

Crisis of Ideology and the Disenchanted Eye: Pasolini and Bataille

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Many films impress their audience with the spectacular by prioritizing visual effects and a corresponding model of sensory-motor response, so that our experience of them is based on one of sensation. These films invoke what Tom Gunning describes as a “cinema of attractions”¹ that, it can be argued, prioritize not vision but a response-induced vision. This is not, however, the case with regard to the cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini. In order to engage with his films the initial aesthetic experience would be better served as a point of departure in order to negotiate what may be called a philosophy of film.

The question, then, would be to consider how we are able to think the films of Pasolini without falling into the rubric of a formalist theory of film or subsuming Pasolini’s work under the philosophy of another. A reasonable response, and indeed a pertinent one, would be to bring to Pasolini’s visuality a philosophy, and, with it, a philosopher, that explores the ideologies present in Pasolini’s work. In doing so, it will help to not only illuminate certain themes that are present in his films, but also to allow his films to teach us how to think philosophically without being rendered as a mere footnote to a philosopher. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the model of philosophy which we bring to the film should enrich our understanding of the film and must not at the same time limit the film’s ability to be opened up to the opportunity for a different reading or interpretation.

This paper stages an encounter between Bataille’s philosophy and Pasolini’s film *Teorema*. To place Bataille alongside Pasolini is not to conclude that their philosophy is identical, but is to look at their respective treatment of certain ideas: such as the notion of the fall of reason and its connection with vision and the sun, and the irruption of irrationality, death, or madness in the face of ‘authenticity’. As their treatment of these themes are not equivalent this paper sets out to explore the ways in which Pasolini’s *Teorema* teaches us how to think in terms of Bataille, that is, how the film recalls aspects of Bataille’s philosophy. In the process of articulating their differences I hope to offer a way into how to think these themes by introducing the idea of the ‘intevallic’, firstly

in its function as the cinematic cut and, secondly, as a dislocating alterity within oneself. By way of figuring the possible meaning and implications of the 'interval', metaphorically and through the materiality of the cinematic, Bataille and Pasolini interrupt one another, marking the site of a crisis of the rational through a loss of vision.

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Surrealism must be imagined but it is not imaginary —its reality is of the same kind as the universe. That reality is irrational. Its irrationality is not imaginary, but it must be imagined.

René Magritte

theorem n. & v. M16 [Fr. *théorème* or L *theorem*, Gk *theorem*, speculation, theory, proposition to be proved, f. *theoria* contemplation, speculation, sight, *theorin* be a spectator, look at.] 1 A general proposition or statement, not self-evident but demonstrable by argument or a chain of reasoning on the basis of given assumptions; 2 Mental view, contemplation E17-E18.

The kinetic and digressive perspectives mobilized by the advent of cinema enabled a resurrection of the *memento mori* that was once seized by a photograph's obstinate fatality. Once resuscitated from its position as a "catastrophe of narrative space,"² the image, freed from immobility to promote a continually shifting multi-perspectival viewpoint, finds itself as an agency of an accursed vision by a refusal to avert its eyes. "There are two things you cannot look at directly," La Rochefoucauld declared, "the sun and death,"³ or else the seer may be wrought with madness, blindness or damnation. And yet, the artificial eye seemingly trespasses such metaphysical boundaries without suturing the consequences posed, and in doing so it opens up an alterity in vision and seduces the gaze of the human eye that looks on. The sun's fiery sensual glow and death's "cold absorptive interiority"⁴ battle for the seduction of our gaze. And these eyes which look on, either through the transparency of the lens or the transparency of the allegorical spectres inscribed in film—what of these eyes that have given way to pure vision? These seers who are not immune to delirium unlike their counterpart, the lens, the artificial eye, so effective as the primary instrument of seeing. How are we able

to reconcile such a vision? Or is it that *la bataille*⁵ only points towards an irreconcilable ideology⁶ and an impossible vision? Perhaps what we need to do is what Pasolini's *Teorema* asks of us. This film calls forth our vision by its very name, and what can we do, but to first and foremost give sight to and behold the spectacle regardless of consequence and ask, what of losing our heads? Whither rationality?

The Eclipsing Eye of Reason

What gives way to blindness? I would like to suggest that it is its difference, it is the difference which blindness does not possess that has to give way. Alterity is at work. The word 'blindness' in itself already hints at a heterology embedded in its meaning. Blindness refers to the loss of vision, even a momentary one such as the *augenblick* in the blink of an eye and, at the same time, blindness also announces an irrationality, Bataille's "sleep of reason,"⁷ a blindness of the intellect that disrupts us in dreams and our imagination. So what do we make of this picture of man, the supposed rational animal? He is but one who interrupts and is interrupted by an alterity that is already within him, but an alterity that he fails to contain. It is this point of rupture where Pasolini's vision evidences traces of Bataille's thinking, in fact, one may even say that Pasolini's and Bataille's ideology rupture into, or are rupturing, each other.

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To figure this space of the interval into the essence of the filmic we must first of all look into the materiality of film, that is the film strip, the projector, the movement of the film strip through the projector. Where does it give itself over to a blindspot?⁸ That spot which gives itself to an alterity but which at the same time constitutes its very ontology? The 'between-frame' opens up a space where the eye of the spectator is blinded. A space outside the temporal logic of filmic time,⁹ its openness is of the order of indeterminacy and alterity. This interval interrupts our vision at 24 frames per second, its appearance of continuity is nothing more than the simulated effects of the 'afterimage', retinal retention which allows us to 'see' even when the image fails to appear in reality.¹⁰ This space of darkness that is beyond our gaze is a potent phenomenon, as it is also the same space which circumscribes and conjoins what can be seen. It traces the liminal space of cinematic spectatorship and thus sets the limit for filmic visibility. What is it that hides beyond this negative space?

The between-frames marks the site of the non-frame or the 'cut', and in this case the

cinematic cut. This process intervenes directly with the film's narrative space.¹¹ That is, the cut inserts itself between the gaze and *logos*, its insertion disrupts and displaces not only what we see, but also erupts with another's vision; it is a space where the director inserts his presence and, with it, his system of thought. For Pasolini, the relationship between images loses its fundamental contiguity; that is, the typical model of shot-reverse shot and other traditional narrative conventions. In its place, a relation of thought which can only be described as the 'cinema of poetry'¹² challenges narrative cohesiveness and the integrity of the image. In doing so, we are left with an ever-widening gap in our motor-sensory relay¹³ by its disruption of the flow of action-reaction responses. We can no longer be certain of what we are seeing, nor do we know how to respond—in presenting us with an intangible vision, reason becomes suspended. Pasolini describes cinema as neither a language nor a system of language, rather cinema "expresses reality not through symbols, but via reality itself," that is, it "expresses reality with reality," so that "[i]f I have to express you, I express you through yourself; if I want to express that tree I express it through itself." His passion for film-making directly reflects his "passion for life, for reality, for physical, sexual, objectual, existential reality."¹⁴ In *Teorema*, this reality questions the very limits of knowledge and points towards a 'time outside of history', a casting back or a projecting forwards of a time which lies beyond the jurisprudence of man. 'Time outside of history' hints at something that is beyond our experience and thus out of the grasp of knowledge, a notion which is echoed in the 'un-knowing' or 'non-knowledge' of Bataille, who writes:

I want to provide once again the schema of the experience which I call pure experience. I reach first of all the extreme limit of knowledge (for example, I mimic absolute knowledge, in whatever way, but that assumes an infinite effort of the mind wanting knowledge). I know then that I know nothing. As *ipse* I wanted to be everything (through knowledge) and I fall into anguish: the occasion of this anguish is my non-knowledge, nonsense beyond hope (here non-knowledge does not abolish particular knowledge, but its sense—removes from it all sense).¹⁵

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Teorema or theorem is a word which proposes the structural logic of a mathematical theorem at work, ordered and analytical. Not only must it obey a set of rules, but the systematic equation it follows must in the end be the proof of the theorem. Pasolini's film, whilst bearing this title, moves beyond the sets formed and delimited by rules and structure, although the film may contain a number of segments centred around the visit of an enigmatic stranger. If we were to follow this trajectory the film can be essentially

divided into two parts, that is, prior to the arrival or after the departure of this stranger. But we must note that the segments of film are specifically anachronistic. In Pasolini's novel of the same title, he suggestively writes of an atemporality at work: "[d]oes some time pass?," and in another, "[p]erhaps it is still the same night... [w]e underline it for the last time—the facts of this story are as one in place and time," and "[m]ore time has passed. (Perhaps days have passed, perhaps months or perhaps even years)."¹⁶ While theorists such as Naomi Greene and Patrick Rumble argue that Pasolini engages in a formal, rigid structure in this film, this observation is one that remains to be addressed.

Even if the film can be provisionally divided and subdivided into segments, the sum of these parts does not equate or even approximate to the whole. These segments either move beyond that of the narrative it tries to tell, or remain inert within themselves and do no more than bear the sign of a void. There is a suspension of resolution or conclusion to this film. In fact, the essence (which, more precisely, may be characterized as a non-essential essence, since this essence does not fall within the metaphysics of a universalizing gaze, time, or structure) of *Teorema* fails to be contained by the literal impression we get from its title. Its meaning is hidden in the paradoxical turn of this word, 'teorema'—the altered ego which asks us to 'spectate' rather than to set out with a solution already at hand. So from the very beginning it already asks of us to seek its meaning from beyond that of the word used to describe it. In this way, it enacts a radical discourse that spills over the definitive and defies an absolute knowledge. This word, theorem, problematizes its very meaning, and it is this very notion of a problematic rather than the theorematic that Pasolini presents to us, and which asks of us to look irrespective of the consequences, to gaze at the sun, to look directly at the source of light, to let its brightness eclipse our vision and turn us blind. Then, and only then, may we be able to gaze at the night, the abyss of being, and tremble at our incomprehension of it. Bataille writes:

Trembling. To remain immobile, standing, in a solitary darkness, in an attitude without the gesture of a supplicant: supplication, but without gesture and above all without hope. Lost and pleading, blind, half dead. Like Job on the dung heap, in the darkness of night, but imagining nothing—defenceless, knowing that all is lost.¹⁷

The Sacred Community: Vaticinal Visions and Contaminated Milieux

The film begins with a prologue shot in *cinéma vérité* style that is only to be revealed later on to be proleptic. In this scene, Milanese factory workers are being interviewed about the hand over of the factory by its owner. The scene raises questions of the assimilating effects of the bourgeoisie (it seems that everyone is being incorporated into

the petit bourgeoisie, resulting in a dissolution of revolution and class struggle in this very act). Pasolini suggests that these are new problems to which an answer remains suspended even at the end of the film, an answer that is a cry of irrationality. The title sequence that follows is of an ariel view across an expanse of a desertscape, the colour of ash, an unnameable wasteland removed of any trace of human life, or any life for that matter. There is no horizon in sight, nor is the land consumed by light. All that we are able to detect is the passing of time by the cloud shadows that move continuously across this view of nothingness. Suddenly, this image abruptly cuts to a wide angle shot of this wasteland, the camera panning across a deserted volcanic-like landscape of rubble and dirt, to the voice-over: "And I shall bring you into the wilderness." This image of the desert is what Pasolini calls the "visual form of the absolute, of time outside history,"¹⁸ and is intercut throughout the film. Its significance and meaning will be explored in the following sections.

A series of silent black and white scenes introducing the members of the household follows; Paolo the father and factory owner, Lucia the mother, Odetta the daughter and Pietro, the son. The sequence ends with the delivery of a telegram by the postman played by Ninetto Davoli, whose character is an allegory of the messenger of God, who flaps his arms on entering and leaving the mansion.¹⁹ The telegram simply reads "arriving tomorrow," without further explanation or any indication of its authorship.

The black and white scenes are particularly unsettling despite their appeal to the poetics of cinema. Their appearance is jarring when put in contrast with the rudimentary and chaotic docu-journalistic opening. The unrelated styles and incohesive images make these scenes somehow lacking, they fail to deliver the aura of luxurious opulence attributable to black and white images and of the lifestyle of the bourgeoisie. Something akin to a quality of humanness seems to be amiss, and the removal of sound makes the characters and their activities seem unrealistic and out of place, disconnected to the world.

What follows is the arrival of a young man, an enigmatic visitor (played by Terence Stamp). We are not told his name nor do we know the purpose of his visit; he is described as no more than just "a boy." His arrival is pivotal to each member of the family. They are powerless in the face of this stranger and can do no more than to succumb to what is beyond their control and which escapes their understanding. Each of them is seduced by their encounter with this 'boy'. For Pasolini, the stranger functions allegorically: he is "[a] mysterious character who is divine love," who "arrives in a bourgeois family," whose presence marks "the intrusion of metaphysics and the authentic," and who has "come to destroy and overturn an existence which is entirely inauthentic."²⁰ Bataille writes: "Life has always taken place in a tumult without apparent cohesion, but it only finds its grandeur and its reality in ecstasy and in ecstatic love"²¹—it is precisely this conjunction, the collapse of the distinction between authentic and inauthentic and the tumult of an ecstatic state that *Teorema* explores.

Pasolini sees this stranger ultimately as "something authentic and unstoppable," he is an "ultra-terrestrial and metaphysical apparition: he could be the Devil, or a mixture of God and the Devil"²²—he is perhaps akin to a pagan god for whom there is no strict

division between virtue and sin. The destruction he wields is an outstripping of any formal inscriptions of the bourgeoisie. Although the members of the family are not shown in any polemical light, for the most part they are stripped of their attitudes, expressions and manners, as the characters are almost silent in this film. What the effect of the stranger does is to strip them not only of their appearance but also, more importantly, of their identity; indeed, it is their idea of themselves that has been stripped bare. The stranger does so with a love without compromise, a love at once sacred and scandalous, a love of the abyss and the unknown. This is an alterity which fissures those who encounter it. It is a love that asserts difference. A heterologous love.

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For Bataille, heterology is an oxymoron. As Mark C. Taylor describes it, it is a “science of the other come together in the notion of *dépense* (expenditure, outlay, flow; *dépenser* to spend, expend, waste; *dépensier* extravagant),” so that for Bataille *dépense* “points to that which is outside of thought [*la pensée*].”²³ Thus, heterology is an ‘impossible science’ that refuses to assimilate the unknown into a ‘knowing’. Bataille described philosophy as a system of reductive thinking which tends to render the unknowable to the status of the knowable, so that non-knowledge is still knowledge through the process of identification. At the heart of *Teorema* there lies an unknown, which may be addressed as a problem or a fissure in which all things converge. In this way, the theorematic gives way to the problematic, which in turn “lives in the theorem, and gives it life, even when removing its power.”²⁴ Whilst the theorem is concerned with its own interior logic, in which the equation would carry it to its conclusion, the problem “introduces an event from the outside—removal, addition, cutting—which constitutes its own conditions and determines the ‘case’ or cases: hence the ellipse, hyperbola, parabola, straight lines and the point are cases of projection of the circle on its secant planes, in relation to the apex of a cone.”²⁵

Just as the encounter with this mythical stranger is wrought with uncertainty, what has come to touch on these people is not definitive and cannot be reduced to an exteriority such as the material world, nor an interiority found in each one’s psychological realm. It is an encounter of alterity, of difference, an outside that ruptures into the family members and makes them pass into each other, transparent and transgressed. Their convergence is towards a centre that is beyond the grasp of thought. This stranger’s presence brings about an eclipse of reason echoed in the father’s utterance: “I am haunted by a question to which I cannot reply.” Deleuze, similarly, describes *Teorema* as a living problem:

Far from restoring knowledge, or the internal certainty that it lacks, to thought, the problematic deduction puts the unthought into thought, because it takes away

all its interiority to excavate an outside in it, an irreducible reverse-side, which consumes its substance. Thought finds itself taken over by the exteriority of a ‘belief’, outside any interiority of a mode of knowledge.²⁶

Just like the intercutting of the image of the desertscape, the non-diegetic insert and the presence to which it refers registers a violation of continuity. This unincorporable event introduces an interruption, an alterity that cannot be explained. Pasolini’s deliberate use of opaque and ambiguous images present the viewer with elements whose meaning is obtuse or nebulous. He pushes the limits of what is representable at the boundaries of the expressible. In this way, he puts narrative cohesiveness into crisis and opts for an anachronistic delivery in an already contaminated milieu.²⁷

For Bataille, the “completely other” of heterology can be more suitably described by the term “*agiology*,” signifying as it does the “double meaning of *agio* (analogous to the double meaning of *sacer*), *soiled* as well as *holy*.”²⁸ For Pasolini, the sacred stranger yields this paradoxical quality. He is already a contaminated god by his very presence in the bourgeois milieu. To descend “among the bourgeois” points to an element of vulgarity in him, as “[t]here are no uncultured bourgeois who are not vulgar; only culture can purify.”²⁹ Pure and impure, attractive and repulsive, “holy and filthy,” “alluring and forbidding” are the kinds of “ambiguity which render the sacred *fascinating*.” This fascination is irrational and irreducible. Just as we are not given to understand the attraction of the stranger to the bourgeois household, we can see that this fascination is unstoppable even if the members of the family are ashamed of their desire. Bataille also describes the sacred as something that is “characterized by the impossibility of enduring,” it is the “opposite of a substance that withstands the test of time, something that flees as soon as it is seen and cannot be grasped.”³⁰ For Bataille, it is the sacred which disrupts order and takes over the role of the profane to interrupt and displace rationality and labour. Mark C. Taylor elucidates Bataille’s notion of the sacred:

The intervention of the sacred exposes gaps, holes, tears, and *Risse*, in what had seemed to be the coherent and consistent fabric of experience. The eruption of the sacred into the domain of the profane takes place in religious ritual. Inasmuch as the maintenance of the structure of reason and work requires submission to the prohibitions against death and sex, the disorder associated with the sacred can be released only by the violation of these founding taboos. In Bataille’s ‘general economy’ of the sacred, transgression is enacted at the *altar* of sacrifice and the *altar* of eroticism. By taking the step beyond, the transgressor glimpses the altarity of the sacred.³¹

The Falling Sun: Soleil Tombée

It is time to abandon the world of the civilised and its light. It is too late to be reasonable and educated—which has led to a life without appeal. Secretly or not, it is necessary to become completely different, or to cease being.

Bataille

He belonged to real life. It would take longer to duplicate his goodness than to create a star. The godhead which had come without my hoping for it...has not returned and will never return again.

Rimbaud

The departure of the mystical stranger is analogous to the dislocation of the pineal eye, which was once seen as the seat of rational intellect. Its displacement takes with it the head and makes of man a headless, acéphalic figure. In the chapter on Bataille from *Altarity*, Mark C. Taylor weaves a rich and labyrinthine tale of the dethronement of the head, which I would like to recall here, in fragments, to thread through a dialogue between Bataille and Pasolini.

The Place de la Concorde figures an indexical relation which Taylor uses to liberate speculative philosophy through its genealogy by the very removal of intellectual concordance. This space, now marked by an obelisk, was once the site of the guillotine that beheaded nearly three thousand people between 1792 and 1795. The Egyptian word for obelisk, *téhen*, is etymologically linked to the word sunbeam, perhaps most significantly described by Bataille in his essay “Rotten Sun” in which he details the religious practice of the Mithraic cult of the sun in which a bull’s throat is slashed on a scaffold, its hot blood spilling onto a pit filled with stripped bodies below. Bataille goes on to describe the sun’s relation to the acéphale:

Of course the bull himself is also an image of the sun, but only with his throat slit. The same goes for the cock, whose horrible solar cry always approximates the screams of a slaughter. One might add that the sun has also been mythologically expressed by a man slashing his own throat, as well as by an anthropomorphic being *deprived of a head*.³²

The sun’s fiery glow robs the onlooker of his vision. According to Bataille, the scrutinized sun can be identified with “a mental ejaculation...or an epileptic crisis,”³³ seizing with it our mental faculties. We ask the question, then, what of the god who illuminates the sensuous light of the visible world, the god whose divine love embraces

physical love? A god who will bring each one he encounters into the wilderness, into a time without history. What kind of transgressions may result from an encounter with such a vision(ary)? In one scene the mother, Lucia, casts off her clothes in a manner uncharacteristically detached from her usual poise. Her meeting with the ‘boy’ was bathed in the warm glow of sunlight, this light which echoes her name, Lucia, the meaning of which is ‘light’. When Stamp’s character approached her his figure was lit by the sun behind him, creating a halo around his head and torso, emanating a sensual glow. On his departure, Lucia could do no more than confess to him that she had lost her identity as the mistress of the house. She in turn becomes a ‘mistress’ in a succession of casual sex with young strangers. Our last vision of her sees her entering a church, the grounds of which also marks the site of her last casual encounter, although from the outside we are unable to detect any sign of its religious bearings since there are no statues or crosses.³⁴ It was not until she had entered it hesitantly that we were shown that this was in fact a sacred place, perhaps a pagan church, situated in an agricultural area at the outskirts of a town,³⁵ and with this knowledge she closes the doors behind her.³⁶

The daughter, Odetta, whose name bears the meaning ‘sensual love’, could do no more than recall the boy’s time with the family following his departure. At first she ran towards the gate as though afraid of what was outside, then peered out timidly and suspiciously from between the bars before turning indoors and firmly closing the two doors behind her. Once inside again, listless, she spins around on the spot, her eyes glazed and unseeing, for at least two rotations of 360°. The movement of the camera following her was one of a vertiginous, enveloping spiral, a visual representation of a movement of a fall, a fall towards interiority. She races to her room and pulls out a photograph album, and whilst gazing at a photograph of the stranger traces his outline. The fingers of the hand that touched his image suddenly curl into a fist and she falls face down on her bed. The non-diegetic insert of the desert landscape abruptly cuts the frame, the image of the desert is in an extreme close-up. We then see Odetta again—this time she is lying on her back on the bed, her right fist still tightly clenched and trembling from the strain of her grasp. Her eyes are wide-open and unseeing, she lies motionless. It is as though she had taken on the effects of the *memento mori* presented to her by the photograph. A dead image, an image of a death mask, immortalized through a process of light on emulsion, but nonetheless of a pastness that refuses to be recovered or one that will never return. Lucia and Odetta both have been struck down with a kind of blindness; one falls into blind faith, the other falls into a state of catatonia. Yet in this way they are freed from the social order dictating the bourgeoisie—their revolution is worthy of the word *dépenser*.³⁷

The son, Pietro, after the visitor’s departure, left home to pursue painting. Once, they had sat together in silence, the stranger and the son, looking at the paintings of Francis Bacon: in particular one triptych, “Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion,” which depicts the pursuit of Oedipus and Orestes by the Furies who are pursued for their monstrous crimes of patricide, incest and matricide. The Furies’ punishment is to induce madness as a ritual of purification. But in the face of madness Pietro chose to embrace blindness in its place.³⁸ His own art was made by covering his eyes to pick at random a

colour and, still blinded, spilling the colour on a canvas and hanging the work up on a wall. On another occasion, all he could do was to piss on a painted blue canvas.

Perhaps the most arresting of all the transformations to the bourgeois household is that of the father's, Paolo,³⁹ who was awakened at dawn by an unconscious pain. He moves through the house and, at first, shielding his eyes from the light of the sunrise coming through a window, gradually walks towards the source of this light, as though compelled to do so. He follows this source and steps outside into the garden where his eyes look directly at the golden glow of dawn, as though seduced. Entranced, he walks back into the house and peers through a doorway into his son's bedroom where he sees the 'boy' and his son together asleep in bed. Perhaps it is the effect of this vision, coupled with his encounter of the stranger after his first collapse, which opens his eyes to a vision that renders him headless. Paolo's auto-confession to the departing stranger gives us a glimpse into the abyss of his being:

You must've come here to destroy. The destruction you've caused in me couldn't be more complete. You've simply destroyed the image I always had of myself, now I can't see anything at all that I can reintegrate into my identity. A scandal like this is death... a complete loss of myself. How can this be with a man used to the concept of order, the concept of a tomorrow and, above all, of ownership?

In the end, the father strips himself bare, not only of the factory, but of his clothes. It is significant to note that the father removed his clothing in the middle of an enormous transport terminal, which in turn constitutes a codified system of exchange, of flow, activity, production and transactions.⁴⁰ By shedding his appearance he also sheds his connection with the world he knows. There is nothing more for him to do but to "flee, leave, leave everything, tear oneself from the world."⁴¹ And he does, as though in exile—we find him naked, running through the volcanic desert and breaking out in an inhuman cry that ends the film. Pasolini described this cry as a cry of 'vile hope' or 'pure desperation'; it is a cry of irrationality, beyond language, its meaning suspended and irreconcilable. Bataille describes this state of rupture in *Inner Experience*:

This eye which, to contemplate the sun, face to face in its nudity, opens up to it in all its glory, does not arise from my reason: it is a cry which escapes me. For at the moment when the lightning stroke blinds me, I am the flash of a broken life—anguish and vertigo—opening itself up to an infinite void, is ruptured and spends itself all at once in this void.⁴²

For Bataille, this eye which contemplated the sun is also the locus of a blindspot at the summit of our skull, that is, the pineal eye.⁴³ This eye of unreason recalls the 'petrified sunbeam' of the obelisk capped by the pyramid, an open tomb to an obscure space and time. Bataille imagines the pineal eye to be like a "horrible erupting volcano... doomed to the contemplation of the sun at the summit of its bursting... the pineal eye is necessarily

interpreted as an irresistible desire to become a sun oneself (a blind sun or a blinding sun, it hardly matters)...[b]ut the cruel and shattering character of this absurd desire soon appears...for the eye that opens in the middle of the skull, the result, even imaginary, is much more terrifying, though horribly ridiculous.”⁴⁴ And it is this pineal eye that erupts in a cry that “bursts out of a shattered life”; “[t]his agonising *cri* is not a ‘fact of reason’ but is an ‘irreducible waste product’—something like excrement that cannot be digested.”⁴⁵ Another view would be to cast this cry as one of ecstasy, following the Greek origin of *ek-stasis*, or *existanai*, meaning ‘to derange’; *ex* which means ‘out’ + *histanai* ‘to cease to stand’. In other words, ecstasy is without stand, without position or foundation: groundless.

Let us return to the obelisk and its meaning in relation to writing and printing. The dagger symbol (=) which it designates was used to indicate a footnote or marginalia. In ancient manuscripts the obelisk was in the form of ‘—’ or ‘|’ and marked passages that were considered doubtful, corrupt or superfluous.⁴⁶ So, perhaps, one may go as far as to say that the obelisk at the Place de la Concorde hints at incompleteness and irresolution, in the sense of Bataille, for whom philosophy must remain open, a “*mobile* thought, without seeking its definitive state,”⁴⁷ and to a writing that has no end. At the extreme possibility of thought there lies the “truth of a scream,” and “the cry of this powerlessness is a prelude to the deepest silence.”⁴⁸ Atop the obelisk lies the death of reason, a hollowed pyramid indicative of the irrationality of immortality which the pyramids try to preserve. But it is the pyramids which survive in the end. Paradoxically, they transcended the lives it took to build them, and they do no more than remind us of the unceasing flow of time and, with it, the impending deaths of man or, as Bataille puts it, “it seems that they maintain what escapes from the dying man.”⁴⁹ Rupture, abyss, gap, interval, tears. What happens when these tears occupy the space of writing? Or is it that the space of writing opens up to these tears, and with it to the shredding of the fabric of reason? So that the tomb of the pyramid is no more than an empty space, the *tomb* or fall of reason is but a headless obelisk. But perhaps Bataille’s sacred community can only be resurrected headlessly in which man must escape from his own head and not be a prisoner of his own reason.

Labyrinthine Interior and Labour’s Burial Ground

Our existence is merely a mad process of identification with that of those living beings whom something that is immensely ours sets us beside.

Pasolini

I would like to draw this paper to its conclusion by firstly recalling a story by Borges titled “The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths.” The narrative begins with the king

of the isles of Babylonia gathering his city's finest architects and priests to build a labyrinth that is as subtle as it is confusing. His desire was to "strike confusion and inspire wonder", the domain of which is reserved only for God and not man. During the king of the Arabs' visit, he was made to enter the labyrinth, where he wandered, lost and humiliated, until nightfall when he called on the aid of God and found the doorway that led him outside. When the king returned to Arabia, he started a war to wreak havoc amongst the people of Babylonia and eventually he held the king of Babylonia captive. They rode on the back of a camel for three days before the king of Babylonia was released with these words from the king of Arabia: "O king of time and substance and cipher of the century! In Babylonia didst thou attempt to make me lose my way in a labyrinth of brass with many stairways, doors, and walls; now the Powerful One has seen fit to allow me to show thee mine, which has no stairways to climb, nor doors to force, nor wearying galleries to wander through, nor walls to impede the passage." The king of Babylonia was then released into the middle of the desert, where he died of hunger and thirst.⁵⁰

In the desert, there is only the sun and the ceaselessly shifting sand that recalls the hourglass and the passing of time. How is one not to go mad, when it is only a vast expanse of nothingness which separates one from identifying with the sun, that which bears the mark of your very destruction? Both Bataille and Pasolini inspire an unsettling vision, that is, this labyrinth of the wasteland is already within us, although this 'within' is never self-contained. The self is constantly effaced by the self becoming other, that is, its identity is under constant erasure by being affected by what is not itself. In other words, we lose ourselves, or perhaps find ourselves different to what we thought. And at the heart of the very act of writing or in thinking philosophy there is a certain destruction in which the self becomes other through this very act of writing or thinking, in the face of the recognition of this impossibility of a reconciliation with oneself; and yet, to continue to write and to think despite this impossibility is our greatest sacrifice.

Bataille writes:

Man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison. He has found beyond himself not God, who is the prohibition against crime, but a being who is unaware of prohibition. Beyond what I am, I met a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites the same eruption Birth and Death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me: his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster.⁵¹

I will now turn to the last 'member' of the bourgeois household in *Teorema*, although she is part of the household, she is not of bourgeois background. Emilia⁵² is the servant

and of peasant background. Her encounter with the mystical stranger only brought about the reverential in her, as though she had been touched by grace. His departure is met by kisses on his hands and a profound deep silence. She leaves soon after him and returns to her village, where she sits by the side of a building on a wooden bench, waiting. It is as though Emilia had departed from herself, because back at the bourgeois household another maid by the name of Emilia has appeared without any explanation, albeit a younger version (with a different uniform and the hair pulled back differently), but without a doubt she is a doppelgänger for the Emilia who has departed. At the village, Emilia sits in solitude and silence. This scene is intercut with the daughter's lapse into catatonia. The scene which follows the 'revelation' of Odetta's unseeing eyes is that of a visionary at work—Emilia is being surrounded by village folk, she closes her eyes on their approach and the camera cuts to her point of view panning across the faces of these people. It is as though she is seeing with her eyes closed. A visionary. This floating, displaced gaze stops at the sight of a young boy whose face and hands are covered in welts. The image cuts to Emilia opening her eyes and solemnly she makes the sign of a cross. The next image is a shot of the boy smiling, his face cleared of blisters and Emilia smiling back. In the scenes which follow, Emilia's hair has turned green from having eaten stews of stinging nettles and, next, we see her in mid-air, beyond the rooftops, levitated, with arms outstretched, echoing the gesture of a statue of Jesus seen on the top of a church from one of Lucia's sexual encounters.⁵³

Emilia's sainthood is not beyond comprehension. At least as spectators we are able to digest what we see, but at the same time it does not repeat the logic of reason. Her transgression took her beyond the limits of being human, perhaps she is an allegory of difference, of alterity or otherness. Finally, she walks with an old woman to a site of labour, though emptied of workers (perhaps because it is only dawn). The earth has been turned and lies fallow, waiting for industry to take hold. They walk past a building inscribed with image of the hammer and sickle, the Communist symbol of labour at work. Then she lays in the hollowed ground, which is like a huge open tomb, and asks to be buried. The dirt covers all of her except for her eyes, which had begun to weep: "I didn't come here to die. I came here to weep. They're not tears of sorrow. No, they'll be a source but not a course of troubles." With these words the old woman departs, leaving Emilia buried in the ground, a small pool of water already collecting by her eyes.

If the wasteland tears at the heart of the father and the other members of the family, Emilia buries herself in this wasteland in an attempt to make it fertile again, to give to it the source of life which are her tears. The foundation of industry, expenditure, and order is displaced by a saint. She has made the site of labour her burial place which, in turn, renders the site of labour useless, creating a new kind of wasteland with a new revolution. Her eyes are no longer needed for seeing, she does not need them to gain vision for she is already a visionary. Instead, her eyes have given over to weeping, and their openness will give rise to a new life and a new ideology. They are also Bataille's eyes, which remain open to new thoughts, to behold new inscriptions...

The sacred community of Bataille and Pasolini rupture into each other. It is a rupturing of difference and alterity which puts rationality and visuality under a certain suspension, one whose state of suspension makes the world we know incomprehensible and irrational. Bataille's anti-visual implications and Pasolini's advocacy of an impure vision contaminate the integrity of visuality as well as the image. Ideology and our vision remain under constant threat, our perspectives subject to mutation and dissipation, the transparency of our thoughts constantly under erasure. So much so that for Pasolini and Bataille, respectively, the politics of cinematic representation and of philosophy as an allegory of community are but a figuration of an impossible society, one that announces a sacred community of difference. And in the end it is perhaps the opened eye which remains prophetic.

Notes

1. This phrase is used by Tom Gunning in his essay "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," where cinema is envisioned "as a series of visual shocks," coupled with the suspension of disbelief: "I know, but yet I see." Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," *Art & Text* 34 (Spring 1989): 33.
2. Edward Colless, "Sickening Vision," *The Error of My Ways* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 1995) 46.
3. Colless, "Sickening Vision" 45.
4. Colless, "Sickening Vision" 45.
5. *La bataille* is used here to hint at Bataille's philosophy, and also to its literal meaning, as in struggle, battle, fight.
6. Bataille's criticism of Hegel's System is that it is homogenizing. Bataille describes this in *Inner Experience*: Hegel "touched upon the extreme limit...attains satisfaction, turns his back on the extreme limit" and when his "memory brought him back to the perceived abyss" it was "in order to annul it!" For Bataille, Hegel's philosophy is a "system of annulment," in other words, Hegel's philosophy is one that does not allow for irreconcilable modes of reason, since his system of sublation is one which cancels out differences. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State U of New York P, 1988) 43.
7. In the *Theory of Religion*, Bataille ends by writing: "You are not any more different from me than your right leg is from your left, but what joins us is THE SLEEP OF REASON—WHICH PRODUCES MONSTERS." Here, Bataille is refering to an etching by Goya of the same name—"El sueño de la razón produce monstruos," which belongs to a series of satirical images commenting on the Spanish government, the aristocracy, the Church and the Inquisition. In this particular etching Goya exposes the self-indulgence and incompetence of his society. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1992) 113.
8. In posing this question, I would like to suggest that 'blindness' is a metaphor that has polyvalent meanings in cinematic spectatorship. Our gaze, as Anne Friedberg says, is "mobile and virtual," suggesting that there are certain things that we do not see when we are locked into a filmic presence. The word blindness also suggests a certain 'darkness', a lack of light, be it natural or artificial light, such as the darkened cinema around us.

9. I must add here that the temporal logic I am referring to, the time frame that is interior to the narrative and imagery of the film, may be anachronistic according to the varying perspectives. In *Teorema* the temporal logic is one of alogic: there is a sense of an absence not only of chronology, but an absence of the *need* for chronology, a perspective that transcends time, an atemporality.
10. To quote Rodowick (after Deleuze): “Memory, on the other hand, requires the interval as a dislocation in time. In the direct image of time, the interval no longer functions as continuity in space, but as a series of dislocations in time.” D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 88.
11. Bergson’s notion of duration describes this intervallic space as an instance of death, of forgetting, which is also the space for the possibility of multiple beginnings. To quote Rodowick: “Duration is neither linear nor chronological...rather, it presumes at each instant an unceasing opening onto an indeterminate future.” Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* 24.
12. This phrase is used by Pasolini as well as his critics to describe his style. This thought process bears no relation to any logical chain of sensory-motor linkages which Deleuze used in both *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* to describe standard Hollywood films, especially action films or films which are narrative-based that use a sequence of shots to induce a particular reaction or response from its audience.
13. The term ‘sensory-motor’ link is used here in a Deleuzian sense, so that it not only conveys the general action-reaction effects of such films or sequences, but also ties this concept in with the ‘action-image’, which he describes as an image that “inspires a cinema of behaviour (behaviourism),” a response that is very much dependent on “not only the actor’s acting out but also to the conception and unfolding of the film, its framings, its cutting, its montage.” Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 155.
14. Cited in *Pasolini on Pasolini*, ed. Oswald Stack (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969) 29.
15. Bataille, *Inner Experience* 53.
16. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Theorem*, trans. Stuart Hood (London: Quartet, 1992) 24, 27 and 112.
17. Bataille, *Inner Experience* 53.
18. Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1990) 133.
19. Religious references play a significant role in the films of Pasolini. In *Teorema*, Pasolini cites passages from the Bible and certain characters may be attributed with gestures and actions that allegorize characters in the biblical text. We must, however, remember that at the heart of *Teorema* there lies something else, something which transcends the tradition of religion, that is, of the Catholic church. Instead, what we see is something that is mythic, sacred, and epic. Pasolini describes his vision of the world as a “mutilated religion because it hasn’t got any of the external characteristics of religion, but it is a religious vision of the world.” Stack, ed., *Pasolini on Pasolini* 77.
20. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Jeune cinéma*, no. 33, cited in Greene, *Cinema as Heresy* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1990) 132.
21. Georges Bataille, “The Sacred Conspiracy,” *Visions of Excess*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985) 157.
22. Stack, ed., *Pasolini on Pasolini* 157.
23. Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 133.
24. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis : U of Minnesota P, 1989) 174.
25. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* 174.
26. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* 175.
27. Pasolini asserts that the cinema is naturally poetic and dreamlike. For him, “physics is poetic in itself, because it is an apparition, because it is full of mystery, because it is full

- of ambiguity, because it is full of polyvalent meaning.” It is “pre-historic, amorphous and unnatural.” Stack, ed., *Pasolini on Pasolini* 153.
28. Georges Bataille, “The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade,” *Visions of Excess* 102, n2.
29. Stack, ed., *Pasolini on Pasolini* 158.
30. Georges Bataille, “The Sacred,” *Visions of Excess* 241.
31. Taylor, *Altarity* 137.
32. Georges Bataille, “Rotten Sun,” *Visions of Excess* 57-58.
33. Bataille, “Rotten Sun” 57.
34. This lack of an appearance of religiousness in its exteriority echoes Pasolini’s sentiments about his films having a reverential and mythical content, but not one that can be recognized as a particular system of religion.
35. Lucia’s last casual encounter was in a ‘ditch’ by the church. This image immediately conjures up that of a tomb or an open grave. Here the allegories of sex, death and the sacred converge.
36. Her closing of the door, though symbolic, does not confirm closure of any kind. In fact, she has just plunged headlong into something that may in fact be alien to her. Unlike Emilia, who has religious images and icons in her bedroom, there is nothing of a religious nature in Lucia’s.
37. I’m referring to the above quote from Bataille, where *dépenser* is used to mean production and waste and also to recall that *dépense* points to something that is outside of rational thought.
38. A earlier speech by Pietro on his becoming a painter evokes the ghost of Bataille: “No one must realise the artist is worthless, who twists and squirms like a worm to survive.” In Bataille’s notion of *formless*, he says: “A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm.” Georges Bataille, “Formless,” *Visions of Excess* 31.
39. Pietro and Paolo, the names of the son and the father respectively, is perhaps suggestive of Pasolini’s own names, which are Pier Paolo Pasolini.
40. On his initial approach into the train station the father exchanged glances with a young man, echoing the actions of Lucia, but instead of honouring this exchange, he did not follow the young man, He refused the exchange and, instead, stripped himself bare.
41. Guy Scarpetta, “Déacinements,” *Tel Quel* no. 89, cited in Greene, *Cinema as Heresy* 133.
42. Bataille, *Inner Experience* 77
43. Mark C. Taylor describes the pineal eye as a ‘multivalent term’ which evokes a brilliant narrative that I will briefly recall here. Descartes was the first philosopher to engage with the pineal gland, a small red-gray organ which is located at the third ventricle of the brain. Descartes suggested that this gland was the seat of the soul, which unifies the soul with the body. Taylor then links Hegelianism with the pineal eye through a twist of the word to penal eye/I, suggestive of panopticism, like the gaze of the philosopher as absolute comprehension. And, last of all, “[t]he obelisk, inscribed with hieroglyphs and erected on the site where decapitation takes place, recalls the tattooed phallus of Lacanian analysis. At the tip of this obeliscal column, we have discovered a cut or an opening that is something like the ‘eye’ of the penis. Rather than securing philosophical mastery, this penal eye castrates the philosopher by exposing the blindness of knowledge”. In this way, Taylor marks the return of the pineal eye as a vision of irrationality in Bataille. Taylor, *Altarity* 121-124.
44. Georges Bataille, “The Jesuve,” *Visions of Excess* 74
45. Taylor, *Altarity* 123.
46. My reference here is, again, Mark C. Taylor’s chapter on Bataille. Taylor, *Altarity* 116.
47. Bataille, *Theory of Religion* 11.
48. Bataille, *Theory of Religion* 13.
49. Georges Bataille, “The Obelisk,” *Visions of Excess* 216.

50. Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1999) 263-264.

51. Bataille, "The Sacred Conspiracy" 181.

52. The servant Emilia is named after Emilia-Romagna, the traditionally communist, predominantly agricultural, region of Italy.

53. Patrick Rumble observes that Emilia "is the only character to survive" because "powerlessness, lack and absurdity is not new to her" and "she shares this with her community—who greet her by her first name, they recognise her, know her," articulating a "sharing of misery." He goes on to say that "[t]his experience and Emilia's acknowledgment of her indebtedness to an otherness allegorised in the Visitor, offer the possibility of meaning, of having a meaning, and being meaningful." Patrick Rumble, *Allegories of Contamination: Pier Paolo Pasolini's Trilogy of Life* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996) 141.

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