the mode of parody and yet miraculously pointing the reader towards death, eroticism and God.

5. The Self / the subject

<u>Negative theology</u>

It is necessary to distinguish the notion of Self from that of the subject: the Self is what, in theory, defines a subject's essence, the mysterious, often ineffable entity that holds what makes a subject unique, the unbreakable core that makes a subject absolutely singular. This idea has of course been explored and contested in an unthinkable number of ways: whilst Rousseau in his Confessions said that absolute transparency of a subject to himself or herself was not only possible but translatable into language, other more socially oriented takes, such as that of Pierre Bergougnioux[1] argue that the Self has no given essence and is a sort of ontological sponge that becomes what it takes in from the outside world. Valéry, as we have already shown, argues that the Self is a mere invention, hypostasized by humans to reassure themselves about their identity and their ontological survival through time, from one moment to another; Valéry's Moi however is also the *place*, the point of contact of the subject with the world, and holds *en puissance* all the possibilities of the Tout. These debates of course largely precede negative theology, where the idea of the Self is influenced by that of the Church: our soul is our essence, and is enveloped in a complex alloy of flesh and bones that the subject will slough off when he or she proceeds into the afterlife. From the very origins of negative theology with Plotinus, becoming One with the One through spiritual apophatism involves escaping the body first and foremost, as it grounds the subject in the physical world. In true platonic fashion, the body gives us access to a physical world full of false images, whilst the only "true" or worthy experience is seemingly lived outside of the body. Porphyry, Plotinus' disciple and transcriber of much of the *Enneads* even writes in *La Vie de Plotin et l'ordre de ses écrits*: " Plotin, le philosophe, qui a vécu de nos jours, semblait avoir honte d'être dans un corps".[2] This feeling of shame towards all that is bodily is something that carries into Christian theology as a whole, which seems a logical consequence of the body being a merely temporary, disposable home for the soul before it undergoes divine judgement.

In apophatic theology more specifically, it is interesting to consider the Self both in

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[1] Pierre Bergounioux, "Dedans, dehors", *Revue des sciences humaines*, 263 (2001), pp.36-44.
[2] Porphyry, 'La Vie de Plotin et l'ordre de ses écrits' in Plotin, *Ennéades*, trans. and ed. by Emile Bréhier, 5th edn. (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1989), p.1.

terms of the essential characteristics of the subject, may they be acquired or inherent, and as something physical, or at the very least spatial. There is a particularly ambiguous double movement that the Self seems to undergo in negative theology: it is simultaneously required to be destroyed in a form of reverse kenosis, by which the subject empties himself or herself of all positive knowledge or identity, in other words of all selfhood, and to be used as the "place" of the mystical, spiritual experience of being God in God. It is important to note here that this part of the chapter will focus on the work of Meister Eckhart, for the simple reason that his work around the notion of subject in relation to God is far more ground-breaking and radical than that of Pseudo Denys or Plotinus, who both embrace their own traditions, albeit in different ways. Meister Eckhart's conception of the self in its pure immanence is also what seems most relevant to the other authors chosen for this thesis, who challenge the notion of transcendence and the Self as an essence.

The first part of this double movement of the Self is what Meister Eckhart calls *detachment*, by which as aforementioned the subject must proceed to the radical self-emptying of everything it/he/she contains; as he writes in *Du détachement*, it is a clear destruction of the Self: "je mets le détachement au-dessus de toute humilité. Et cela pour la raison suivante: l'humilité peut exister sans détachement, mais non pas le parfait détachement sans une humilité parfaite. Car celle-ci tend à la destruction de notre moi. Or le détachement frôle de si près le néant qu'entre le détachement *parfait* et le néant il n'y a aucune différence".[3] But this annihilation of the Self by the subject is even more complete than it may seem: it does not concern only what the Self contains, but also what it contains *en puissance*, its intelligence, its ability to think, desire, have goals. There cannot be even a shred of intentionality left:

Le détachement parfait ne connaît aucun regard sur la créature, ni fléchissement de genou, ni fierté dans le maintien, il ne veut être ni au-dessous ni au-dessus des autres, il ne veut que reposer sur lui-même, sans souci de l'amour ou de la souffrance de personne. Il n'aspire ni à l'égalité ni à l'inégalité avec quelque autre être que ce soit, il ne veut pas ceci ou cela, il ne veut qu'être un avec soi-même! Mais être ceci ou cela il ne veut pas, car celui qui le veut il veut être *quelque chose*, mais le détachement veut être *rien*! C'est pourquoi toutes choses sont indifférentes pour lui.[4]

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[3] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.20.
[4] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.20-21.

This of course causes a number of problems with respect to more traditional Catholic practices: how can a subject love God if he or she is emptied of everything, of all desire? There are practical consequences to this radical spiritual apophatism:

> Je vais maintenant plus loin et pose la question: quelle est la *prière* du cœur détaché? A quoi je réponds de la façon suivante: le détachement, la pureté ne peut absolument pas prier. Car celui qui prie, il désire de Dieu quelque chose: que ce lui soit accordé, ou que Dieu lui retire quelque chose. Mais le cœur détaché ne *désire* rien et il n'a rien non plus dont il voudrait être libéré. C'est pourquoi il se tient libre de toute prière et sa prière ne consiste qu'en *ceci*: n'avoir qu'une forme avec Dieu.[5]

The incompatibility with the Church's practices is already blatantly apparent, and it is hardly a surprise that Eckhart was eventually excommunicated.

Once this self-annihilation has proceeded, the Self, it seems, has been reduced to *nothing,* and yet this reverse kenosis somehow vacates a space in which God can operate and the subject, by abolishing itself, can become God in God:

> Dans un cœur où a encore place ceci ou cela se trouve facilement aussi quelque chose qui empêche Dieu d'agir pleinement. Si le cœur doit être parfaitement préparé il faut qu'il repose sur un pur néant – en celui-ci réside en même temps la plus haute puissance qu'il peut y avoir. […] De même façon, si *Dieu* veut écrire dans mon cœur d'une façon accomplie, alors tout ce qui s'appelle ceci ou cela doit être chassé du cœur. Comme c'est justement le cas chez un cœur détaché. Alors Dieu peut exécuter parfaitement sa haute volonté. Aucun ceci ou cela n'est donc l'objet du cœur détaché![6]

It might seem contradictory here to see the word "volonté" associated with God, given that the God of negative theology and certainly the God of Meister Eckhart has no desire, intentionality or will. These kinds of cracks in the discursive fibre are common occurrences in these impossible texts, which allow themselves such mistakes because of their knowledge of their own inadequacy, like when Plotinus uses different declensions of the verb "to see" when evoking the experience of the One, whilst the One can of course absolutely not be seen or

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[5] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.26.
[6] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.26.

experienced empirically in any way. In this excerpt, the notion of "volonté" is perhaps less the result of an intentionality than a form of divine causality: if the Self is emptied, God *has to come*, or rather to manifest himself. In Meister Eckhart's work, God is not a being of chronological creation but rather the source of an eternal, ongoing birth or generation of all things, which he describes as "naissance éternelle que Dieu le Père a réalisé et réalise encore sans interruption dans l'éternité".[7] Instead of God being seen as a divine, transcendent entity whose actions or operations lie above humanity, both ontologically and in terms of intelligibility, the bare, annihilated, utterly deserted Self is the place in which God not only generates life, but also resides. It is not a part of God that enters the emptied Self; instead he resides there *in his totality*: humans and God share the same origin and are, in that bare, pure soul, what he calls "le fond de l'âme", consubstantial, equal nonsummative parts of God; as he writes in *Du renouvellement dans l'esprit*: "Dieu doit carrément devenir moi et moi Dieu: si complètement un que celui et moi deviennent une chose et le demeurent, et – comme l'être pur lui-même – soient dans l'éternité les ouvriers de la même œuvre!".[8] This notion of "devenir" does not imply a transformation of the Self but rather the fact that the subject, by abandoning and destroying everything positive it contains as well as its consciousness, intentionality and intellectual faculties, is reduced to this empty Self that literally *is* God.

Meister Eckhart's immanentism (the word is perhaps too weak) is radical to the extent that it challenges the very notion of selfhood: saying the Self becomes a place in which God can operate is inaccurate, in the sense that the very limit between God and the subject is abolished, and, it seems, was only ever partially existent: "Si donc Dieu trouve une âme annihilée – une âme qui (par le moyen de la grâce) est devenue un néant de personnalité et d'action propre, Dieu opère en elle (au delà de toute grâce) son œuvre *éternelle* et l'élève par là hors de son existence de créature. Mais par là Dieu s'anéantit *lui-même* dans l'âme, et ainsi ne subsistent plus ni « Dieu » ni « âme ». Soyez persuadés que ceci est ce qui est le plus propre à Dieu!"[9] In a way, Meister Eckhart's theology frees the subject from its limited selfhood, shattering the seemingly unbreakable shackles of metaphysical solipsism. Where some may construe the destruction of the Self as the death of the subject, it is indeed a form of radical emancipation both from the World and the authority of any given transcendence, the consequence of which is a form of complete freedom:

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[7] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.36
[8] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.133.
[9] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.154.

l'homme doit être libre de cette manière qu'il ne trouve ne lui aucune faute ni imperfection. Deuxièmement, libre de cette manière qu'il ne tienne à rien de ce qui a un nom, ni cela à lui. Et il doit encore être libre de cette manière qu'en toutes ses œuvres il n'ait pas en vue de récompense de la part de Dieu, mais seulement que Dieu soit par elles glorifié. Et pour finir par ce qui est le plus haut: il doit être libre de cette manière qu'il oublie son propre moi et reflue, avec tout ce qu'il est, dans l'abîme sans fond de sa source.[10]

It is the very notions of subject and the Self that are challenged, confronted with the idea of the idempotency of God or the One as the vector of true freedom and the ultimate horizon for the liberation of the subject from its preconceived ontological prison.

Valéry

For Valéry, the existence of a stable Self, a core identity or quiddity that would determine the absolute singularity of a subject is nothing more than a myth. The subject hypostasizes his or her Self not through conscious choice but by a quasi-instinctive necessity. This necessity is existential, reassuring the subject on the meaning of his or her life, reinforcing the generally accepted idea of the unicity of every individual. It is also, however, and perhaps even more essentially, ontological: having a sense of selfhood, being able to say "I" and believing that I is referring to the stable foundations of his or her identity allows the subject to talk and think "Il y a certainement des idées non primitives, non simples et cependant indispensables pour être et pour penser. Ainsi celle qu'on a de soi – ; cette autre de l'avenir au moins immédiat."(C, IV, 344). Valéry goes as far as suggesting that perhaps this idea of the Moi is something inscribed in the very functioning of our minds:

Qu'est-ce qui est moi ?
Pas mes idées – pas mes sentiments que je méprise – qui en engendrant un autre encore, celui dudit mépris.

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[10] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.80-81.

Mes idées je les discute pied à pied – donc il est absurde d'en parler même ainsi –
C'est cette discussion.
C'est ne pouvoir imaginer un autre moi – (C, II, 159)

The Moi here seems to be presented as a logical axiom of our own imagination, the mind creating a chimeric essence to react to its own limitations. The fact that we are unable to be someone else, to even imagine that we are someone else, is interpreted as proof of our singularity, rather than just an actualisation of our limited intellectual power. The Moi would thus be the subject's unknowing answer to his or her metaphysical solipsism.

The idea of a stable, essential Self also seems incompatible with the idea of the *présent absolu*, where every instant cancels out the previous instant ("Tout instant est transcendant par rapport à tout autre, et il n'a d'autre mesure que lui-même c'est-à-dire qu'il n'en a pas" (C, II, 172)), leaving no space for the persistence of any given identity. The subject is considered as a perpetual succession of different mental states having no essential link to each other. This model, which applies both to the subject and to knowledge in general, is what he calls *self-variance:* "J'appelle *variation propre* ou *self variance*, le changement continuel de la connaissance – ou l'impossibilité de la considérer comme fixe." (CII, 318). This change is so radical that he even uses the metaphor of death to illustrate it: "Tu vois cette ligne et cette ligne: elles se suivent immédiatement. Eh bien je suis mort après avoir écrit celle-ci – et j'ai ressuscité après avoir écrit celle-là." (C, II, 210-211) Valéry does however offer an explanation as to why this inherent genericity of all humans, who share the common trait of having an empty Self, is not visible, and why people can be perceived as being essentially different from one another: "Le moi est déterminé par l'*ordre* des états qui se succèdent à partir d'un état quelconque dans un individu. Plus le nombre des états nécessaires pour déterminer est grand plus l'individu est particularisé, plus, aussi, il est rare. On peut admettre qu'il y a des individus à plusieurs solutions à partir d'un état. " (C, III, 95). What causes human personalities to vary is thus simply the order in which mental states appear in every individual, some successions being rarer that others, and some individuals having more complex patterns of successive states. This, however, is not a way for Valéry to save or recuperate the Self, but rather a way of finding, within his own system, how to logically explain why there is a phenomenal illusion of the Self.

The complete genericity of the empty Self is translated in the *Cahiers* by an attempt to remove any idea of self-identity from the personal pronoun 'je'. Valéry tries to use the 'je' is the same way as one would use the x in mathematics, as an indeterminate unknown that is a necessary tool to calculate and write in the algebraic language. This is illustrated for instance

in the first *Cahier* when he writes "J'ai pensé — j'ai été ceci (une image) - je me suis retrouvé une autre image ou chose, un certain temps après. Le temps étant compté par une certaine action qui donne une appréciation par limite (cigarette etc..) Le passage? *Ou étais-je?*" (C, I, 172). Here the 'je' is used purely to represent a generic subject, and not in any case Valéry himself. It is important to note that Valéry gives very few autobiographical details in the early *Cahiers*, which are not by any means a journal or a diary. There are in fact very few references to the exterior world at all, including to writers, mathematicians or philosophers. His goal was to create a space of pure thought not to be tainted by any autobiographical interference and exterior interventions. Not only does he view his life as uninteresting ("Ma vie n'a rien d'extraordinaire" (C, I, 195)), but he has no interest in himself other than as a generic example of a subject that he can observe and experiment with: "Paul Valéry n'intéresse pas Paul Valéry, et il ne cherche aucunement à y intéresser de possibles lecteurs. (…) Les anecdotes, les événements, les états d'âme, substituables les uns aux autres, détournent l'attention de l'essentiel, qui se situe au-delà des médiocres singularités et caractéristiques des êtres humains."[11]

Throughout the *Cahiers*, Valéry thus constantly reasserts that "Le « moi » n'est rien. C'est un point fixe fictif" (C, I, 339). The conditions and specific modalities of this "rien" are however far more intricate than a simple denial of its existence, or an admission of its emptiness. In Valéry's system, the Moi plays a role analogous to that of the zero in mathematics: it has no value, it is literally nothing, completely empty, and yet is the absolutely indispensable basis without which nothing else could exist. This is what Gusdorf calls the *ego zéro*, an empty self that nevertheless is the subject's only point of contact with the world, allowing him or her to access all its potentialities. As Valéry writes himself:

"Le Moi doit jouer le rôle du zéro, dans une écriture du Tout. – Le non-moi = 1. Ce sont des symboles essentiels qui permettent d'écrire. Ce zéro est sous-entendu dans toute relation. Le moi réduit à son être le plus général, et indiscernable et unique, n'est plus que ce qui s'oppose au Tout, – ce dont Tout a besoin pour être pensé ou écrit. En dehors du tout, il y a nécessairement ce qui constate, qui nomme le Tout. Ce Moi est déficience du Tout. – Or le contraire de Tout c'est Rien. Il faut donc que ce Rien soit en quelque manière. On ne peut pas le penser, mais on peut l'écrire. On ne peut pas penser le Tout sans l'opposer à quelque chose. Le Tout dont

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[11] Georges Gusdorf , *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie*, p.168.

il est question est le Tout logique.[12]

The Self, however empty it may be, has a highly important practical utility: it must be used by the subject to access the World and perhaps even whatever lies beyond it. It is at the very least an essential ontological and epistemological tool: "Se servir agilement, sciemment, et méthodiquement de son Moi comme origine de coordonnées universelles – tel est l'ars magna." (CIV, 108). But it is not simply a tool, as the Self is ripe with all the possibilities of the World. Given that it is the subject's only point of contact with the World, and even with the *Tout*, it carries *en puissance* all the subject's potential experiences and possibilities: "Je ne suis rien. Mes idées ne me paraissent jamais uniques: elles me laissent le possible." (CI, 275). In this sense, Valéry's Moi seems to carry the same ambiguities and paradoxes as the God of negative theology, and perhaps even partially as the uncreated utopia mentioned previously, as it is both nothing and everything, *tout en tout et rien en rien* as Gusdorf perfectly summarizes:

> L'Ego Zéro de Valéry recèle une fondamentale équivoque. Tantôt il se donne comme
> un opérateur algébrique, une simple inconnue; tantôt il apparaît comme la ténèbre
> au sein de laquelle va se prononcer la création; ainsi hésite-t-il entre le vide formel
> et la plénitude ontologique du moi inconnaissable, l'inconnaissable ayant la valeur
> positive d'un foyer de vérité, origine radicale et féconde des créations de la pensée.[13]

There is no transcendence on the horizon of Valéry's thought, but the emphasis on the Self as an infinitely fertile nothingness, an almost mystical point of contact between the subject, the possible and the World, forces the parallel to be drawn with the more openly mystical works of the other authors explored in this thesis, a parallel that, as will be showed in the following chapter, helps unearth Valéry's singular strand of hidden mysticism.

Bataille

Trying to define precisely what the Self is for Bataille, especially in the more mystical texts this

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[12] Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, vol.II (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p.296-297
[13] Georges Gusdorf , *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie*, p.182.

thesis focuses on, is an impossible task. These texts are highly heterogeneous and fragmented, containing a huge number of internal contradictions. This impossibility to pinpoint what the Self is is caused by multiple factors. Bataille's rejection of the notion of system means that there is no obligation for coherence, nor any positivist or epistemological ambition. Valéry for instance, despite his heretical departure from rationality and science, still allows his thoughts to form a system (despite this system perhaps only being a simulated form or shape), which makes defining what the Moi is for him much easier from an academic standpoint. Bataille on the other hand engages with the question of the Self and the subject in numerous different ways; attempting to unite these into a single, unitary definition or concept would both be epistemologically flawed and disrespectful of his own desire to not create a system. Doing so would be the equivalent of treating Laruelle's work as that of a simple philosopher, rather than grasping the radical positioning of his non-philosophy. Rather than search for a form of exhaustivity, this subchapter will attempt to explore what in Bataille's vision of the Self resonates with the role of the Self in the texts of the other authors contained in this thesis' corpus, not to create an artificial consensus but indeed to show how strong the relationship is. Neither is there ambition to cover all of Bataille's conceptions of the subject and of the Self, which stretch across numerous disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, but rather to show how the subject lives and survives in the midst of the inner experience.

Unsurprisingly, Bataille does not adhere to the classical conception of the Self as an irreducible core where the essential and singular qualities of an individual lie, although he is less concerned than Valéry and Laruelle by the notion of Self as generic, namely the fact that all individuals are essentially exactly alike. For Bataille, the one thing that constitutes the Self is a feeling that is often not accessed due to the subject's alienation by the socio-economic imperatives of the World such as production, the omnipresent concern about the future and even intelligence, which leaves no space for spiritual life. This particular feeling is one evoked by Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, Laruelle and even to some extent Valéry, the feeling of not belonging to the World:

> Dans l'abandon où je suis perdu, la connaissance empirique de ma similitude avec d'autres est indifférente, car l'essence du moi tient à ceci que rien jamais ne le pourra remplacer: le sentiment de mon improbabilité fondamentale me situe dans le monde

où je demeure comme lui étant étranger, étranger absolument.[14]

This feeling is caused by a form of reflexive awakening of the Self that could seem analogous to that of Plotinus in the fourth Ennead that will be explored in depth in chapter 6, which starts with "Souvent, m'éveillant de mon corps à moi-même",[15] making this form of self-transparency the first step towards spiritual apophatism and the mystical experience. Making a strict parallel between the two however would be to forget an aspect of Bataille's thought that differentiates him from all of the other authors: emotions - *l'affect* plays an important role in his vision of the Self and of the subject, particularly pertaining to the inner experience. For most of the other authors studied in this thesis, this feeling or intuition of not belonging to the World is a sign of openness towards the One or God, even perhaps a necessary condition of the mystical experience, but always ethically neutral or maybe even positive, marking the start of the emancipation of the subject from the World. For Bataille, on the other hand, this realisation causes anguish and despair, which are essential parts of what an open subject is: "Et surtout « rien », je ne sais « rien », je le gémis comme un enfant malade, dont la mère attentive tient le front (bouche ouverte sur la cuvette). Mais je n'ai pas de mère, l'homme n'a pas de mère, la cuvette est le ciel étoilé (dans ma pauvre nausée, c'est ainsi)."[16] This despair is linked to the absence or death of God, a feeling of metaphysical, absolute loneliness that does not exist for instance in negative theology, in which the experience of our oneness with God is a form of ultimate experience; the removal of God's inert corpse from the subject's metaphysical doorstep leaves him or her alone with two certainties: their own mortality and the fact that they themselves cannot become the *Tout*, as the *ipse* desperately desires to be:

> Nous ne sommes pas tout, n'avons même que deux certitudes en ce monde, celle-là et celle de mourir. Si nous avons conscience de n'être pas du tout comme nous l'avons d'être mortel, ce n'est rien. Mais si nous n'avons pas de narcotique, se révèle un vide irrespirable. Je voulais être tout: que défaillant dans ce vide, mais me prenant de courage, je me dise: « J'ai honte d'avoir voulu l'être, car je le vois maintenant, c'était dormir.[17]

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[14] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.84.
[15] Plotin, *Ennéades,* IV, p.215.
[16] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.62.
[17] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.10.

The subject's knowledge of his or her mortality is essential in the Self's reflexivity, which, as Hussey explains, in a trait inherited from Hegel: "Bataille's 'method of meditation', therefore, is a transgression of the Hegelian system which, nontheless, remains faithful to the Hegelian notion of death as an abstract negativity in which self, or in Bataille's terminology *ipse*, becomes aware of its own existence through the contemplation of its destruction."[18]

In his approach of the Moi, Bataille, like Valéry and negative theology, proceeds to a form of spatialisation of this Moi, and shares the same central paradox: it is essentially empty insofar as quiddity is concerned, and yet is a place in which the mystical experience amongst other things seems to take place: "« Soi-même », ce n'est pas le sujet s'isolant du monde, mais un lieu de communication, de fusion entre le sujet et l'objet."[19] In and for the *Expérience intérieure*, Bataille aims to render this emptiness total by making the subject undergo a form of radical spiritual apophasis, a total *détachement* reminiscent and very probably inspired by that of Meister Eckhart, as Dubliet explains:

> The experience Bataille seeks to elaborate is one that denudes and empties the subject of all attachments. To undo attachments is to unbind the subject determined and constituted by them; it is to inaugurate the processes of dissolution that consume not only the subject, but the object and the network of mediation that links them together. The experience Bataille articulates names not an experience of an object, but a process of subjective dispossession that affirms an irreducible desinstrumentalized uselessness at the core of the subject.[20]

The term "uselessness" here is not used in a negative axiological way, but simply underlines how this immanent life *without a why* is incompatible with the World. It can *do* nothing, has no attributes, does not have any ontological existence as it is purely negative. This is what is revealed by or at least experienced in *l'Expérience intérieure*. The non-savoir on the horizon of Bataille's work and this experience destroys the subject, revealing his or her innermost negative core, which is nothing, pure negativity that means and signifies nothing:

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[18] Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar: the Mysticism of Georges Bataille*, p.143.
[19] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.21
[20] Alex Dubilet, *The Self-Emptying Subject, Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), p.162-163.

LE NON SAVOIR DENUDE. / Cette proposition est le sommet, mais doit être entendue ainsi: dénude, donc je vois ce que le savoir cachait jusque-là, mais si je vois je sais. En effet, je sais, mais ce que j'ai su, le non-savoir, dénude encore. Si le non-sens est le sens, le sens qu'est le non-sens se perd, redevient non-sens (sans arrêt possible)[21]

The subject thus creates a breach in the fabric of the World by opening himself or herself, through anguish provoked by the realisation of their own mortality, to the total loss not only of the Self but of everything without recuperation, in a form of infinite kenosis, due to the circularity of the inner experience. In one of his many first-person narratives in *L'Expérience intérieure*, it is this process that Bataille seems to describe in the following excerpt:

"Je suis *ouvert,* brèche béante, à l'inintelligible ciel et tout en moi se précipite, s'accorde dans un désaccord dernier, rupture de tout possible, baiser violent, rapt, perte dans l'entière absence du possible, dans la nuit opaque et morte, toutefois lumière, non moins inconnaissable, aveuglante, que le fond du cœur."[22]

The Moi is passive in this experience ("tout en moi se précipite") of a complete openness to the possible, which is simultaneously the irreversible loss of the subject and the instant of *extase*. *Extase*, coming from the greek *ekstasis*, to be outside of *x* or outside of one's self, is the zenith of the *Expérience intérieure*, and also a simultaneous experience of the possible, the impossible and death brought on by the self-destruction of the subject:

À l'instant, j'accède à tout le possible! J'accède à l'impossible en même temps. J'atteins le pouvoir que l'être avait de parvenir au contraire de l'être. Ma mort et moi, nous nous glissons dans le vent du dehors, où je m'ouvre à *l'absence de moi*.[23]

There is thus this form of reverse kenosis, similar to that in negative theology, in which the subject disappears, loses all form of selfhood and becomes one with *Dieu*, *RIEN* or *la nuit*. As Paul Hegarty writes: "Bataille [is] trying to locate the subject in such a way that being becomes aware of itself as a loss of being – and then loses that awareness. On returning, the

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[21] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.66.
[22] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.74.
[23] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.180.

individual subject will carry the trace of that loss even as the mundane closes in once more."[24] The subject is forever affected by this experience, as s/he is conscious of his or her essential nothingness, of his or her essential oneness with nothingness

> Bataille's kenotic model offers no salvation for the subject that is not and cannot be saved from its loss, abandoning hope and consolation, Bataille's thought proposes a different spiritual drive, one centred on dispossession and dissolution no longer grounded in a transcendent possibility of recovery. The self is not lost in order to be saved yet again, down the line, on a different plane, but to affirm the inevitability of loss without recuperative salvation.[25]

The subject in Bataille is thus a perpetually desperate one, where emancipation from the World also leads to perpetual anguish and having to live with the clear knowledge of both one's mortality and one's nothingness.

Laruelle

It is impossible to evoke the subject in Laruelle's work without evoking the relation he or she has to the World. The subject feels a sense of belonging to the World because of philosophy, used here as an avatar of the *pensée-Monde*, all the economic, social and cultural production of the World. Philosophy is a tool, a conquering force that helps subjects identify to their être-au-monde and never question the existence of the Real: "la philosophie est faite pour l'homme, non l'homme pour la philosophie."[26] The concept of "l'homme" itself, as it appears in the philosophical tradition, is a sort of hallucination performed by philosophy so that the subject identifies himself or herself with it. Laruelle, on the other hand, rejects all classical notions of identity, similarly to Valéry, and finds the idea of an intrinsic and singular core of identity that

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[24] Paul Hegarty, 'Violent silence: Bataille's "Method of meditation"' in *Negative ecstasies, Georges Bataille and the study of religion*, ed.by Jermeny Biles and Kent Brintnall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp.95-105, p.96.
[25] Alex Dubilet, *The Self-Emptying Subject, Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern*, p.164.
[26] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence: introduction critique*, p.10.

would make each individual truly different to be an archaic product of the *pensée-Monde*. There is only one true identity, the *identité réelle* of the subject, cloned into a *Sujet* or, in *Le Christ futur*, into a *Sujet-Christ*. Philosophy, on the other hand, can see nothing of the subject's true essence, the part of the subject that does not belong to the world and is immanent to the Real, and thus must invent or hallucinate him or her:

> L'homme est cette nuit, ce néant que le philosophe hallucine lorsqu'il regarde l'homme dans les yeux. J'appelle *hallucinante* – nom commun féminin – toute pensée ou vision qui croit voir le réel lorsqu'elle ne voit que le tout; qui croit voir l'Un lorsqu'elle voit l'Être. Soit une hallucinante du type: je pense donc je suis...[27]

The characterisation of the subject as "cette nuit, ce néant" is of course reminiscent of Bataille and Valéry, and of most of the texts explored in this thesis. For Laruelle, the subject's essence lies elsewhere, away from the World, in the immanent struggle against the World that is evoked in chapter 3. In this struggle the subject is cloned into a *Sujet*, determined-in-the-last-instance by the Real, and is in a way cleansed from the World and all its manifestations and the ways philosophy hallucinates the subject: "C'est de toute façon éliminer les « natures humaines » et les « essences réelles » par lesquelles on a tenté d'inclure unitairement les hommes dans l' «l'humanité » et quelque autre fétiches, dans le Monde."[28] The subject is thus radically separated from the World: not by an act in relation to the world, which self-emptying or reverse kenosis could arguably be considered as, but by an immanent separation with no act:

> L'Homme n'est pas séparé, au sens banal, du Monde, il en est séparé de manière immanente, sans acte de séparation. Lorsqu'il est séparé par un tel acte, par exemple celui de la création, c'est le signe qu'il est encore inclus dans le Monde « élargi », encore une objectivation ontologique de l'Un (à la manière grecque), ou une intuition aveuglée de l'Un[29]

It is interesting to draw the comparison with the spiritual apophatism, the radical self-emptying of negative theology, where it is hard to pinpoint the exact role of the subject insofar as he or she loses all positive attributes, knowledge and even intentionality. In Laruelle,

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[27] François Laruelle, 'La Biographie de l'œil', *Le Décision Philosophique*, 9 (1989), 93-104 (98).
[28] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.16-17
[29] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.89

however, for the subject to be cloned into a *Sujet* and become a Heretic, there is what he calls a *choix unilatéral*:

> L'hérésie commence non pas empiriquement avec le refus du Monde ou de l'Histoire comme on dit vaguement, mais *réellement* avec l'indifférence du Monde et *transcendantalement* avec son refus ou plutôt son unilatéralisation. Cette décision n'est plus une coupure sectaire, voire une différence, elle est strictement unilatérale et ne dérive que de l'Un-en-personne. On définira l'hérésie par le choix unilatéral, celui qui possède une cause réelle-séparée dont le défaut le rendrait illusoire et contradictoire.[30]

Heresy is thus not political or religious in the sense that it is not sparked by a decision by the subject, but by a *choix unilatéral.* In Laruelle's work, unilaterality is meant to signify the duality of non-philosophical causality: the *support* or material is presented, but its cause, without being entirely absent, is non-present or immanent-in-One. In this case, this means that the subject is the material of this cloning, of this choice that is caused by the Real without the Real ever being implicated or present in the operation. The subject's *apparent* self-emptying is thus caused by the Real (which is nevertheless separated from it, in Laruelle's words a *cause réelle séparée*), but should not be seen as a form of alienation: it is an immanent actualisation of the subject's essence of being a stranger to the World, of this *hors-nature* contained in every human. Laruelle details the chain of causality behind this self-emptying or radical cleansing from the world, making it clear that it is not the subject's intentionality that leads him or her to such a choice. This is a point where Laruelle differs strongly from Bataille, for instance, in whose work the subject must strive to create the artificial, dramatic conditions that might lead to the true ecstatic moment of *L'Expérience intérieure*. Even Meister Eckhart, despite calling for the purest of *détachement* in which intentionality dissapears, does not quite explain how the initial decision arises, a decision that, in normal conditions, seems impossible to make. Philosophy itself has tried to delve into a form of self-emptying, albeit artificial, in a number of thought experiments, notably the hyperbolic doubt of Descartes's *Médiations Métaphysiques*. These, Laruelle insists, are far less radical than the heresy he is describing: "Nous postulons pour des raisons de radicalité que l'hérésie est l'être-révélé de l'homme en sa non-consistance et dépouille les fétiches théo-métaphysiques plus radicalement que les opérations philosophiques

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[30] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.29

comme le « doute », la « réduction » ou le scepticisme."[31] By revealing the true essence of the subject, he or she is almost mechanically, organically rid of all the concepts coming from theology and philosophy.

In Laruelle's heresy, the subject thus becomes, through the immanent action of a unilateral choice, a *Christ Futur* (that he might sometimes name *Sujet-Christ*, but they mean approximately the same thing, the latter just serving as a reminder of the Sujet part of the *Christ Futur*). This is the name given by Laruelle to the Heretics, the "humains en-lutte avec le Monde".[32] The choice of the word Christ here is obviously, if not intentionally, subversive. However, the "Christ" in *Christ-Futur* is not the historical Christ, at least not as he is seen in most of Christianity as the one and only Messiah. Laruelle uses Christ as a figure for the messianity there is in every Sujet, every Heretic, making the historical Christ equal to all Christ-Futurs as he writes in *Christo-fiction*:

> La personne du Christ nommée « Jésus » doit être elle aussi traitée comme un fidèle égal aux autres, car on sait qu'il n'était pas exempt de toute faiblesse dans l'assomption de sa mission. Comme sujet individuel du message Christ, Jésus est lui aussi indexé au facteur-Christ.[33]

'Christ' as a term is dualysed and used by Laruelle precisely to signify the revelation of the true nature of humans in this heresy. This of course does not account for the use of the word "future" in Futur-Christ. It is important firstly to understand that this immanent struggle between the Future-Christs, the Heretics and the World is not a war, has no object and thus will never end. Laruelle evokes "une lutte « éternelle et sans espoir » contre un mal non-identifié et qu'il n'identifie que dans l'immanence de la lutte, que son existence se confonde strictement avec celle-ci, qu'il soit le seul vivant qui se définisse, comme sujet, par la lutte plutôt que par le discours de l'Être ou de l'inconscient".[34] This is an immanent struggle in which the *Sujet* defines himself or herself, it is the revelatory "activity" of the Future Christs but the nature of this struggle is invisible and impossible to evoke, obviously absent to the phenomenal world. It will also never find a resolution because it is literally out of the World and thus outside of any kind

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[31] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.127.
[32] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.36.
[33] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.144
[34] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.20.

of chronology:

> Pourquoi alors « futur »? […] Par exemple « le-temps » se laisse dualyser à son tour en un passé radical, l'« en-passé » compris comme immanence du Vécu, et en un mélange qui est justement « le-temps », désormais compris comme présent élargi au Monde au-delà de la simple représentation ou présence. Leur conflit se résout comme futur radical ou immanent, désinséré du temps et qui se confond avec le sujet, Le Christ futur. Tel est le théorème qui démontre la vie future comme celle de l'homme-Christ ou encore de Messie. Parce que le Vécu est sans extase ou sans destination en vue du sujet qui, lui, est pour-le-Monde et le Temps sans être, même comme « futur », inscrit dans le temps-monde.[35]

This conflict, like the Christ-Futur, is outside of time and purely immanent. Here, the radical future means a future that knows no end and no change, the *Christ Futur* is locked in this immanent struggle for eternity, even though the use of the very concept of eternity seems questionable in an immanence where there is no time. As a discursive shortcut, one could say that the *Christs Futurs* in their heresy actualise themselves in a struggle against the World that is not a means to an end but a state that will never end, and thus in their only, radical future.

This use of the word "future" could also point towards another aspect of Laruelle's theory or project of Heresy as he develops it in his more theological and mystical works. In Christ, Laruelle retains the messianic force but in a generic way: all *Sujet-Christ* or *Christs Futurs* are equal and generic insofar as they all actualise their identical immanent nature in the same exact struggle against the World:

> Avec le clonage de tout homme comme *sujet*, les humains, malgré ou à cause de leur in-suffisance, se mettent à exister sous forme d'un *organon*, Le Christ futur justement, l'authentique rapport au Monde et à l'histoire en totalité plutôt qu'à tels de leurs phénomènes. L'ancien Christ avait été conçu dans la transcendance et le Monde (dans le péché ?), c'était un organon sans doute mais sur le modèle encore de la médiation et de l'outil (pour une recréation ou une renaissance). […] Le Christ Futur signifie plutôt que chaque homme est Christ-organon, c'est-à-dire Messie, évidemment, mais simple et unique une fois chaque fois. C'est un christianisme

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[35] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.46-47.

minimal. Nous les Sans-religions, les Sans-église, les hérétiques du futur, nous sommes tout-un-chacun Christ ou Messie.[36]

Unlike with the historical Christ, there is no unique messianic event, no waiting for a miracle or resurrection, only a constant flux whereby Future-Christs emerge as identical messiahs. As Laruelle writes: "Nous n'espérons plus rien qui soit de l'ordre d'un événement fini ou d'une attente messianique infinie. Le sujet-Messie est étranger à l'attente-du-Messie comme le sujet-Christ au retour du Christ".[37] All of these *Sujets-Christs* form what Laruelle calls "le corps «écclesial, mais illocalisable des fidèles»".[38] This ecclesial body challenges the notion of selfhood, much like the uncreated utopia, and in a sense both could perhaps be seen as *immanent communities*. This "body" could be said to be, in Aristotelian terms, homeomerous, the same everywhere, indivisible in that every "part" of the body would contain the whole body. It is also, one could suggest, in-One, the same thing as the Real. In *Christo-fiction*, Laruelle choses to use the quantic model to detail how this ecclesial body, and indeed the immanence of the Real, works through the key concept of idempotency:

Ce qui s'oppose à toutes ces solutions philosophiques corpusculaires qui vont de l'identité à la différence et à la dialectique, c'est évidemment l'acte quantique de la superposition vectorielle […] La superposition relève d'une propriété de certaines opérations algébriques, c'est l'idempotence (A+A=A) qui échappe à une relation analytique ou bien synthétique classiquement définie. […] Il y a superposition lorsque l'immanence est de part en part la même et traverse les transcendances qu'elle apporte plutôt qu'elle ne les contient mais qui ne la changent pas en s'additionnant à elle. Deux termes peuvent se superposer s'ils sont de telle nature qu'ils conservent la même immanence inchangée malgré leur ajout ou leur addition qui rentre sous ou en l'immanence. N'importe quelle matière n'est pas susceptible de superposition, elle doit être ondulatoire, et n'importe quelle logique ne lui convient pas, elle doit être idempotente.[39]

Without going into the painstakingly complex details of Laruelle's quantic modulization,

[36] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.145.
[37] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.149.
[38] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.70.
[39] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.102.

the important thing to understand here is the term 'idempotency', which applies to all the Future-Christs and to the Real. Laruelle choses the quantic model because the superposition of two terms can result in equality and identity between the two terms, A+A=A. This is exactly what happens with the *Christs-Futurs*, which are superimposed on one another to form this immanent ecclesial body in which everything is exactly the same. It is possible to argue that this immanent state of struggle and of idempotency is also one in which the *Christs-Futurs* are idempotent to the Real itself, immanently actualising their fundamental oneness with the One or the Real. Whilst Meister Eckhart always speaks of the subject on an individual level, and does not have this conflictual dimension in his heretic theology, the final state of the subject, whereby he or she has no selfhood and in One in One, God in God is quite similar, as will be discussed again in chapter 6. What can be affirmed with absolute certainty is that the philosophical notions of subject and Self are completely disregarded and ridiculed by Laruelle, to whom they are desperate philosophical hallucinations, symptoms of the sufficiency of the World, and fail to grasp the true essence of the Subject, who is destined for an immanent, invisible life of struggle in a radical future where he or she forms an idempotent body and is One with the Real without any kind of operation.

6. The Inner Experience

Negative theology

The inner or mystical experience is, in rigorous epistemological terms, as unsayable, as indescribable as God or the One, as it is the moment (for lack of a better word, given that "moment" has a chronological connotation) in which the subject's self-dispossession leads to either a *unification* with God or the experience of the actualisation of his or her *oneness* with God. This is a very important distinction to make, as they are very different things: *unification* with God or the One supposes that the subject or the part of the subject that is involved in the experience goes from being separated from One to being united with it, *becoming* its very essence and undistinguishable from it. Experiencing one's *oneness* with God suggests that God is already one with the subject or a part (a non-part?) of the subject and has always been so; the experience is thus merely actualising something that was contained negatively, *en puissance* within the subject. This second idea, in varying forms, is something that links all of the authors studied in this thesis. It is one of their central shared intuitions, which bonds them in a spiritual kinship: from Plotinus' rather non-platonic suggestion that "notre âme non plus ne s'est pas enfoncée en sa totalité dans le sensible, mais il y a quelque chose d'elle qui demeure toujours dans le monde spirituel"[1] to Laruelle's claim in *Le Christ futur* that "Il y a « un quelque chose » de radicalement hors-nature dans les humains",[2] it is clear that there is something in the human subject and even humanity as a whole that does not belong to the world.

One of the interesting aspects of discourse on this *Expérience intérieure* or mystical experience is that contrarily to attempts to talk solely about God or the One, authors can make their texts literally subjective, in the sense that they can relate their own experience in first-person narratives, as for instance Bataille does on multiple occasions in *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Le Coupable*. There is thus a wealth of texts because despite knowing that they will never be able to represent this experience adequately, the first person gives them a certain experimental and perhaps as we have seen fiction-oriented freedom in their writing. These attempted descriptions, theorisations or *récits* are often extremely revelatory, if read carefully, not only of the author's inclination towards the ideas of oneness and unification but also to the relation the subject has to God, be it *vertical* or *horizontal*. In the Roman Catholic tradition and

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[1] Plotin, *Ennéades*, IV, trad. and ed. by Emile Bréhier (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1990), p.225.
[2] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.37.

indeed in most recognised branches of Christianity, the relation from the subject to God is always a transcendent one. This allows us to understand why for instance, whilst paving the way for more radical heresies, Pseudo Denys still arguably considers the mystical experience as a vertical one:

> C'est alors seulement que, dépassant le monde où l'on est vu et où l'on voit, Moïse pénètre dans la Tenèbre véritablement mystique de l'inconnaissance; c'est là qu'il fait taire tout savoir positif, qu'il échappe entièrement à toute saisie et à toute vision, car il appartient tout entier à Celui qui est au-delà de tout, car il ne s'appartient plus lui-même ni n'appartient à rien d'étranger, uni par le meilleur de lui-même à Celui qui échappe à toute connaissance, ayant renoncé au savoir positif, et grâce à cette inconnaissance même connaissant par-delà toute intelligence[3]

Although there is no explicit mention here of vertical movement by the subject that elevates himself or herself towards God, as there can be in other parts of his work (for instance in *La Hiérarchie céleste:* "s'élever jusqu'aux archétypes immatériels"),[4] the participate participle "dépassant le monde où l'on est vu et où l'on voit" can easily be interpreted as a vertical emancipation from the world towards a God characterised by being above all, "au-delà de tout", clearly stating her transcendent nature. The use of the verb *unifier* ("uni par le meilleur de lui-même") also aligns Pseudo Denys with the less radical of the two previously described options, namely that of *unification* with God. For Pseudo Denys, the mystical experience by which the subject becomes one with God is thus a temporary elevation on the soul in which the subject, performing or undergoing the process of spiritual apophatism, loses all individuality, is desubjectivised and united with God, filled with the supreme non-knowledge, this untaught divine ignorance of all that is. This model is not only quasi-compatible with the Catholic dogma, but is very heavily influenced by neoplatonism and Plotinus in particular. Whilst Pseudo Denys uses Moses as the symbolic avatar of the subject and refrains from any first-person narrative, Plotinus on the contrary embraces the first person in his *Ennéades* to produce some of the most singular and remarkable texts from any given platonic tradition, and arguably of philosophy and theology as a whole. This text, from the fourth Ennead, is one of the richest and most evocative examples:

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[3] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.179-180
[4] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.193.

Souvent, m'éveillant de mon corps à moi-même, devenu alors extérieur à tout le reste et intérieur à moi-même, contemplant alors une beauté merveilleuse, sûr alors d'appartenir au plus haut point au monde supérieur, ayant vécu la vie la plus noble, étant devenu identique au divin, m'étant fixé en lui, étant parvenu à cette activité suprême et m'étant établi au-dessus de toute autre réalité spirituelle, quand, après ce repos dans le divin, je retombe de l'Intellect au raisonnement, je me demande comment j'ai pu jamais, et cette fois encore, descendre ainsi, comment mon âme a pu jamais venir à l'intérieur d'un corps, si déjà lorsqu'elle est dans un corps, elle est telle qu'elle m'est apparue.[5]

This verticality in the relation from the subject to the divine is very clear here, as the end of the experience is described as a fall after an elevation, the narrator regaining consciousness and not understanding why he could not remain One with the divine. At first glance, this text might seem very similar to that of Pseudo Denys. There is, however, one key difference that is, in the words of Pierre Hadot in *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* "l'intuition centrale de Plotin: le moi humain n'est pas irrémédiablement séparé du monde éternel du moi, tel qu'il existe dans la pensée divine. Ce vrai moi, ce moi en Dieu, nous est intérieur."[6] Despite the apparent verticality of the experience, it is indeed an inner experience of the awakening of something that was already inside the subject, signified by the triple use of personal pronouns of the first person at the beginning of the excerpt "m'éveillant de mon corps à moi-même", a part of the subject already belonging to or residing in the divine. Despite still respecting the traditional platonic hierarchies, with there being the Intellect, then the Spirit as intermediary stages between the subject and the One, Plotinus's subversive heretic intuition transpires here, that of a true oneness at least of something in the subject with the One.

The idea of a fundamental oneness of something in the subject and of God, one of the driving concepts behind the theological and metaphysical explorations attempted in this thesis, is potentially actualised the most radically by Meister Eckhart, for whom the subject contains what Alex Dubilet calls an *uncreated ground*[7] radically separated from everything and that literally is God. One of the most challenging questions is the location of such a ground, or

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[5] Plotin, *Ennéades*, IV, trad. by Pierre Hadot in Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p.29.
[6] Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, p.31.
[7] Dubilet, Alex, *The Self-Emptying Subject, Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern*, p.37.

whether the word 'location' is indeed appropriate at all. Trying to pinpoint a location that adheres to the rules of time and space would arguably be dragging this experience back into the realm of the possible, presided by logic and science. For this reason, the term coined by Dubilet, although useful and well designed, seems inadequate as the word "ground" has too much of a physical connotation. A more appropriate term may be *uncreated utopia*, utopia being used in its etymological sense, a place that has no place. It is literally out of space and time, one with the eternity of God. Eckhart himself evokes this question numerous times, most notably perhaps in *De la naissance éternelle* where he "locates" the uncreated utopia in "l'*essence* de l'âme. Là est le profond silence, car là n'a jamais pénétré aucune créature ni quelque image que ce soit: là n'arrive plus à l'âme ni action ni connaissance, là elle ne sait plus rien d'aucune image, ni d'elle-même ni d'aucune créature."[8] What he also calls "le fond de l'âme"[9] transcends the categories imposed by scientific rationality, namely space and time. This is not however something that he speculatively creates, like for instance Meinong's "jungle", in which he grants a true ontological status to non-beings. This *essence de l'âme* is something his negative faith allows him to impossibly uncover and ascertain as a certainty. God does not come, arrive, appear or for that matter ever leave this negative, uncreated utopia: it is where God constantly generates life as he/she/it has always generated life: God and the subject (once it has undergone radical *détachement* and self-emptying) are co-birthed eternally. They have the same origin, and are ultimately the same thing, God in God, equal and identical:

> Il l'engendre sans interruption. Et je dis en outre: il m'engendre comme son Fils, comme le même Fils! Oui, il ne m'engendre pas seulement comme son Fils, il m'engendre comme lui, et lui comme moi, il m'engendre comme son essence propre, sa propre nature: dans sa source la plus profonde je jaillis dans l'Esprit saint là il n'y a qu'une vie, une essence, une œuvre! – Tout ce que Dieu opère est un, c'est pourquoi il m'engendre comme son Fils, sans qu'une séparation intervienne.[10]

The consequence of this eternal, constant co-birthing is the abolition of the very categories of immanence and transcendence. It could be tempting to think of this relation as entirely immanent and horizontal, but that would be inaccurate: there is neither horizontality nor verticality, no more than there is a relationship between God and the subject. They are

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[8] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.37-38.
[9] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.38.
[10] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.108

idempotent, radically and eternally One. This leads in turn to a complete shift in what is generally perceived as the mystical experience, as it stops being an exception, a rare moment of unification with God, as Dubilet aptly explains: "the uncreated ground, the "something" in the soul, must not be mistaken for an exceptional moment in which the soul becomes united with God via a mystical experience or for the fulfilment of a spiritual ascent indexed by, for example, the mystico-monastic *via unitiva* that follows upon the states of purgation and contemplation"[11] but rather a constant co-birthing with God that can be experienced or not. Despite this, there is no way of explaining, describing or rationalising this "activity"; "co-birthing" is here a non-referent, that like the very God that perpetuates it and the essence of the soul it is perpetuated in and by, is completely unfathomable. At this impossible step, even Meister Eckhart admits defeat, having pushed far beyond the limits of the impossible:

> Qu'opère donc Dieu sans image dans le fond et essence de l'âme? Je ne suis pas en état de *savoir* cela, car les puissances de l'âme ne peuvent percevoir qu'en images, par quoi elles doivent prendre et reconnaître chaque chose dans son image *particulière* […] Car l'âme sent bien *que* c'est, mais on ne sait pas *comment* c'est et ce *que* c'est. […] Seule cette connaissance non-connaissante maintient l'âme dans une telle suspension et la pousse pourtant à la chasse.[12]

Valéry

At first glance, the idea of an inner, mystical experience seems quite distant from Valéry's scientific ideals. Ideas like the uncreated utopia and an ineffable *Dieu néant* seem unlikely to be compatible with the conceptual framework in which he operates, especially given that it has almost no mentions of anything remotely theological, let alone the development of a substantial theological theory. The trap that must be eluded is that of attempting to force this concept onto Valéry's work. However, there are traces in the *Cahiers* and in his various texts around M. Teste of the intuition of such experience, which becomes clearer as his positivist nature gives way to a more subversive and heretical side of Valéry. A good starting point in attempting to decipher Valéry's relationship with this idea of a mystical experience is one of many short fictional passages in the *Cahiers* where he uses fiction as a *mise à distance* of more irrational ideas he

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[11] Alex Dubilet, *The Self-Emptying Subject,* p.36.
[12] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.42.

dares not confront directly:

> Mahmoud s'étendit sur le dos sur le sommet étroit du mont et il vit et il pensa:
>
> Et il voulut fortement connaître la loi et le principe, et il les devint.
>
> Il regarda des yeux le haut du ciel et en même temps les formes de son esprit.
>
> Toutes les formes et un seul soleil —
>
> Tout ce qu'il voyait entrait en vie dans son esprit et mourait au-delà.
>
> Tout ce qui entrait dans son esprit prenait le mouvement et la force et prenait une force propre.
>
> Tout ce qui naissait dans son esprit prenait la couleur de la lumière régnante et l'intrépidité du rayon qui arrive.
>
> <Et il dit: je suis la loi du réel et de la lumière.> (C, I, 314)

The first reference that comes to mind in this passage is Plato: becoming the object one is attempting to know is the highest form of knowledge in Plato's conception of science as *dunamis*, which is exemplified for instance at the end of the banquet where Alcibiade becomes Love and speaks in its name. However, the following anaphora with "Tout" goes in a rather more mystical and probably Plotinian direction: what seems to be described is a moment of union of the World and of the spirit, *l'esprit,* then leads to a form of consubstantiality, by which the spirit seems to turn into "la lumière régnante", the image of light often being used by Plotinus to symbolise the divine. The final assertion, where Mahmoud declares "je suis la loi du réel et de la lumière", seems to point towards a state of union or even oneness with the One. This state almost appears as a sort of fantasy for Valéry, Mahmoud perhaps being M.Teste's more openly mystical relative, both of course being idealised avatars Valéry created of himself.

The idea of an instant of total knowledge is encapsulated for Valéry by a notion that he takes from Edgar Allen Poe, who in turn borrowed it from Boethius: the *Totum Simul*, literally all at the same time, the idea of an instant in which the totality of the cosmos would become accessible simultaneously to an individual. This idea is very coherent with Valéry's *présent absolu*: given that true knowledge only exists in the instant and cannot survive the transition from one instant to the next, it makes sense that the instant would be the only possible unit that could contain such an experience of the totality of truth. As he writes in *Au sujet d'Eurêka*: "A peine au sortir de l'instant, à peine nous essayons d'agrandir et d'étendre notre présence hors de soi-même, nous nous épuisons dans notre liberté. Tout le désordre de nos connaissances et de

nos puissances nous entoure. Ce qui est souvenir, ce qui est possible, ce qui est imaginable, ce qui est calculable, toutes les combinaisons de notre esprit, à tous les degrés de la probabilité, à tous les états de la précision nous assiègent."[13] Outside of the instant, there is far too much diversity for the subject not to get lost in it. Valéry hypothesizes a form of mystical epistemology, by which the *Totum simul* would be the only way for the subject to access the truth, as well as short-circuiting the problematic necessity of exteriority embodied by language: "Si le Tout est instantané ou entièrement donné, pas de langage. Si tout savoir pourrait se remplacer par une vision de choses ?"(C, X, 357). Valéry thus does seem to formulate the hypothesis, however speculative or ideal, of a form of mystical experience, the difference with the previously discussed Eckhartian experience being that there is a form of knowledge that seems to appear as a revelation, there is no nescience like in negative theology but rather an instant that makes the cosmos accessible to the spirit, or alternatively the spirit becoming one with the universe.

In *M.Teste*, however, the experiences that Valéry actualises through his fictional *alter ego* seem much closer to the apophasis and mystical experience described by Plotinus than to Poe's *Totum simul.* Besides the aforementioned "Ôtez toute chose que j'y voie"[14] from the *Logbook de M.Teste*, there is another excerpt that is quite explicitly inspired by the Neoplatic philosopher, once again pertaining to this idea of vision, in the *Lettre de Madame Emilie Teste* where Teste's wife refers to her husband in these terms: " Vous savez qu'il ne lit presque rien de ses yeux, dont il fait un usage étrange, et comme *intérieur.* Je me trompe, je veux dire: un usage *particulier.* Mais ce n'est pas cela du tout. Je ne sais comment m'exprimer; mettons à la fois *intérieur*, *particulier...* et *universel*!!!"[15] Contrarily to the *Totum simul*, M.Teste's vision is turned towards the inside, not towards the totality of the universe, and yet seems not to be simply a form of self-observation. In Plotinus's *Enneads*, the description of the experience of the Intellect and then of the One as a form of non-empirical vision is recurrent. One of the conditions of spiritual apophatism and elevation towards the One id the be able to *look differently*, to become transparent to oneself and see the One from the inside outwards, what might be called in Laruellian terms the vision-in-One: "Il faut cesser de regarder; il faut, fermant les yeux, échanger cette manière de voir pour une autre et réveiller cette faculté que tout le

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[13] Paul Valéry, *Variété I*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p.144.
[14] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* , p.56.
[15] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* , p.35.

monde possède, mais dont peu font usage".[16] One can thus suggest that M.Teste's "usage *particulier*" of his vision, which his wife struggles to define ("Je ne sais comment m'exprimer"),[17] is directly inspired, if not copied from this other, non-empirical, "manière de voir"[18] evoked by Plotinus in the *Enneads*.

It is thus clear that Valéry experiments with the idea of a mystical experience, but in doing so always keeps a safe distance. The *Totum simul* is something he toys with conceptually without affirming its existence, whilst M.Teste, ultimately, is no more than a work of fiction where he projects his ideal intellectual and spiritual life. There seems to be, at the very least in his work, a barrier erected between the possible and the impossible, these mystical experiences being placed firmly on the latter side. There is, however, one specific moment towards the end of the second *Cahier* that could be interpreted as a sign that these mystical, at least partially apophatic *rêveries* might be closer to reality than previously suggested:

> Parfois, je m'écrase moi-même: je voudrais jouir de toutes mes pensées à la fois, dans le même instant. C'est absurde. Cependant beaucoup de mes vues nouvelles furent dues à un petit fragment d'un état tel. La pensée passe son temps à unir naturellement maintes choses diverses. Si l'on tâche artificiellement à faire de même, si l'on demande ce qui s'est produit ou bien si l'on cherche le lien... - on ne trouve que Soi et par conséquent on découvre bien des choses.(C, II, 27)

There is a lot to unpack in this excerpt: "je m'écrase moi-même" seems to signify a momentary suppression of the Self, or rather, because the Self is empty, of positive knowledge and perhaps the influx of empirical information Valéry is subject to. He then evokes a mystical instant of pure transparency "jouir de toutes mes pensées à la fois", that could be derived both from Poe and Plotinus. What is most interesting however is the following sentence, which perfectly encapsulates the paradox of the earlier *Cahiers*: he says that the desire for this instant is absurd, and yet asserts that all his new ideas are caused by the very same state he just called absurd, thus not only introducing it into the realm of possibility but affirming that he has already experienced it. It is in these rare moments of the *Cahiers* that a form of irrational faith seems to

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[16] Plotin, *Ennéades*, I, trad. by Pierre Hadot in *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, p.35.
[17] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.35
[18] Plotin, *Ennéades*, I, trad. by Pierre Hadot in *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, p.35.

appear on the horizon of Valéry's work, showing one possible facet of the negative faith that will be explored in chapter 9.

Bataille

What sets Bataille apart from the other authors in this thesis is that he explores the *Expérience intérieure* as a standalone, independent non-referent. The mystical experience is merely evoked by Pseudo Denys and explored further by Meister Eckhart, but always in relation to God; in other words, discourse about the mystical experience is always subsumed under thinking about God. This could also perhaps be explained by the heretical and irrational connotation of such an experience, which is something that the authors in this thesis use discursive and intellectual methods to compensate: Plotinus hierarchizes the experience following platonic dogma, placing l'Intellect and l'Esprit as intermediate levels of being between the Self and the one, whilst Valéry for instance operates a systematic *mise à distance* through explicit fiction and fictional inner dialogues. Bataille on the other hand evokes the experience directly, almost abruptly, and even makes it the title of his book, *L'Experience intérieure*. The first reason for which he can consider the experience independently, for itself, is that he rejects all form of dogma. Although he recognizes his affiliation with the Christian mystics, it is to their method and their intentions, not their dogma and its positive content. He considers that the Church (as an institution) and God (as a concept) both as limits, potentially able to interfere with the purity of the *Expérience intérieure*. Bataille choses to use a number of other non-referents throughout the book, going from 'God' to 'LE FOND DES MONDES', then to 'la nuit*'* or even 'la mort*',* as will be explored in the next chapter. These non-referents are quasi, if not completely interchangeable, and move around in the text without any logical explanation given as to why or how they are used: it is because there is movement in the text, their interchangeability mimics the instability of the non-referent itself. Whilst God is an innate, historical non-referent, all these other non-referents that he creates are openly dissimilar signs that take turns in failing to name God. The final goal of their undertaking, however, arguably remains the same, as Peter Tracey Connor writes in *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*:

His relation to the mystical literature is always cagey, awkward, surrounded with

qualifications and retractions. Yet the message he consistently delivered is that every human being has access to that "place of bewilderment, of non-sense," where the contradictions that befall rational thought are dispelled. He spent a lifetime trying to find a language to communicate an experience he could only describe with the help of a mystical lexicon, and even why he wrote at all[19]

This rejection of all that is exterior is both a condition and a consequence of Bataille's radical choice to place the experience itself as its sole authority in a form of absolute autotelicity:

L'Expérience intérieure ne pouvant avoir de principe ni dans un dogme (attitude morale), ni dans la science (le savoir n'en peut être ni la fin ni l'origine), ni dans une recherche d'états enrichissants (attitude esthétique, expérimentale), ne peut avoir d'autre soucis ni d'autre fin qu'elle-même. L'ouvrant à l'Expérience intérieure, j'en ai posé par là la valeur, l'autorité. Je ne puis désormais avoir d'autre valeur ni d'autre autorité. Valeur, autorité, impliquent rigueur d'une méthode, l'existence d'une communauté.[20]

Unlike all the other mystical experiences, it is not placed under any authority and does not have an exterior goal, to be One in One or God in God, although of course something very similar does happen.

It is interesting to note that in its first movement, *L'Expérience intérieure* is mostly described negatively in a regression to a form of textual apophasis. This apophasis is of course much less repetitive and parodic that what can be found for instance in Pseudo Denys, and does not pertain to the same non-referent, which is God for Pseudo Denys and the inner experience for Bataille. Nevertheless, the way in which the text itself is structured seems to mimic the spiritual apophasis that the subject must undergo. In this sense Bataille seems very aligned with the apophatic tradition, there is both the textual apophasis and the self-emptying, the reverse kenosis that the subject has to undergo leaving him or her completely bare: "C'est par une «intime cessation de toute opération intellectuelle» que l'esprit est mis à nu."[21] However, there may be a difference in the subject's perceived neutrality: in Meister Eckhart for instance, the

[19] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataile and the Mysticism of Sin*, p.15.
[20] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.18.
[21] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.25.

subject must achieve or attain what he calls *le détachement*, where the s/he quite literally disappears, the very notion of selfhood being destroyed as s/he perpetually experiences his or her co-birthing with the One. For Bataille, however, there is another key factor in this inner experience: *l'angoisse*. To experience the extreme of the possible and the inner experience itself, *l'angoisse* is indispensable:

> Par définition, l'extrême du possible est ce point où, malgré la position inintelligible pour lui qu'il a dans l'être, un homme, s'étant dépouillé du leurre et de crainte, s'avance si loin qu'on ne puisse concevoir une possibilité d'aller plus que loin. Inutile de dire à quel degré il est vain (bien que la philosophie ferme cette impasse) d'imaginer un jeu pur de l'intelligence sans angoisse. L'angoisse n'est pas moins que l'intelligence le moyen de connaître et l'extrême du possible, par ailleurs, n'est pas moins vie que la connaissance. La communication encore est, comme l'angoisse, vivre et connaître. L'extrême du possible suppose rire, extase, approche terrifiée de la mort; suppose erreur, nausée, agitation incessante du possible et de l'impossible, et, pour finir, brisé, toutefois, par degrés, lentement voulu, l'état de supplication incessante, son absorption dans le désespoir. Rien de ce qu'un homme peut *connaître*, à cette fin, ne pourrait être éludé sans déchéance, sans peché[22]

This also underlines the necessity of dramatisation, which sparks the appearance of anguish. For Bataille, this is something that religions do very well, a form of *mise en récit* and *mise en scène* of these ontotheological questions: "on n'atteint des états d'extase ou de ravissement qu'en *dramatisant* l'existence en général. La croyance en un Dieu trahi, qui nous aime (à ce point que, pour nous, il meurt), nous rachète et nous sauve, joua longtemps ce rôle."[23] This is also very different than in negative theology: in Bataille, the subject's role is in a way far greater and less passive, as he or she must create or embrace the artificial conditions that pave the way for the existence of the inner experience. Whilst dramatisation of different forms is found in most dogmas and religions, in *L'Expérience intérieure* it operates non-dogmatically as a tragic contemplation of the subject's mortality.

Interestingly, and despite the inherent inconsistencies of his descriptions, Bataille gives a long, complete account of how the *Expérience intérieure* works:

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[22] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.52.
[23] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.22.

Je veux donner encore une fois le schéma de l'expérience que j'appelle l'expérience pure. Tout d'abord j'atteins l'extrême du savoir (par exemple, je mime le savoir absolu, peu importe le mode, mais cela suppose un effort infini de l'esprit voulant le savoir). Je sais alors que je ne sais rien. *Ipse* j'ai voulu être tout (par le savoir) et je tombe dans l'angoisse: l'occasion de cette angoisse est mon non-savoir, le non sens sans remède (ici le non-savoir ne supprime pas les connaissances particulières, mais leur sens, leur enlève tout sens). Après coup, je puis savoir ce qu'est l'angoisse dont je parle. L'angoisse suppose le désir de communiquer, c'est-à-dire de me perdre, mais non la résolution entière: l'angoisse témoigne de ma peur de communiquer, de me perdre. L'angoisse est donné dans la thème du savoir lui-même: *ipse*, par le savoir, je voudrais être tout, donc communiquer, me perdre, cependant demeurer *ipse*. Pour la communication, avant qu'elle ait lieu, se posent le sujet (moi, *ipse*) et l'objet (en partie indéfini, tant qu'il n'est pas entièrement saisi). Le sujet veut s'emparer de l'objet pour le posséder (cette volonté tient à l'être engagé dans le jeu des compositions, voir le *Labyrinthe*), mais il ne peut que se perdre: le non-sens de la volonté de savoir survient, non-sens de tout possible, faisant savoir à l'*ipse* qu'il va se perdre et le savoir avec lui. Tant que l'*ipse* persévère dans sa volonté de savoir et d'être *ipse* durant l'angoisse, mais si l'*ipse* s'abandonne et le savoir avec soi-même, s'il se donne au non-savoir dans cet abandon, le ravissement commence. Dans le ravissement, mon existence retrouve un sens, mais le sens se réfère aussitôt à l'*ipse*, devient *mon* ravissement, un ravissement que je *ipse*, possède, donnant satisfaction à ma volonté d'être tout. Dès que j'en reviens là cesse ma communication, la perte de moi-même, j'ai cessé de m'abandonner, je reste là, mais avec un savoir nouveau.[24]

This excerpt is intriguing in the sense that it seems to be an attempt to truly systematise the way in which l'*Expérience intérieure* works: the subject, the *ipse* trying to be everything tries to possess an ineffable object, the ultimate non-referent, *le rien*, *la nuit*, and ultimately loses itself in this non-savoir. It is only once this desire for knowledge is abandoned and the *ipse* gives itself completely to the non-savoir that the "ravissement", the ecstatic instant takes place. But the satisfaction of the *ipse*'s desire to be everything then puts a stop to this instant

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[24] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.66-67.

and to the communication that it implies. In this perspective, one could suggest that there is a difference between l'*Expérience intérieure* and the moment of radical self-dispossession where the subject is lost and becomes one with the non-savoir, fading into *la nuit*. As he writes in *Le Coupable*: "Mais je reste, nous restons – quoi qu'il en soit – dans le domaine où seule la limite du silence est accessible. Le silence équivoque de l'extase est lui-même à la rigueur inaccessible. Ou – comme la mort – accessible un instant."[25] It is this instant of radical reverse kenosis, of being one with *le non-savoir*, *la nuit*, *Dieu*, that is identical to that of negative theology. *L'Expérience intérieure* as a whole is very different and emphasises the necessity of a desperate, mortal subject, but the result or the ultimate horizon is the same, an ineffable instant of experiencing one's radical oneness with the *RIEN*. In *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, Connor argues that there is on the contrary a fundamental difference between the radical experiences of the mystics and of Bataille: "an initial difference between the mystical and the inner experience begins to emerge. Inner experience, unlike mystical experience, yields no insight".[26] This is arguably one of the limits of Connor's work on Bataille and the mystics: he constantly asserts that the experience of one's oneness with God is a positive experience, that yields "insight", which at the very least in the context of negative theology is provenly false. The reasons for his conclusion in this quote are understandable, and not dissimilar to the ones we have set forth earlier: Bataille's inner experience is free from all dogma, whilst the mystics evoked by Bataille are entrenched in Catholic culture, thus used to referring to God and even their experience of God in positive terms. However, in his reading of the mystics, Connor arguably makes a key mistake: he confuses the written *corpus* of mysticism and by extension of negative theology for their essence. Whilst these texts self-destruct upon reading, have absolutely no epistemological value and thus do not bare the trace of a singular personality but rather of the shared negative faith of all these authors, Connor asserts that "the mystic's devaluation of rhetoric and logos tends to reintroduce precisely those questions of "name, identity and the historical" that Bataille would like to dismiss by claiming they "don't change anything"".[27] On the contrary, the negative faith that caused (without any operation or interaction) the existence of these impossible texts is precisely the dissolution of any given identity, ontological or historical. His approach of these texts is in a way too academic, too logical, giving too much value to the hermeneutics of these empty vessels.

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[25] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.15.
[26] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataile and the Mysticism of Sin*, p.55.
[27] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataile and the Mysticism of Sin*, p.62.

Bataille also evokes this instant in other parts of his work, such as *La souveraineté,* where even in a book with far more pragmatic considerations this instant is the pinnacle of human possibility: "Le plus remarquable est que ce miraculeux négatif, donné par la mort, répond le plus clairement au principe énoncé plus haut, selon lequel l'instant miraculeux est l'instant où l'attente se résout en RIEN."[28] Bataille himself seems to recognise this ultimate point of convergence with the Christian mystics when he writes:

> Plus j'avance dans le savoir, fût-ce par la voie du non-savoir, et plus le non-savoir dernier devient lourd, angoissant. En fait, je me donne au non-savoir, c'est la communication, et comme il y a communication avec le monde obscurci, rendu abyssal par le non-savoir, j'ose dire Dieu: et c'est ainsi qu'il y a de nouveau savoir (mystique), mais je ne puis m'arrêter (je ne puis – mais je dois avoir le souffle.[29]

There is one term here that cannot be ignored and is not found in negative theology and very little in either Valéry or Laruelle, at least with this meaning. For Bataille, this ecstatic instant of being one with the non-savoir implies *la communication*. Many different interpretations of what this means have been proposed, but in the perspective of this thesis one could suggest that communication could be seen as the actualisation of the idempotency of God and the subject, of their radical transparency to one another insofar as they "are" the same thing. They thus *communicate* not as a subject to an object but as one, completely transparent to each other and crucially to any other subject that is having this same experience of radical loss of the self and experiencing his or her oneness with God or RIEN. It is this communication that produces what he calls "du nouveau savoir",[30] which is in fact radical non-knowledge but that changes the individual and manifests itself through the subject's negative faith. For Bataille, this negative faith must be lived by the subject *sur le mode de l'angoisse*, as the desperate *energeia* allowing him or her to go to the extreme of the possible, to become the impossible in an eternally repeated supplication. As Dubilet perfectly summarizes:

> In a logic convergent with one seen in Eckhart, it does not affirm the unification of two separate or separated entities so much as an immanence that precedes and exceeds such divisions. The designation of experience as *inner* must, likewise, not

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28 Georges Bataille, *La Souveraineté*, p.22.
29 Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.65-66.
30 Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.65.

be misunderstood as denoting an internal or private space of the subject. Rather, it recalls Eckhart's deployment of the concept of the "innermost" [le fond de l'âme]: Bataille's inner experience marks precisely the dissolution of the subject as something enclosed, as something that could be put to use (that is, as subjected and agential), disclosing in its stead a desinstrumentalized and dispossessed immanence. Inner experience may be said to take place in oneself, but only if it is understood that here '[o]neself' is not the subject isolating itself from the world, but a place of communication.[31]

The possibility of this misunderstanding is very real, as the inner experience can be misconstrued by some as meaning personal, belonging and limited to the subject. Suleiman's view of the inner experience as argued in her article 'Bataille in the Streets: the Search for Virility in the 1930s',[32] has been accused of making that very same mistake, notably by Benjamin Noys when he writes:

Inner experience confronts this problem when it is mistaken for what Susan Rubin Suleiman calls an 'inward turn', all the more so when she goes on to argue that this inward turn is Bataille's inner emigration, a collapse of thought in the face of the occupation. For Suleiman Bataille is practising an ineffectual 'spiritual' resistance against the Nazi occupation which lies ambiguously between resistance and collaboration […] She misconstrues inner experience in two ways: firstly by mistaking it for an experience that is internal to the self, rather than an experience that has no reference to anything outside of itself. Bataille regards inner experience as 'an experience laid bare, free of ties, even of an origin, of any confession whatever' (IE, 3). Suleiman misreads this experience of freedom as a retreat into the self to recover a threatened virility, a transformation of the political conflicts of the 1930s into an internal psychodrama. Nothing […] could be a worse misunderstanding of inner experience, especially as this experience can always be traced to an experience of community[33]

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[31] Alex Dubilet, *The Self-Emptying Subject*, p.166-167

[32] Susan Suleiman, 'Bataille in the Streets: the Search for Virility in the 1930s', *Critical Enquiry*, (1994), pp.61-

[33] Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*

It is precisely this community in a very abstract sense of the term that is experienced in *la communication*: becoming one with absolute nothingness.

Laruelle

Laruelle's relation to the idea of an experience of the One or the Real is quite ambiguous. Whilst authors like Bataille set out to create works that revolve precisely around that experience that is outside of being, not only unfathomable but non-existent is the sense of our human ontology, Laruelle does not mention such an experience, especially not in such dramatic, lyrical terms. From the outset, Laruelle's system excludes the idea of any empirical experience of the Real. The Real is radically separated from the World and is never present to the World, it is only the World's *negative condition,* but never manifests itself. He is quick to retaliate to any accusations of mysticism by his philosopher peers. In *Les philosophies de la différence,* after positively distinguishing Neoplatonism and mysticism from Différence, he writes:

> Lorsque cet effet se libère de la Différence, de son jeu immanent, il devient alors une technologie philosophique, celle qui fonde la *via negationis*, et distingue un certain néo-platonisme de l'usage spécifique que la Différence en fait pour son compte: non plus « en vue de » l'Un mais immédiatement « comme » Un – c'est toute la différence de la Différence par rapport au néo-platonisme en général. Toutefois, que l'Un puisse être atteint par le moyen d'une technique, fût-elle immanente à l'essence de ce qui est à atteindre, n'indiquera sans doute trop combien la Différence aura livré l'Un et la vérité, selon un geste traditionnel, aux aventures de la transcendance et de la décision.[34]

He accuses Neoplatonism and the mystics who sprouted from that tradition (he never names them, but Plotinus, Pseudo Denys and Meister Eckhart are certainly present behind these accusations) of believing the One can be approached by the use of technique. The technique he is alluding to without naming it is most probably apophatism. In assimilating the apophatism behind these texts with a technique or a technology, he arguably misses the very essence of

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[34] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.38.

these texts. Ironically enough, it would seem that it is Laruelle himself who is seeing philosophy where it is not, perpetuating just for a few lines the hallucinations he strives to call out. Laruelle, surprisingly, seems to be making the classical and common mistake of thinking negative theology's essence lies within the texts themselves. As we have already started to explain, these are empty, impossible parodies in which the text self-destructs, confronting the reader with the true essence of the text, the negative faith that caused it to exist (this will be further explained in chapter 8). *In fine*, Laruelle has a very philosophical reading of these texts and does not linger to uncover their potent impossibility, to which any kind of technique or technology is irrelevant. The argument he makes in *Les philosophies de la différence* that mysticism "n'est qu'une technologie de la pensée qui veut se prendre pour son essence"[35] can be turned against him, as he is the one mistaking the spiritual apophatism imitated by mysticism for its essence. These texts obviously work in a very different way to his own texts and having his own, self-standing theory of identity allows him not to have to resort to *simulacra* the way the other texts in this thesis do.

One thing that Laruelle does not seem to share with theories of the inner of mystical experience is the idea of an ecstatic *instant* in which the subject experiences his or her oneness with God or the One, nor the notion that such an experience should be mediated, by dramatization in Bataille or by accessing the Intellect and the Spirit first in Plotinus. When he does evoke, in *Les philosophies de la différence*, the experience of the One, he does it in these terms:

> Il s'agit de *l'Un comme expérience transcendantale irréfléchie ou donation absolument immédiate et non-thétique (de) soi.* Absolument immédiate: l'Un ou l'Indivision est donné (à) soi sans passer par la médiation d'un horizon universel, d'un néant, d'une extase ou scission, d'une « distance ». Il est strictement irréfléchi, c'est-à-dire absolument singulier et autonome comme tel avant tout universel (forme, sens, rapport, syntaxe, différence, etc.). C'est cela l'« unarité » en tant qu'elle se distingue de l' « unité »: l'unarité est inhérente immanente (à) soi, et non thétique (de) soi, alors que l'unité est toujours *et* immanente *et* transcendante, à peu de choses près identique à la Différence.[36]

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[35] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.177.
[36] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.33.

The meaning of the word 'experience' is hard to define here, and is probably a non-referent, simply a word used because of the necessity of language. If one were to choose to see the word differently, this could perhaps evoke a non-empirical, non-temporal immanent experience that is present *en puissance* and *a priori* in the subject, due to its transcendental nature, and that can be accessed in a way by the subject after the heretical *choix unilatéral*. This would of course bring Laruelle closer to gnosticism, which he often evokes as one of his main inspirations: the Gnostics, whilst being a movement that produced very diverse theologies, rallied around the idea that every human contained a piece of God inside of himself or herself. However, it may be more relevant to compare this to Meister Eckhart's theories, which have already been discussed in this chapter. If *l'Un* is a transcendental experience which has absolutely no mediation, no content or theory (non-thétique), radically separated from the World, and that can be accessed as Laruelle suggests in his later work by and through Heresy, it seems very close to Meister Eckhart's notion of the experience of God in "le fond de l'âme".[37] Meister Eckart's experience of this constant immanent co-birthing is also out of time, the dispossessed life he preaches for seems close to the immanent life of the *Christs Futurs*. One difference is perhaps that Laruelle, in his *philo-fiction* or *mystique-fiction,* does not have to deal with the realities of the phenomenal World, of what becomes of these *Sujet* as they are still physically (if not in any other way) present to the world. Whilst theories of inner experience are nearly always accompanied by narratives of falling back into the world, for instance Plotinus' surprise when he finds himself in his body again after reaching the One, Laruelle on the other hand seems to indicate that the *être-au-monde* of the heretic is reduced to nearly nothing, and that the *Christ-Futur* will never return to the World. This is why the assassination and persecution of the heretics, leading to their actual deaths, is an almost mechanical, logical consequence of the unilateral choice that made the Heretics, as if the World, acting like Occam's razor, eliminated the beings who were already almost absent from the World:

> La mort humaine ne peut être en-dernière-identité que l'effet de l'hallucination de l'Homme-en-personne opérée par le Monde, avec le refoulement consécutif du sujet. L'assassinat bien réel de l'hérétique, sa liquidation effective, est l'effet de la volonté hallucinatoire de destruction de l'en-Homme. C'est dans le crime anti-hérétique que se manifeste une mort immanente et radicale, donnée sur le mode humain du Vécu-sans-vie. Toutefois il faut distinguer entre le côté « déjà-mort » ou

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[37] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.39.

d'indifférence (au Monde) qui appartient à la Vie Nouvelle et le côté du crime-monde pourtant saisi par la Vie.[38]

The last sentence leaves the reader imagining the spectral presence of the *Sujet* who has accessed *la Vie Nouvelle*, a life of immanent struggle emancipated from the World. In Laruelle, the subject is never really present to the World ever again, which is in a way a terrifying prospect, that may cause the anguish that Bataille talks about so often. But becoming a Future-Christ is not a simple *experience*, it is a radical *transformation* and separation from a World that the subject is no longer hypnotised by. Very much like in Meister Eckhart, the subject achieves total, immanent freedom turned towards the eternity of a *futur radical* rather than an ephemeral glimpse of his or her oneness or union with the one.

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[38] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.130.

7. Dieu / le néant / la nuit

Negative theology

Trying to give a description, or at least an academic definition of the *Dieu Néant* of negative theology is of course impossible. "God" in this context is a non-referent, and as has already been explored and will be explored further, negative theology tends to parody the *via negativa* as a way to attain God rather than believing it is truly an adequate technique to do so. Furthermore, there is not one God in negative theology, in the sense that every different author who can be loosely linked to this pseudo-category has very different ideas of God; this would necessitate a thesis in history of theology or religion, which is not exactly what this thesis is aiming for. However, we can try to point out a few simple traits from the God evoked in the previous chapters, with Meister Eckhart, Pseudo-Denys and Plotinus in mind, that distinguish them all from the Catholic tradition. First of all, God is not all-powerful in the sense that she is incapable of revealing herself to the World or of manifesting herself in any way because of her immanent unity. As Meister Eckhart writes: "L'un pur et simple est de lui-même incapable de se révéler. Là réside son impuissance, et cette impuissance est l'unité elle-même; mais l'unité est justement la plus grande puissance de Dieu!"[1] This is very reminiscent of the powerlessness of the One or the Real in Laruelle, in which the One cannot manifest itself simply because it cannot perform any operations and cannot separate itself from itself:

> Une finitude absolue ou intrinsèque. Elle réside dans l'impouvoir de l'Un d'opérer sur soi pour s'auto-constituer (il est lui-même et manifesté comme tel avant toute constitution) ou bien pour se quitter et s'aliéner, se séparer de soi et, par exemple, s'identifier au Monde ou à la Philosophie[2]

To a certain extent this is applicable to the God of negative theology or at the very least in Meister Eckhart. The mystical experience being the co-birthing of God and the Subject in the uncreated utopia, there can be no intrusion into and crucially no separation from the One, at least not as One. This God is both "in" everything, indirect cause or emanation depending on the theologians, but there is certainly no notion of intentionality or creation: God is the negative

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[1] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.77.
[2] François Laruelle, 'Introduction à la vision-en-Un', *La décision philosophique*, 5 (1988), 41-61 (47-48).

condition of the existence of the universe and the way in which she "caused" the World is incomprehensible insofar as it was not by action or intention. This is what Pseudo-Denys is addressing when he writes these now famous almost aphoristic sentences: "Il n'est rien de ce qui est et on ne peut donc le connaître à travers rien de ce qui est, et il est pourtant tout en tout. Il est rien en rien et il est pourtant connu par tout en tout en même temps qu'il temps qu'il est connu par rien en rien."[3] One cannot point to an object and identify it with God, nor can one affirm it is a part of God, because God has no parts. This is perhaps one of the most interesting things to consider while studying the God of negative theology: that she is idempotent, exactly the same everywhere, and thus has no differentiated parts, or perhaps nonsummative parts. This is where Bataille's *nuit du non-savoir* becomes an interesting image to try to understand this God. God is one and is equal to herself and is perfectly idempotent: the image of a pitch dark and eternal night where nothing can be seen, experienced or thought seems quite relevant here. When the subject is co-birthed with God in the uncreated utopia, he or she is not added to God in a mathematical sense as he or she is already the same thing as God and is nothing, has no physicality of presence of any kind in that co-birthing. It is thus an idempotent operation that can be symbolised as follows: A+A=A, an operation that will be further explained in the Laruelle section of this chapter. It is to this complete idempotent darkness that Meister Eckhart seems to be referring too when he writes:

> Dois-je donc me tenir en pleine obscurité? – Oui certainement! tu ne peux absolument pas être en meilleure position que quand tu te changes entièrement en l'obscurité, en l'ignorance. […] Mais qu'est-ce que cette obscurité, comment s'appelle-t-elle? Quel est son nom?» – On ne pourrait l'appeler qu'une possibilité et une aptitude, qui pourtant ne manquent déjà pas de cette réalité qui n'a pour contenu que ceci: que *tu* deviennes *accompli*. Et c'est pourquoi de là il n'y a pas non plus de retour.[4]

In Plotinus, however, and the Neoplatonic tradition in general, it is the idea of transparency and of light that dominate conversations about something close to the idempotency of the Divine, or at the very least of the One. There are of course in Plotinus the other aforementioned levels of divinity, but the One itself remains undivided and indivisible. This difference could be seen as simply aesthetic, a reflection of historical philosophical and

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[3] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite*, Œuvres complètes*, p.145.
[4] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.62.

theological tendencies, where the One was not plunged into the *ténèbres* as the God of the early Christians was. However, one could suggest there is quite an important and significant divergence implied in the chromatic differences of these images. This particular excerpt from the *Ennéades* underlines this difference emphatically:

> Tout est transparent; rien d'obscur ni de résistant; chaque chose est visible pour chaque chose jusqu'à l'intérieur ainsi que toutes choses, car la lumière est transparente pour la lumière; et en effet chaque chose possède toutes choses en elle et voit aussi toutes choses en chaque autre, en sorte que partout toutes choses sont là, chacune est toutes et toutes sont chacune et la splendeur est sans bornes[5]

This excerpt gives the sense of an idempotency not of generalised darkness but of absolute transparency whereby an idempotent community would be formed where the notion of selfhood and difference would be abolished. This is once again surprisingly close to Laruelle's idea of an immanent, idempotent ecclesial body of *Christs-Futur*. Of course, this is a radicalisation of Plotinus, or perhaps just one of his more heretical moments that he would not consider as carrying the true content of his doctrine. Interestingly, Pseudo-Denys evokes a very similar idea but cannot seem to bring himself to make this idempotency total and void of all notion of difference, as he maintains a form of Trinitarian system:

> De la même façon, si j'ose user ici d'images sensibles et familières, les lumières de plusieurs lampes, rassemblés dans une seule pièce, bien que totalement immanentes les unes aux autres, gardent entre elles, mais en toute pureté et sans mélange, les distinctions qui leurs sont propres, unies dans leur distinction, et distinctes dans leur unité.[6]

Valéry

Valéry was not religious in the traditional sense of the term. He rejects any form of religious dogma, as Paul Glifford explains in his article 'Paul Valéry and French Catholicism:

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[5] Plotin, *Ennéades*, V,8,4,4, trad. by Pierre Hadot in *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, p.51-52.
[6] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.81-82

Recognizing the Context of Renewal': "Dissenting, Valéry stands back from religious tradition and from the very notion of a revealed truth, handed down and received".[7] The *Cahiers* reflects this: there is no God in the *Cahiers*, or at the very least no transcendent God. What there is, however, is a *néant* at the very heart of the subject, the Moi, that arguably, as already discussed, plays a similar role to that of God in negative theology, and perhaps even in some respects to the uncreated utopia. The goal here is once again not to create an artificial *rapprochement* between Valéry and negative theology: to be clear, there is no notion of cosmology in Valéry's Moi, in the sense that whilst the uncreated utopia sees the subject and God be co-birthed in their originary oneness in a form of eternal generation, there is no such notion of origin in Valéry's Moi. The Moi is not the cause, not even *en-dernière-identité*, of the World or of the *Tout*, it is simply the point of contact between the subject and the World. The Moi contains all the possibilities of the World *en puissance* but only for the subject, the Moi and the Tout are essentially separated from one another and only come together in the event of a mystical experience, both in the Plotinian model and that of the *Totum simul*. There is however something unexplainable, even impossible about this Moi: it does not only allow the subject to access the World but it also generates ideas at every instant in a form of *ex nihilo* creation:

> esprit = opérateur
>
> contenu
>
> enregistreur
>
> à la fois automate
>
> et créateur – spontané
>
> à chaque instant l'idée sort du rien – (C, III, 384)

It is important to note that it is the idea that is portrayed as coming out of this "rien", as to not give it any attributes or a precise activity to the "rien" itself. This is one of the main points that causes the *Système*'s authentic scientific ambitions to collapse: Valéry cannot find a rational explanation for the emergence of these ideas from the absolute nothingness of the *Moi*. This is highly problematic given that these ideas are not only the fundamental basis of the subject's *vie mentale*, but also, in the theory of the *présent absolu*, the only unit of knowledge to have any epistemological worth. The generation of these ideas is both unexplainable and unobservable,

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[7] Paul Glifford, ' Paul Valéry and French Catholicism: Recognizing the Context of Renewal', in *God's Mirror: Renewal and Engagement in French Catholic Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. by Katherine Davies and Toby Garfitt, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp.50-68, (p.50).

at least from a rational standpoint, as any observation will only have a truth-value in the very instant of that same observation, and all subsequent discourse will of course fail to translate said observation, that even if it were possible would by then have also dissolved in the mind of the observant. Whilst the scale of this hugely problematic impossibility is far smaller than that of the God in negative theology, the way in which it functions is very similar, as this unexplainable generation of ideas coming from the empty Moi is in a way the origin of everything in *la vie mentale*, and perhaps of everything that is human. In this sense, and whilst the word God rarely appears at all in the first *Cahiers*, there is an unfathomable generation of the vital principle of human life coming from a void inside the subject without the subject being responsible for this generation: "Je ne suis rien. Je ne vaux rien. Je ne puis rien. En moi, le grand travail s'est accompli." (C, X, 29). *Je* is absolutely nothing, and yet something is at work inside the individual, a constant immanent generation that he or she can neither observe or understand, at least not rationally. Even the result of this generation, these ideas, are inaccessible to the subject, who cannot exist inside the présent absolu nor learn anything from it. Thus, when Valéry asserts that "Tout est instant", he is effectively condemning the subject to being forever isolated from any form of authentic knowledge and from the very vital principle that enables consciousness and life, except once again in the case of a mystical experience, where one can "jouir de toutes [ses] pensées en même temps" and experience complete transparency to oneself, including the unfathomable generation of ideas. The Moi, in its generative emptiness, its fertile negativity, as Gusdorf writes, "forme d'une totalité, ici déclarée comme inconnaissable, off limits de la connaissance rigoureuse, pourtant seule digne d'intérêt".[8]

Without Valéry ever making the comparison explicitly, it would seem that the Moi acts as a form of purely negative God or principle. He does not name, of course, the origin of this generation, and why should he? It would be purely speculative, without any epistemological basis whatsoever. The very existence of this *ex nihilo* generation is strictly unprovable, and yet Valéry *knows* it exists. A form of faith is slowly appearing on the horizon of Valéry's thought, that will be examined in chapter 9. Valéry is not oblivious to that, and with time references to God and mysticism become slightly more explicit, as he recognizes the closeness between these ideas and his own experience. In the seventeenth *Cahier* for instance he asks "Un dieu tout primitif, une idole sans traits, sans membres, sans voix. Négation simple – ou affirmation?" (CXVII, 491). It is this paradox that he will never fully manage to grasp: how can *nothingness*

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[8] Georges Gusdorf , *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie*, p.173-174.

be ontologically fertile? It is this impossible realisation that he evokes in his tenth *Cahier*, reflecting on this discovery that was brought onto him by the initial ambitions of his *Système*:

> L'étude de l'esprit amène à des aspects qui seraient intolérables en physique:
> Ainsi: action de ce qui n'est pas. Rôle positif de ce qui n'a pas lieu.
> Cette notion n'est pas étrangère à celle de temps. Souvent ce qui est ne serait pas
> ce qu'il est s'il n'empêchait autre chose qu'il n'est pas.
> Le « néant ». Comment il s'introduit dans nos calculs. Néant d'(x).
> Invention de cette notion.
> Négation et absence. (CX, 157)

Gusdorf also offers a very insightful analysis of the peculiar modalities of Valéry's *néant* and its impossible positivity:

> Le néant dont il est question n'est pas le néant d'un nihilisme, qui s'acharne, par les justifications les plus diverses et les plus saugrenues, à faire le vide de l'être... Non pas un néant privatif et négatif, dans une fuite éperdue pour échapper à la responsabilité d'assumer une vie personnelle; mais un néant positif, par « convention momentanée », riche de toutes les virtualités, et que les lie l'une après l'autre que pour mieux les conserver toutes. Le zéro selon Valéry serait donc la négation pure et simple de tout, le germe de tout, la cellule générative et inconditionnée à partir de laquelle se développeront les conditionnements de tout.[9]

The invention, as Valéry puts it himself, of this positive *néant* ("Invention de cette notion"), as well as his relation to the mystical experience explored in chapter 6, makes it obvious that there is a form of mysticism in Valéry and in his work. It is perhaps in *La lettre de Madame Emilie Teste* that he confesses somewhat to this mysticism, as through her description of her husband, Valéry is arguably describing himself:

> Alors j'ai dit à Mr. L'abbé que mon mari me faisait penser bien souvent à un mystique sans Dieu...
> -Quelle lueur ! A dit l'abbé, – quelles lueurs, les femmes quelquefois tirent des

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[9] Georges Gusdorf, *Lignes de vie 2: Auto-bio-graphie*, p.179-180.

simplicités de leur impression et des incertitudes du langage! »

Mais aussitôt à soi-même il se répliqua:

Mystique sans Dieu...! Lumineux non-sens!... Voilà qui est bientôt dit!... Fausse clarté...

 Un mystique sans Dieu, Madame, mais il n'est point de mouvement concevable qui n'ait sa direction et son sens, et qui n'aille enfin quelque part!... Mystique sans Dieu!... Pourquoi pas un Hypogriffe, un Centaure! »

– « Pourquoi pas un Sphinx, Monsieur l'abbé ?[10]

The expression *mystique sans Dieu* seems to suit Valéry perfectly, as he never uses the word God to explain this *néant*, and yet it is a non-place, perhaps an uncreated utopia in which the subject is mystically birthed. This expression is meant to set him aside from any kind of traditional religion, but it would be misguided to believe it separates him from the other theologians and authors studied in this thesis. This title of *mystique sans Dieu* could in essence be given to any of them: Bataille for instance continually asserts his desire for a *tabula rasa*, a mystical experience free from all dogma, where the mere fact of naming God brings too many cultural and historical connotations to the table for the experience not to be altered. For Meister Eckhart, God is the word he uses *by default* because of his rather loose affiliation to the Roman Catholic tradition, but he too is without the God that Valéry is evoking here, the God of priests, abbots and the Church, an institutionalized, authoritarian God. In this sense, their "God" is the same, an unfathomable *néant* that can be experienced only when all that is positive has been destroyed. The abbot's rather frightened or at least agitated response to Emilie Teste, Valéry is in a way symbolising the response that both religious and scientific institutions would have to his mysticism, knowingly placing M.Teste and himself on the side of the heretics.

Bataille

There is undeniably a form of absolute negativity on the horizon of Bataille's work, an absolute nothingness with which the subject is innately one and that he or she experiences in the ecstatic, radically kenotic instant of the *Expérience intérieure*. This absolute nothingness can obviously not be subject to any form of positive knowledge or epistemological discourse: "On ne peut

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[10] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.48.

parler de la connaissance qu'à Dieu de lui-même sinon par négations – négations suffocantes – images de langues coupées. Or on abuse ainsi de soi-même, on passe d'un plan à l'autre: suffocation, silence révèlent de l'expérience et non du discours."[11] The profound silence of the ecstatic experience can only be experienced and never be evoked: any tongue that tries to venture that far is cut off, made speechless and sent back to the World and its empty non-referents. The mere use of the word God, as previously evoked, is problematic for Bataille; he however still occasionally uses it, as well as other non-referents that will be explored shortly. This is also because the word "God" is a name given to her by a certain tradition, by certainly not by himself to himself: for Bataille, God can have no reflexivity and no self-conscience. Similarly than in negative theology, God is pure ignorance, does not possess knowledge or attributes:

> Dieu ne trouve de repos en rien et ne se rassasie de rien. Chaque existence est menacée, est déjà dans le néant de Son insatiabilité. Et pas plus qu'Il ne peut s'apaiser, Dieu ne peut *savoir* (le savoir est repos). Il ignore comme Il a soif. Et comme il *ignore*, il s'ignore lui-même. S'il se révélait à Lui-même, il Lui faudrait se reconnaître comme Dieu, mais il ne peut même un instant l'accorder. Il n'a de connaissance que de Son néant, c'est pourquoi il est athée, profondément: il cesserait aussitôt d'être Dieu (il n'y aurait plus au lieu de Son affreuse absence qu'une présence imbécile, hébétée, s'Il se voyait comme tel).[12]

The statement "Dieu est athée" is the logical conclusion of such a negative God, that has no knowledge and no intentionality. This explains in part Bataille's revulsion for the word, because an entirely negative God cannot be named with a word that signifies a form of hierarchy, of transcendent verticality, whilst Bataille's God is nothing and entirely immanent. Another reason Bataille might be unsatisfied with the word "God" is that is gives a sense of self-containment, an entity in the strict metaphysical sense of the term. This is why, in *L'Expérience intérieure* in particular, he uses the non-referent *la nuit*, short for *la nuit du non-savoir*. The image this non-referent creates is interesting because the only information it gives is darkness. The night is the absence of all possible referentiality and knowledge, engulfing the subject that experiences his or her immanent oneness with this night. It is everything that is not apparent, the absolute nothingness hidden behind the phenomenal world:

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[11] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.126.
[12] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.121.

la « nuit » où je me sais jeté, où pendant ce temps je tombe, avec moi tout ce qui est, cette vérité que je connais, dont je ne puis douter, je suis comme un enfant devant elle, elle me fuit, je demeure aveugle. J'appartiens pour l'instant au domaine des objets que j'utilise et demeure étranger à ce que j'écris. Être dans la nuit, sombrer dans la nuit, sans même avoir assez de force pour le voir, se savoir dans cette obscurité fermée, et malgré elle voir clair.[13]

There seems to be a contradiction when Bataille writes "malgré elle, voir clair"; surely, this absolute nothingness, this absolutely negative perfect pitch blackness cannot allow the subject to see even in a metaphorical way? This is where *la communication* comes into play: the subject experiences his or her oneness with the night and can "see", in the same way that Plotinus uses the lexical field of vision, because it is transparent to itself and to *la nuit*, they are the same thing and thus communicate. This communication is close to a form of non-verbal, non-physical ecstatic communion inside of pure negativity. What the subject "sees" is nothing but *la nuit*, which is the only thing there is to be "seen", it is a limitless nothing beyond which there cannot be anything else. Bataille is careful to never evoke this *nuit*, or for that matter any other of his non-referents as generative or being linked to any form of causality: the separation from the World is absolutely total, and in that sense these texts and the subject are the only possible breaches between the two.

This notion of something behind the phenomenal world, encompassing the totality of the possible and the impossible finds one of its most interesting expressions in the non-referent 'LE FOND DES MONDES' in *Le Coupable*:

Il ne s'ensuit pas qu'à travers la déchirure, j'accède à l'au-delà que j'appelle, en termes vagues, « LE FOND DES MONDES ». | Termes irrecevables, mais qui, vagues à l'excès, doivent le rester: jamais ce caractère vague, en effet, ne s'atténuera qu'à l'aide de précision négatives. / En premier lieu: | « LE FOND DES MONDES » n'est pas Dieu. Définitivement, ce « FOND DES MONDES » entrevu, la possibilité de stagnation immuable s'annule qu'annonçait un vocable dérisoire…; |en second lieu: | « LE FOND DES MONDES » n'oppose rien à ce mouvement vertigineux,

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[13] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.59.

catastrophique, emportant avec nous dans l'abîme tout ce qui, d'une immensité profonde, effrayante, émerge – ou pourrait émerger – de solide. |(La vision d'un « fond des mondes » est en vérité celle d'une catastrophe généralisée, que jamais rien de limitera… La vision de « LA MORT DE DIEU » n'en diffère pas qui, violemment, nous heurte au sommeil théologique, et qui répond seule, en définitive, à l'exigence la plus honnête.)[14]

The expression itself is very interesting: the word "le fond" expresses something that is at the limit, the lowest, darkest point, hidden from the phenomenal world, these "mondes" that generally ignore its existence. Here, in his negative attempt to if not describe, at least evoke it, Bataille seems to definitively sweep the non-referent God aside ("« LE FOND DES MONDES » n'est pas Dieu") for another non-referent's whose metaphorical spatialisation is revelatory of a similar train of thought that *la nuit*: God is one, has a shape, is loaded culturally and historically, whilst the pure negativity Bataille is evoking cannot take the risk of being confused for any other kind of God, positive, incarnate, omnipotent, vengeful and all the characteristics God can be given in the various monotheistic religions. This non-referent is also reminiscent of Meister Eckhart's *le fond de l'âme* and could play a similar role, impossibly attempting to refer this uncreated utopia minus the idea of perpetual co-birthing of the subject and God: *la nuit est totale*, and «LE FOND DES MONDES» is experienced as a sort of negative and cataclysmic revelation, or perhaps awakening: that what lies behind the World, at the extreme of the possible, is nothing, pure negativity, and provides no answers. This is where there is a marked difference with Meister Eckhart: for Bataille, the uncreated utopia does not make the question of the death of the subject irrelevant. Death is a finality, and leads to the exact same thing as the ecstatic instant of the *Expérience intérieure*, except that instant becomes eternity, and the subject is lost forever in *la nuit*, in «LE FOND DES MONDES». This is why «LE FOND DES MONDES» also strikes fear in the subject, as it is simultaneously an experience of the subject's terrifying finitude, the end of all possibilities and an experience of all the possible and the impossible combined in an ecstatic moment that always marks the subject with an wound that will never heal:

Dieu terrifie s'il n'est plus la même chose que la raison (Pascal, Kierkegaard). Mais s'il n'est plus la même chose que la raison, je suis devant l'absence de Dieu. Et cette

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[14] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.58.

absence se confondant avec le dernier aspect du monde – qui n'a plus rien d'utilitaire – n'ayant d'autre part rien à voir avec les rétributions ou des châtiments *futurs*: à la fin, la question se pose encore:

– *…la peur…oui la peur, à laquelle atteint seulement l'illimité* de la pensée…la peur, oui, mais la peur de quoi…?

La réponse remplit l'univers, elle emplit l'univers en moi:

…évidemment la peur de Rien… »[15]

This 'Rien', this '*Dieu-Rien*' is feared not because, like in the Old Testament, she is vengeful and prone to acts of sheer miraculous violence, but because this 'Rien' is the negative revelation of humans' oneness with nothing, that will ultimately be actualised permanently when the subject dies.

Laruelle

For Laruelle, The One has no relation of generation or of topology to anything, contrarily to most apophatic traditions: " Et très souvent j'emploie cette formule qui évidemment choque les philosophes et particulièrement les platoniciens et les plotiniens: ce n'est pas l'UN qui est au-delà de l'Être, c'est l'Être qui est au-delà de l'UN. C'est l'Être qui est l'autre de l'UN".[16] It is radically separated with the World and being but with no separation, it is forclosed to all else, but it is everything else that is separated from it and not the contrary:

L'Un en son essence n'est pas transcendant, il est *absolument* séparé de l'étant et de l'Être et il l'est *seulement par son immanence réelle en soi*. Ce qui veut dire: ce n'est pas en réalité l'Un qui est séparé de l'être, c'est l'Être qui est séparé de l'Un; ce n'est pas l'Un qui est l'Autre de la Différence, c'est la Différence qui est l'autre de l'Un.[17]

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[15] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.13.

[16] Jacques Derrida and François Laruelle, 'Controverse sur la possibilité d'une science de la philosophie', *La décision philosophique*, 5 (1988) pp.63-76, p.74

[17] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.170.

It cannot be subjected to any operations nor is it at operation itself: "Le réel ne tolère aucune opération et n'en est pas une".[18] It would be possible to continue in a long string of quotes, describing different angles of the One from *Les philosophies de la différence.* However, there is something strange about these definitions, namely how philosophical they sound. This makes sense, given that *Les philosophies de la différence* is, as Laruelle writes himself, "un projet à l'usage des philosophes".[19] At this stage of Laruelle's work, his non-philosophical was arguably less developed, giving way to more philosophical-*looking* texts, whilst they were already one foot in radical non-philosophy. One of the clearest descriptions of the One in that specific period of Laruelle's writing come from his essay "Introduction à la vision-en-Un" where he writes:

> Une identité non-thétique en général, c'est-à-dire à la fois non-décisionnelle (de) soi et non-positionnelle (de) soi: sans volonté pour essence, sans topologie pour existence. Identité donnée primitivement avec elle-même, par elle-même, *comme* elle-même: elle est sur le mode du comme (telle) ou du *comment*, mais tels que ceux-ci n'expriment plus une activité, une pratique, mais soient présupposés par celles-ci. Identité intégralement donnée comme le minimum transcendantal, ou la pétition minimale de réalité – c'est-à-dire la réalité que suppose toute pétition en général – et non pas *acquise* ni même « originairement acquise » à l'aide d'une scission ou d'une opération répétée de manifestation. L'Un n'est pas un processus ni le résultat d'un processus, mais ce que l'un et l'autre ont déjà supposé pour seulement être ce qu'ils sont – pour l'homme, c'est-à-dire *comme* homme ou humains.[20]

The One has no physicality, to intentionality, is neither a process nor the result of a process, but rather the radical immanence necessary to any process. It has neither beginning nor end and it is entirely removed from time and cannot and will not be integrated into any kind of hierarchical structure. Laruelle does not use the word '*néant*' specifically because of the word's metaphysical bagage, in particular in the 20th century with the likes of Sartre and Heidegger. He also fears that the word '*néant*' as attributed to the One would make it enter into a dialectic of negativity and positivity, yet another philosphical dyad he wants to denounce and avoid. There is no recuperating this One into any tradition, that all is more or less subtle way perpetuate

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[18] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.173.
[19] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.29.
[20] François Laruelle, 'Introduction à la vision-en-Un', *La décision philosophique*, 5, p.46.

the practice of *le mixte*.

In his later works, there is a sense that this conceptual, one could suggest nearly philosophical rigour loosens up somewhat, where the Real is implied in more dynamic thought processes that aim to impact the subject and the World. In *Le Christ futur* for instance, without being named *une fois chaque fois*, the One is the immanent force behind the Heretics:

> La force de l'hérésie, ce qui déchaîne la vindicte et le crime, c'est son abstraction hyper-spirituelle, plus encore son être-abstrait-sans-abstraction, sa non-conscience élevée au rang de cause nécessaire mais insuffisante, l'absence qui est sans absence-de-principe et pire que le néant philosophique ou que l'an-archie juive, plus proche du néant mystique comme le suggèrent des formules comme Homme-en-Homme ou Un-en-Un mais sans se confondre vraiment avec lui.[21]

The "néant mystique" is the closest point of comparison he has to the real; although they do not correspond exactly to the same things for Laruelle. However, it is clear that *Le Christ futur* implies a form of invisible visibility for the Real through the figure of the *Christ-Futur*, as Dubliet explains:

> This is to say, the One and the messianic subject do not form a dualism, but rather what Laruelle names "a unilateral duality": the messiah is the One as it is revealed for the World. Without possible return or conversion back to any ontological homeland, the messianic subject is a "unilateral existence, a uni-que face, stranger to the World". Rather than engaging with the World in a face-to-face struggle, the figure of the messianic is essentially one of exposure, a "being-for-the-World-without-the-World". It is the messianic "weak force" of the Vision-in-One insofar as it voids the self-sufficiency of the World, marking the destitution of its structures of authority and domination.[22]

The use of the word "revealed" here may lead to some confusion: there is no positive revelation of the One to the world. The *Christs-Futurs* are to be seen perhaps more like invisible

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[21] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.74.

[22] Alex Dubilet, 'Neither God, Nor World': On the One Foreclosed to Transcendence" in *Palgrave Communications*, 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2015.27 >.

manifestations of the One to the World, and that the World will attempt to hide by assassinating and silencing them at all costs. Yet this "revelation" is made essentially *en-lutte*, in the immanent struggle against and for the World, to free it from itself. One could argue that it is in texts like *Le Christ futur* and *Christo-fiction* that the reader can intuitively get a sense of the One through a non-discursive, non-intellectual experience. Trying to define the Real is definitely a flawed approach in the sense that it is impossible to hierarchise those descriptions, that will have no epistemological value and perhaps in a sense very little non-philosophical value, as John Ó Maoilearca notes: "For Laruelle, there is no explaining what the Real "really is", because every thought, *be it Deleuzian or not, be it philosophical or not,* is as good or as bad an explanation as any other – for they are all (nonsummative) material parts."[23] This might be why the later texts, steering away from the philosophical reflexes of direct and technical definitions, may allow the Reader to intuitively or at the very least non-discursively understand the role of the Real in Laruelle's impossible axiomatic system. The Real is present in *Le Christ futur*, *Christo-fiction* and *Mystique non-philosophique* but never as a standalone non-referent, rather as the condition of all of Laruelle's heretic projects and of the messianic emancipatory emergence of the *Christs Futurs*.

One of the most interesting and perhaps obscure texts written around the Real by Laruelle is a foray into more poetic grounds, in a poem published in *La décision philosophique 5* entitled 'Du noir univers dans les fondations humaines de la couleur', where the *Noir* can be seen as the total immanence of the One, that cannot be seen or understood:

> Au commencement il y a Noir –| l'homme et l'Univers plutôt que le philosophe et le Monde. | Autour du philosophe tout devient| Monde et lumière; autour de l'homme tout devient Univers et opacité. | L'homme, qui emporte l'Univers avec lui, est condamné, sans qu'il en connaisse la raison, au Monde et à la Terre, et ni le Monde ni la Terre ne peuvent lui dire pourquoi: seul l'Univers lui répond en étant noir et muet. | Noir n'est pas dans l'objet ou dans le Monde, il est ce que l'homme voit dans l'homme, et ce dans quoi l'homme voit l'homme. | Noir n'est pas seulement ce que l'homme voit dans l'homme, il est la seule « couleur » inséparable de l'étendue hyperintelligible de l'Univers. | Solitude de l'homme-sans-horizon qui voit le Noir dans le Noir. | L'Univers est sourd et aveugle, nous ne pouvons que l'aimer et l'assister. L'homme est l'être qui assiste l'Univers.[24]

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[23] John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal: Laruelle and nonhuman philosophy*, p.8.

[24] François Laruelle, 'Du noir univers dans les fondations humaines de la couleur', *La décision philosophique*, 5

"Noir" here seems to be a metaphorical representation of the Real, as it is what humans can see only in humans, that are fundamentally one with the Real. He traces a form of fictional cosmology of the universe, in which this "noir" represents the immanent life without a why that is "sourd et aveugle", that does not answer humans insofar as it is inaccessible through the means of philosophy and rationality. He even writes: "Le *noir univers* est l'opacité du réel ou la « couleur » qui le rend invisible. | Aucune lumière n'a jamais vu le noir univers. | Noir est antérieur à l'absence de lumière, que cette absence soit l'ombre où elle s'éteint, qu'elle soit son néant ou son positif contraire. Le noir univers n'est pas une lumière négative. |Aucune lumière n'a jamais vue l'univers"[25] signalling the complete impossibility of science and of philosophy as ways of penetrating that blackness, that is One with the subject when the subject actualises this oneness and becomes a Future Christ. The comparison with Bataille's "nuit de la non-savoir" is of course interesting here, as both use the same imagery for a non-referent. However, for Laruelle to be One with *la nuit*, to be *la nuit* is to participate to this immanent struggle removed from time as *Christ-Futur* and part of the ecclesial body that is, in a way, *la nuit.* For Bataille, on the other hand, the subject only enters the night in the ecstatic instant of the *Expérience intérieure*, and forever when he or she dies. This image is also interesting insofar as it metaphorically represents the idempotency of the One: somewhat transgressing the leitmotiv of light as associated to the Divine in both the Catholic and the neoplatonic traditions, this *Noir* here that is everywhere and identical to itself everywhere is a poetic depiction of the idempotency of the One as shown in part 5 by the immanent destiny of the *Sujets-Christs*.

(1988), pp.107-112, p.108-109.

[25] François Laruelle, 'Du noir univers dans les fondations humaines de la couleur', *La décision philosophique*, p.109.

8. Reading / Writing

Negative theology

The ontological status of the *corpus* of negative theology, as already explored in previous chapters, is both problematic and ambiguous, these texts being empty of any truth-value and being written as fictions, as a series of parodic *simulacra*. If the mere existence of these impossible texts must lead to an overhaul of our way of thinking about categories such as the impossible, they are still texts that are destined to fail, and knowingly so, each sign, voluntarily dissimilar or not, constantly signifying its own deficiency. One must question however the motivations around writing such a text: to signify a heretical approach? To poetically represent God's ineffability? The obvious and intuitive reaction in front of the God of nothingness is, of course, silence: as nothing can be said of him, silence is the only way of not lying, even in a way of not blaspheming. As Pseudo Denys points out in *Les Noms Divins*, discourses about this mystical experience are sparse precisely because of this silence that should logically ensue from the ineffable experience of being One with an unfathomable God: "maints théologiens ne l'ont pas louée seulement en l'appelant invisible et indescriptible, mais encore inexplorable et indépistable, car ils n'ont laissé aucune trace, ceux-là qui ont pénétré jusqu'à sa secrète infinité".[1] God, it would seem, cannot be approached in any given intellectual or discursive manner. In his sermon *Du renouvellement de l'esprit,* Meister Eckhart even vehemently, and rather ironically given the prolixity of his own work, enjoins the reader or the listener not to talk about God: "Dieu est sans nom: car de lui personne ne peut rien dire ni connaître. […] C'est pourquoi, dit saint Augustin, le plus beau de ce qu'un homme peut dire de Dieu et de savoir se taire par pure sagesse de richesse intérieure. Donc tais-toi et ne radote pas sur Dieu ! Car en bavardant sur Dieu tu mens, tu commets un péché. Si donc tu veux être sans péché et parfait, ne radote pas sur Dieu!"[2] In the light of these two passages, one might start to think that these texts are simply motivated by an egotistical desire to be different, to stand out, actualising an irrepressible desire for hubris and controversy. However, the explanation is thankfully not that simple.

The first hypothesis to explore is actually evoked in the quote taken earlier from Pseudo

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[1] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite*, Œuvres complètes*, p.69
[2] Maître Eckhart, *Œuvres*, p.131

Denys' *Les Noms Divins*, "ils ne laissent pas de trace";[3] the notion of trace here seems highly relevant: without a trace, however false, empty and inadequate, there is no way of signifying the existence of spiritual apophatism, the ensuing mystical experience and perhaps more radically the uncreated utopia. This is exactly what Derrida is pointing towards in *Sauf le nom* when he evokes the status of this problematic *corpus*: "Quelque trace reste à même ce *corpus*, elle devient ce *corpus* comme *survivance* de l'apophase (plus que vie et plus que mort)".[4] The only reason for writing the text would thus be to leave a trace that would indicate an undescribable event took place, leading to a parody of it, given the impossibility of representing it. This hypothesis, at least considered on its own, seems quite dangerous epistemologically, in the sense that it exposes negative theology to the risk of being in turn copied, falsified, simulated and ultimately counterfeit. How is the reader supposed to know if there is actually an "event" behind the parody, behind the trace? As Derrida remarks, producing false negative theology would thus be incredibly easy, and could be as simple as writing a series a theological sounding negations:

> Ce que nous identifions sous ces deux mots {théologie négative}, aujourd'hui, n'est-ce pas d'abord un corpus, à la fois ouvert et fermé, donné, ordonné, un ensemble d'énoncés reconnaissables soit à leur air de famille (family ressemblance), soit parce qu'il relèvent d'un type logico-discursif régulier dont la récurrence se prête à une formalisation? Cette formalisation peut devenir mécanique...

> – D'autant plus mécanisable et facilement reproductible, falsifiable, exposée à la contrefaçon et à la fausse monnaie, que l'énoncé de théologie négative se vide par définition, par vocation, de toute plénitude intuitive. Kénose du discours. Si l'on suit une règle de type phénoménologique pour distinguer entre une intuition pleine et une visée vide ou symbolique, oublieuse de la perception originaire qui la soutient, alors les énoncés apophatiques sont, ils doivent être du côté du vide et donc de la répétition mécanique, voire purement verbale des phrases sans vouloir-dire intentionnel actuel ou plein.[5]

It would thus seem that the reader would have a number of unavoidable obstacles in his

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[3] Pseudo-Denys L'Aéropagite, *Œuvres complètes*, p.69.
[4] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.55.
[5] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.46-47.

or her quest to adequately read negative theology: without any explicit instructions or indications, the reader must first be sure not to mistake the text for a didactic indication of what must be done to reach the mystical experience; he or she must then realise it is a *simulacrum*, and even if he or she does, there is still the danger that this text might be "fake", a parody of a parody. It is perhaps this lack of pedagogy and of metadiscursivity that has led negative theology to being read and interpreted in inaccurate and overly simplistic ways so many times. The lack of unity of this *corpus*, its profound heterogeneity and the absence of any established school of thought or theological undercurrent these authors might identify with is also to blame for this, as no reading method or technique can be developed if these texts aren't connected and made to interact with each other.

The idea of the trace, although not irrelevant, is largely insufficient as it emerges from an exclusively intellectual and logical apprehension of these texts. If these texts were simply traces, all they would be doing is signifying to the reader "x happened", without the reader being able to approach or comprehend what x is, and for that matter to have any way of measuring a texts authenticity. When considering why these texts were written, it is impossible to dissociate the writing process from the intended reception: these texts are empty vessels, and in Derrida's word negative theology "naît de rien et se tend vers le rien"[6] and yet they cannot be reduced exclusively to this excessive, parodic aspect, the grotesque trace of an ineffable event. There is an organic nature to these texts, that can be activated by the ideal reader (this ideal reader, however marginal, must exist, or at the very least this is the working hypothesis behind the writing of these texts). He or she must first, as aforementioned, apprehend the text intellectually and understand its parodic nature, that in no case is aiming to achieve truthful representatively. Once this is understood, the text does what it is programmed to do: self destruct in a form of *verbal apoptosis*, the text itself disappearing completely in a "auto-destruction onto-logico-sémantique interne".[7] This is yet another form of kenosis, textual kenosis, where the text cancels itself out, actualising its innate emptiness. The reader is thus encouraged, maybe even forced to go beyond the words, beyond the text, and in a way to forget it ever existed, and be confronted to the *energeia* that made the text appear, that is the cause for its existence in the world. Once stripped of the text, the reader is exposed to the radical negative faith that enabled this impossible text to exist. How this exposure unfolds is of course as inscrutable as the

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[6] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.28.
[7] Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, p.28.

mystical experience itself, and is not an experience that is describable, even in a purely phenomenological way; the reader is left with the impression of having gone where he or she should not have been able to go. This is what makes these texts completely unfalsifiable, as this negative faith cannot be simulated, and this reading experience can only be caused by the negative faith of the authors. It creates a form of radical intimacy between the reader and the writer, by which the reader is exposed to the writer's vital principle, this negative faith that is by no means *transmitted* by these texts. This corpus is not an exercise in proselytism, it is not an attempt to convert anyone to this negative faith, nor would that even be possible, given its fundamental non-discursive, non-intellectual nature. What it does is introduce the reader to the possibility of this faith, something that would otherwise be unthinkable, and perhaps open a door, create a desire to explore what could not even have been imagined in the moments preceding the act of reading. There is in a way a form of non-textual performativity at work, whereby the reader will be *changed* by this particular reading experience in an unfathomable and invisible way.

Valéry

"Pourquoi mon obligation de traduire presque tout en mon langage?"(C, III, 486) Valéry asks at the end of the third *Cahier*. This question is of the highest importance, especially given the vehement criticism of language Valéry constructs during the whole lifespan of the *Cahiers*. For Valéry, language is either an approximation of the truth, which means that it bears a certain resemblance to it, or has no epistemological value at all; the latter hypothesis is prioritised especially in regard to the initial project of the *Cahiers,* to analyse and explain *la vie mentale*, given that *faits mentaux* cannot be represented by language. Langage is a symptom of a certain human sufficiency: "Le mot comme marque du consentement universel" (CIV, 201). Every word is a reminder that language is an arbitrary convention accepted by all out of the necessity of exteriority and communication. This means that nothing can be represented adequately with language, leading to cataclysmic epistemological and perhaps even spiritual consequences, as nothing can really ever be signified through language, human communication being reduced to what Merleau-Ponty would call *la parole parlée*, a language that only repeats itself within conventional, superficial boundaries and can never create anything semantically new. This superficiality is reflected for Valéry is almost every part of human reality:

Donc au plan inconnu – le phénomène – original – introduit – et l'invention pure. Tout le reste des systèmes de correspondance, transformation et symboles –

Ainsi la plupart énorme des occupations humaines se jouent à la surface. La mathématique a pour objet unique l'étude complète de la liaison – et de la représentation. Le temps en est l'objet le plus subtil et presque encore vierge. Écrire ou noter aussi purement que possible, rapproche – La faculté de représentation et de traduction, où mène-t-elle? (C, IV, 64)

This is especially frustrating for Valéry, who quickly realises that words only have a true meaning relatively to the conventional semantic circuit that they belong to. He thus distinguishes the relative value from the absolute value of words:

Du sens absolu ou relatif des mots. Ainsi: infini est concevable et inconcevable – au regard absolu c'est un mot nul, inexistant –
au sens relatif il désigne une opération en train de se faire par rapport à une chose fixe.

Or au sens absolu il ne correspond qu'à des faits mentaux purement accidentels ou illusoires, dont on voit vite la faiblesse du lien avec lui.
Au sens relatif, il peut toujours se remplacer par une formule où il n'intervient pas.

Or, il est une négation.
J'induis qu'en présence des négations soit données par un mot, soit par une phrase il faut chercher son analyse de ce point de vue – absolu ou relatif – (absolu veut dire ici correspondant à un fait mental déterminé – autre que verbal) (C, III, 294)

Throughout the *Cahiers*, Valéry is confronted to this difficulty of having to write with these *mots nuls* or non-referents. This frustration is translated textually by the emergence of false deictics scattered across the *Cahiers*, signs of his frustration in the face of his powerlessness to properly represent anything of interest:

...Tel! Je suis!
Tel! Est le Monde!
Telle! La Connaissance.
Telle est mon explication:

D'abord je me décris, je me résous en quelques faits fréquents, typiques – Ces propriétés de moi, qu'elles servent à toute l'Explication.

  Voilà les limites. (C, III, 488)

This anaphoric repetition of "Tel" is followed by concepts or non-referents he is unable to write about correctly, such as the Moi ("Je suis"). For Valéry, writing is always considered as an epistemological and sometimes spiritual loss, by which the word always transforms and betrays what it is meant to signify. This is perhaps why M.Teste writes only for himself, contrarily to Valéry that has to quench his thirst for exteriority and recognition. This is what Valéry means when he writes in the *Préface à la soirée avec M.Teste* "L'acte d'écrire demande toujours un certain « sacrifice de l'intellect »."[8] The *Cahiers* cannot thus be anything else but a simulacrum, a deeply heterogeneous compilation of deficient fragments, pretending to represent what Valéry knows is fundamentally unfathomable.

Whilst Valéry's strong opinions on language and writing have been made clear here and in previous chapters have been made clear, one question remains: how is one supposed to read the *Cahiers*? The specificity of the *Cahiers* in this regard is that they weren't meant to be read, at least in the first years they were written. This partially explains why the text is so cryptic and labyrinthic, as Nathalie Celeyrette-Pietri points out: " Dans la multitude des micro-analyses qui s'effritent ou tournent court, des intuitions choyées et prolongées, des impasses, des retours, la lecture est d'abord déconcertée."[9] The experience of reading the *Cahiers* will at least at first be vastly different from that of negative theology, Bataille or Laruelle because there is no direction, no easy trajectory for the reader to follow: the text explodes into thousands of infinitesimal considerations that the reader must put back together in order to attempt to create a sense of unity or progression. To define the specificities of the *Cahiers*, Nathalie Celeyrette-Pietri suggests a very interesting notion "*débris d'un futur*: matériaux plus ou moins bruts et compulsivement amassés d'un édifice impossible, éléments d'un dénombrement qui voulait se résumer en une simple formule et s'est découvert indéfini. Ce sont les restes ou les traces d'une pensée qui chercha peut-être vainement les règles de son jeu."[10] Intuitively, one would perhaps argue that the *Cahiers* would seem to be the *débris d'un présent*, all of these deficient signs manifesting Valéry's hidden negative faith, pushing him in this lifelong exercise of *simulacrum*.

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[8] Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p.8.
[9] Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, *Valéry et le Moi*, p.1.
[10] Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, *Valéry et le Moi*, p.1.

However, this notion of the *Cahiers* being oriented towards a future is perhaps most relevant to the act of reading the *Cahiers*. The writing itself is not important, and it is not what is being falsely represented in the present of the writing (which is not of course the *présent absolu*) that constitutes the essence of the reading experience, but rather what comes after, once the text has undergone its *verbal apoptosis*. The *Cahiers* not being written for any reception does not mean this process of self-destruction of the text does not operate: its only condition is the negative faith at the origin of the text. The *Cahiers* are oriented towards their own future, one where the text itself is destined to disappear, leaving the reader, even if he or she was not programmed, theorised or imagined by Valéry, to be confronted to what is left, the ultimate horizon of the text which is negative faith. This is what Valéry seems to suggest when he writes "Savoir lire – La phrase signifie quelque chose, mais il faut la lire avec de tels yeux – qu'on lise aussi la signification de l'existence de Cette phrase –" (C, IV, 252). What the existence of these impossible *Cahiers* signifies is the failure of science and rationality, equipped with their epistemologically flawed languages, in the face of the impossible generation of ideas by the empty void of the Moi. It also signifies the existence of an ineffable negative faith that is the cause of the *Cahiers*, where Valéry's apophatic tendencies radicalise themselves into a concrete, almost physical *energeia* actualised throughout the 29000 pages of this massive and still largely unexplored corpus.

Bataille

Bataille's writing is locked in a constant performative paradox: he claims the inner experience and God to be ineffable, criticising language for its powerlessness and yet writes extensively (albeit less so than Valéry and perhaps Laruelle). This paradox is openly evoked at the beginning of *L'Expérience intérieure*:

> Mais qu'on vienne me lire, eût-on la bonne volonté, l'attention la plus grande, arrivât-on au dernier degré de conviction, on ne sera pas nu pour autant. Car nudité, sombrer, supplication sont d'abord des notions ajoutées aux autres. Bien que liées à l'élision des faux-fuyants, en ce qu'elles étendent elles-mêmes les domaines des connaissances, elles sont réduites elles-mêmes à l'état de faux-fuyants. Tel est en

nous le travail du discours. Et cette difficulté s'exprime ainsi: *le mot silence est encore un bruit*, parler est soi-même imaginer connaître, et pour ne plus connaître il faudrait ne plus parler. Le sable eût-il laissé mes yeux s'ouvrir, j'ai parlé: les mots, *qui ne servent qu'à fuir*, quand j'ai cessé de fuir me ramènent à la fuite. Mes yeux se sont ouverts, c'est vrai, mais il aurait fallu ne pas le dire, demeurer figé comme une bête. J'ai voulu parler, et comme si les paroles portaient la pesanteur de mille sommeils, doucement, comme semblant ne pas voir, mes yeux se sont fermés.[11]

Talking and writing are deemed unworthy activities as they show not only a form of epistemological dishonesty but also a form of cowardice in front of the silence of *la nuit*. If "*le mot silence est encore un bruit*", Bataille's work is extremely noisy in its simulated evocation of *Expérience intérieure* and the absolute negativity that lies on its horizon. He even openly admits to the complete emptiness of his text when referring to *L'Expérience intérieure*: "La différence entre *Expérience intérieure* et philosophie réside principalement en ce que, dans l'expérience, l'énoncé n'est rien, sinon un moyen et même, un obstacle; ce qui compte ce n'est plus l'énoncé du vent, c'est le vent."[12] This emptiness is perhaps even more emphatic than in the other texts studied in this thesis given the sheer number of non-referents Bataille's writing is built upon: the inner experience or at least the ecstatic instant, 'Dieu', 'LE FOND DES MONDES', 'Moi' or even 'je'. As explored in chapter 5, for Bataille the Self has no essence, is filled only with either sufficiency and servitude or *angoisse*. And yet, in *L'Expérience intérieure* for instance, there is a proliferation not only of personal pronouns but of short, first person narratives, often meant to account for a form of inner experience, for instance:

Dans ce naufrage de la raison, l'angoisse, la déchéance solitaire, la lâcheté, le mauvais aloi trouvaient leur compte: la fête un peu plus loin recommençait. Le certain est que cette aisance, en même temps « l'impossible » heurté éclatèrent dans ma tête. Un espace constellé de rires ouvrit son abîme obscur devant moi. A la traversée de la rue du Four, je devins dans ce « néant » inconnu, tout à coup... je niais ces murs gris qui m'enfermaient, je me ruai dans une sorte de ravissement. Je riais divinement: le parapluie descendu sur ma tête me couvrait (je me couvris exprès de ce suaire noir). Je riais comme jamais peut-être on avait ri, le fin fond de

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[11] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.25.
[12] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.25.

chaque chose s'ouvrait, mis à nu, comme si j'étais mort.[13]

Not only does this kind of *récit* seem to be an attempt to describe the *Expérience intérieure*, thus destined for failure, but it uses the "je" that Bataille himself sees as a mark of servitude to the universal conventions humans accept to live with and never challenge:

Le « je » incarne en moi une chiennerie docile, non dans la mesure où il est l'*ipse*, absurde, inconnaissable, mais une équivoque entre la particularité de cet *ipse* et l'universalité de la raison. Le « je » est en fait l'expression de l'universel, il perd la sauvagerie de l'*ipse* pour donner à l'universel une figure domestiquée; en raison de cette position équivoque et soumise, nous nous représentons l'universel lui-même à l'image de celui qui l'exprime, à l'opposé de la sauvagerie comme un être domestiqué. Le « je » n'est ni la déraison de l'*ipse*, ni celle du tout, et cela montre la sottise qu'est l'absence de sauvagerie (l'intelligence commune).[14]

The 'je' is thus the neutral, sufficient counterpart of the *ipse*. Is this sense, Valéry and Bataille both share the idea that the 'je' is the textual avatar of a deep ontological denial. This way of thinking, like in Valéry, is spread to language as a whole:

Ce sable où nous nous enfonçons pour ne pas voir, est formé des mots, et la contestation, devant se servir d'eux, fait songer – si je passe d'une image à une autre différente – à l'homme enlisé, se débattant et que ses efforts enfoncent à coup sûr: et il est vrai que les mots, leurs dédales, l'immensité épuisante de leurs possibles, enfin leur traîtrise, ont quelque chose des sables mouvants.[15]

Words and language in general, due to their prominent place in the World and the fact that they are vital to the way in which civilization has built itself, shields humans from the truth of their own mortality and of course the mystical experience of their oneness with God and nothingness:

Bien que les mots drainent en nous presque toute la vie – de cette vie, à peu près

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[13] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.46.
[14] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.134.
[15] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.26.

pas une brindille que n'ait saisie, traînée, accumulée la foule sans repos, affairée, de ces fourmis (les mots) –, il subsiste en nous une part muette, dérobée, insaisissable.[16]

The question is once again, why write? In *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, Connor points out what appears to him as a fatal flaw in Bataille's more mystical works:

> Yet as fundamentally democratic as was his desire to redefine mystical experience so as to include the "nonbeliever", in writing, Bataille ends up caught between the incoherence of arguing on behalf of that which is not "logically demonstrable" and the immodesty of insisting upon the priority of the empirical, a position that reinstitutes the notion of the Subject – with all its claims to singularity, exclusivity, and self-identity – which he actively sought to oust[17]

It is interesting to note here Connor's use of the word "incoherent" that is symptomatic of his reading of Bataille. What he writes in this excerpt is logically correct: Bataille constant contradictions, his struggle with language is indeed incoherent *at face value*. Nevertheless, this shows that his reading of Bataille is very much a *reading of the possible*, that fails to grasp the apophatic, negative value of these texts. In a traditional epistemological sense, of course these texts fail; but Bataille himself knows this and has constantly reasserted this knowledge of the valuelessness of his own undertaking. The omnipresence of the I, his inability to rid himself completely of the subject in his attempts to translate the inner experience into language are all signs of a project that is conscious that it will ultimately fail, at the very least in any given scientific perspective. Connor's reading of Bataillle, whilst being a remarkable academic feat, is a perfect example of what happens when something that does not belong to the World is view and analysed with the tools of the World. This is why Laruelle's *vision-en-Un* is such as essential concept, as it allows us to think from another place than the World, to adopt a radical mode of thought that opens new intellectual and spiritual perspectives that are impossible to access through rational means.

One of the keys to understanding why and how Bataille writes the notion of *simulacrum*, whose condition of existence is this negative faith that all these authors have in common. Through his

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[16] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.27.
[17] Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, p.65.

erotic writings and the use for instance of pseudonymity, Bataille pushes this idea of simulacrum to its paroxysm in a very intentional way. The spectacular eroticism of his texts forces the reader to interact with it and question the reason for its very existence. Contrarily to the *Cahiers*, these *simulacra* were meant to be read and contain *en puissance* an idealised reception. Bataille's work, both explicitly fictional and implicitly fiction, has suffered from a similar problem as negative theology in its reception, as critics have often thought the essence of the text to be in the text itself, rather that beyond it, as Hussey aptly explains:

> The inner experience was read for the most part as a textual 'transgression', the term used by Bataille to describe an aesthetic, erotic or philosophical violation of laws or limits. Bataille's writings on inner experience were discussed with exclusive regard to their theoretical implications for textual criticism, whilst the transgressive act of inner experience, which undermined ordered, discursive thought with the collapse of the subject, was seen as part of a textual game. The actual experiences which lay behind the notion of inner experience, and which were described by Bataille with reference to the theories and experiences of the religious mystics were, to a large extent, either overlooked or disregarded.[18]

Very much like in negative theology, the test itself has no value, and will when read correctly collapse on itself; Bataille seems to hint towards this phenomenon when he asserts:

> Je ne donnerai qu'un exemple de *mot* glissant. Je dis *mot*: ce peut être aussi bien la phrase où l'on insère le mot, mais je me borne au mot *silence*. Du mot il est déjà, je l'ai dit, l'abolition du bruit qu'est le mot; entre tous les mots, c'est le plus pervers, ou le plus poétique: il est lui-même gage de sa mort.[19]

Every one of the sentences written by Bataille, because it is built around non-referents, is knowingly destined to a form of *verbal apoptosis*. The reader must thus understand that these texts are *simulacra*, parodies to then be confronted to the negative faith that lies behind the text, that is the text's cause. In this perspective, Ian James distinguishes two ways of reading Bataille: the "readings of the possible" and the "readings of the impossible". The first way of reading, and the way the vast majority of critics have chosen to read his work, is to read Bataille

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[18] Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar: the Mysticism of Georges Bataille*, p.8.
[19] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.28.

normally, discussing his intellectual links with his contemporaries and taking the texts at face value, studying them through the lens of ethics or politics, with authors as different as Suleiman and Connor being examples of this approach. The second way of reading is what is done throughout this thesis: attempt to understand why and how these texts exist, and accept to leave logic and philosophical rationalism at our hermeneutic doorstep in understanding the negative faith that lies behind such impossible texts. And this is perhaps the kind of reading Bataille hints to when he writes "Pour qui est étranger à l'expérience ce qui précède est obscur – mais ne lui est pas destiné (j'écris pour qui, entrant dans mon livre, y tomberait comme un trou, n'en sortirait plus)".[20] To read Bataille impossibly, one must become intimate with his desperation and fear, and accept to fall into a hole where death, God and *le RIEN* lurk in the shadow of *la nuit*. It is only then that the reader is confronted to the unalienable core of his undertaking, the *energeia* that is negative faith. When he writes "Je veux décrire une expérience mystique et ne m'en écarte qu'en apparence, mais qui discernerait une voie dans le chaos que j'introduis?",[21] it is only a reading of the impossible that will be able to discern that path that leads to negative faith and ultimately, perhaps, to 'LE FOND DES MONDES'. There is arguably something sacred in the most non-dogmatic, non-religious way in reading Bataille; as Jeremy Biles beautifully writes in the conclusion of *Ecce Monstrum*:

> Is this, then, to say that Bataille's writings themselves are sacred? The answer to this question will depend, at least in part, on the reader. Bataille's texts, both within and beyond their popular and academic appropriations, may, for those who read them with compassion and in friendship, incite and inspire what they theorize and describe. Approached with a willingness to put oneself at risk, these writings might not only be read but communicated. And in such privileged instants, the substance of the text disappears as if in a sacrifice, destroyed in being consumed: theory and art, language and image, give way to an experience of the sacred, at once distressing and brilliant.[22]

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[20] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.135.
[21] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.35.
[22] Biles, Jeremy, *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the sacrifice of form* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2007), p.170.

Laruelle

As Andrew Reszitnyk writes, "Laruelle often writes as though he comes from another world, replete with its own foreign and radically abstract standard of truth, clarity, and beauty."[23] This writing is both beautiful and frustratingly cryptic, which might explain in part the slow critical response to his work, although interest seems have seen an increase over the past ten years. His writing is inaccessible due to its non-philosophical nature: words of in non-philosophy after having been cloned and dualysed carry different meaning than they usually do and are used differently. Adjectives such as 'radical' or prepositions such as '-en', 'sans', 'en-personne' are added in various places and of course in a coherent manner, but make for a sometimes excruciatingly hard read, especially for beginners; picking up and reading one's first Laruelle's book is a terrifying experience that many chose not to repeat. It is not only the language but the way in which the arguments are laid out and the statements are made, relying on axioms that appear to the normal reader as completely arbitrary that makes the reading experience confusing and often discouraging. Laruelle himself is of course aware of the level of difficulty of the work him produces, as he acknowledges at the beginning of *Mystique non-philosophique*:

> Éprouvé, agité en tous sens, probablement nauséeux, le lecteur s'étonnera que l'on puisse malmener à ce point le bon usage par des rafales de synonymes, des paquets ou des clusters de vocables jetés en vrac, des innovations sémantiques excessives, quelques torsions syntaxiques, une logique d'agrégats.[24]

As discussed in chapter 4, these radical fictions that use a language as far removed from philosophy than possible whilst remaining intelligible (at least to a certain degree), exist out of necessity. However, Laruelle does not consider his writing as being completely loose and free. He is so far from scientific, academic and philosophical conventions but has to obey his own, self-standing rules in order to be able to say anything about or around the Real:

> Il importe à la science non-chrétienne comme à toute la science de démontrer les limites de validité de sa démonstration (de l'axiomatisation) contrairement au fondationnalisme et au fondamentalisme des religions. Et par conséquent de pouvoir parler, de ne pas être obligée de se taire mais seulement de savoir limiter

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[23] Andrew Reszitnyk, 'Wonder Without Domination', *A Site for Thought*, *Chiasma*, 1 (2014), pp.24-53, p.51.
[24] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporain*, p.11.

son discours – c'est la fonction des axiomes dans lesquels elle s'exprime.[25]

Of course, these rules will never have any value from a rational standpoint, but are dictated by the vision-in-One as the condition of his writing; if he were unable to obey such rules, Laruelle simply couldn't write. His writing is not completely hermetic to its anticipated reaction, which is to be called insane or worthless, which he interprets as a logical and perhaps even positive sign that the World is attempting to destroy his Heresy and his immanent struggle against the World that finds itself evoked, if not embodied in his work: " On imagine le procès philosophique « en hérésie » dont est passible la mystique future et *que peut-être elle admet de telle manière que ce procès soit identiquement la preuve de sa vérité c'est-à-dire de son témoignage en faveur du Vrai-sans-vérité.*"[26] Laruelle's texts are not, as one may think, born out of states of trance by which the Real would somehow be talking through him but rather throw the discipline of following a very strict non-philosophical protocol that he details in *Le Christ futur*:

Quant aux « décisions » de langage et de pensée par lesquelles nous formulons et définissons l'hérésie, nous savons qu'elles doivent être elles-mêmes hérétiques et non pas orthodoxes, philosophiques et théologiques. Ce sont pourtant des énoncés d'origine philosophique mais traités en deux phases.

1. Ils sont séparés-sans-séparation de la prétention philosophique unitaire qui était initialement la leur sur le Réel, de la prétention de l'Eglise et de la suffisance du Dogme sur leur être-humain.

2. Ils doivent être de plus dualysés (objet d'une séparation, cette fois, mais comme effet de la dualité unilatérale du Réel et du Monde) dans leur contenu et leur sens philosophiques, leur fonctionnement et leur opération de concept. C'est pourquoi les énoncés du christianisme futur, tout en étant tirés de la philosophie et de la théologie, passent continûment de l'état de dogmes ou de « vérités révélées » à l'état de matériaux pour des axiomes (en tant qu'ils ont perdu en-dernière-identité leur vérité et leur prétention sur le Réel) et des théorèmes (en tant que leur structure est transformée selon la « syntaxe » de la dualité unilatérale).[27]

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[25] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.56-57.

[26] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporain*, p.90.

[27] 4François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.65-66.

This is of course a process in which the Real participates. From the point of view of science and philosophy, these texts are either valueless or experimental, and it is not surprising that Jonathan Fardy tried to recuperate Laruelle into a form of "non-aesthetics", as Laruelle is often seen as the sole member of a metaphysical OULIPO, limiting his writing with these factitious rules that produce outrageously radical ideas. The question of the value of these texts *relative to non-philosophy* is however perhaps a more interesting and complex one. At first one may be tempted to draw a parallel with negative theology, especially when Laruelle writes in *La décision philosophique 5*:

> Les textes qui décrivent l'Un – à commencer par celui-ci – ne sont que les facettes infinies de la vision-en-Un. Ce sont là aussi bien quelques-unes des descriptions, possibles en nombre illimité, de l'Un, que ce que l'on peut voir en celui-ci du langage et de la philosophie. La description de la vision-en-Un est déjà « non-philosophie » et doit être reçue comme telle.[28]

At first glance, this may seem reminiscent of earlier discussions about the equality of the cataphatic and the apophatic in the eyes of negative theology, insofar that they are both valueless and simply add to the discourse about God that in its totality constitutes a complete failure. However, Laruelle does not seem to say any description of the One is valueless, but that it is one of an infinite number of facets of the vision-in-One. This is made possible by the quantic model: all these texts, written from the vision-in-One, are superimposed to the One immanently, the text itself becoming idempotent to the One in a similar way the Future Christ does. The text is thus a non-summative part of the One or the Real, and thus cannot be deemed as empty or valueless. In this sense, Laruelle, circumvents all notion of representatively by making the text a part of the Real itself.

This may be quite a radical hypothesis, but it is a very functional one that then helps understand how these texts work. The goal of these texts is of course not only to describe the One or the Real, but, especially in his more recent texts have a more performative aspect or at least an avowed performative goal. There is a practical aspect to these texts that are not simply facets of the One/Real, which in itself would have little utility. In *Le Christ futur* Laruelle writes:

> Notre proclamation d'un Christ Futur est un kérigme performatif, ce n'est pas une

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[28] François Laruelle, 'Introduction à la vision-en-Un', *La décision philosophique*, 5 (1988), pp. 41-61, p.42-43

promesse ou un message encore indéchiffré porté à l'humanité, c'est un *ultimatum*. Ou la paix est un ultimatum ou elle n'est que l'attente d'une guerre et peut-être une guerre d'attente. L'Homme est cet *Ultimé* qui détermine le Christ comme ultimatum et met en demeure la pensée d'avoir en-dernière-identité à porter assistance au Monde.[29]

He thus claims to performatively transmit or perhaps enact to the reader the essential teachings or message of the Christ, that for him is the simple fact that all humans are equal and generic and that this is actualised only by the Heresy and the immanent struggle against the World, Christ being equal to all humans in that sense. There is nothing hidden or cryptic about Laruelle's rhetoric here: the writing is clear, direct, and has an almost political feeling to it (although of course it is far from politics that are an emanation of the philosophy-World). In fact, despite language emanating from the World, it is a vital vector of this immanent struggle against the World, as Laurelle explains in *Mystique non-philosophique*:

Car seul un Verbe toujours émergent et neuf peut délivrer le Monde hors du Monde. Et nous-les-Humains comme sujets-Christs sommes cette force, pas une force forte trop faible pour se mesurer au Monde et à Dieu, mais la « force faible » qui fait les messies et vient au-devant des montagnes qu'elle « soulève ». *Quelle montagne ici? Évidemment celle du langage.*[30]

Language is depicted as having the power to emancipate both the World from itself and the subject from the World, because the dualysed, cloned language is caused by and part of the Real. This is why the text never disappears or undergoes the same *verbal apoptosis* as it does in the author texts studied in this thesis. In negative theology for instance, language belongs only to the World and *must* at all cost vanish for the reader to be confronted to the negative faith that had caused it. In Laruelle, the performative force of the text is carried by this cloned, dualysed language that has the power to immanently impact the Word and the subject.

What this entails for the reading experience of Laruelle is another challenge. Laruelle can obviously not control the conditions in which his work will be read: philosophers and scholars of various disciplines (and perhaps the odd person who read Laruelle for pleasure or

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[29] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.150.
[30] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.11.

out of curiosity) will not respond to the text's performativity for one simple reason: responding to this performativity is accepting on a permanent or at least temporary basis to share Laruelle's negative faith, on which the whole of his work is built. If the reader is unable to suspend his or her rationality and preconceived notions and concepts and refuses to be open not only to the idea of the Real but to the Real itself, then the experience will be a disappointing and frustrating one. This is not to say that all readers that accept to suspend previously accumulated knowledge and rational ways of thinking will automatically connect with these texts on a spiritual level, but rather that this is a compulsory step if one wants to attempt to experience the radicality of Laruelle's work, rather than read it as philosophy, art or the ramblings of a very highly educated man. In *Mystique non-philosophique*, Laruelle sketches out a quick but interesting outline of a theory of reception for his own work:

> Il n'y a pas ici de « lecteur » potentiel distinct de l'auteur, pas d'auteur distinct de tout Homme, de métalangage assuré pour surplomber la situation de manière théoriciste, et ces préliminaires ne s'adressent déjà plus à lui, si ce n'est en tant qu'il participe encore de l'hallucination philosophique et c'est alors à lui que s'adresse tout l'aspect protreptique de ces énoncés formulés contre la doxa mystique. Mais ils *présupposent et impliquent radicalement* dans leur opération le lecteur comme Sujet-Christ. Cette discipline est performative comme toute pratique mais avec cette réserve ultimante qui l'éloigne de la performativité classique, son être-déterminé-en-dernière-identité.[31]

There are two different readers that are considered: first, the reader that still partakes the hallucinations created by philosophy and is thus very much rooted to the World. For that reader, as he explains, his writing will try to convince him to escape the World and become a Future-Christ. However, both this reader and the second, already emancipated reader are considered in writing as *Sujet-Christs*, and therefore there is no reader that differs in any way from the author: the absolute equality between humans in their heretical nature is present *en puissance* in the first, still entrapped reader, and *en acte* in the second reader who has already joined the ecclesial body of those fighting immanently against the World. Furthermore, the act by Laruelle of recognising the reader as a *Sujet-Christ* reveals them to each other as being part of the same immanent community whose existence, in and for the World, seems to only be evoked by

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[31] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.30.

Laruelle's work. This performativity, as it is determined in the last instance, is different to classic performativity insofar as it can not only convince a reader by putting forth ideas and arguments but recognizes the reader as radically identical to the writer and to all other humans that can actualise their oneness with the Real by becoming *Christs-Futurs*. Laruelle, however, rejects all notion of proselytism, not because he is not attempting to convince the reader but because there is no Church, no religion, no hierarchy on the horizon of his *Mystique-future*:

> Toutefois, elle [la mystique future] n'a aucune des prétentions de prosélytisme des religions et des mystiques positives, aucune ambition de se faire une place sur terre un jour parmi les « grandes » religions et les « petites » sectes, d'établir sa domination, fût-ce par un rêve philosophique d'utopie. L'Homme-en-personne est un Maître tout « négatif » de non-religion, ce qui ne veut certainement pas dire un petit maître d'athéisme mais le Maître tout d'absence et donc de venue des Futurs que nous sommes.[32]

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[32] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.31

9. Negative faith

Negative theology

Negative faith is at the core of what this thesis is aiming to achieve; it is a discovery, a concept that stems from the realisation not only of the "spiritual kinship" of these texts and authors, but of a deeper, more originary *common ground* they share. It is not by any means an instrumentalist theory, one born out of a necessity to find a logical explanation to why these texts seem so close, whilst their historical and cultural contexts were vastly different. Negative faith is not the negative *pendant* of traditional faith, it does not oppose it, seek to abolish or delegitimise it. It is not a faith that consists of negative assertions, of having faith in *something* that is not. Negative faith is completely non-discursive and non-intellectual. It is not a belief, and is not, of course, something that is easily explainable or made academically acceptable. The temptation of an apophatic approach to negative faith is strong, but ultimately would be inadequate: unlike the mystical experience or God/the One, negative faith has *visible* actualisations in the phenomenal World, namely the texts that have been studied for the past eight chapters.

Contrarily to the traditional *modus operandi* of faith, negative faith is radically non-relational: it has no object, is not faith *in* something. It is thus not attached to any kind of belief and is not verbalizable, cannot be subject to discourse (at least not adequately). For lack of a better word, negative faith is the energy, the *energeia*, derived by the subject from the experience of the uncreated utopia, from this constant co-birthing of God and the Self. Epistemologically, negative faith has the same status as the uncreated utopia, God and the mystical experience, it is a non-referent; however, unlike the other non-referents, it has concrete actualisations in the World that it is, despite this, radically separated from in all other possible ways. It is this faith that allows the authors explored in this thesis to go further than the impossible, to embark on impossible projects that are destined to fail, that allows them to go where there is no thought. Although the form and content of their works are often very different, they all have the same origin: this negative faith, which is never named or shown explicitly. It is this faith that explains the existence of these texts, the answer to an impossible onto-theological equation. It is not only the explanation for these text's existence but arguably their

direct cause, without which the mere idea of their conception could not have existed. This does not mean of course that there is any sort of alienation of the authors of these texts, nor any kind of temporary possession that would mean they had been written *through* them rather than *by* them. On the contrary, negative faith is the *energeia,* a form of vital principle of the subject that has become *Sujet-Christ*, that is in a state of perfect *detachment* and is both the cause and the symptom of a radical emancipation from the World, which is actualised both textually by this *corpus* and by the lives of the heretics who wrote it. These texts, as visible and positive objects caused by negative faith that is derived from the oneness of God and of the subject, mark the impossible intrusion of absolute negativity into the phenomenal world. They defy all purely rational approaches and interpretation precisely because, unlike all other textual and cultural productions, they do not *belong* to the world. It can of course be argued that the doctrinal variations between these texts are due to historical and cultural factors, and this is obviously the case, but these are ultimately unimportant: it is the confrontation between the reader and this negative faith that constitutes the core of these texts, when they self-destruct through *verbal apoptosis* and suddenly there is nothing left but their cause, which burns a hole in the World and makes itself impossibly visible or experienceable for the reader.

Valéry

The existence of the *Cahiers*, both in their incredible prolixity and in what they contain, appears not only as impossible, but also reveals a side of Valéry that is very different from how his generally perceived. These 29,000 pages are deficient signs that Valéry knows are going to fail, and yet he keeps writing in the same direction with the same regularity and energy for over thirty years. He knows that the Système will never be constructed, and that his ambition to explain and rationalise the way in which human *vie mentale* works is impossible, a form of hubris. He even reflects on this with humour and irony in the fourth *Cahier* "Représenter les faits mentaux, c'est illusoire – on y retourne –" (C, IV, 99). Valéry does not believe in what he writes, he voluntarily creates a *simulacrum* of a true epistemological undertaking, commenting "On peut parler ou écrire sans se croire – et de bonne foi." (C, III, 542) Despite his writing being, in a sense, pure fiction, it is still honest, *de bonne foi*, because language is so deeply inadequate that any attempt to truly represent the non-referent around which the *Cahiers* are built would be dishonest and dangerous. In the same way that Pseudo Denys recommends representing God or the Divine by what is obviously the furthest away from it, so as to not

confuse readers into believing that there is an actual attempt to correctly represent the divine, Valéry could not honestly do anything else than what he did in the *Cahiers*, create a fiction in which he writes *what he can* "On déforme ce qu'on veut dire d'après ce que l'on peut dire. Les mauvais écrivains disent ce qu'ils veulent dire et les bons ce qu'ils peuvent dire." (C, IV, 116) The result is thus the *Cahiers*, an impossible text draped with the language and the texture of the possible.

These considerations do not seem sufficient to explain the sheer energy deployed by Valéry in writing the *Cahiers*. One aforementioned hypothesis, that of the negative epistemological power of the *Cahiers*, by which everything that is said about the Moi and after 'je' in the *Cahiers* is what the Moi is not, giving the *Cahiers* a negative epistemological value, would perhaps be able to explain the quantity of writing. However, in the same way as it does in negative theology, this hypothesis quickly crumbles with the realisation that all discourse, both apophatic and cataphatic, says absolutely nothing about the non-referent in question. Whilst it is tempting to think of negation in language as a credible way to approach the ineffable, the fact is that as there is no referent, then a negative proposition pertaining to that non-referent will have no value whatsoever, no more than any affirmation. As explained in chapter 8, far from any attempts to recuperate the *Cahiers* into rationality by giving it an epistemological resonance, there is another, more spiritual or mystical way of approaching the *Cahiers*, very close to that of negative theology. Whilst the content of the text itself is irrelevant, it is the energy that flows through it, the cause of the text that is the cause of its prolixity. The *Cahiers* in this sense was a textual outlet for the energy derived from this faith, expressed and symbolised by a lifelong, conscious and honest failure to represent through language what lies in an entirely different, separated-without-separation plain or utopia: "Je distingue deux mondes | l'un qui a rapport au language" (C, IV, 147).

This is not a purely speculative claim: there is a discreet but undeniable porosity between this negative faith that is behind the text as its cause, and the content of the *Cahiers* itself, as if occasionally this *energeia* had overflowed into the language itself. One of the most evocative examples of this can be found in the second *Cahier*, once again in one of the fictional dialogues used by Valéry to frame such radical ideas:

    – « Mon ami je viens de faire une grande, une profonde découverte !
    – Parlez -

– Mais – je ne puis l'exprimer.

– Diable.

– Songez que – en quelque sorte – les mots, les langues usitées sont comme incommensurables avec elles – pas plus qu'ils ne peuvent donner l'idée de telle courbe... Mon secret réside dans une image que je pourrais beaucoup plus dessiner que décrire – mais je ne puis guère la dessiner non plus – car elle n'est ni seulement des traits et de la couleur – ni un objet connu. Cela ne ressemble à rien – voilà pourquoi cela est puissant. – Un coup d'œil intérieur à cette vision – m'éclaire. Je lui rapporte tout ce que la vie me propose, ou la réflexion. Je puis doser – et j'ose...

→ Le feu plein d'idées ← » (C, II, 229-230)

The choice of words here is interesting on many levels. Firstly, there is the Plotinian leitmotiv of inner vision as a symbol for a mystical experience in which the subject, by becoming transparent to him/herself, experiences his or her oneness with the One ("Un coup d'œil intérieur à cette vision – m'éclaire"). But what is perhaps the most significant is the expression "Le feu plein d'idées"; the idea is the unit of the *vie mentale* and more largely of the subject whose emergence or rather mysterious generation from the empty *Moi* cannot be explained. This "feu plein d'idées" seems to be an attempt, however knowingly deficient, to create an image of this mysterious generative principle that Valéry dares give a name to here. This is not something that he believes in or has faith in, given that it is nothing, but is what he derives his faith from, this uncreated utopia inside every individual.

This faith stays hidden behind the text throughout the *Cahiers*, Valéry voluntarily hiding it, keeping it away from a language that will unavoidably deform and betray it, and taint it with cultural and historical connotations. Despite this, there are a few surprising moments of direct evocations of this negative faith. One of the most notable of these moments is in the eighth *Cahier* when he writes "Chacun doit avoir sa Mystique, qu'il garde en soi jalousement, qu'il ne trouble pas de sottises théologiques, ni de traditions, avec tous les compromis et les feintes soumissions qui s'ensuivent. Ma devise fut: Cache ton Dieu. Et encore ce dernier mot est une *hérésie*" (C, X, 9) Valéry's "Dieu", not meaning an idolatrous God or the God of any given religion, is literally hidden behind the pages of the *Cahiers*, perhaps even represented by its deficient avatar, the word 'Moi'. In the tenth *Cahier*, he even evokes his faith in concrete terms, as if he had finally come to accept that it was absolutely central to him and to his work: "La foi est la force de faire le vrai.| Je veux que ceci soit vrai et m'y applique." (CX, p.9). *Faire le vrai*

here is an ambiguous term, as Valéry abandoned the traditional concept of truth at the beginning of the *Cahiers*. What might be meant here by *faire le vrai* is to live and write according to his faith, which is exactly what he is doing in the *Cahiers*. Further on in the same *Cahier*, he offers a fascinating, detailed description of this faith:

> "- Pour moi – la foi est un fait quasi physique. Le croire. Cette solidité variable, personnelle de certaines notions, n'est pas une relation psychique. Celui qui n'a pas éprouvé doit nier comme l'aveugle doit nier la lumière (et surtout ne jamais faire semblant de comprendre la description qu'on lui en donne). | C'est ce physique qui fait la force de la foi. Le combat traditionnel entre la « raison » et la « foi » est semblable à un cauchemar. Puisque les adversaires ne se peuvent affronter, ne s'appliquent pas l'un à l'autre – ils ne se rencontrent que sur la langue. Il faudrait 2 langages sans connexité." (C, X, 65)

His faith has nothing in common with the psychological meaning of faith, as he describes it as being *almost* physical, something that is felt, that is unexplainable and yet undeniable. This faith cannot be proved or described because it does not belong to the World and is incommensurable with reason and rationality. It is not a simple belief ("Je crois... Ce verbe à fini par signifier: Je ne suis pas sûr." (C, X, 12)) and would need an impossible, irrational language to be expressed. What Valéry does in the *Cahiers* is not by any means to attempt to search for the truth of this faith, to reduce it to something rational and translatable, but rather to provide a textual actualisation of its existence. As he writes at the end of the tenth *Cahier*, his goal is to " Ne pas chercher la Vérité, le fond mais chercher à développer les forces qui font la vérité." (C, X, 458) The only experience of the truth for Valéry is in the moment of the mystical experience, where the *néant* that is the Moi becomes transparent to the subject and he or she becomes Moi en Moi, One in One. Outside of that moment, the only thing of value, the only *force qui fait la vérité* is this hidden negative faith and the empty texts that allow it to intrude in the phenomenal world and perhaps help the subject realise that he or she does not belong exclusively to it.

Bataille

 "Georges Bataille ne fut jamais définitivement athée"[1] writes Michel Surya in *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre*, which is quite clear in the reading of his more mystical works and his erotic fiction. He did not however identify as religious, not since he left the seminar when he was seventeen, in the first act of a very complex relationship with the Church and its idols. As studied earlier in this thesis, Bataille's problem with the word God stems firstly from the word's historical connotation, but also from the implication of a transcendent, separated being. The reading of *L'Expérience intérieure* that has been made in this thesis suggests that *Dieu*, *RIEN* or any of those interchangeable non-referents are not separated from the subject: the ecstatic moment of the *Expérience intérieure* reveals the terrified subject's oneness with this total negativity, which the World stops him or her from accessing. This is not by any means a speculative construction: the fact that he built these interconnected *simulacra*, carefully constructing their excessive nature, should have been impossible and from a rational standpoint seems literally insane. And yet he derived from his negative faith the energy to overcome the impossible. Whether or not he himself has experienced what he describes in *L'Expérience intérieure* remains to be confirmed; he certainly experienced a number of spiritually altering states, that he describes at length in *Le Coupable* and *L'Expérience intérieure*, but he never questions the existence of these states of oneness with the God of nothingness; as he writes in *Le Coupable*: "Les circonstances de ma vie me paralysent. | Peut-être ? | Mais j'ai la conviction d'apercevoir un jour, dans sa transparence, « tout ce qui est », morts et vivants."[2] This *non-savoir* and the experience of his oneness with it are the only tangible thing on Bataille's horizon, tangible because Bataille, unlike perhaps Meister Eckhart, still considers this experience to be positive ("Du fait qu'elle est négation d'autres valeurs, d'autres autorités, l'expérience ayant l'existence positive devient elle-même positivement la valeur *et l'autorité*")[3] despite the ecstatic instant being ineffable. This of course seems quite contradictory given the purely negative nature of this experience, but it is impossible to undo all the knots in Bataille's complex weave of ideas.

This negative faith pushes him to write as an act of defiance to the World, perhaps more so than others. This explains in part the ethically subversive content of his texts, especially the erotic *récits*. These texts are marked by a deep struggle with the world, akin to that described

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[1] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: la mort à l'œuvre*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p.31.
[2] Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, p.62.
[3] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, p.19.

by Laruelle in the first part of *Le Christ futur*. Social conventions, economic laws and moral codes are all challenged, but these are perhaps the most superficial targets of this challenge: it is the servility undergone by the subject in the World, the impossibility of accessing the uncreated utopia through the inner experience, and more generally the rejection of the notion that humans should have anything to do with the world that are in play in these empty texts:

> Parler de RIEN, ce n'est au fond que nier l'asservissement, que le réduire à ce qu'il
> est (il est utile), ce n'est en définitive que nier la valeur non pratique de la pensée,
> la réduire, par-delà l'utile, à l'insignifiance, à l'honnête simplicité du défaut, de ce
> qui meurt et qui défaille.[4]

These texts aim to help the reader emancipate himself or herself from the World, in the same way as Bataille himself did or attempted to through these experiences and the negative faith he may have derived from them. He is not looking to convert anyone to this non-religion, or to impose his faith that is anyway not transmittable, as its source is purely immanent, and yet these texts aim, through the impossible power of dissimilarity and *simulacrum* to open the reader, to change him/her, to initiate an invisible inner movement towards the subject's very core where he or she is one with RIEN.

Laruelle

Like with Valéry, it is the prolixity of impossible texts Laruelle has produced that seems hard to understand at first. Although perhaps dwarfed in terms of pure quantity by Valéry's production for the *Cahiers* (between 29,000 and 35,000 pages depending what texts are included), the *Cahiers* weren't initially meant to be published and were almost a form of stream of consciousness. Laruelle's work on the other hand consists of over 30 books and hundreds of articles, often in reviews that he has set up himself like *La décisions philosophique*, spanning over 40 years of constant activity and energy. This of course is even more fascinating when considering the nature of his work: Laruelle's work is radical insofar as it is entirely self-standing: in the eyes of the philosopher, it is but an illusion, a disaster waiting to happen. For

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[4] Georges Bataille, *La Souveraineté*, footnote p.28-29.

Annouck Barberousse and Phillipe Huneman, both researchers at the CNRS in philosophy of science, Laruelle is nothing short of a farce:

> "la « philosophie » de Laruelle nous semble encore plus insensée que celle de Badiou: aucun de nous ne peut donner sens aux affirmations selon lesquelles l'Un est oublié de la philosophie, qu'il n'est ni divisible ni indivisible, qu'il est aussi bien Un que Autre, qu'il est forclos dans ou par la pensée – soit les thèses séminales de la « non-philosophie » – et encore moins d'entrevoir les raisons de ces thèses"[5]

This is one of many examples coming from academia, especially in France, of the responses to Laruelle's work. It is interesting of course to note that they fail to understand Laruelle's "philosophie"; an assertion that, quite sadly, is rather self-explanatory. Nevertheless, the resistance in the academic world to Laruelle was and still is to some extent quite vehement, and the only thing that can explain his persistence is his force of will and his negative faith. In this case, it is easy to see this faith *en acte* struggling to be heard over philosophy's vituperative criticisms. This is not just a speculative assertion and a poorly led biographical reading of his life: the concept of faith has become absolutely central to his work, and far more openly so over the last fifteen years. However, his faith was present from the very beginning, perhaps more discreetly as he was careful not to brutally force his way out of the philosophical institutions that had seen him succeed both intellectually and professionally. Even in *Les Philosophies de la différence*, which he wrote for philosophers, his negative faith is blatantly apparent: "Supposons donc l'expérience de l'Un – mais nous n'avons pas à la supposer pour faire plaisir aux philosophes, nous sommes en elle comme dans le réel en soi".[6] L'Un is already here not a hypothesis but a certainty, an axiomatically poised truth. This faith is equally apparent in the choice of his axioms. Critics, of course, are free to view these choices as completely arbitrary, but they would then of course be reading non-philosophy the philosophical way, given that axioms are results of the vision-in-One and are determined-in-the-last-instance:

> La vision-en-Un par exemple est axiomatiquement posée par un acte d'*ultimation première* qui la pose comme « ultimatum » *pour* le christianisme. Des axiomes peuvent la redécrire, ainsi que tout le contenu du modèle non-chrétien, à l'aide de

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[5] Annouck Barberousse, Philippe Huneman, *Un « philosophe français » label rouge. Une relecture tripodienne d'Alain Badiou* (2016), *Hypothèses,* <https://zilsel.hypotheses.org/2548> [01/08/2021].
[6] François Laruelle, *Les philosophies de la différence*, p.28

l'immanence, de la vie, de la séparation, de la foi, du monde, du salut, etc. et de catégories plus immédiatement théologiques et gnostiques, mais en les soumettant chaque fois à un travail d'abstraction approprié.[7]

This faith is not only the *energeia* that allowed him to write but is absolutely central to his heretic project. There is a specific, heretical faith that is arguably identical to the previously identified negative faith:

Soit maintenant la mise entre parenthèse de ce que nous croyons savoir dans « le-christianisme » par foi et par intelligence, par prière et par dogme, intérieurement et extérieurement. Nous retirons notre foi à la foi, nous dualysons ce redoublement philosophique, nous renonçons à celle-là pour mieux acquérir l'intelligence non-croyante de la foi. Car il y a une foi que l'on dira opératoire, plus profonde et plus indéracinable que la foi « religieuse », une foi à la foi qui rend possible et exacerbe son auto-défense contre son suspens et parfois même contre la foi revendiquée et ses dogmes.[8]

He also answers the question of the appearance of this heretic faith. This is not a religious or dogmatic faith into which one is born or that one decides to accept after having undergone a given spiritual experience: this is a non-choice, as humans are already determined by this heresy by essence, *a priori*. Even when they are still under the World's spell, this faith is in them *en puissance*:

Mais comment devient-on hérétique, il est sûr que la question est cette fois inadéquate. On est tenté de poser le problème sous la forme d'une alternative – ou dépasser et continuer autrement ou cloner et déterminer en-dernière-identité? ou analyser et synthétiser ou dualyser? Tel semble être le nouveau carrefour de la pensée. Mais cette alternative est encore de logique philosophique. Le choix hérétique ne peut être que le choix « de... » l'hérésie, au sens où celle-ci l'a déjà déterminé. C'est une image unilatérale de l'Identité-en-personne, pas plus un choix de l'un des termes à l'exclusion de l'autre que de la partie, de la faction, de la secte, et pas davantage du devenir, du passage ou de la transition. Son identité, sa non-

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[7] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.160.
[8] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.153.

participation à l'Être ou à l'Autre, à l'ontologie ou au judaïsme, témoigne de son être-performé. Le choix « hairétique » est immanent ou sans raison, sans essence ou fondement toujours transcendants. Mais qu'il n'obéisse pas au Principe de Raison et à la suffisance philosophique le rend d'autant nécessaire, comme le Réel même.[9]

If this faith is "opératoire", as Laruelle writes in the earlier excerpt from *Le Christ futur,* it is because it has an effective power of action, both uniting the Future-Christs in-One and radically separating them from the World:

La foi est sans doute dé-cision par l'un de ses côtés, elle aussi possède un aspect de transcender et de pro-jet. Mais ce n'est pas un transcender vide ni même dans le néant. C'est une décision de foi plutôt que de savoir théorique, de pratique ou de projection ontologique d'un horizon qui s'auto-affecterait et se diviserait. Elle n'est pas division première et retour sur soi. En priorité elle unit mais sans horizon, retour et repli, ou n'unit qu'en-Christ. Unir-en-Christ est à la fois son objet, sa fin et sa modalité d'union. Cet unir est donation de la Vie et ne donne la Vie qu'en unissant de cette manière les vivants. Elle sépare donc elle aussi mais ne sépare du Monde qu'en unissant par la Vie-en-Christ, qui détermine la séparation. La foi comme procédure de traitement possible du Monde en vue de modéliser « le-christianisme».[10]

Faith is even key in distinguishing what Laruelle calls *les croyants*, humans that still believe in philosophical hallucinations, the Church and all of the World's iterations, and *les fidèles*, who are emancipated from the World and have no beliefs: " La foi immanente est le phénomène générique, c'est-à-dire humain ou idempotent en-dernière-instance, qui distingue les fidèles des croyants".[11] *Christo-fiction* even goes as far as making this faith the basis of Laruelle's quantic system by inventing what he calls *le quantum de foi*, meaning that faith is the smallest, most irreducible particle in all of the movements and phenomena "observed" within his model, thus recognizing this negative, immanent faith as absolutely vital and necessary to his work. However, Laruelle warns that this faith is *donné* and that it must be received and used properly to have a beneficial effect on the subject and the World. It would seem that it is the

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[9] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.68.
[10] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.171.
[11] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.14.

subject's responsibility to act on the promise of that faith and to become a Future-Christ:

> La foi nous est donnée par la messianité mais ce don est le plus grand risque, celui d'une réception qui se comprend mal ou se réduit à ses occasions mondaines d'existence. Pour le fidèle ou le « nouveau converti », le danger est de ne pas comprendre sa propre foi ou son absence de foi sur lesquelles il peut s'interroger, et les conditions sous lesquelles elle lui est donné ou bien refusée, de l'interpréter comme complètement déterminée et assurée, qu'elle soit présente ou absente, finalement de ne pas savoir que lui comme fidèle est impliqué dans la messianité et n'est nullement son observateur théologien.[12]

The subject must thus himself become a messiah, become a Future-Christ and become an actor of this heresy. This is arguably what, in different ways and to different degrees, all of the authors explored in this thesis have done: by creating impossible, fictional, sometimes empty texts that were cause by their negative faith, they have participated in the Heresy Laruelle is calling for, and it is in that heresy only that these texts find their impossible worth and performativity.

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[12] François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: Les ruines d'Athènes et de Jérusalem*, p.147

Conclusion

These texts stand as an act of defiance to the World. Even in the *Cahiers*, perhaps the least radical of these texts, Valéry's realisation of the World's conventions, locking him out of all spirituality, giving him ideals built on a flawed and yet unchallenged basis, turns him towards a form a heresy. If M.Teste was his idealised projection of a mystical Self, Valéry himself hid his God, hid his negative faith deep inside the pages of the *Cahiers*, as if to protect himself from the persecution of the World. Despite appearances, Valéry too is linked to these other authors by this negative faith. All of these texts defy the impossible, go further than thought should go, because through their faith they understand the weakness of the World's principle and the simple fact that they do not belong to the world. But this feeling of not belonging, this "quelque chose de radicalement hors-nature"[1] is not exclusive to these authors, or for that matter exclusive at all: it concerns all humans. There are no chosen ones, picked out by some divine determinism to have this negative faith. For Laruelle, Bataille, Eckhart and to some extent even Valéry, the subject or part of the subject, even if he or she is still in the World, is God, *la nuit* or *le Réel*. This is something that, hypnotised by the World and the hallucinations of philosophy, a subject can ignore all his or her life. The reason of the realisation, of the sudden lucid and mystical transparency to oneself is unclear: for Laruelle, as has been discussed, it is a non-choice or a unilateral choice, the subject becomes a Heretic and a Future-Christ through the unilateral action of the Real. For Eckhart, this is perhaps more complex, his *detachment* having to be radical and somehow unintentional, much like inner experience for Bataille that cannot be a project or will fail. On the horizon of these inner and mystical experiences, there is a common finality: the emancipation from the World. This implies of course numerous things that can be expressed in very rational ways: rejection of all positive knowledge, culture, and even identity, because emancipation from the World means emancipation from the subject, at least from his or her hypostasized identity and limits. In the World, the subject of science and rationalism lives a tragic fate, that of metaphysical solipsism, that of being absolutely alone in the World. These texts, caused and driven by negative faith, expose and explode the notion of selfhood: emancipation from the World correlatively means emancipation from the Self, a *mise à mort* of

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[1] François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur*, p.37

the notion of selfhood. These mystical experiences are not, at their most radical, ephemeral moments of union with God, the One or the Real but of a fundamental oneness that is at last actualised. For Meister Eckhart, this is manifested in the immanent process of the constant co-birthing of God and the subject inside the uncreated utopia, whereby the subject is God. Even for Bataille, where inner experience is portrayed as having one or perhaps several ecstatic moments of oneness with *la nuit du non-savoir*, this experience causes an unhealable wound, perhaps the sign of an ongoing, invisible and immanent life that Bataille himself did not realise the full potentiality of. In Laruelle, no ecstatic moment of sorts but a radical emancipation from the World through a unilateral choice, that would be seen as anything but a choice from a rational point of view, that actualises the subject's Heresy and sees him or her become a *Christ-Futur*. However, these experiences and immanent lives imply not the simple dissolution of selfhood into nothing or God, but the creation of *immanent communities*. In what he calls *la Vie Nouvelle*, for Laruelle, the *Christs-Futurs* form an ecclesial body, idempotent to the Real and struggle as a community against the World. This is generally true of any experience of oneness with God, the One or any one of those non-referents: if there is a fundamental oneness of all subjects with said God, then there is first a community *en puissance*, waiting to be revealed, hidden by the World. The mystical experience, through actualising that oneness, not only fulfils the perfect equality between all subjects, but introduces them to an *immanent community*. As Laruelle writes in *Mystique non-philosophique*:

> Plus encore que dans la philosophie ou dans sa mystique où nous expérimentons seulement le désir de l'Un, nous *sommes*, tout-un-chacun, l'Un-en-Un. Nous le sommes même sans l'être-ni-l'avoir, même sans l'éprouver comme donné en transcendance. C'est un blanc non pas absolu mais radical, un Fond blanc déterminé, même s'il ne l'est pas par attributs et prédicats, et déterminant. Nous sommes l'Un dépourvu de la suffisance de l'Être, de son pouvoir de briller et de se poser, de se nommer et de s'éclairer lui-même.[2]

For these *immanent communities* where total equality and idempotency are the only *modus operandi*, Dubilet uses the term "undercommons of the World".[3] These communities are untraceable, undetectable and yet a force that struggles menacingly against the World,

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[2] François Laruelle., *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains*, p.92-93
[3] Alex Dubilet, 'Neither God, Nor World': On the One Foreclosed to Transcendence" in Palgrave Communications, 1 (2015) https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms, p.6

heretically challenging its structures of power and its hegemony on the subjects that live there. These texts suggest that this immanent life in the undercommons of the World can produce, through negative faith, disruptions in the very fabric of the World. Laruelle's self-standing work is a symbol of this radical heresy, that refuses the hegemony of one life on another, of the phenomenal on the immanent. In this sense, all of these authors form their own community, a *resistance* by which, each in their own way, they have placed the World into radical immanence, inviting the reader to discover another path leading to a community that is not social, intellectual or political, but void from all the categories of the World and of the World itself: an *immanent community*, one of idempotency and perfect equality.

For critics and readers, the approach to such texts is challenging. From the outside, from the perspective of the World, these concepts, texts and mystical experiences may seem at best strange, at worse insane. But there is an open radical insanity in the works explored in this thesis, that is by no means hidden or made acceptable in any way. From a rational standpoint, none of these texts or the way this thesis has chosen to read them stand the test of logic and philosophical analysis. And yet this is why they are so important: they are *necessarily* insane. The limits of thoughts and experience will never be pushed back by remaining within the same epistemological and spiritual limits humans have now be following for centuries. It is time to acknowledge that the insanity of these heresies is what will make thought and (non-) knowledge progress, or at least expand. For the reader or the critic to have this negative faith is by no means a prerequisite to make this thesis or these texts relevant intellectually; spiritually, perhaps, and even so each subject can make his or her own path through the meanders of these *impossible texts*. Even for the most faithless critic, this thesis provides the critical framework that allows to understand these texts fully, as they themselves were designed to perform and function. Without this idea of negative faith, these texts are simply empty, at best simple parodies or *simulacra* with no *telos* and no possible reading experience. Exploring the insanity of these texts is a confrontation to a radical form of thought that can only exist because the authors write and act according to this negative faith. The question of whether or not this faith "exists" is a philosophical question that the authors, of course, would consider completely irrelevant. The reader must not try to answer it, but to make a choice instead: stay shackled by the World, or join the *immanent community*?

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