Realms of Eroticism and Modes of Transgression
Georges Bataille, Literature, Architecture

Roberts-Hughes, Rebecca Louise

Awarding institution:
King's College London

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT

Unless another licence is stated on the immediately following page this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Realms of Eroticism and Modes of Transgression:
Georges Bataille, Literature, Architecture

Rebecca Roberts-Hughes
King’s College, London
2015

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in English Literature
and Cultural Theory

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or
information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.
Abstract
My project traces the interrelated discourses of eroticism, modernism and transgression in the twentieth century through a nexus of thinkers, writers and architects focused around the French theorist and pornographic writer Georges Bataille (1897-1962). My aim is to consider what it means to think of eroticism as a transgression, and what transgression might look like. The topics of eroticism and transgression demand an interdisciplinary approach, and my thesis responds to this need through analysis of cultural theories, literature and architecture. Bataille, D. H. Lawrence, Anaïs Nin and Le Corbusier were contemporaries who explored similar ideas through different disciplines and using different language. My thesis draws them together to explore these similarities and what they reveal about the different disciplines, their relationship to one another, and their relationship to eroticism and transgression.

My method involves close theoretical readings of Bataille’s texts – chiefly *Eroticism*, but also *The Accursed Share, History of Eroticism, Theory of Religion* and selected essays and fiction – to develop a rigorous reading of Bataille’s notion of erotic transgression. This notion and related ideas of expenditure, sacrifice and poetry provide the basis for original analysis of the literary motifs and language used by Lawrence and Nin who, like Bataille, were concerned with writing eroticism. The importance of the sites of eroticism in fiction by all three writers and the structure of the language they use reveals a connection between their erotics, and between transgression and architecture. I explore this connection further by analysing the ideas and productions of architects who have openly engaged with Bataille’s thinking, focusing on Le Corbusier and Bernard Tschumi. I examine the possibility of transgression and poetry in architecture, and what the relationship between literary and architectural modes of transgression reveals about eroticism.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................... 5
List of Abbreviations........................................................................................................ 6
List of Photographic Images............................................................................................ 7

Introduction......................................................................................................................... 8
   Transgression and Eroticism.......................................................................................... 8
   Literature....................................................................................................................... 12
   Architecture................................................................................................................ 19

Chapter One
Georges Bataille’s Theory of Erotic Transgression......................................................... 27
   Situating Bataille........................................................................................................... 27
   The Essence of Humanity: Eroticism............................................................................ 30
   Expenditure and Sacrifice: Transgressive Themes in Bataille’s Texts....................... 35
   Excess and the Architecture of Humanity.................................................................... 41
   Undoing the Paradox of Death in Bataillean Transgression........................................ 47
   ‘The Ideal Nature of Society’: Architecture............................................................... 55
   Defining Structures of Humanity................................................................................ 62

Chapter Two
Erotic Transgression in Literature: D. H. Lawrence and Anaïs Nin......................... 68
   Modernist Eroticisms................................................................................................... 68
   Erotic Transcendence and the Polarity of Sex............................................................. 71
   Situating Lawrence’s Regenerative Eroticism........................................................... 81
   ‘The Resurrection of the Body’: Lady Chatterley’s Lover......................................... 86
   Sacrifice and Transgression....................................................................................... 96
   The Nature and Architecture of Eroticism............................................................... 105
   Erotic Language and Modes of Transgression.......................................................... 114
   ‘Building and Adorning’: House of Incest............................................................... 126
   Literary and Architectural Eroticisms........................................................................ 139

Chapter Three
Architectural Transgression: Eroticism and Excess in Architecture......................... 143
   The Possibility of Transgressive Architecture.......................................................... 143
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Anna Snaith and Professor Patrick ffrench, my supervisors at King’s College, London, whose insightful comments have guided me throughout my years of study in writing this thesis. I must also thank the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) for the generous award of the Gordon Ricketts Memorial Fund to support my trip to Chandigarh in India.
List of Abbreviations

- **F**: *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, D. H. Lawrence in *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)
- **ME**: *Madame Edwarda*, Georges Bataille, in *My Mother; Madame Edwarda; The Dead Man*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse (London: Marion Boyars, 2003)
- **RC**: *The Radiant City: Elements of a doctrine of urbanism to be used as the basis of our machine-age civilization*, Le Corbusier, trans. by Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux and Derek Coltman (London: Faber and Faber, 1967)
List of Photographic Images

- Fig. 1: Le Corbusier’s Modulor outside the Chandigarh Architecture Museum
- Fig. 2: The Open Hand
- Fig. 3: The Assembly
- Fig. 4: The Secretariat
- Fig. 5: Roof of the Secretariat
- Fig. 6: View of the Assembly and Secretariat from the Open Hand
- Fig. 7: View of the Assembly from inside the High Court
- Fig. 8: Signage in Chandigarh’s leisure valley
- Fig. 9: The rose garden
- Fig. 10: Green spaces outside housing
- Fig. 11: The Open Hand viewed from the road, behind barbed wire
- Fig. 12: The water feature of the Assembly
- Fig. 13: The water feature of the state museum
- Fig. 14: View of the Assembly and, in the distance, the High Court from the roof of the Secretariat
- Fig. 15: Typical brise-soleil on commercial buildings in Sector 22

All images can be found in the Appendix, and are photographs taken during a visit to Chandigarh in March 2013.
Introduction

Transgression and Eroticism

Comments made by contemporaries of French theorist and pornographic writer Georges Bataille (1897-1962) draw attention to his transgressions from the common rules of cultural discourse. André Breton, for example, said that Bataille was obsessed with banal and pathological ideas such as those he tried to promote through projects like the journal Documents,¹ and numerous critics have pointed out that Bataille’s ability to upset the established thinkers of his age is common to his approach.² Indeed his philosophical and literary texts often concern topics and ideas that may still be considered shocking today, nearly ninety years after his earliest works were published. Prostitution, obscene sexual acts, human sacrifice and disgust are amongst the topics on which he wrote, but they are explained in the context of his ideas about the human condition alongside other topics such as architecture, poetry and religion. The philosopher and anthropologist in Bataille led him to ask essential questions about what it is to be human, whilst another side to his character – one that was traditionally at odds with his contemporaries – led him to explore his ideas about humanity through that which is base and obscene.

Discussion of such topics spans his career, from his early texts such as the novel Story of the Eye (1928) and his essays of 1929 on architecture’s attempts to hide the ‘dire filth’ of waste³ to his dissection of the relationship between the ‘biological disorder’ of the rotting corpse and erotic behaviour in his major work Eroticism (1957).⁴ In this thesis I consider Bataille a philosopher of the human. Starting with his theory of eroticism, I examine and discuss his ideas about our humanity and the structures that define it. My aim is to critically examine what it means to think of eroticism as a transgression, and to trace what transgression might look like in two structures that are defining for humanity: language and architecture.

² Scholars have suggested that the Critical Dictionary Bataille wrote for Documents came about as a way of enabling him to write without his concerns, which the others considered unusual, becoming a defining force within the magazine. For example see Alastair Brotchie’s ‘Introduction’ in Encyclopaedia Acephalica, Georges Bataille et al (London: Atlas Press, 1995), pp. 7-28 (p. 10).
Whilst the object of this thesis is transgression and its manifestations in fiction and urban sites, eroticism is treated as a privileged example of transgression. This is not to say that Bataille privileged any one transgression over others but eroticism is privileged in this thesis because, as I will come to explain, it is an emerging area of interest in modernist literary studies. As such it is a common denominator across several of the key figures I discuss. Eroticism is not the same as sex. This thesis defines eroticism through Bataille’s philosophy of eroticism, in which he explains it is an instance of transgression and a singularly human experience. The account Bataille offers of eroticism is unique in that it is one of few accounts outside the discourses of sexology, psychoanalysis, gender and sexual orientation. In other words, eroticism is little discussed in contemporary Western criticism without it being considered in scientific terms and related to earlier Darwinian ideas and/or being related to discourses around feminism and homosexuality. For example, Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) and Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles* (1903) both discuss the role of sexual activity in developing the human species, positing rational arguments that rely on scientific language and methods of inquiry. Alternative perspectives were proposed by Iwan Bloch in *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (1906) and Edward Carpenter in *Love’s Coming of Age* (1916) with free love theories about how sexual love can regenerate society and human relationships. Unlike his predecessors, Bataille’s consideration of eroticism did not attempt to evaluate its purpose or judge it morally, nor to scientifically categorise its manifestations, but to understand what it is and how it is significant to the human condition. He considers eroticism in and of itself; he asks how it is different from animal sex, and elaborates an understanding of erotic activity as profoundly and definitively human.

The text central to my analysis is *Eroticism*, in which Bataille brings together philosophical questions about the nature of being and the foundations of human existence with an anthropological approach. Mankind emerges through his rationality, but his eroticism comes into being at the same time as he does: humanity and the condition of eroticism are inseparable. Bataille explains that man rejected his original animal nature ‘by working, by understanding his own morality and by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism’ (*E*, 31). Humans live by social rules which define and create them as human, such as the value of utility and the taboo of incest. Bataille believes that the primary taboos, those surrounding sex and death, are ‘the refusal laid down by the individual to co-operate with nature regarded as a squandering of
living energy and an orgy of annihilation’ (*E*, 61). Sex and death are both wasteful, therefore they must be controlled so that we focus on life, or on retaining energy rather than squandering it.

For Bataille, eroticism ‘calls [man’s] being into question’ (*E*, 29). This is because it threatens the boundaries of the humanity of its participants, because it threatens to overcome ‘the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals’ (*E*, 18). Eroticism is a transgression due to its violence and excess; it challenges our order, our humanity, ourselves – and yet the boundaries of our rational everyday existence prevail. As an act of transgression, Bataille explains, eroticism suspends taboo and order without completely and irreparably breaking them. He states ‘Unless the taboo is observed with fear it lacks the counterpoise of desire which gives it its deepest significance’ (*E*, 37).

Whilst it is in *Eroticism*, published near the end of his life, that the notion of transgression is identified by Bataille, it is essential to his understanding of humanity as explored throughout his *œuvre*. From his early *Critical Dictionary* entries of 1929 to *Eroticism* three decades later, human civilisation and human subjectivity are discussed by Bataille as formed through boundaries that exclude violence and irrationality, so that humanity is defined through the dual process of exclusion and inclusion. This duality makes transgression a possibility that is essential to humanity, as the excluded other is ever-present to the human order. To consider what it means to think of eroticism as a transgression therefore entails analysis of many of Bataille’s texts – *The Accursed Share*, *History of Eroticism*, *Theory of Religion*, the entries to the *Critical Dictionary*, ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ and ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’ – and related notions of sacrifice and expenditure. Through a close reading of Bataille’s texts I suggest that rather than thinking of transgression as a (temporal) momentary breaking and instant reinstatement of taboos and values that define humanity, such as incest and utility, it is better understood as a (spatial) internal threat to the defining structures of humanity that calls our humanity into question without destroying it. Transgression is therefore part of our internal state of being: it is a structural reality for humanity that is made apparent through certain acts that reveal violence against our order and rationality. Transgression is a constant threat: it is exposed to us in its tension with taboo and the ‘disequilibrium’ its violence creates (*E*, 31). It is therefore a

---

5 This develops the idea of expenditure formed in Bataille’s earlier work such as ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ and *The Accursed Share*, as I note in Chapter One.
structural state rather than a process we undergo, to be understood through a spatial rather than a temporal metaphor.

In the first chapter of my thesis I define eroticism through Bataille’s texts; I discuss what it means to call it a transgression and examine its philosophical implications. In the following two chapters I consider what transgression might look like in practice. Whilst Bataille himself elaborates on two examples of transgression in detail in his texts, eroticism and sacrifice, I apply his discussion of these to look for what I will call modes of transgression within two structures: language, in the form of literature, and architecture.

I approach my consideration of what transgression might look like by placing Bataille in conversation with writers and architectural theorists. D. H. Lawrence and Anaïs Nin were contemporaries of Bataille who wrote about eroticism during the 1920s and 1930s. Although we do not know whether Lawrence and Nin read Bataille they shared a common intellectual heritage, so much so that their ideas enter into a provocative and illuminating dialogue with Bataille’s. In Chapter Two I examine Lawrence’s and Nin’s ideas about and representations of the erotic in relation to Bataille’s theory. I also trace within their texts a relationship between the presentation of eroticism through images of spatiality and architecture, which in turn provides interesting material through which to consider the structure and spatiality inherent in Bataille’s transgression.

Le Corbusier and Bernard Tschumi are architects who engaged directly with Bataille’s thinking on expenditure and eroticism respectively. In Chapter Three I assess Tschumi’s analysis of Bataille’s transgression and contrast it with my own, and I discuss the ways in which Le Corbusier’s greatest undertaking, that of the city of Chandigarh in India that he designed from scratch, can be considered transgressive. There is increasing interest in the idea of transgressive architecture, inspired by Bataille, and my thesis contributes to these recent debates. I examine what language and architecture share as defining human structures and the different modes through which transgression is manifest in each.

In staging encounters between Bataille’s ideas and specific pieces of literature and architecture, my approach in this thesis is interdisciplinary. My method therefore combines theoretical analysis, literary readings and comparisons between texts, ideas and instances of transgression. Eroticism and transgression require this interdisciplinary approach not only because they are of interest to figures in cultural theory, modernist literature and architecture but because they are philosophically-grounded ideas. As Bataille defines them, they relate to the very conditions of our
humanity and thus are manifest, and can be studied in, a range of different disciplines.

**Literature**

Recent modernist studies, such as *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Culture* (2015) retain the reference to Ezra Pound’s call to ‘make it new’ but couple this with ‘tracing modernist allusions to popular forms, and an interdisciplinary study of modernism.’\(^6\) Celia Marshik argues that new modernist studies seek to understand the relationships between modernisms in different aspects of culture, from literature to fashion and technology, and that as a result ‘The field, once securely organised around a clear cohort of major writers, has exploded’ to include more figures and more disciplines.\(^7\) Whilst my thesis sits comfortably in this interdisciplinary direction of modernist studies, it also offers a new contribution by studying modernist literature in relation to two other areas of study that are not discussed in the *Cambridge Companion*: eroticism and architecture.

In the first half of the twentieth century there was a range of sexually provocative writers, many of whom were associated with the modernist movement. E. M. Forster started *Maurice* in 1913 and revised it in the 1930s and 50s, but chose not to have it published during his lifetime; D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was banned until three decades after it was first published in 1928; and novelists such as Djuna Barnes, Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin chose to live and publish in Paris in the 1920s and 30s so that they could write freely their tales of lesbian longing, orgies, encounters with prostitutes, elusive affairs and fantasies of incest. Whilst sex and desire are oft discussed in modernist literary criticism, the relationship between modernism and eroticism is only now starting to gain interest.

*Modernist Sexualities* is a collection of essays published in 2009, examining the themes of homosexuality and gender in various modernist works. In his ‘Introduction’, editor Hugh Stevens charts some of the contributions made to this field thus far: masculine identities, feminism and female creativity (which he notes all relate to gender), lesbian desire, homosexual identities and male bonding (relating to homosexuality). Throughout his ‘Introduction’ Stevens fails to define sexuality. Perhaps this is purposeful, so that the subject area of this collection can

---


\(^7\) Marshik, p. 2.
oscillate between sexual orientation, gender and feminism, and notions of transsexuality. He explains:

If same-sex desires and identities are shown to be important to modernism in many of the chapters contained in *Modernist Sexualities*, the chapters also show that modernism is not involved in straightforward assertions of stable identities. Sexuality and gender in modernism cannot be assimilated into one story.⁸

Fair though this statement may be, it in fact betrays the problems with this formulation. Sexuality is often considered as gender or orientation, but the erotic itself is occluded. A similar theme emerged in a book published a decade earlier, Joseph Allen Boone’s *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernity*. Boone examines the relationship between modernism and the libido through a psychoanalytic lens. His dual claim is that the modernist project of understanding and representing the interior consciousness led to an interest in sexual behaviour, as an intimate realm of experience for the subject, and also that modernist narrative structure mirrors that of libidinal currents. In his summary of his terminology, Boone claims that the ‘unmarked transition from *sexuality* to sex, from the word typically signifying the realm of instinct to one denoting a physical act […] is part of my point.’⁹ He wants the physical act and the ‘realm of instinct’ (and therefore the theory accompanying it) to remain ‘unmarked’, ambiguous and undefined.

There are studies of the role of gender or of homosexuality in specific modernist writers, but they offer no further unpacking of that vague term ‘sexuality’ and little in the way of detailed critical analyses of sexual acts or erotic behaviour in modernist writing. Recent collections on Lawrence and the subversive side of modernism also omit eroticism, as I explain in Chapter Two. Similarly, Allison Pease’s chapter on ‘Sexuality’ in the *Cambridge Companion* describes the advent of the sexologists and debates around marriage and prostitution, but does not examine the different perspective of eroticism.¹⁰ The problem we encounter here is similar to one that was debated by Gayle S. Rubin and Judith Butler as long as thirty years ago, but which remains largely unresolved in the critical examination of modernist

---

literature today. In 1984 Gayle S. Rubin argued that there was a need for a theory of sexuality, and her essay ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of Sexuality’ attempted to understand the history and develop a politics of ‘sex’. Rubin claimed that whilst feminism would always have something to say about sex, it should not be a privileged site out of which to develop a theory of sex. She noted that the word sex ‘means gender and gender identity’ but that it also ‘refers to sexual activity, lust, intercourse, and arousal, as in “to have sex.”’¹¹ She argued against what she called this ‘semantic merging’ which suggests ‘that sexuality is reducible to sexual intercourse and that it is a function of the relations between women and men.’¹² In her essay ‘Against Proper Objects’ Judith Butler revisits the implications of Rubin’s essay ten years after it was published. Commenting on how Rubin’s essay was interpreted as the birth of lesbian and gay studies, she explains,

This distinction between “sex” as anatomical identity and “sex” as regime or practice will become crucial to the formulation of lesbian/gay studies as the analysis of sex and sexuality, for the ambiguity of sex as act and identity will be split into univocal dimensions in order to make the claim that the kind of sex that one is and the kind of sex that one does belong to two separate kinds of analysis: feminist and lesbian/gay, respectively.¹³

Butler charts the problems with this strict separation between fields of theory and their proper object – she claims that this separation is ‘a chiasmic confusion in which the constitutive ambiguity of “sex” is denied in order to make arbitrary territorial claims.’¹⁴

These three sexualities – sexual acts, gender and sexual orientation – are all interwoven in personal experience, social structures and critical theory. However, they are not all the same thing and the use of the term ‘sexuality’ as a collapsible term to represent all of them has resulted in eroticism being forgotten and unexplored theoretically. Rubin’s ‘sexuality’ which she aims to explicate is entirely political; it is about understanding how sexual-social stratification valorises and

¹² Rubin, p. 32.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.
oppresses sexual identities within a hierarchy. Her theory will encompass lesbians, transvestites, prostitutes and other identities, and their oppression. I instead want to develop a forum for the discussion of the theory of sexuality, or rather eroticism, a theory that explicates how sexual activity became meaningful for human civilisation and how this significance, eroticism, is manifest.

There are recent texts that do approach the notion of eroticism: Tonya Krouse’s *The Opposite of Desire* examines three modernist writers’ attempts to write sexual pleasure, and Krouse explores the aesthetics of scenes involving sex and gender. In *Radical Modernism and Sexuality* David Seelow claims that D. H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille are joined by Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich in being ‘frontier thinkers’ or ‘radical moderns’ in that they cross a threshold and take the thinking of sex into a new arena. Both of these books make valuable contributions to the study of eroticism in texts from the modernist period, but neither takes the further step of examining what eroticism is, how it is presented in the novel, nor what this presentation tells us about the modernist understanding of humanity.

This thesis offers a contribution to this emerging field of study by considering Georges Bataille’s theory of eroticism as particularly relevant, both due to its unique and comprehensive approach to theorising eroticism as distinct from sex and also due to his overlap with the modernist movement. Erotic literature by Lawrence, Nin and others emerged in the same period as Bataille’s erotic texts including his novel *Story of the Eye*. Indeed, some of the most recent studies of eroticism in modernism include Bataille alongside other writers long regarded as modernists, Seelow’s work being one example and another being the collection *Modernist Eroticisms: European Literature After Sexology* (2012) in which there are dedicated chapters on Lawrence, Bataille, and others such as Marcel Proust, Djuna Barnes and James Joyce.

The editors of *Modernist Eroticisms*, Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller, argue that ‘sexuality and erotic experience’ play a central role in modernism, often in relation to the distinction between body and mind, materiality and immateriality. They note that modernism shows the influence of discourses of sexuality and psychoanalysis, specifically Freud’s notion of perversion, which

---

normalised perverse behaviours the sexologists had medicalised by instead placing them within the usual process of human development.\textsuperscript{18} They do not define the erotic but their summary includes sexuality, desires and erotic experiences (which encompasses the ambiguity of ‘sex’ and at the same time starts to hone in on eroticism as distinct) and they define erotic modernist literature through five principal characteristics.\textsuperscript{19} These include the erotic being ‘privileged as a realm of existential significance’, an emphasis on ‘deviant desires and the so-called sexual perversions’, representations of the erotic that are ‘more explicit than in romantic, realist and natural works’ and blur the boundaries between the erotic and the obscene, an ‘ambivalent’ attitude to the erotic, and finally that it is ‘apparent not only at the level of content, but also, and no less importantly, at that of literary form or style.’\textsuperscript{20} Two of these five points are relevant to my own project, namely their suggestions that the erotic is existentially significant and is explored through literary form as well as content – this latter being a point similar to that made by Boone.

An emerging perspective, then, defines erotic modernist literature as exploring the existential significance of human sexuality explicitly, ambivalently, and in ways that combine literary techniques or aesthetics with content such as plot. Schaffner and Weller usefully discuss how eroticism and modernism intersect. They note that the ambivalent attitudes to and presentation of the erotic in modernism stem from its specific cultural moment:

If, more generally, the modernist writing of the erotic tends to vacillate between viewing sexual deviance as, on the one hand, a symptom of a sick modernity and, on the other, a cure for it, it is precisely this ambivalence that locates the modernist engagement with the erotic historically, coming, as it does, after the pathologization of non-normative sexuality in the sexological discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and before the affirmation of sexual difference beyond the normal/abnormal binary in the post-Second World War era, especially in queer studies.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{19} The editors do refer to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of eroticism and go on to define it as ‘the representation of scenes of a sexual nature, with the focus being on sexual acts or desires that fall into the category of what the sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw as deviance or perversion’ (p. 13). This definition only exists in reference to literature and sexology, so does not define eroticism in itself.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{21} Schaffner and Weller, p. 11.
The ambiguity they note, and the cultural era to which they attribute it, might also account for the lack of study of the erotic to date and the application of the vague term ‘sexuality’ to discuss a complex and often ambiguous topic. Schaffner and Weller take important steps away from the vagueness of ‘sex’ and start to specify eroticism, but their focus on defining erotic fiction can be supplemented by a more rigorous focus on the philosophical importance of eroticism, a theme at which they often hint. For example, they note that modernists often privileged the erotic as crucial to their ‘attempt not merely to challenge the Cartesian division between body and mind, but to achieve a reconciliation of the two’ due to the convergence of the bodily and psychological in erotic experience. In fact the existential significance (or meaningfulness) of the erotic that they note is supplemented throughout their collection, with discussions often highlighting the significance of eroticism in relation to philosophical discourses influential to modernists. Michael Bell’s chapter on Lawrence discusses the importance of Friedrich Nietzsche’s affirmation of the instinct over rationalist discourses, and Weller’s chapter on Bataille uses a reading of Bataille’s theory of eroticism to discuss necrophilia in his fiction.

To really understand how eroticism differs from sex – and hence how this topic and realm emerged for modernist and other writers – we need a more comprehensive theory, one which accounts for the specifically human experience of sex and how it became significant or existentially important. Georges Bataille’s theory of eroticism – which he defines as human rather than animal sexual practice – is in actuality a philosophy of humanity and of modern civilisation. For this reason, Bataille provides a useful and original set of ideas through which to read Lawrence and Nin’s fiction and understand the significance of eroticism in and of itself.

In his fiction Bataille often explored the erotic through extreme and obscene acts. In Story of the Eye alone we encounter scatology, murder and necrophilia. Whilst I discuss the role of sacrifice in the erotics of Madame Edwarda in Chapter Two, my focus in reading Bataille is not the obscenity in his fiction but his philosophy of eroticism and how it may reflect other fictional presentations of the erotic (just as I will discuss other presentations of transgression in architecture).

---

22 Schaffner and Weller, pp. 4-5.
With emerging studies focusing on modernist erotic literature, rather than defining eroticism in itself, Bataille is currently being studied in relation to modernism and with a focus on his fiction, as Schaffner and Weller do through their analyses of perversion and necrophilia in his novels. But more can be gained by putting his philosophy of eroticism into relation with fictional presentations of the erotic. The dialogue between Bataille’s eroticism and Lawrence and Nin’s erotic fiction also reveals how Bataille’s theory could apply to a range of erotics, beyond the obscene or so-called perverted presentations in his own fiction. My reading of Bataille’s theory, and my application of this theory in reading Lawrence and Nin’s fiction, reveals areas of convergence in their presentations of the erotic around themes of sacrifice, architecture, and linguistic and structural transgression.

The editors of a recent volume of essays on Bataille, The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication, explain in their preface that Bataille ‘shows the only thing worth communicating is the incommunicable itself’. Whilst my thesis does not discuss the notion of community in any detail, the paradox of communicating the incommunicable is central to my analysis, in particular when I look for examples of transgression in erotic novels. I examine two modes of transgression in poetic language that are elaborated by Bataille in his essay ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’ (1946) and are evident in fiction by Lawrence and Nin. In this essay Bataille suggests that the voluptuous sounds of poetry reduce the rationality and efficacy of language to instead communicate emotional and carnal experiences. This is just one mode of the transgressive language that creates eroticism in novels such as Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover and Nin’s House of Incest.Eroticism is a human fact and its manifestations in the texts I discuss share certain qualities whilst applying those shared ideas differently. For example, Lawrence and Bataille both discuss the sacred in relation to eroticism but their formulations of the sacred differ. I also find that architecture is relevant to their presentations of eroticism, both in the linguistic architecture of their texts and in the spatial images and sites they deploy. Lawrence and Bataille’s architectural visions may be antithetical – Lawrence’s pure and pastoral vision on the one hand, and Bataille’s dirty and urban one on the other – but architecture is a crucial intersection between their erotic fictions, which both include sacrificial erotics.


that are architecturally conceived and created through textual modes of transgression.

But there is more than a metaphorical relationship here: not only must a vision of eroticism (as transgression) be expressed through space but, on a very physical level, the transgressive nature of eroticism means it needs a definite space – or place – in order to exist. It does not conform to our daily social routines and everyday life, it is not part of 'society’s ideal nature' (EA, 35). It needs its own architecture (because it is transgressive) and it also has a tendency to be expressed through architectural tropes (because transgression relies upon a structure, on spatiality). Eroticism, as a transgression of the defining structures of human society and subjectivity, would need an alternative architecture and language because it calls everyday structures into question.

In Chapter Two I therefore compare different erotics – Lawrence’s regenerative and Nin's surrealist with Bataille’s transgressive eroticism – to find that they converge around certain themes. For Bataille and Lawrence, eroticism is often presented as a sacrifice and requires a woman. Their erotics also converge with Nin’s in needing a site, and an architecture, and in being textually created, as well as represented, through poetic language. Their approaches to architecture and their poetic techniques differ, but there remains a convergence which is revealed through Bataille’s theory.

**Architecture**

Critical interest in Bataille has developed through a range of academic discourses. In the 1970s the Tel Quel group published and also discussed his texts, their concern for linguistics and deconstruction evident in their assessments of both his philosophical and fictional texts and the impact of the narrative breakdown within them. In the 1990s Bataille’s notion of formlessness was analysed by art historians. In addition to the modernist literature studies discussed above, other recent discourses on Bataille arise in the fields of sociology and architecture, in which Bataille’s transgression is interpreted as the breaking of boundaries to drive social and architectural change. A discussion of the contemporary approach to Bataille’s transgression in architectural criticism will introduce the context of the relationship between Bataille’s ideas and architecture, illuminate current critical

---


discourse on Bataille, and offer an interpretation of transgression which differs from my own and provides a useful counterpoint by which to approach my own.

The Critical Dictionary entries discussing architectural theory and practice have recently appeared on undergraduate courses at two of the UK’s leading architecture schools, the University of Cambridge and the Architectural Association. Bataille’s later work on erotic transgression and sacrifice has also been used by architects. Eroticism is quoted by Bernard Tschumi and used to develop his theory of disjunction;\(^{28}\) Le Corbusier read and annotated a copy of *The Accursed Share*.\(^{29}\) An example of current architectural interest in transgression (arising from sociological discourse) is the emerging research and architectural practice group on the topic of transgression at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol. UWE has, since 2012, curated an exhibition, hosted a conference and guest edited an issue of *Architectural Design* magazine entirely dedicated to a discussion of ‘The Architecture of Transgression’. The guest editors, Rachel Sara and Jonathan Mosely, offer the following definition of transgression:

To transgress is to go beyond the boundaries set by law, discipline or convention. It implies a naughtiness, or wayward behaviour, and acts as a challenge to the establishment […] Transgressive acts of architecture might be seen to be pushing the boundaries of what architecture is, and what it could or even should be.\(^{30}\)

The approach to transgression taken in *Architectural Design*, by Mosely and Sara and the majority of the contributors, follows that set out by sociologist Chris Jenks, who contributes a short piece which draws upon Bataille.\(^{31}\) In his book *Transgression*, Jenks states that to transgress is to ‘go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention’ and explains that in crossing dichotomies, transgressions may be ‘appearing to make reference to clear-cut distinctions’ but are ‘manifestly situation-specific and vary across social space and


through time.\textsuperscript{32} His work therefore focuses on the character of cultures and contexts that ‘provide’ for transgression.\textsuperscript{33} Whilst his focus is the social context of acts of transgression, his book surveys the history of the idea of transgression through philosophers including G. W. F. Hegel, Nietzsche and Bataille. Bataille is discussed in a substantial section focusing on the notion of excess since, Jenks reasons, ‘his work, perhaps beyond all others, is closely associated with the concept of transgression.’\textsuperscript{34}

Using a reading of Foucault’s essay on Bataille, ‘A Preface to Transgression’, to develop his argument, Jenks provides the following account of Bataille’s transgression:

The only way that a limitless world is provided with any structure or coherence is through the excesses that transgress that world and thus construct it – the completion that follows and accompanies transgression. Transgression has become a modern, post-God initiative, a searching for limits to break, an eroticism that goes beyond the limits of sexuality […] limit becomes the transgression of limit. The nothingness of infinity is held in check through the singular experience of transgression.\textsuperscript{35}

In this account Jenks presents Bataille’s transgression as the breaking of an absolute limit, which is a temporal concept in two ways. First, transgression is an act of breaking the structure of the world that is ‘followed’ by the affirmation of that structure, thus it is an act defined in linear time. Second, it is a ‘modern’ or – as Jenks’s subsequent application of the concept to events suggests – contemporary condition; we are more transgressive today because our society is secular (or our values are being revaluated, depending on how you read Nietzsche’s death of God).\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Chris Jenks, \textit{Transgression} (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 2 and pp. 2-3. Text from the Introduction to this book is also used to introduce another book, this one a collection of essays edited by Jenks: \textit{Transgression: Critical Concepts in Sociology} (London: Routledge, 2006) which includes texts by Bataille, Nietzsche and Antonin Artaud alongside other types of discourse, such as essays on urbanism, madness and criminal intent. As with Jenks’s own work, these essays all relate to the sociological notion of transgressing cultural rules rather than what I interpret as Bataille’s account of the human condition.

\textsuperscript{33} Jenks, \textit{Transgression}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 87.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 90.

\textsuperscript{36} See ‘Chapter Five: Extreme Seductiveness is at the Boundary of Horror’, in Jenks, \textit{Transgression}, pp. 111-134 in which Jenks applies his reading of Bataille to the criminal acts of the Kray brothers in 1960s Britain and other social examples.
There are passages in Jenks’s text wherein his reading of Bataille’s transgression comes close to my own, which I will elaborate in more detail in Chapter One of this thesis. He acknowledges the ‘essential relation between taboo and transgression’ and notes that the latter ‘confirms limits, it shows a consciousness of limits not their absence.’ But fundamentally, his account always returns to transgression as the breaking or crossing of a limit, which he explains as a temporal ‘process’:

[T]he essential relation between taboo and transgression makes sensible the utter contingency of, on the one hand, the stasis and determinacy of social structures and, on the other, the innovation and agency inherent in the practice of social action. This same relation allows us to contemplate the necessity and complementarity of continuity and change in social experience.

The notion of transgression as a form of change influences the discussion of transgression in architecture. The architectural examples discussed in Mosley and Sara’s issue of Architectural Design share the common theme that transgression is a break from normal practices. There is in the magazine an acknowledgement that this makes transgression relative, as transgressive acts then become part of the new norm. Breaks from regular architectural practice are presented as having the potential to change our conception of architecture or even change the fabric of the culture within which the break took place. The argument gives transgression a revolutionary role which other architects such as Bernard Tschumi have also perceived.

Most of the articles in the magazine conform to this definition and the theme of using transgression to drive change, either in architecture and the norms associated with its role and how it is practiced professionally, or else in culture, in the political and social systems over which architecture is believed to have influence. Indeed, a call for transgression echoes throughout the magazine. One contributor claims ‘design research that is prepared to transgress all known boundaries, given limits and conventions will become particularly necessary’ for architecture to respond to

37 Jenks, Transgression, p. 95.
38 Ibid., p. 95.
39 Some articles in Architectural Design come closer to my own reading of transgression, but only to an extent. One example would be Robin Wilson’s ‘Not Doing/ Overdoing: “Omission” and “Excess”’ (44-51). Wilson discusses how the form of one architectural project (a performing arts space in France) destabilises aesthetic categories through abject carvings in the fabric of the building (p. 49 and p. 51).
Another suggests that ‘it is only in the participatory act of experiencing real or imaginary situations that profoundly rupture the everyday of our architectural settings that we can explore the extent of their essential meaning.’\textsuperscript{41} Different modes of producing architecture that do not rely upon commissions and contracts, or architectural products which can adapt to different communities and sites, are amongst the ‘transgressions’ presented.\textsuperscript{42}

The definition of transgression in \textit{Architectural Design}, via Jenks, is drawn from Bataille, and it is true that he saw a relationship of influence between architecture and culture, which I will discuss in Chapters One and Three. In this thesis, I argue for a different notion of transgression that I believe is more closely aligned to Bataille’s thinking. I argue that it must be considered as a dynamic and spatially-imagined state of tension between a boundary and its other, rather than a) the complete annihilation or crossing of that boundary or b) a temporal interpretation in which a boundary or structure is broken then subsequently reformed when the break has proven its necessity. I draw this reading from the notion that transgression is a fact of humanity for Bataille, linked to the structures that define us as human rather than the particular rules and conventions of a given cultural era. I also find that the relationship between architecture and culture, or specifically, its impact on our political and social structures, is not simply causal, and transgressive architecture does not necessarily cause transgressive behaviour amongst people. The notion some architects have of using transgression to create social revolution is at odds with Bataille’s philosophical and anthropological account of transgression as essential to the structures that define us as human, and related to the structures architects seek to challenge.

The architectural interpretation of transgression outlined in \textit{Architectural Design} relies on what we might call ‘generic’ transgression as differentiated from Bataillean transgression. This is not meant to suggest that there are different degrees of transgression, some of which are more or less acceptable than others.\textsuperscript{43} I propose a differentiation between what Bataille means by transgression, which is an act or event that calls into question the very boundaries of the human self and

\textsuperscript{40} Editorial, \textit{Architectural Design}, November/December 2013, p. 5.


\textsuperscript{42} See, for example, Mosely and Sara ‘Tactics for a Transgressive Practice’, \textit{Architectural Design}, November/December 2013.

\textsuperscript{43} Although at times in his thinking Bataille does seem to suggest this, such as when he argues that other forms of transgression are preferable to war in \textit{The Accursed Share}. I discuss this later in my thesis.
civilisation on the one hand, and a generic breaking of the rules of convention on the other, such as Bataille’s discussions of base and obscene topics like the human toe in the cultural arts journal *Documents*. Bataille discusses both and David B. Allison points out that Bataille distinguishes between ‘limited’ and ‘unlimited’ transgression in *Eroticism*.44 Whilst ‘unlimited’ may not be the right word to describe it, this second type of transgression, concerned with the inner experience of violence against humanity’s limits (rather than a tolerated transgression that enables expenditure for the ultimate conservation of the limited social economy) is my focus. Generic transgression can be considered as a relative challenge to social convention, such as Lawrence’s obscene language in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* or Connie’s extra-marital affair with someone beneath her social standing. These transgressions can be subsumed into a new, adapted social system – which is what happened when, following the trial that concluded that the novel was not obscene and was thereby republished, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was no longer censored and was incorporated into our culture as classic literature available in most bookshops. This can be differentiated from a challenge that strikes at the heart of humanity and our ability to perform the order and boundaries that define us. For example, what does the death and rebirth Connie experiences through orgasm mean for the human subject? I will discuss the difference in more detail in Chapter Two, and further in Chapter Three when I discuss how transgression is interpreted by architects as a way of challenging state structures of power.

One of the potential reasons architects have tried to use Bataille’s transgression to re-imagine architecture and its powerful role in articulating socio-cultural norms is that earlier texts by Bataille commented on the power and status of architecture. It is these early texts, written as entries for the Critical Dictionary of the journal *Documents*, which demonstrated how architecture could be considered a defining structure for humanity. In the Critical Dictionary entry ‘Architecture’ Bataille describes architecture as having a significant effect on society because it imposes a format on society and shuts out excess. As Denis Hollier explains, architecture is not simply a symbol of a dominant political or social order, but acts out that order, imposing it on society in a built and lasting medium.45 Architecture is metaphysically important because it contributes to the development of civilization by representing

---

44 Allison, ‘Transgression and the Community of the Sacred’ in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication*, pp. 83-98 (pp. 91-92).
and reifying the social order. It is linked to the fabric of humanity so indelibly that it can be considered a stage of human development.

In Bataille’s writings, in particular his Critical Dictionary entries, language and architecture are shown to have an active role in formatting human experience. In ‘Formless’ Bataille suggests that words perform tasks and exert their influence to structure and rationalise our experience into something intelligible and communicable. In the entry on ‘Architecture’ he proposes that it demonstrates the logic and order that help to define humanity. In light of this, my thesis discusses humanity as a structural existence and investigates the ways in which transgression manifests itself through conflict between the existence and annihilation of that structure. I discuss the possible modes of transgression in structures amongst those that define humanity, language and architecture being the key examples cited by Bataille.

My method involves a close reading of Bataille in order to stage encounters between his ideas and those of architectural scholars who have written about him. But more than this, I stage encounters between Bataille’s ideas and architecture – not just architectural theory but a study of buildings and a discussion of potential modes of transgression within their structures. I read three critical appraisals of Bataille from an architectural perspective, from scholar Denis Hollier and from two scholars who both practice and theorise architecture, Greg Lynn and Bernard Tschumi. Whilst I find Hollier’s reading of Bataille useful in establishing a connection between architecture and language (in the form of writing, although for Hollier this connection does not rest on their structural importance for humanity as it does in my reading of Bataille), I find Tschumi’s reading of transgression is less compatible with Bataille’s thinking. Greg Lynn in his turn is not concerned with transgression in architecture but with other ideas arising from Bataille. I turn to Le Corbusier for a more detailed analysis of the possible manifestations of architectural transgression, since scholars have argued that he designed his urban plan and a selection of buildings in the city of Chandigarh in India whilst reading Bataille. My study of Le Corbusier’s work includes an examination of his discursive essays, archival research on papers about Chandigarh in the Royal Institute of British Architects Archives at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and observations from a visit to the city. Whilst I find no hard evidence that Le Corbusier intended to interpret Bataille’s ideas into architectural forms, I compare the two figures and their ideas, and study the architecture of Chandigarh for the possibility of transgression.

The body of this thesis concerns modes of transgression in erotic literature and architecture. I develop my understanding of them using Bataille’s texts on
transgression and related ideas of sacrifice and expenditure, and this sheds light upon a relationship between literature and architecture. In literature we see poetic language as a mode of transgression, but we also see that erotic acts are presented spatially. In architecture, the mode of transgression is similar to poetic language but with architectural motifs instead of words. All this amounts to a validation of Bataille’s transgression and his notion of the human as constructed of defining structures. Whether this notion of humanity was a common idea in the first half of the twentieth century or whether Bataille has developed a rigorous philosophical account of humanity that is supported by other discourses is not the focus of this thesis. What I do find is that if eroticism is a transgression, and transgression is fundamental to the human condition, we can look for – and find – various modes of transgression in language and architecture. This is also to say that realms of humanity are realms of transgression and eroticism.
Chapter One
Georges Bataille's Theory of Erotic Transgression

Situating Bataille
That Georges Bataille's texts are currently gaining interest in the varied fields of modernist literature studies and contemporary architectural theory is testament to the diversity of his work. In addition to erotic fictions and poetry he edited a range of journals and published critical works on economics, excess and transgression. The second text he wrote and published, Story of the Eye (1928) and his last works, Eroticism (1957) and The Tears of Eros (1961), establish eroticism as a key concern spanning the trajectory of his life. At the same time, his interest in anthropology and so-called primitive societies established the question of the human as a concern throughout his entire œuvre. Although Bataille chose not to or was not able to explicitly relate his individual publications to one another in an all-encompassing theory, the fact that Bataille explained eroticism as something that defines the human condition means we must draw upon his discussions of humanity in his other works. Through a close reading of Bataille's theory of eroticism the importance of transgression will be revealed. This in turn necessitates an analysis of how the notion of transgression is explored at different stages within his life and work, specifically in the ideas of sacrifice and literature. This chapter also engages critically with Bataille's theory of eroticism via readings of scholars including Jürgen Habermas and Nick Land, and examines how Bataille's texts on architecture can be linked to his theory of eroticism. Bataille's transgression is not an isolated idea: it encapsulates eroticism, poetry, mysticism and the violence of sacrifice, all of which threaten boundaries – specifically the boundaries of the human being. My reading of erotic transgression rearticulates Bataille's theory of eroticism and notion of transgression through the idea of a dynamic structure that defines humanity, in which the architecture of our existence and experiences is persistently performed and asserted against the excess that imperils our ability to be human.

Before examining Bataille's ideas I want to contrast his work in relation to developments around sexology, as it is important that we understand how his theory of eroticism stands apart as a different, philosophical type of inquiry. The theorisation of sexuality from Charles Darwin through to psychoanalysis normalises heterosexuality and has often explained deviations from this norm as anatomical abnormalities. The discussion of sex following Darwin's publication of The Descent of Man coincided with social debates sparked by feminism's New Woman and homosexuality, such as Oscar Wilde's trial, in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
Whilst the sex theorists of this earlier period clearly influenced thinkers of the 1920s and beyond, D. H. Lawrence and Anaïs Nin amongst them, they did not influence Bataille. Whilst Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing were clearly of interest to Bataille, his own account of eroticism draws more heavily on the anthropological accounts of early civilisation and developing societies. Like Freud, Bataille saw non-Western communities as primitive forms of our own Western civilisation which show the early stages of development of humanity – with human subjectivity and civilisation both formed through the process of the creation of barriers that exclude otherness and continuity. For Bataille, the first barrier is a taboo related to sexual activity, namely incest, and this links eroticism to the very existence of humanity.

In the 1920s and 1930s Bataille consulted works on anthropology by Freud and Ellis, and although not explicitly referenced there, they inform the account of waste and transgression in the early article ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ which discusses early societies and expenditure, in the form of potlatch. Later, in Eroticism and History of Eroticism, Bataille develops the work Freud started in his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905) and Totem and Taboo (1913). In the Three Essays Freud argues that the libido is the defining impulse for the human psychology, and in Totem and Taboo he places incest at the core of human development, making eroticism essential to humanity. Comparing primitive society’s taboo prohibitions to the obsessional prohibitions of neurotic patients, Freud observes that ‘the prohibition does not succeed in abolishing the instinct. Its only

---

1 In February 1923 Bataille borrowed Sigmund Freud’s Introduction to Psychoanalysis from the Bibliothèque Nationale and in May 1929 he borrowed Totem and Taboo. Bataille also borrowed Havelock Ellis’ History of Sexuality from the Bibliothèque Nationale in May 1931. The second issue of Documents, which started the Critical Dictionary with the ‘Architecture’ entry, appeared in 1929 and ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ was published in the journal La Critique sociale in 1933. For Freud’s Introduction to Psychoanalysis see Georges Bataille, Œuvres Complètes XII: Articles 2 1950-1961 (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1988), p. 554. Bataille read a French translation. For Freud’s Totem and Taboo see Bataille, OC XII, p.565. Bataille read a French translation. For Ellis’s History of Sexuality see Bataille, OC XII, p. 577. The book listed is a French translation of Volume II of Ellis’ Studies. It is notable that Bataille read sexual theories at the same time that he was writing about expenditure and publishing his contributions to the Critical Dictionary of the review Documents.

2 Bataille reviewed Psychopathia Sexualis in La Critique Sociale, October 1931.

3 In Eroticism Bataille quotes from Marcel Mauss’s The Gift and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s The Elementary Structures of Kinship.

4 Although it has been noted that in Documents he explored other perspectives, calling into question the differentiation between ethnographic artefacts and fine art. See Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS, ed. by Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (London: Hayward Gallery, 2006). Relevant essays include ‘Archaeology’ by C. F. B. Miller (pp. 42-50) and ‘The Question of Lay Ethnography [The Entropological Wild Card]’ by Denis Hollier (pp. 58-64).
result is to repress the instinct. Taboo lends a ‘dangerous power’ to the thing it
prohibits, but it does not rid society of that thing. It simply banishes it to the outside,
just as for patients the instinct is banished to their unconscious. Sex lies at the core
of each individual human and every human community. This is a view to which
Bataille wholeheartedly ascribes, although he will understand humanity as formed
by structures, order and boundaries (like taboo) and focus on the role of eroticism
for humanity.

In taking a turn away from the sexologists and theorists who wrote before him,
Bataille also responds to them and the interest and analysis they established in
human sexuality. He was aware that his position was both made possible by the
history of ideas before his own, and was a departure from their approach. In his
Foreword to Eroticism he notes that he can study the subject seriously due to the
efforts of scholars before him but also that he works ‘in contradiction to scientific
method’ (E, 7). He might here be referring to Alfred Kinsey, who died the year
before Eroticism was published and to whose studies Bataille dedicates a chapter.

He critiques Kinsey’s scientific and statistical approach, claiming that ‘true
knowledge of man’s sexual nature is not to be found in these Reports’ as they
regard sex as an object to be studied externally (E, 154). The approach Bataille
critiques is one Kinsey shares with the sexologists. Kinsey’s study of sexuality
started with a study in the mating habits of wasps and seventy years earlier,
Darwin’s Descent of Man also discussed animal mating habits before elaborating
this into a theory of human sexuality. Krafft-Ebing’s Psychopathia Sexualis, which
Bataille reviewed, surveyed case studies of human sexual practices to elaborate a
classification system with reference to medical notions of neurology and
psychology. In contrary to the scientific approach in these studies, which rationalise
human sexuality by comparing it to animal behaviours and introducing scales and
classifications to explain it, Bataille is clear that his concern is instead the
significance eroticism holds for humanity. To study it from an assumed position of
rationality, as if it were an external and distant object would be to overlook our
relationship with it entirely. He explains his alternative approach: ‘I believe that

---

6 Ibid., p. 21.
7 Alfred Kinsey founded the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University in 1947 and
published the Kinsey Reports (Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 1948 and Sexual
Behavior in the Human Female, 1953). His method included undertaking and studying
interviews, observation and filming of sexual acts, and collating material on sex from around
the world.
8 Alfred Kinsey, The Gall Wasp Genus Cynips: A Study in the Origin of Species (University
of Indiana, 1930).
eroticism has a significance for mankind that the scientific attitude cannot reach [...] I have subordinated all else to the search for a standpoint that brings out the fundamental unity of the human spirit' (E, 8).

In asking what it means to be human, must we not also ask why sex has a human meaning that animals do not attribute it? This is Bataille’s focus in Eroticism, and the early pages of his text hold further suggestions of the direction his inquiry will take and the critical discourses he will use, noting the significance of ‘the field of anthropology and history of religions’ and the implications of a theoretical or ‘philosophical’ argument (E: 9; 12). For Bataille, eroticism differs from sex in being independent of reproduction except insomuch as reproduction and birth imply the finitude of our existence as humans. Bataille’s eroticism is best understood as an anthropological philosophy of eroticism, in that it entails a philosophy of the human condition informed by both disciplines.

The Essence of Humanity: Eroticism

Eroticism was published towards the end of Bataille’s life, in 1957. He draws upon topics discussed throughout his career to explain that eroticism threatens the boundaries defining humanity. Erotic acts ‘open the way to’ the world beyond what everyday existence can offer us, so that eroticism ‘breaks down the patterns’ of ‘the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals’ (E: 24; 18). This transgression is a ‘violation’ of the human that is ‘destructive’ and implies death, because ‘our discontinuous existence’ as defined individuals is ‘shaken to its foundations’ in a way that has implications for human civilisation (E: 1; 18).

In Bataille’s account of eroticism birth implies a start and therefore end point to life, and death is the continuity that exists outside life. Death therefore has a dual meaning for Bataille, firstly (in a physical sense) as repulsive decay and secondly (in an ontological sense) as the continuity existing outside the finitude of human life (or nonexistence, nothingness). All of this happens because man is an animal with an awareness of death, meaning that this awareness is what causes the development of man. Mankind uses work and the creation of taboos to differentiate himself from animality by excluding the violence of death. Prohibitions are erected like city walls because ‘decay summed up the world we spring from and return to, and horror and shame were attached both to our birth and to our death’ (E, 56).

Bataille believes the primary taboos, those surrounding sex and death, are ‘the refusal laid down by the individual to co-operate with nature regarded as a squandering of living energy and an orgy of annihilation’ (E, 61). This develops the
idea of expenditure formed in Bataille’s earlier work such as 'The Notion of Expenditure' and *The Accursed Share*. Sex and death are both wasteful, therefore human civilisation insists that they must be controlled so that we focus on life, on retaining energy rather than squandering it. Death ‘leaves intact the general continuity of existence outside ourselves’ (*E*, 21). Bataille goes on to state, ‘continuity of existence is independent of death and *is even proved by death*’ (*E*, 21). In short, ‘Eroticism opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives’ and to ‘the continuity of all existence’ (*E*: 24; 22). Having explained the importance of death in the experience of eroticism, Bataille explains that eroticism is unlike animal sexuality because of this link with death. Eroticism ‘calls [man’s] being into question’ and Bataille claims that in raising such fundamental questions it is ‘*primarily a religious matter*’ (*E*: 29; 31).

Eroticism is thus a human phenomenon, and plays a role in the transition from animality to humanity, and therefore in the construction and constitution of humanity. As Suzanne Guerlac explains, ‘Man is the erotic, not the rational animal, Bataille responds to the philosophical tradition.’[^9] It would be more precise to state that for Bataille eroticism and rationality together identify humanity, and in their very togetherness at that. According to Bataille, man rejected his original animal nature and ‘emerged from it by working, by understanding his own morality and by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism’ (*E*, 31). Work and taboos against death and sex are *all* part of the development of humanity, and shame plays a crucial role in defining the human response to sexual acts. The taboo shuts out animality but eroticism is an act of transgression which, Bataille explains, challenges the taboo without completely and irreparably breaking it. He states ‘Unless the taboo is observed with fear it lacks the counterpoise of desire which gives it its deepest significance’ (*E*, 37). For Bataille, the taboo holds animality separate, remote, but does not stifle it entirely: this is what enables transgression.

To better understand the role of taboos in forming humanity, and what it means to say that eroticism is a form of transgression, it is worth turning to Bataille’s *History of Eroticism*.[^11] This text was written prior to *Eroticism* and was meant to

[^9]: I examine these texts later in this chapter in the section ‘Expenditure and Sacrifice: Transgressive Themes in Bataille’s Texts’ and further in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[^10]: Suzanne Guerlac, “Recognition” by a Woman!: A Reading of Bataille’s *L’Erotisme*, *Yale French Studies*, 78 (1990), 90-105 (p. 91).

[^11]: Bataille lists forms of transgression in *Eroticism* including war, sacrifice and physical eroticism (*E*, 70). He also explains in both *Eroticism* and in his earlier (but unpublished during his life) text *Theory of Religion* that some forms of transgression are mildly regulated and less violent. I believe this is not a case of his ideas changing at different periods of his
follow *The Accursed Share* to become the second of three volumes. Bataille chose not to publish it in his lifetime, but it is useful to read in conjunction with *Eroticism* because it sets an anthropological narrative behind the ideas he did choose to publish. In *History of Eroticism*, Bataille agrees with the assertion of Claude Lévi-Strauss that the horror of incest is a specifically human horror, marking a boundary between nature and culture. In so-called primitive societies a human community is formed by the exchange of gifts. Bataille develops this theme and claims that in these societies women are luxurious and intoxicating gifts akin to champagne, given in the festivity of marriage:

The father must bring the wealth that is his daughter, or the brother the wealth that is his sister, into the circuit of ceremonial exchanges: he must give her as a present, but the circuit presupposes a set of rules accepted as the given milieu as the rules of a game are.

These rules, and here Bataille quotes Lévi-Strauss again, state that there is either an immediate exchange for the father or brother’s gift or the guarantee of a later gift that shall be greater in value than that received. This in turn merits a further gift, and so on. There is a circuit of gifts increasing in value, which is not a definite economic value since the luxury of the gifts opposes useful labour, and thus there is a community of givers and receivers. This early stage of society is vastly different to the later capitalist society in which work is so central: it runs counter to our capitalist community since ‘the dedication of objects to glorious exchanges withdraws them from productive consumption’ (*HE*, 42).

Bataille thus summarises the formation of a human community, and thereby of humanity. In this process the daughter is a gift given by her generous father, a taboo is placed upon immediate sexual gratification and the rule of the gift ensures writing (although this does happen to some extent, with articulations of key ideas – such as expenditure and sacrifice – being modified over time) but of the complexity of the ideas and topics he discusses. I will explain throughout this thesis that the violence of transgression is extreme but its impact is not absolute and the impact of its different forms is different – for example the ‘festival’ Bataille describes in *Theory of Religion* is a form of transgression that offers a ‘limited solution’ – *Theory of Religion*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Zone Books, 1989), p. 53. Hereafter *TR*. I will explain this in more detail over the following pages.

12 In his earlier essay ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ Bataille discusses the potlatch in detail: we will return to this essay when we examine how the idea of transgression links Bataille’s earlier work on expenditure and his later work on eroticism. See ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, trans. by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M Leslie Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 116-129. I discuss this essay in the next section of this chapter.


32
social development. To create a community 'women are essentially pledged to
communication, which is to say, they must be an object of generosity on the part of
those who have them at their immediate disposal' (HE, 42). Community is affirmed
because the benefits of having a woman at immediate disposal (the chief benefit
being, in Bataille’s thinking, immediate sexual gratification) are given as a gift
ensuring a cycle of generosity and thus communication. In another sense of the
word than that which Bataille uses, women are sacrificed, as their status means
they are used to create a human community of which, as objects, they are not
members. Ignoring this sacrifice and its implications, Bataille develops Lévi-
Strauss’s argument further, because for Bataille the prohibition necessarily entails a
desire for transgression into the meaningful realm it excludes. This, then, is
eroticism: a transgression. An awareness of sex differentiates us from animals, and
this awareness creates eroticism and humanity. Eroticism is therefore the key to
man’s evolution from the animal world: ‘What we are, hence all that we are, would
be involved in the decision that sets us against the vague freedom of sexual
contacts, against the natural and undefined life of “beasts”’ (HE, 31).

Eroticism is thus central to human society and humanity – for they are formed
by the same process at the same moment. In this respect, Bataille follows Freud’s
argument in Civilisation and its Discontents (1930) in positing a ‘similarity between
the process of civilisation and the libidinal development of the individual.’ 14 Man is at
first an animal in his natural environment until he separates himself from nature and,
similarly, ‘originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external
world from itself.’ 15 Just as prohibitions are boundaries surrounding human
civilisation, so there are boundaries surrounding and creating human identity.

The dual process of exclusion and inclusion is the formation of humanity and
with it eroticism – but Bataille is interested in the repercussions of this process. The
prohibition upon instant sexual gratification, the rule about sex that is allowed and
sex that is forbidden, makes sex desirable:

[T]he object of the prohibition was first marked out for coveting by the
prohibition itself: if the prohibition was essentially of a sexual nature it
must have drawn attention to the sexual value of its object (or rather, its
erotic value). (HE, 48)

---

15 Ibid., p. 255.
Prohibition and transgression are born at once, because the prohibition draws attention to that which it controls and the thing that is excluded becomes transformed by its exclusion. This is the crucial moment at which erotic transgression emerges in what Bataille describes as the ‘history’ of sexual life in the linear account of eroticism he describes in *History of Eroticism* (*HE*, 49). Returning to *Eroticism*, Bataille states that taboo and transgression are not external influences on humanity but internal to our constitution. Prohibitions remove disturbing objects and our own violent impulses so that we can exist in a world of clarity, ‘of action and of objectivity’ (*E*, 38). Violent impulses within us would otherwise destroy ‘that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable’ (*E*, 38). Taboos are a necessary condition of existence: ‘The truth of taboos is the key to our human attitude’ and they are imposed from within in order for us to become human (*E*, 38).

Bataille further emphasises the importance of the taboo-transgression co-dependence when he discusses inner experience, which is a form of anguish internal and unique to mankind. If we uphold a taboo we are not aware of its existence, but in threatening it we feel ‘the anguish of mind without which the taboo would not exist’ (*E*, 38). This leads to an experience of ‘the successful transgression which, in maintaining the prohibition, maintains it in order to benefit by it’ (*E*, 38). We desire the violation of the taboo but the threat our desires poses to the taboo brings with it the anguished realisation that we need the taboo to function, even to exist. By coming to this realisation we show that we respect and therefore support the taboo, and the transgression is complete. Bataille says that this anguish is inner experience – the experience of something internal to ourselves and integral to our humanity. He states, ‘Man achieves his inner experience at the instant when bursting out of the chrysalis he feels that he is tearing himself, and not tearing something outside that resists him’ (*E*, 39). Violence and the taboo controlling it are inside us and are part of our very humanity. Violence is ever-present but it must be controlled; we experience transgression in the instant that we feel and are made aware of the violence that we must control and order so that we can be human. Death (which is, like sex, another violence controlled by taboo) is described by Bataille as ‘a sign of violence brought into the world which it could destroy’ making it clear that transgression is the experience of a violence that could annihilate the human world (*E*, 46). Bataille also states that the ‘taboo cannot suppress pursuits necessary to life, but it can give them the significance of a religious violation’ (*E*, 74). Transgression is an experience that ‘signifies’ ‘violation’ of the terms of our human world. In transgression it is not annihilation that we experience (because we would be annihilated and unable to experience anything) but threat; we experience
the anguish of our own possible annihilation, in that we challenge the taboo that is
the boundary that helps to constitute our humanity. If we did experience annihilation,
we would not exist to experience it. This is a paradox which deserves further
discussion later in this chapter, when I explain in more detail why I believe
transgression is about threatening a structure or boundary rather than breaking it.
Also of note is the structural language that accompanies taboo and transgression, of
internal and external elements and boundaries of humanity. This too will be
considered in more detail throughout this chapter.

Expenditure and Sacrifice: Transgressive Themes in Bataille’s Texts
To further understand Bataille’s theory of eroticism and notion of transgression, it is
necessary to examine some of the interrelated ideas Bataille develops at various
stages in his work. For example, Andrew Hussey claims that eroticism, mysticism
and thinking are all similar in that each is ‘an experience which strips away layers of
discourse in an elliptical movement which exceeds,’ in the way that transgression
‘brings together thought and experience in a moment which is both erotic and
revelatory.’\textsuperscript{16} It is important that no single element of transgressive experience is
used to schematise Bataille’s thinking, as such a reading would undermine the
complexity of his notion of transgression and also undermine transgression itself, by
allowing its different instances to be put into a hierarchy. Bataille’s thought resists
such systematisation whilst at the same time discussing structures and systems to
explain the nature of humanity. Sacrifice, war and eroticism are identified by Bataille
as forms of transgression and his discussions of expenditure and poetry imply that
they can also be considered forms of transgression \textit{(E, 70)}.\textsuperscript{17} But none of these
forms can claim dominance over the others: they imply and echo one another in
their very existence, or rather in their equal threat of shattering our everyday
existence. For example, Patrick ffrench and Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons each discuss
how erotic transgression and sacrifice on the one hand, and textual forms of
transgression on the other, repeat and evoke one another. Ffrench argues that the
destructuring structural play in the text of in \textit{Story of the Eye} ‘brings together textual
and sexual transgression in such a way that they are inseparable.’\textsuperscript{18} Boldt-Irons
claims that the textual device of the \textit{mise en abîme} is a representation of sacrifice

\textsuperscript{16} Andrew Hussey, \textit{The Inner Scar: The Mysticism of Georges Bataille} (Amsterdam; Editions
\textsuperscript{17} See Chapter Two, Erotic Language and Modes of Transgression.
\textsuperscript{18} Patrick ffrench, \textit{The Cut: reading Bataille’s Histoire de l’oeil} (Oxford: Oxford University
that initiates an experience of loss and gain at once in the reader.\textsuperscript{19} These two scholars articulate the same characteristic of transgression: whatever form transgression takes, or rather whatever form it threatens, it encapsulates its other forms or possibilities.

The earliest essay in which Bataille discusses transgression in explanatory detail is ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ (1933). In this essay Bataille draws on anthropological studies to discuss the concept of potlatch, and he also develops the notion that certain elements (excess and expenditure) are excluded from the human society. He thus uses a similar theoretical practice to that which he will later employ in developing his theory of eroticism. In ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ Bataille is concerned with the notion of use-value and the ideas of work and wealth. He uses these topics to compare primitive societies modelled on the potlatch to the modern world of work and profit, ultimately developing a critique of capitalism. During this period in Europe fascism was gaining ground and Bataille critiqued its political progression, yet his approach to these topics shows the first emergence of what will later become his notion of transgression.\textsuperscript{20} Bataille explains that humanity defines itself and its limit within use-value. Either an activity produces and/or conserves something necessary, or it is an activity which is an end in itself and is therefore excessive and wasteful. As an excess, it threatens to overwhelm the limits that contain and define humanity (those limits being productive work and the guiding concept of utility). He explains, ‘on the whole, any general judgement of social activity implies the principle that all individual effort, in order to be valid, must be reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation.’\textsuperscript{21} Bataille proposes that consumption takes two forms: energy that is necessarily consumed to maintain life (which is therefore useful) and unproductive expenditure which is contrary ‘to the economic principle of balanced accounts’ and includes ‘a loss that must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning.’\textsuperscript{22}

An act that is pleasurable, and serves no other end than this instantaneous

\textsuperscript{19} Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, ‘Sacrifice and violence in Bataille’s erotic fiction: Reflections from/upon the \textit{mise en abîme},’ in \textit{Bataille: Writing the Sacred}, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 91-104 (p. 92).
\textsuperscript{20} Bataille contributed to \textit{La Critique sociale}, which was a leftist journal started by ex-Communist party member Boris Souvarine. For a detailed account of the life of \textit{La Critique sociale} and the relationship between Souvarine and the other contributors — including Bataille — see Michel Surya’s \textit{Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Bibliography}, trans. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 159-170.
\textsuperscript{21} ‘The Notion of Expenditure’, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 118.
experience of pleasure, is not acknowledged as part of our rational system but is excessive to it: this principle means that ‘violent pleasure is seen as *pathological*.’

One of the defining elements of transgression in *Eroticism* can be traced in ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ and in another work, *The Accursed Share* (1949). In *Eroticism* Bataille says:

> Man has built up the rational world by his own efforts, but there remains within him an undercurrent of violence [...] There is in nature and there subsists in man a movement which always exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order (*E*, 40).

The constant tension between taboo and transgression is a tension between bounded order and violent excess. This theme pervades all Bataille’s work, and is manifested differently in different periods of his work. In ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ Bataille says that ‘human life cannot in any way be limited to the closed systems assigned to it by reasonable conceptions’ and later in *The Accursed Share* he elaborates what these closed systems are, whilst still insisting that expenditure must and will occur. Bataille does not explicitly link ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ to *The Accursed Share* but the two texts (which are closely related in the development of Bataille’s writing projects) develop between them a sense of expenditure in political, economic and solar terms. In *The Accursed Share* Bataille argues that there is ‘a need to study the system of human production and consumption within a much larger framework.’

---

23 Ibid., p. 116
26 ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ begins the study of economic factors which Bataille will pursue in the late 1930s in the aborted project ‘La Limite de l’utilité’ (‘The Limits of the Useful’), an early draft of the later work *The Accursed Share*.
27 For a detailed comparison of expenditure in ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ and in *The Accursed Share* see Pierre Lamarche ‘The Use Value of G.A.M.V. Bataille’, in *Reading Bataille Now*, ed. by Shannon Winnubst (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 54-72. Lamarche’s explication focuses on the Marxist reading of expenditure as a means of undermining the capitalist economy; I give my own summary of the relationship between the two texts on the following page. Although Lamarche’s paper is detailed, by my reading it overemphasises the political instance of transgression over and above its other manifestations.
that the human world is ‘built’ with ‘bounds’ and of ‘systems’. There is an architectural or structural imagery at play in Bataille’s description. His language reveals that humanity – and later, I will argue, transgression – must be thought of in spatial and architectural terms. The structural terminology he uses supports the notion that transgression brings to light the structural state of humanity and the need to constantly, continuously maintain that structure against the nothingness outside it. I will return to this idea shortly.

Bataille argues in *The Accursed Share* that living organisms have more energy than is necessary for the simple continuation of life, and this wealth or excess is there to promote growth. However, since a system or organism can reach a limit at which it can no longer grow, the excess must be spent or wasted, ‘necessarily lost without profit’ (AS, 21). This is a quasi-biological interpretation of Bataille’s previous argument in ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ and he widens his argument to suggest it has economic implications. In our rational social economy (based on use value and acquisition) waste is judged a sign of impotence and failure, but Bataille’s point is that in looking beyond the confines of our society and recognising the totality of the general economy, wastage is ‘logical, even inescapable’ (AS, 29).

An acknowledgement of the general economy involves, for Bataille, a new relationship to excess, waste and nothingness: in short, to the otherness that is both outside and at the origin of humanity. In ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ Bataille’s concern is the class struggle.29 He charts a brief anthropological history of society to claim that the bourgeoisie hypocritically refuses expenditure, and this results in expenditure taking the form of Christianity on the one hand, and the workers’ movement on the other. At one end of the social spectrum, the bourgeoisie are withholding their wealth, denying expenditure and ‘sterilising’ its existence, which means all the expenditure that needs to happen does so at the other end of society, amongst the workers, in the form of class struggle.30 *The Accursed Share* interprets expenditure in economic terms, not in the explicitly political terms of ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ but in a wider sense that looks beyond the global economy.31 Here Bataille talks about solar energy and life on the planet needing to expend the

---

30 Denis Hollier discusses whether expenditure can be clean, or have preferable formats. I discuss his thinking later in this chapter and again in Chapter Three.
31 See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the general economy in *The Accursed Share*. 
excess it gains from the limitless provision of the sun. The common ideas are evident through different periods of Bataille’s thought.

The theme of taboo (and transgression, although he does not yet call it that) continues in Bataille’s discussion of religion and sacrifice in both *Eroticism* and in an earlier text written at the same time as *The Accursed Share*, *Theory of Religion* (written in 1948 but published posthumously in 1973). Here Bataille argues that erotic activity does not bring about a form of sacrifice but that it is sacrifice. Bataille is concerned with a topic familiar in *The Accursed Share*, namely the passage of mankind out of animality into his own human world, and thus the creation of the sacred outside the barriers man created to define himself. Man is an animal that transcends his original animal condition, thus closing off the animality that is his origin: ‘the animal world is that of immanence and immediacy, for that world, which is closed to us, is so to the extent that we cannot discern in it any ability to transcend itself’ (*TR*, 23).

Man transcends nature due to the creation of tools because ‘the tool is subordinated to the man who uses it,’ nature is subordinated and becomes a useful object to man, thus defining nature’s role for man (*TR*, 28). The tool is of teleological importance as it at the same time defines man himself. Bataille states ‘The purpose of a tool’s use has the same meaning as a tool’s use: a utility is assigned to it and so on’ (*TR*, 28). Thus the transcendent world of man, to which nature is subordinated, is created by and thus defined by the emergence of use value and work. However, once nature becomes an object to man it becomes closed to him. Bataille explains, ‘Nature becomes man’s property but it ceases to be immanent to him. It is his on the condition that it is closed to him’ (*TR*, 41). This is how immanence attains a new meaning and comes to be the sacred: it is the mysterious other man originally chose to shut out but is now drawn towards. The immanence of nature is something that will always be part of man’s life but that he can never know.

This is a crucial step for Bataille’s definition of sacrifice. Humanity is based on barriers against and transcendence over nature, thus the negation of immanence in nature, but it is also based on the acquisition of tools and the creation of work, so that its defining values are utility and duration. Sacrifice threatens the barriers of humanity with the impingement of sacred immanence by negating utility and duration. Bataille claims simply ‘The principle of sacrifice is destruction’ and explains, ‘Sacrifice is the antithesis of production, which is accomplished with a view to the future; it is consumption that is concerned only with the moment’ (*TR*: 43; 49). 

---

In consuming rather than working and producing, and in concerning itself with the moment rather than duration and future stability (as is achieved through work and profit) it is one of the defining values of humanity that sacrifice destroys. It is 'only the thing' that sacrifice destroys, only 'an object’s real ties of subordination,' only the transcendence and thus notion of humanity (TR, 43). When Bataille says ‘To sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give’ he is emphasising that death as the end of a finite thing is not what is important (TR, 49). What is important is death as the dissolution of values; the very values that create humanity (and its finitude) are destroyed and this destruction shakes the very foundations of humanity.

The event being described here is the same as eroticism. In Eroticism Bataille explains the reason taboos first came into existence with regard to death and birth: they both signify the finitude of human life, its end and its beginning. Death is a ‘danger for those left behind’ and the ‘biological disorder’ of the rotting corpse is ‘threatening’ (E, 46). Birth, on the other hand, also implies a denial of order and represents ‘the transition from nothingness to being, or from being to nothingness’ (E, 54). Anything outside the order of humanity – which therefore represented nothingness – had to be controlled, if not by the rational world of order and work, then by taboos formulated specifically to leave this world unscathed. This is a crucial point in my reading of Bataille, as it reveals that taboo and order, and transgression and nothingness, are mutually defining. Bataille states that the world of transgression is a sacred world which he describes as ‘the natural world mingled with the divine […] it is the human world, shaped by a denial of animality or nature, denying itself, and reaching beyond itself in this second denial, though not returning to what it had rejected in the first place’ (E: 84; 85). Eroticism ‘reaches beyond’ humanity towards the realm of totality, experiencing the violence of the threat of death in order to reach out towards life as continuity. Human discontinuity is embraced in order to affirm a radical continuity that is the underside of human experience: that is both its other and its foundation.

Sociologist Chris Jenks says that in Eroticism Bataille suggests that ‘self, being, is locked into a self-referential void, a meaningfulness which is established through the certain knowledge of death, the final limit.’ Whilst death is indeed the thing against which we define ourselves to come into being, I would argue that Bataille is more concerned with nothingness than meaninglessness. Death and nothingness are the other of the human: that which the structural limits of the human stand against. Nothingness is a threat because we fear death and decay, but it is

---

33 Jenks, Transgression, p. 94.
also a threat on a humanist, almost ontological level. This is because nothingness, which is outside those structures that define our humanity, also (paradoxically) exists and constantly threatens to overcome our existence. Indeed, we exist only in our ability to shut it out, and hence that which can undo our existence is essential to our existence. All that stands between our being and the alluring and terrifying nothingness of continuity is our ongoing ability to maintain the structured order of taboos and work and their value system – and these are in constant danger of being overwhelmed by that which they exist to control and block out. I believe this constant danger is why transgression is experienced violently, and why Bataille describes it through violent emotions.\(^{34}\)

I have argued then that transgression is the threat of annihilation, not the act of annihilation. The limits and structure of humanity are not broken in transgressive experience, as to break humanity’s limits would be a death from which there would be no return. But transgressive experiences reveal how easily that death could come about, by revealing the constant need to uphold humanity through its limits: architecture, order, language, utility, reason and taboo. Humanity is not a finished work but a constant application of itself.

**Excess and the Architecture of Humanity**

Few of Bataille’s critics have fully examined the structural relationship between taboo and transgression, choosing instead to focus on a detailed examination of transgression in one or many of its guises, Hussey, ffrench and Boldt-Irons being previously mentioned examples.\(^{35}\) Nick Land’s reading of Bataille follows this trend but his discussion of limits and excess helps to illuminate why that structural relationship is important and how there is a sense of an architecture to Bataille’s human. Land interprets transgression as expenditure, chiefly in terms of the excess energy living things have as a result of the sun, the originator of all earthly energy. In doing so he picks up on a point Bataille makes repeatedly, namely that ‘Solar energy is the source of life’s exuberant development’ (AS, 28). Land explains that ‘any possible self – or relative isolation – is only ever precipitated as a precarious digression within a general economy, perpetually negotiated across the scale of energy flows.’\(^{36}\) Subjectivity and society are destined to fail and, more than Bataille

---

\(^{34}\) See my analysis of *Madame Edwarda* in Chapter Two.

\(^{35}\) Earlier in this chapter I noted that Hussey compares transgression to thinking, ffrench discusses it in relation to the structure of Bataille’s texts and Boldt-Irons assesses its presence in literary devices in his fiction.

even, Land emphasises that these constructs – indeed any restricted economy – are more accurately understood as the *effects* of limitless solar energy than as the *cause* of transgression. Land states:

> The solar source of all terrestrial resources commits them to an abysmal generosity, which Bataille calls “glory” [...] When the silting-up of energy upon the surface of the planet is interpreted by its complex consequences as rigid utility, a productivist civilisation is initiated, whose culture involves a history of ontology, and a moral order. Systematic limits to growth require that the inevitable re-commencement of the solar trajectory scorches jagged perforations through such civilisations [...] Predominant amongst the incendiary and epidemic gashes which contravene the interests of mankind are eroticism, base religion, inutile criminality, and war.\(^{37}\)

Land is saying that we order and organise limitless energy to form human beings and human civilisation (our own ontology and moral order, in his words). More importantly, he points out that this fabrication of boundaries, this isolation of elements out of the general economy, will always be precarious. Our isolated human identities could at any moment be ripped apart by erotic, sacrificial, transgressive excess. Bataille argues that we need the boundary that is threatened, but Land usefully shifts our perspective to remind us that the boundary – be it the value of utility or the taboo around sexual acts – is an attempt to control the proliferating excess of energy. This energy is continually emerging from the sun and constantly threatening to overwhelm the boundary and that which it defines, humanity. There is always an ‘unsublatable wave of senseless wastage welling up beneath human endeavour’ ready to undermine the endeavour, and with it the human.\(^{38}\) In this sense, Bataille’s human being is constantly formed and performed through the limits and structures it upholds.

Whilst Land’s reading focuses on excess and destruction, and as such differs from my own, he does usefully articulate something that has been present in Bataille’s language but has not been drawn out in other critical discussions: a spatiality or structure inherent in his understanding of the relationship between taboo and transgression. Earlier in this chapter I noted that Bataille describes the human world as ‘built’ with ‘bounds’ to create ‘order’, using architectural terms to describe humanity and erotic transgression (*E*, 40). The architecture of humanity is

---

\(^{37}\) Land, p. 65.  
\(^{38}\) Land, p. 65.
not only evident in Bataille’s language but is fundamental to his anthropological philosophy of the human constitution. Previously, scholars have often discussed transgression in terms of an absolute barrier being absolutely broken, which logically leads them to a temporal interpretation of transgression. To differentiate my own spatial and architectural reading I want to briefly discuss the other, temporal perspective which I mentioned in my Introduction.

Jenks interprets transgression as the act of going ‘beyond’ a limit, suggesting that limit is a clear and concrete line (which, in Jenks’ account, can move and change in different social eras, due to the impact of its transgression).\(^39\) This in turn means that when we consider transgression in its definitive role in humanity, Jenks must suggest that excesses transgress the human world ‘and thus construct it’ because that world is ‘the completion that follows and accompanies transgression.’\(^40\) For Jenks, a limit defines humanity against excess, transgression is an act of excess that breaks that limit, and what ‘follows’ is that the need for the limit is (re)proven and humanity is (re)constructed.

This chronological interpretation of the relationship between humanity and transgression, based on the idea that taboos and other definitive limits of humanity are solid, can be found in other critical accounts of Bataille too. Marie-Christine Lala argues that when the rationality of discourse is overcome in Bataille’s text *The Impossible* and poetry communicates the experience of the limitations defining humanity, this is the death of the subject followed by its re-emergence.\(^41\) This leads to what Lala describes as ‘a paradox of the human condition and existence that man can only escape the finitude of his being if he accepts losing himself.’\(^42\)

The inherent absolutism and temporality intrinsic to such critical appraisals of Bataille’s work both imply that i) the subject dies when the boundaries forming it are overcome in transgression and, in trying to solve the problem posed by the subject experiencing the transgression now being ‘dead’ or annihilated, they ii) pose a temporal theory which depicts transgression as breaking a taboo and then reinstating it. This chronology of taboo and transgression does exist in some sense. For a start, there is in Bataille’s account an anthropological history behind the notion of a human subject defined by taboo and transgression. Further, when Bataille

\(^{40}\) Jenks, *Transgression*, p. 90.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 114.
explains his theory, he draws upon this anthropological account and the stages of the development of humanity, meaning he explains his notion of transgression in logical stages. Neither of these chronologies applies to transgression itself: Bataille’s description instead supports a structural manifestation.

Transgression does not break a boundary and annihilate humanity before humanity somehow, out of its annihilated non-existence, reformulates the taboos and its own structure. Instead, transgression is not absolute annihilation or death, and Bataille’s description of it suggests a structural status. For example, he describes the state of transgression as ‘partial dissolution’ and ‘a violation of the very being [...] bordering on death’ – not as complete dissolution and actual death (E, 1). He discusses it in terms of the ‘disequilibrium’ of the human subject, another word that brings to mind spatial images of substances in dynamic coexistence (E, 31). In transgressive events we are reminded of our radical contingency and how easily our limits and defining structures could be overwhelmed and ourselves annihilated. This is why I believe Bataillean transgression is not the breaking of a taboo or other boundaries but the revelation of a threat to those limits that define us. Transgression is an experience that throws us against our limits and shocks us violently by revealing how easily they could break and how persistently we must work, act and order to maintain them and that which they define: our humanity, our civilisation and ourselves.

There is, then, an architecture to Bataille’s humanity. The architectural terms Bataille uses support this: limits and boundaries imply an architecture to the subject and in earlier texts he compares the development of architecture to that of humanity in its order and rationality.43 Our humanity is structured through limits and order which we use to shut out and control the violence within ourselves and the nothingness or continuity against which we stand. There is also a performativity to this architecture, akin to that which Judith Butler describes when she says that ‘gender is always a doing’ and that ‘identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.’44 Whilst Butler is talking specifically about gender, her theory can be applied to identity in other ways and is useful in thinking about Bataille’s notion of humanity. The limits and order Bataille describes as constitutive of humanity are not concrete absolutes, they are not built and left intact like a physical wall to defend us against threats. Instead, like Butler’s gender

43 EA, 35. I will discuss this later in this chapter in the section The Ideal Nature of Society: Architecture.
identity, they are constantly iterated, formed and performed. Further, these structures that underpin human existence are revealed to be contingent by sovereign experiences like those Lala describes – by intense experiences that disrupt our ability to perform. Our architecture is not absolutely concrete in the way we assume it is in order to live. We realise our radical contingency through a violent transgressive experience to which we then respond violently, insomuch as we feel anguished at our radical ungrounding at the threat of death and annihilation. These intense experiences, such as orgasm, are momentary and cannot persist but in that moment they reveal the contingency of our structural, performed state of being.

The structure and spatiality of Bataille’s philosophy of the human condition and notion of transgression is also evident when he discusses sacrifice, an idea that conjures up the notion of the death and annihilation of a human subject. In Theory of Religion Bataille states that the significance of sacrifice is that it ‘destroys an object’s real ties of subordination; it draws the victim out of the world of utility’ (TR, 43). In freeing livestock and the first fruits of harvest from the realm of production, utility and duration, they are withdrawn from the world as we know it – from the human world. But Bataille is clear that ‘the destruction that sacrifice is intended to bring about is not annihilation’ (TR, 43). The human world is not, therefore, annihilated in Bataille’s sacrifice: ‘Sacrifice burns like the sun that slowly dies of the prodigious radiation whose brilliance our eyes cannot bear, but it is never isolated and, in a world of individuals, it calls for the general negation of individuals as such’ (TR, 53). That sacrifice calls for the negation of individuals is not the same as negating the individuals.

When the example of transgression Bataille discusses is sacrifice, the solution to the problem posed by the violence that manifests transgression is the festival. The problem is articulated as such:

[I]f man surrendered unreservedly to immanence, he would fall short of humanity; he would achieve it only to lose it and eventually life would return to the unconscious intimacy of animals. The constant problem posed by the impossibility of being human without being a thing and of escaping the limits

---

45 Lala argues that the ‘moment of excess is often communicated through sovereign modes of behaviour such as drunkenness or eroticism’ in Bataille’s texts and that ‘Bataille’s writing espouses an experience lived out as emotional ecstasy’ through language in which ‘the rationality of discourse is finally overcome by the irrational, which springs out of danger or ecstasy.’ See Lala, pp. 106-107.

46 Bataille does not call sacrifice transgression in Theory of Religion but he does call it a form of transgression in Eroticism (E, 70).
of things without returning to animal slumber receives the limited solution of
the festival. (TR, 53)

This is relevant to my assessment of transgression and my attempts to understand
the extent to which the human world is annihilated or rather, whether transgression
is a threat to a boundary or breaks the boundary. He suggests the boundaries of
humanity are challenged but not ‘surrendered unreservedly’ (TR, 53). This is why
the festival is a ‘limited solution’ (TR, 53). He explains:

[T]he letting loose of the festival is finally, if not fettered, then at least confined
to the limits of a reality of which it is the negation. The festival is tolerated to
the extent that it reserves the necessities of the profane world. (TR, 54).

The festival is a tolerated transgression that takes place within the limits of human
possibility. Allison notes Bataille’s differentiation between limited and unlimited
forms of transgression, which I discussed in my Introduction to this thesis as
‘generic’ and ‘Bataillean’ transgression. The festival Bataille describes in Theory of
Religion is a ‘tolerated’ (TR, 54) form of what Bataille describes as transgression in
Eroticism (E, 66-7). Generic transgression is necessitated by the constitution of the
human, but it manages the threat and avoids transgression in Bataille’s truest sense
of the word, that would threaten the structures of humanity. Yet even in this generic
form, Bataille’s description of sacrifice and the festival is structural and spatial: he
goes on to describe their violence as within the (human) profane world and not
external to it (TR, 57). He describes sacrifice in relation to this notion of the
structured human constitution:

In general, human sacrifice is the acute stage of a dispute setting the
movement of a measureless violence against the real order and duration. It is
the most radical contestation of the primacy of utility. It is at the same time the
highest degree of an unleashing of internal violence (TR, 60).

In this statement Bataille makes it clear that utility controls internal violence and is
part of the order that constitutes humanity. The contingency of humanity is also
clear. His account of sacrifice in 1948 shows that at this point in his thinking Bataille
was considering the human condition and the violence it must continuously control
in order to exist, and further, that he was considering humanity in structural terms.
When the notion of transgression is introduced in Eroticism less than a decade later,
it takes the same format as sacrifice and expenditure, largely because his notion of humanity is less subject to change. Transgression is a structural challenge to the radically contingent and continuously performed architecture of humanity.

**Undoing the Paradox of Death in Bataillean Transgression**

The perceived ‘death’ of the human subject followed by its reappearance, which is the paradox Lala identified within her interpretation of Bataille’s discussion of humanity, relates to a paradox articulated in a different format by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas’ discussion is relevant to the question of the use value of transgression. Whilst I believe the death of the subject in transgression is a paradox that is solved by a structural reading of transgression, the paradox of whether transgression can have a use-value when it is opposed to utility is relevant to my project. In my Introduction I noted that some architectural theorists are interested in using transgression to drive change in both architectural practice and in the cultures and societies architecture helps to articulate and maintain. Whether transgression can be used is relevant to questions about architectural transgression and also literary forms, as some modernist writers wanted to use eroticism to drive social regeneration.47 Whilst Habermas sees this as undermining Bataille’s theory, I instead interpret it in light of the structural interdependence of taboo and transgression. Habermas’ philosophical engagement with Bataillean transgression is useful for its rigorous analysis of Bataille’s ideas and also because it differs from my structural reading, and can be used to counterpoint and thereby explicate my reading.

Bataille’s construction of the human subject (and eroticism) is, for Habermas, also a construction of ‘a history of Western reason.’48 In his collected essays *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Habermas claims that the Nietzschean critique of modernity was developed in one mode of practice by Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, and another by Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault. The problem with modernity, as Habermas articulates it, is the creation of a rational, unified subject that not only lays claim to spatio-temporal neutrality (hence denying its origins in Western history) but also to transcendence, such that it can witness its own rationality and totality. Habermas acknowledges his debt to Hegel in stating ‘the

---

47 I will discuss both of these forms of transgression, architectural and literary, in the following two chapters of this thesis.

principle of subjectivity determines the forms of modern culture,’ and to Nietzsche, in stating that subject-centred reason is ‘the result and expression of a perversion of the will to power.’ Habermas proposes that Bataille identifies capitalist enterprise and the state apparatus as the subject-centred rationality at the core of modernity. Bataille ‘interprets reason as labour’ and ‘investigates the imperatives to utility and efficiency, to which work and consumption have been ever more exclusively subordinated, in order to identify within industrial production an inherent tendency toward self-destruction in all modern societies.’ Habermas claims that in Nietzsche’s Dionysus, ‘subject-centred reason is confronted with reason’s absolute other,’ and that the experience of the Dionysian (through art) is an experience of ‘ecstasy […] a painful de-differentiation, a de-delimitation of the individual, a merging with amorphous nature within and without.’ Given these comments, it is easy to see why Bataille will become important in Habermas’ Hegelian/Nietzschean critique of modernity.

Habermas devotes a lecture to Bataille which claims in its title that Bataille is ‘between eroticism and general economics’. In this lecture Habermas claims that Bataille’s sustained attempt, starting from his 1933 essay ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’, is to develop a heterology that does not result in fascism, or rather, that allows for the subversion that fascism tries to outlaw and overrule. This effort, Habermas states, will lead Bataille to oscillate between eroticism and the general economy, both of which will ultimately fail in their undoing of subject-based reason. In short, this is because no subject is left to observe the otherness it accesses or, to use Bataille’s own terminology, the otherness and continuity the subject dissolves into in its self-sacrificial transgression. This is the problem that some critical readings of Bataille present through the notion of a human subject being annihilated in transgression, as I have explained above.

---

49 Habermas, p. 21. Hegel was relevant to Bataille’s thinking about humanity after he attended Alexander Kojève’s lectures on Hegel in the 1930s (see Surya, pp. 187-190). Kojève describes humanity’s emergence through self-consciousness and interprets Hegel’s work as an analysis of how man emerged as a temporal being through actions such as negation, which differentiate man from animal. See Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by James H. Nichols, JR. (London: Cornell University Press, 1980). For an assessment (via Derrida’s texts on Bataille) of the Bataille’s ideas as they relate to Hegel’s philosophy, see *Derrida and the Writing of the Body*, Dr Jones Irwin (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 30-41. For Irwin, transgression’s dual need for a limit and ‘reinforcement’ of that limit makes Bataille’s writing ‘uncategorisable’ for Derrida, which exceeds the Hegelian dialectic (p. 40).

50 Habermas, p. 95.

51 Ibid., p. 103.

52 Ibid., p. 102.

53 Ibid., p. 94.
Continuing his contrast of Heidegger and Bataille as two post-Nietzschean practices of a critique of modernity, Habermas opposes ‘Bataille’s approach of moral critique’ to Heidegger’s ‘critique of metaphysics,’ but in so doing Habermas only admits half of Bataille’s theory. Utility is only one of the principles at the foundation of humanity. The other is taboo and these are part of an architecture that also incorporates principles of reason, duration and boundaries. Habermas says that Bataille attacks reason by concentrating on ‘the foundations of an ethical rationalization’ by establishing modernity ‘in relation to the success-orientated utilitarian action that serves the realization of any given subjective purpose.’ Habermas claims that Bataille critiques modernity on a moral basis by ‘unbounding’ the subject. Yet Habermas’ focus on utility and ethics in Bataille’s thinking is problematic, since for Bataille the incest taboo – which rules over sex, and in so doing makes sex a thing managed, meaningful and therefore erotic – also has an effect on nature, rendering it other and inaccessible as pure immanence. Eroticism is one instance of transgression but it is, first, related to all other instances because they structurally imply one another and, second, the origin of the human condition – the so-called original sin, the transgression that is original because it is born within the human and the human is born of it. Having overemphasised Bataille’s explanation of use-value without accounting for how it feeds into Bataille’s later work on eroticism, Habermas then goes on to reverse this importance (without accounting for how this admission might therefore undermine his reading of Bataille). He claims that the humans emerging from animality ‘are constituted not just in virtue of labour, but also by prohibitions’ and goes even further to claim ‘Because the rational world of labour is bounded and established within the frame of prohibitions, these prohibitions themselves are not at all laws of reason.’ The chronological relationship Habermas wants to posit, which takes the taboo outside the realm of reason because it enables reason to form, is problematic. Taboo and transgression are at the core of humanity and the origin of human development for Bataille but not chronologically: the taboo is not subject to the laws of reason in so much as it embodies reason. Bataille says that taboos are an irrational fear, but he means that we feel them irrationally: they remain the point at which reason and the order of the human world become possible (E, 63). The taboo is a boundary that contains within it the promise of order and rational systematisation in its nature as a

54 Habermas, p. 214.
55 Habermas, p. 213 and p. 214.
56 Ibid., p. 214.
57 Habermas, p. 230.
58 Ibid., p. 231.
boundary. It is the bind and division between human and other, meaning its very existence is an ordering.

Habermas continues his analysis by claiming that organised religion has created an ‘autonomous morality’ for its own ends, but can only do this because ‘the dialectic of prohibition and transgression is brought to a standstill, because the sacred no longer penetrates the profane world with its lightning flashes.’59 This is a useful articulation of a point Bataille makes; it is the case that certain religions disallow transgressive experiences in order to claim access to the continuity of the afterlife for themselves (E, 118). However, unlike Habermas and Guerlac, I do not agree that the relationship Bataille describes between taboo and transgression is dialectical in a Hegelian or Marxist sense of the word. That term would imply the potential for future resolution but if that resolution were to be reached, by Bataille’s theory, humanity and human history would end (echoing Bataille’s engagement with the Kojèvian thesis of the ‘end of history’).60 For Habermas, the logical conclusion of Bataille’s statement in The Accursed Share that excess can and will occur, whether in the form of war or eroticism, is that:

[T]he staging of orgies of waste and expenditures in the grand style will become inevitable – whether in the form of predictable catastrophes or precisely in the form of a libertarian society that frees its wealth for sovereign waste, that is, for excesses, for the self-transcendence of the subject, for the unbounding of subjectivity in general.61

But Bataille’s transgression is neither a permanent death nor a path to transcendence, and the unbounding of subjectivity in Bataille’s terms would be a form of annihilation and no subject would exist. Habermas acknowledges this to an extent when he points out that ‘the knowing subject would – paradoxically – have to surrender his own identity and yet retrieve those experiences to which it was exposed in ecstasy.’62 This is the same paradox I identified above, which for Lala and Jenks led to a temporal reading of transgression as the annihilation and rebirth of the subject. For Habermas this paradox is Bataille’s undoing, but this ignores the architectural nature of Bataille’s idea of humanity and therefore his notion of transgression.

59 Habermas, pp. 232-233.
60 Alexander Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit
61 Habermas, p. 235.
62 Ibid., p. 236.
By reading transgression as a dialectic of reason and nature Habermas misconstrues an essential element of Bataille’s thinking, specifically that it is the permanent tension between taboo and transgression that defines the human. By my reading, Bataille’s transgression is never an absolute break to a concrete boundary. Instead, the transgressive event is a momentary experience of violence that reveals to us our limits and their radical contingency. In transgression we are thrown against the structures, norms and values that we perform and continually reiterate to be human, and we are made aware of the otherness against which we define and defend ourselves and which we must constantly order to retain our grasp on humanity.

Habermas interprets transgression as ‘an orgiastic will to power’ and says that it is ‘the creative and exuberant activity of a mighty will manifested as much in play, dance, rapture, and giddiness as in the kinds of stimulation aroused by destruction.’ The idea that transgression is an affirmative existence of the will to power is attractive if we want to be able to use transgression to create and drive positive social and political change. For Habermas, Bataille presents transgression as an ‘overpowering return to a lost continuity as the eruption of elements opposed to reason’ and through it the unified subject is ‘dispossessed and cast down into the abyss,’ but this is a misinterpretation of Bataille’s continuity. For Bataille, the sacred and nature are both forms of continuity; the sacred is the quality of immanence that has been transformed once nature is closed off from the human subject. There is therefore no ‘return’ to continuity as such – a different continuity is glimpsed in transgression. Moreover the subject’s dispossession is not an absolute death but rather a ‘disequilibrium,’ the word Bataille uses to describe the experience of eroticism, in which a being ‘consciously calls his own existence into question’ without ending that existence (E, 31). Continuing his examination of critiques of modernity, Habermas contends that Bataille has to rediscover pre-Socratic, pre-Western society in order to find something that will resist rationalisation and refuse assimilation into modernity. The general economy and sovereign exuberance are what Bataille finds and, to take Habermas’ argument even further, offers to us in the true spirit of the potlatch. Habermas continues:

Whereas reason is characterized by calculating manipulation and valorization, its counterpart can only be portrayed negatively, as what is simply

---

63 Habermas, p. 100.
64 Ibid., p. 100.
unmanipulable and not valorizable – as a medium into which the subject can plunge if it gives itself up and transcends itself as subject.\textsuperscript{65}

Habermas wants to see these ideas as tools we can use to undermine modernity. Yet for Bataille, it is not possible to conceive of changes to the condition of humanity through transgression, because transgression is already integral to it (albeit in a way that exposes it to otherness without transcendence over that otherness). This makes Bataillean transgression a very different force from Nietzsche’s will to power, and also denies the possibility of the subject’s transcendence through transgression.

Transgression is atemporal, as my analysis has revealed. Transgression and taboo are not neatly lined up as separate successive events. Rather, the dynamic interdependency between taboo and transgression is, for Bataille, a phenomenological fact of experience that forms the basis of the human condition. We must therefore ask whether transgression can ever really have an effect. If it never breaks a boundary totally, but proves the existence of both the boundary and the otherness it prohibits to maintain order and system, can transgression ever have a transformative effect within that order and system?\textsuperscript{66} Later in this chapter, and in more detail in the final chapter, we will discuss how architects like Bernard Tschumi want to free architecture from what he (amongst others) sees as its oppressive role as perpetrator of state power. But will Tschumi’s use of transgression really effect change or leave the system intact, according to Bataille’s model? If architects want to use transgression as a tool to produce new systems of power – new articulations of new systems in the form of new built environments – either the transgression will fail or its utilisation will fail. If they want to think architecture through transgression and create a built environment that articulates its own existence as a radically contingent structure which contains within it an excess that could overwhelm it, then they are not finding a use value for transgression so much as acknowledging its existence and its potential to overwhelm our architecture. They might use theory and Bataillean ideas to do this, but they are not using taboo, transgression nor the tension between the two.

Whilst I am talking about architecture here, the same is true for Habermas’ modern human subject; transgression cannot be used to destabilise the rational

\textsuperscript{65} Habermas, pp. 102-3.

\textsuperscript{66} Leslie Ann Boldt-Irons recognises the problem of the use value of transgression specifically with regard to Bataille’s fiction. See Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, ‘Sacrifice and violence in Bataille’s erotic fiction: Reflections from/upon the \textit{mise en abîme}.’ I will discuss use value in relation to architecture in the final chapter of my thesis.
human subject because the human is only rational through its ongoing effort to rationalise and order the world. Transgression is the revelation of the violence that stands against that attempt, at all times, forcing rationalisation to be an ongoing state of existence. Habermas comes close to this reading of Bataille but his inability to grasp the heart of Bataille’s world is evident in his disappointment that ‘Bataille promises himself enlightenment about, but ultimately no influence over, the transcendent play of forces.’

Bataille does not allow for a subject who can experience otherness as an object of knowledge, he merely presents a philosophy which acknowledges the existence of the otherness and its formative role. Transgression is not self-overcoming nor is it transcendence: nothing can be learned from it as an experience, nothing can be brought from sacred dissolution into human order, but its dynamic (dis)equilibrium with taboo is a fact fundamental of our humanity (if disturbing when we realise it). What we can and do experience are moments of violence that reveal the otherness against which our limits stand and the precariousness of those limits and their architecture as we constantly enact, rebuild and perform them. Violent events of eroticism, poetry and sacrifice cause an equally violent reaction of anguish, akin to vertigo, as we realise our ability to fall and dissemble our defining architecture. Quoting Foucault’s ‘Preface to Transgression’ Habermas repeats that Bataille’s is a ‘desperate and relentless attack on the pre-eminence of the philosophical subject. His experience and his language become an ordeal, a deliberate drawing and quartering […] allowing voiceless words to be born.’ This is how we might start to recognise transgression in architecture: an ordeal that is the ordeal of the unresolvable, unrationalisable dynamic (dis)equilibrium between taboo and transgression. Foucault gets closer to Bataille even as Habermas quotes him to feed into his own reading. Not all dichotomies are dialectics: Bataille’s is a dynamism.

One final paradox does remain. In The Accursed Share Bataille claims that since expenditure must and will occur, it is rather ‘a matter of an acceptable loss,

67 Habermas, pp. 103.
68 Habermas, p. 213 and Michel Foucault, ‘A Preface to Transgression’, in Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, ed. by James Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 69-87 (p. 79). Michel Foucault’s reading of transgression comes close to my own in several ways. He understands the role of excess as ocasioning both the formation and potential (as transgression) to undo humanity (p. 72). He also articulates the constant tension between taboo and transgression when he states that the limit is ‘a glorification of what it excludes’ and ‘opens violently onto limitlessness’ (p. 73) and that transgression is an affirmation of limited being (p. 74). However, although Foucault describes the tension in these ways, he chooses not to elaborate on it, instead focusing on a spatial interpretation of transgression. I have already explained why we cannot interpret the relationship between taboo and transgression as temporal.
preferable to another that is regarded as unacceptable’ (AS, 31). Transgression can occur in different forms, on a sliding scale of ethical acceptability. However, Holliër mocks the attempts of architecture to negotiate acceptable forms of transgression, ‘as if dépense could be thoroughly presentable, spending energy without polluting.’ Must expenditure always be completely shameful and unacceptable in an economy that does not allow a place for waste? Here I must return to my earlier distinction between generic transgression and Bataillean transgression. Erotic transgression is an example of Bataillean transgression in that its threat to humanity is real and leads to inner experience. Bataille suggests that we can avoid ‘the problem of war’ by ‘raising the global standard of living’ as a means of ‘absorbing the American surplus, thereby reducing the pressure to below the danger point’ (AS, 40). Ffrench points out that in Eroticism Bataille explains how Christianity differentiates between a ‘sanitized’ transgression associated with God and an ‘impure’ transgression associated with the body. In Bataille’s terms, Christianity introduces the concept of transcendence so that ‘Continuity is reached through experience of the divine’ (E, 118). But this is the dishonesty for which Bataille criticises Christianity, namely that it does not admit that only the potential violation of a taboo can expose sacredness and otherness. Excess is branded other within our restricted human economy, and the moment it becomes acceptable and therefore useful, it is not other – but there will always be another other, another excess that cannot be appropriated. Instead of a sliding scale of transgressive acts with different degrees of ethical value, we have generic and Bataillean transgression. Society can substitute one form of generic transgression for another, to manage excess and ultimately retain reason, order and control, but the threat of violence at the heart of humanity is always a threat. This is the nature of the structural tension between taboo and transgression, and it is also the nature of humanity, of every restricted economy or bounded entity. Bataille contrasts war with eroticism, suggesting the latter is more acceptable. Both are transgressive but the generic transgression of war will result in loss of life whereas eroticism will result in inner experience. One is preferable for the good of society, but this preferable form of transgression, eroticism, is still radically other to any system in which ethics is possible. There is a historical dimension to this argument, in that humanity has learned to accommodate certain kinds of expenditure but not others. The ethical potential of transgression therefore remains paradoxical: Bataillean transgression is always radically other to humanity and any human system of ethics, yet generic transgression (which is

---

69 Holliër, Against Architecture, p. xv.
70 Ffrench, The Cut, p. 37.
compatible with humanity and its maintenance) can take forms that damage human civilisation. This fact is a paradox that remains unsolvable in Bataille’s thinking.

Whilst the ethics of transgression remains paradoxical, there is an ethical element to my reading of Bataille that emerges from the humanist nature of his philosophy. Tschumi (who I will discuss in Chapter Three) argues that we must create architecture that allows for or enables transgression, to avoid the state controlling and cancelling out transgression. I am not convinced this accurately reflects Bataille’s thought, since using transgression in this way immediately appropriates it into the state’s system thus making it no longer transgression. However, my ethical assertion is that for us to be human, to fully express and allow what defines us as human to exist, we must explore ways of thinking – and ways of writing, and of designing and building our physical environment – that express the dynamic between transgression and taboo. How we explore the fact of transgression, acknowledge it and make it visible, are questions raised by Bataille’s thought. I will explore erotic literature and modern architecture for modes of transgression later in my thesis. Here I want to return to Bataille’s early writing on architecture and consider its influence on architectural theory, as well as further assess the role of the notion of transgression in that context. Having established transgression as part of the structure of humanity, I now want to understand the impact Bataille’s thought has had on another structure: architecture. To do this I will return to some of his earlier texts which were written before he fully elucidated his theory of eroticism and notion of transgression with it but, I will argue, still bear some resemblance to these ideas and are part of the early iterations of Bataille’s philosophy of humanity.

‘The Ideal Nature of Society’: Architecture

Denis Hollier’s *Against Architecture* emerged alongside the reconsideration of Bataille through the *Tel Quel* journal in the 1960s and 70s, and drew on the special edition of the review *Critique* dedicated to Bataille in 1963.\(^7\) In his Introduction Hollier explains how three of Bataille’s most influential early essays demonstrate society’s attempts to control expenditure using architecture. ‘Architecture’, ‘Slaughterhouse’ and ‘Museum’ were all published in the journal *Documents* early on in Bataille’s career, before he had fully formulated his notion of transgression, yet for Hollier these essays are precursors of this notion and of Bataille’s focus on

---

\(^7\) *Against Architecture* was first published in France in 1974 and translated into English in 1990.
expenditure. I will explain below that I also believe there are common ideas in Bataille’s texts from different periods of his life.

Bataille’s short articles on architecture were written as entries for a Critical Dictionary that he convened in Documents, the short-lived journal he edited and to which he contributed. Bataille was a numismatist working in the Cabinet des Médailles in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris when he and his colleague Pierre d’Espezel founded Documents in 1929. They did so with financial backing from Georges Wildenstein, who was also behind the successful Gazette des Beaux-Arts. Documents ran from 1929 until 1930, with a total of 15 issues. Much has been written about the turbulent relationship between different factions of the board of editors and secretaries, with reports that the Critical Dictionary that emerged in the second issue was an attempt to let Bataille write his own contributions (alongside those of the other contributors to the Dictionary) without his unusual concerns becoming a defining force within the magazine.72 In his entry ‘Formless’ Bataille writes ‘A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meanings of words but their tasks,’ which demonstrates that Bataille used this Dictionary to redefine what a dictionary does and make us reconsider what words do (EA, 51).73 He goes on to say:

[Formless] is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that every thing should have a form. What it designates does not, in any sense whatever, possess rights, and everywhere gets crushed. (EA, 51-51)

The word ‘formless’ implies that everything should have a form, and thus undermines everything that it is used to describe – this is a job, a ‘task’ the word performs. The word is therefore more active than an adjective, it does more than describe. As Fred Botting and Scott Wilson explain it, ‘Bataille is interested in the affects of words and objects. These affects exceed the work and continuity of observable effects and their causes.’74 Bataille says that a dictionary should not be about how a word is used, but what it does when it is used. Yve-Alain Bois explains that the Critical Dictionary desublimates the very concept of a dictionary whilst mirroring its programmatic function, ‘the programme here being to scuttle the very

---

73 All Bataille’s Critical Dictionary entries are taken from Encyclopaedia Acephalica.
idea of a programme, of the self-assurance of reason.’ This makes the formless transgressive, as it exerts its existence against form and order, reminding us that they (and we) are contingent rather than concrete. The points made by Botting, Wilson and Bois make clear that the word formless – or, to use the original word, *informe* – undermines the dictionary in which Bataille has placed it by working against the form and categorisation a dictionary exists to perform. This is an example of transgressive language appearing early in Bataille’s career.

‘Architecture’ was Bataille’s first Dictionary entry, in his second issue of *Documents* in May 1929. This immediately posits architecture as crucial to language (or rather, to its undoing) in that he uses it in his attempt to develop his own Dictionary and his own definition of words as active creators rather than merely passive signifiers. He states: ‘Architecture is the expression of the true nature of societies […] In fact, only society’s ideal nature – that of authoritative command and prohibition – expresses itself in architectural constructions’ (*EA*, 35). He goes on to state that ‘great monuments rise up like dams, opposing a logic of majesty and authority to all unquiet elements; it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State speak to and impose silence upon the crowds’ (*EA*, 35).

Architecture expresses society but in so doing it also defines society and controls it – because it only expresses one element of society and excludes its ‘unquiet elements.’ It is an act of authority in that buildings can be physical manifestations of power in their scale and visibility across the built environment. Discussing ‘Architecture’, Hollier emphasises that what was a reflective relationship between architecture and social order becomes a prescriptive one:

> Architecture, formerly the image of social order, now guarantees and even imposes this order. From being a simple symbol it has now become a master. Architecture captures society in the trap of the image it offers, fixing it in the specular image it reflects back.

In ‘Architecture’ Bataille claims that architecture is a development of the human order and that if we attack architecture we effectively attack man. Bataille says that architecture’s order is ‘really the culmination of the evolution of earthly forms, whose direction is indicated within the biological order by the passage from the simian to the human form’ (*EA*, 35). Architecture is therefore a defining structure for humanity; its mathematical order is the same order that characterises humanity, so much so

---

76 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p. 47.
that it can almost be an evolutionary development of humanity. The same is true of language and the tasks that words perform, sorting things and ascribing value. This is an important point in my reading of Bataille, as he is using architecture as a route to the reconsideration of the form, language and structures of humanity.

In ‘Architecture’ humanity is characterised by ‘mathematical order’ (EA, 35); in The Accursed Share and Theory of Religion the values of utility and rationalisation of work define man, and in Eroticism taboos and the world of work define the profane world of humanity. This is perhaps why transgression, and other ideas that are related to it appear, throughout his work also: if humanity is a bounded entity defined structurally by its application of logic, work, order and taboo, then the possibility of transgression and the threat of that which is excluded by the structure will always be there.

Bataille’s other Critical Dictionary entries that concern architecture continue the activity of destabilising the architecture of our buildings, institutions and our language. In ‘Slaughterhouse’ he compares slaughterhouses to religious temples through the notion of sacrifice, because both ‘were used both for prayer and for killing’ (EA, 73). Expenditure, whether in the form of eroticism or any other transgressive excess, is akin to sacrifice: it destabilises our humanity and reveals its disequilibrium. By comparing the two Bataille challenges our conception of the buildings as different. Killing an animal for food is compared to a sacrificial killing, and temples are compared to slaughterhouses, which Bataille says are ‘cursed and quarantined like a plague-ridden ship’ (EA, 73). In this way Bataille challenges architecture’s ability to sort, differentiate and define, just as he challenges a dictionary’s ability to do the same. Bataille starts his entry ‘Museum’ by pointing out that the first museum in France was founded by the Convention in 1793, and is therefore linked to the guillotine. Where there was blood and slaughter, there is now a ‘celestial apparition’ of society, which people leave ‘fresh and purified’ (EA, 64).

Bataille shows how the museum is, like all architecture, the acceptable nature of society and is an institution that performs a task. Yet beneath the clean order of museums and temples is the reality of excess and waste, Bataille argues, and his assertion and imagery pollute our serene everyday lives. Bataille is enacting what he will later call transgression, as he exposes the violent, disturbing otherness we control and silence in order to be human.

In his analysis Hollier recounts that for Bataille waste and expenditure must happen, even in cities which thrive on work. The museum is a new, clean sacrifice: time is killed, the day is wasted. What Hollier raises is the notion of acceptable expenditure (and therefore transgression) that Bataille raised in The Accursed
Share and which I discussed earlier in relation to the ethics of generic transgression. Whilst still an antidote to useful work, the killing of time is altogether cleaner and more socially acceptable than other forms of sacrifice. Hollier gives an example of generic, or so-called acceptable transgression by noting that in twentieth century urban design, three parks emerge on the site of abattoirs or revolutionary battles.\(^77\) This amounts to a cultural appropriation of sacrifice and expenditure through architecture, demonstrating the silencing Bataille discussed. This is architecture’s assumption

\[
\text{[...]} \text{that an integral appropriation of expenditure is possible – as if it were possible to spend and be spent without getting dirty, as if dépense could be thoroughly presentable, spending energy without polluting, shamelessly, nothing repugnant about it, right at home in a public space, with everybody looking.} \text{\textsuperscript{78}}
\]

These are attempts ‘to put workers into their Sunday best, to train and organize them and make them presentable when they are not actually working.’\(^79\) As Hollier explains, ‘For lack of an animal they kill time’ and this ‘transformation of a harsh expenditure into a soft one [...] is programmed into the logic of the modernization of urban space.’\(^80\) Hollier does not believe transgression can ever be clean but we know from Bataille that it can attain degrees of acceptability, comparatively.

Today there are other examples in cities that have experienced the bloody sacrifice of war. The Neues Museum in Berlin and the Kolumba Museum in Cologne are two examples of public buildings that have been devastated by war and brought back into public use. Both have been redesigned into ‘new’ buildings which do not hide their history and the scars left by war, but build them into the fabric of the new environment. Both are now stunning public spaces that have been awarded architectural accolades, and were designed to completion by famous architects. Peter Zumthor’s Kolumba (completed 2007) works the ruins of a cathedral into a modern museum with religious artefacts, with the ruined foundations of the building clearly distinguishable from the new brickwork and style forming the rest of the

\(^{77}\) For details of the three examples, one of which is Bernard Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette, see Hollier, \textit{Against Architecture}, p. xv.

\(^{78}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. xv.

\(^{79}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. xv.

\(^{80}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. xv.
museum. In David Chipperfield’s redesigned and rebuilt Neues Museum (completed 2009) ruined murals from the original walls are displayed along the walls of galleries like art works, and shrapnel marks can still be seen in some of the pillars. The destruction of war is visible but no longer bloody, dusty or reminiscent of decay, and these sites of battle are now stunning and popular cultural relics. The shrapnel marks are transgressive in making visible the violence done to the building (and culture) in war. They are not assimilated into the art and architecture of the building – they could have been covered over but they remain visible, and in this visibility they are useless. This is an example of transgression in architecture: the visibility of waste and violence that cannot be managed but expose the uncontrollable excess against which we live.

Hollier’s discussion of architecture in Bataille’s work focuses on three Dictionary entries. However, he omits another architecturally-themed entry, ‘Factory Chimney’, which appeared in the Dictionary in the same issue of Documents as ‘Slaughterhouse’. In ‘Factory Chimney’ Bataille claims that ‘in early childhood, the most fear-inspiring architectural form was by no means the church, however monstrous, but rather large factory chimneys’ (EA, 51). He states that we come to recognise the factory chimney as ‘a pipe for the evacuation of smoke […] for an abstraction’ but we need to undermine this ‘recognition’ and instead recognise the ‘dire filth of those enormous tentacles’ whose ‘immense and sinister convulsions’ worried Bataille as a child (EA, 51). Again architecture is similar to language in performing its tasks. Just as a dictionary should examine the function a word performs, its task rather than its meaning – as Bataille will write in the next issue of Documents when he enters ‘Formless’ into his Critical Dictionary – now he reminds us of the job the chimneys are doing. He unsettles our vision and in talking about the waste chimneys attempt to hide, he exposes the otherness the architecture of humanity is designed to hide. The chimneys, in Bataille’s vision, are abstracting waste, dispelling it into the sky, and although they try to cover the journey of this waste with their opaque and tall forms, we see the convulsions and the filth they attempt to hide, just as we see the unsavoury words in Bataille’s poetic account:

---

81 Details of the museum are available on its website at <http://www.kolumba.de/?language=eng&cat_select=1&category=14&artikle=61&preview> accessed 5.3.15.
82 Details of the museum are available on its website at <http://www.neues-museum.de/nm/index.html?r=vestibuel> accessed 5.3.15.
83 I will discuss transgression in architecture in Chapter Three, in which I explain why this particular example is the ‘incidental’ mode of architectural transgression and differentiate this from the ‘essential’ mode.
Hardly has it risen towards the first covering cloud, hardly has the smoke coiled round within its throat, than it has already become the oracle of all that is most violent in our present world, and this for same reason, really, as each grimace of the pavement’s mud or of the human face, as each part of an immense unrest whose order is that of a dream, or as the hairy, inexplicable muzzle of a dog. (EA, 51. My italics.)

The violence in our present world is waste, the by-product of human order, which is useful work. This is an idea Bataille elaborated in 1949 in *The Accursed Share* and his subsequent works on eroticism and sacrifice. Architecture, in the form of the chimney, is being useful and therefore restoring order in the face of waste and excess, but also covering up the waste and excess and abstracting it to the cover of clouds, high up where we can choose not to look. Bataille’s dictionary entry undoes this cover, just like the formless, *informe*. Ffrench highlights this action when he states that the *informe* is not base materialism as a thing or object, but is the act of materiality upon idealism, the undoing of idealism.84 ‘The Factory Chimney’ undoes the work that the factory chimney does, it reveals the material waste that the chimney is designed to hide.

Putting this idea into dialogue with Bataille’s later works, a theme is apparent: given that we emerged as human through the taboo of incest and the concepts of use value and productive work, we should not forget that for Bataille any form of waste, even smoke from a productive and therefore useful factory, is an excess that can occasion expenditure and therefore is transgressive in the risk its presence poses. Bataille’s Critical Dictionary therefore challenges architecture as well as language, because the ability of architecture to order and manage the excess that threatens order is called into question. His language is transgressive in that the Critical Dictionary entries recast words in a way that poses a risk to structure and form, to the ability for buildings and words to *be ordered* and to *demonstrate order* in our lives. For Bataille ‘the essence of man emerges from [...] excess’ (*HE*, 57). Bataille said that architecture reflected human development and the factory chimney mirrors this relationship perfectly: its attempts to control and hide waste define it, just as humanity’s attempts to control and hide otherness define what we are. Bataille’s approach is transgressive in that it stages an encounter with waste and otherness, forcing us to experience the radical contingency of the effectiveness of the architecture of our world and ourselves. His approach is also one that uses one

structure (or, in Hollier’s terminology, form) to challenge another – his transgressive dictionary threatens architectural systems, both physical and linguistic.

**Defining Structures of Humanity**

Earlier in this chapter I argued that Bataille’s human subject is architectural because it defines and performs itself through structures, order and limits. The architecture of humanity now has a second meaning because the architecture of civilisation, our physical built environment, repeats our internal human architecture and reflects it back on us. Humanity and architecture are doubly linked, metaphorically – as architecture provides the structural terminology and imagery Bataille uses to explain humanity – and metaphysically – as Bataille calls architecture an order that builds on the ‘biological order’ of human development (EA, 35). I now want to examine the metaphysical relationship in more detail.

Sacrifice was a religious act used to purify and cleanse – but museums now perform the task of religious sacrifice: a purifying act of expenditure. We cannot cope with expenditure, therefore we hide it. More importantly, if we combine all four articles on architecture, Bataille is saying that we use architecture to hide and deny expenditure. We here return to the active role of the Critical Dictionary. If words like formless perform tasks, by actively ordering our world and sorting that which is formless from that which has form, then architecture is like language in that it also performs the task of ordering the world. Again we can see how the notion of transgression is based upon a notion of the human as something that defines, and is defined by, structures. And Bataille’s Critical Dictionary reveals that language and architecture are two of these structures that are defining for humanity, that are acts of sorting, ordering and structuring that we use to create our world and through this process create and define our humanity – and which can be challenged, in this instance through the transgressive activity of the Critical Dictionary.

The notion that a process of exclusion forms humanity is something Allan Stoekl focuses on in his reading of another essay written during the early 1930s, ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’. The focus is on heterology, which is a similar topic to expenditure in that it identifies that which is inassimilable into the structure of humanity. Stoekl explains:

Rational science, mathematics, physics, and, certainly, the social sciences all reduce questions, all phenomena, to quantifiable data that can be inserted

---

85 ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’ was published in *La Critique sociale* in 1933. It is available in English in *Visions of Excess*, pp. 137-160.
into a “closed” system, one that solves all problems adequately […] But inevitably there are things that cannot be assimilated to any scientific understanding because by definition they are “heterogeneous”: they are terms that underlie the scientific method, Bataille argues (in a proto-deconstructive mode), but whose exclusion is necessary for that system to constitute itself in its homogeneity, its coherence.86

Stoekl points out, as Bois has done, that the process by which humanity is formed is reflected in the history of ideas, of science and of academic and intellectual development. A physical thing or an area of thought can either be appropriated into the restricted economy or they are excessive, heterogeneous, and therefore expelled by reason behind the safe barriers that cannot make sense of it. Stoekl explains that this is Bataille’s base matter, ‘charged matter that defies assimilation into any scientific or classificatory grid.’87 He explains:

Bataille stresses that this expulsion of (by definition) heterogeneous (inassimilable) terms is functionally identical to the excretion of shit by the body: “As soon as the effort of rational comprehension leads to contradiction, the practice of intellectual scatology requires [commande] the excretion [déjection] of inassimilable elements.”88

Earlier in this chapter I explained how the process is the same for the formation of the human subject and human society, and here Stoekl shows us that it is the same also for human intellectual development: all of them repeat the process of expulsion via the creation of boundaries (in the form of values, reason, taboos and prohibitions).89 Architecture is part of this very process. In presenting the ‘ideal nature’ of society and covering over or designing out its ‘unquiet elements’ architecture repeats the process of becoming human. Architecture is in this sense, as Bataille stated in his Critical Dictionary entry, the next stage of human development, because it is a continuation of the formation of boundaries that expel unwanted elements in order to isolate, define and create entities – including human subjects, human society, and built environments. As a physical and ever present

---

87 Stoekl, Bataille’s Peak, p. 20.
88 Stoekl, Bataille’s Peak, p. 20.
89 Rosalind Krauss discusses the relationship between Bataille’s heterogeneity and the excremental and later theories of abjection, such as Julia Kristeva’s and usefully surveys their differences. See Krauss, “Informe without Conclusion’.
construct within civilisation that reflects human reason and order, and is also formed through the same process, it projects its forms onto our life patterns, thus creating the prescriptive as well as reflective relationship noted by Hollier. Stoekl interprets Bataille’s claim that architecture is the next evolutionary stage of man in terms of its physical manifestation of elevation as well as reason. He says that architecture is ‘the completion of Man, so to speak, the ultimate elevation and making permanent of his stature.’ Stoekl also picks up on the power of influence architecture has, noting that it ‘boomerangs back, generating Man and constraining him to be erect, perfect, rational.’

Whilst Stoekl states that the physical formation of boundaries repeats the same process as the formation of humanity, Land reverses this relationship. Land made an important point when he said that ‘when the silting-up of energy upon the surface of the planet is interpreted by its complex consequences as rigid utility, a productivist civilisation is initiated.’ In presenting civilisation and humanity as rigid interpretations of the ‘silting-up of energy upon the surface of the planet’, Land is elaborating upon a point Bataille himself makes in *The Accursed Share*. Here Bataille bluntly declares ‘in short, it is the size of the terrestrial space that limits overall growth’ and it is this limitation which means there must be ‘a simple and pure loss’ (*AS*: 29; 31). Transgression is made possible by an excess of energy, because there is the sacred realm of continuity continually threatening our moral order. *But this excess exists because there is finite space in which it accumulates.* The surface of the planet is the founding boundary that gives rise to the organisation of energy into the bounded entities of human society and subjectivity. It is not necessarily the first boundary of the human subject (like incest or use value, in Bataille’s account) but the principle condition for the emergence of humanity as an organised and bounded structure is the spatial boundary of the planet’s surface. This is the foundation of Bataille’s spatial and structural presentation of humanity and with it transgression: architecture repeats the process but is also part of the process, and further, provides the language and conceptuality through which we express and understand humanity and transgression.

Whether we follow Stoekl’s or Land’s reading of Bataille, it is clear that the philosophically significant relationship Bataille posits between humanity and architecture has been highly influential and is metaphysically significant. In his book *Architecture: Ecstasies of Space, Time, and the Human Body* David Farrell Krell

90 Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, p. 95.
91 Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, p. 95.
92 Land, p. 65.
claims that ‘If the hyper-Nietzschean thought of Georges Bataille is “against
architecture,” it is so only in order that we learn to spell it new as archeticture.’\textsuperscript{93} Krell encourages us to rethink architecture as ‘archeticture’: this new spelling
emphasises the Ancient Greek root of the word as tic which concerns ‘lovemaking
and engendering’ over and above tec, which speaks of ‘techniques, technics,
technologies and architectonics.’\textsuperscript{94} Bataille brings about the transformation from
architecture to archeticture by writing a living human body that is engaged in its
environments ‘as a prime instance of extravagant expenditure, as potlatch, in the
ecstasies of orgasm and sacrifice.’\textsuperscript{95} Krell argues that our traditional concept of
space stems from the Pythagorian astronomer Timaeus and his notion of space as
a third option between being and non-being, which ‘is somehow neutral, because it
must “receive all things” without disturbing them.’\textsuperscript{96} This space is the one that ‘will
be articulated by all architectures and occupied by all Western bodies hence.’\textsuperscript{97} For
Krell, Bataille’s account of the pineal eye ‘wrenches the human body into a space
that is quite remote’ from the neutral space of Timaeus.\textsuperscript{98} Krell chooses ‘The Pineal
Eye’ as a specific example of Bataille’s text which presents the body in orgasmic
excess and challenges the notion of space as a neutral stage for neutral bodies.
The point Krell is making can be expanded upon: our buildings and our bodies,
which are bounded extensions of this human system of economics, are also in
internal states of dynamic (dis)equilibrium between order and excess. Bataille’s
excess is the other that humanity is defined against, through attempts to control and
exclude it, but the result is a dynamic tension between the defining structures of
humanity and the excess threatening to overwhelm them. I have argued that
humanity is a performed architecture, that our defining structures are not concrete
and absolute but that order must be continually maintained over excess. The key
question that arises from a consideration of Krell’s argument and Bataille’s Critical
Dictionary and other texts is: what does excess and its attempts to break structures
(manifest in transgressive experiences) look like? Krell is interested in its impact but
as I have noted throughout this thesis, I am interested in the ways in which it might
become manifest, or rather in the different modes of transgression in our defining
structures.

\textsuperscript{93} David Farrell Krell, \textit{Archeticture: Ecstasies of Space, Time, and the Human Body} (Albany,
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p.6.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 137.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p. 138.
Although the notion of transgression is articulated late in Bataille's career, in *Eroticism*, his notion of humanity that gives rise to the idea of transgression is more consistent throughout his texts. From his Critical Dictionary entries in 1929 through to *Eroticism* in 1957, humanity is characterised by structures and barriers that define reason and order against violence and continuity – by taboo and prohibition, by work, productivity and utility that must maintain their continual presence against that which threatens to overwhelm us. The very notion of transgression emerges along with Bataille's notion of humanity as it emerges in the same moment as the first taboo that separates humanity from animality.

Bataille said in *Eroticism* that prohibitions against the animal world (taboos and the concept of use value) provide 'that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable' (*E*, 38). Yet these prohibitions bring with them the fact of their own transgression. Architecture is one such calm ordering of ideas which forms and is essential to our humanity. Forms of expenditure and waste that cannot be filtered into the clean and acceptable killing of time, or generic forms of transgression, still happen. Eroticism is one form of transgression, and this means that erotic acts threaten the structure than contains and defines humanity. They threaten the boundaries we erect to form *society* and *subjectivity*, our communal and individual forms of human existence. Remembering Land's analysis of transgression, we can equally say that society and subjectivity will always manifest themselves, and continue to stand (tentatively, in peril) against that excess. For architects and for Hollier, the key problem articulated by Bataille is that transgression must and will occur, but architecture covers over and tries to cleanse transgression. I translate this problem into a slightly different one to question how architecture might acknowledge the interdependence of controlling structure and uncontrollable excess which is constitutive of humanity. If architecture is really, as Bataille claims it is, the next stage in human development then it will have to articulate the dynamic, imperilled relationship between taboo and transgression, structure and nothingness that constitutes the core and definition of humanity.

Architecture is not the only defining structure for humanity. In *Inner Experience* Bataille suggests that human existence is 'linked to language' and claims that 'Being is mediated in him [the human] through words'.99 Examples of what he means by this are apparent in the Critical Dictionary, and it is also noticeable that Krell renegotiates architecture through language – turning it into arché/tecture. In this chapter I have argued that architecture performs tasks that help

---

to define (and control) humanity, and according to Bataille's Critical Dictionary, words can perform similar tasks. Both actively order our world and sort that which is formless from that which has form, that which is other from that which is part of humanity. Language and architecture are two of these structures: they order ideas calmly, they sort and limit otherness to help us create our intelligible world and ourselves. I have suggested there are different modes of transgression in architecture, and in Chapter Three I will continue this analysis and look for architecture in which the dynamic coexistence of form and excess is manifest. In the next chapter of this thesis, Chapter Two, I look for and discuss different modes of transgression in erotic literature.
Chapter Two
Erotic Transgression in Literature: D. H. Lawrence and Anaïs Nin

Modernist Eroticisms
In a recent collection of essays on D. H. Lawrence, editor Howard J. Booth states that following the publication of Lawrence’s letters, contemporary criticism has focused on ‘the philosophical texts, the psychoanalytic works, and the travel writing – what is now often called his “discursive prose.”’¹ Quoting Lawrence’s call to ‘Rip the veil of the old vision’² in one of his discursive works, Booth states:

Lawrence is calling for nothing less than a major break in human history. That shift would include change across religion, social structures, personal interaction, the relationship to the body, modes of thought, language, and the form and role of culture.³

This chimes with the notion of modernity as ‘a new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind’ and of modernism as art which has ‘explored, felt through, sometimes reacted against’ modernity and its newness.⁴ Booth claims the essays in his volume explore these changes. But in their discussions of the publishing trade, Marxism, suicide, war and eco-criticism, they do not address one of the key themes through which Lawrence himself explores those changes: eroticism.⁵

In this chapter I read erotic fiction by D. H. Lawrence and Anaïs Nin in relation to Bataille’s notion of erotic transgression. I also consider Lawrence and Nin’s own perspectives on eroticism, which do not necessarily align with Bataille’s. In charting

² D. H. Lawrence, ‘Foreword’ to Fantasia of the Unconscious, in Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 11-16 (p. 16). Hereafter F.
³ Booth, p. 11.
⁵ Tonya Krouse and David Seelow have offered valuable discussions as to how modernist writers like Lawrence have treated eroticism. I will discuss Seelow later in this chapter. I do not discuss Krouse in this thesis because her focus on sexual events in modernist novels differs from my own. See Tonya Krouse, The Opposite of Desire: Sex and Pleasure in the Modernist Novel. Whilst Krouse discusses sexual acts, rather than gender or orientation, (saying of Lady Chatterley’s Lover that scholars do not ‘benefit by reducing the sex of the novel to a battle of the sexes’ (p. 56) she is concerned with what the portrayals of sex tell us about the modernist aesthetic and ambition: ‘modernist portrayals of sex and sexuality suggest ways of ‘reading’ sex not only in terms of its value as a fictional device but also in terms of its significance within the broader culture that circumscribes the literary’ (pp. 2-3).
Lawrence’s approach to eroticism in his critical articles and psychoanalytic essays, and considering these ideas in relation to his novels *The Trespasser* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, I therefore take a similar approach to Booth et al in their analysis of Lawrence’s discursive prose, but on a topic that remains unexamined in their *New D. H. Lawrence*. My study also corresponds to the two enterprises Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz identify in modernist criticism in their collection *Bad Modernisms*, ‘one that reconsiders the definitions, locations and producers of “modernism” and another that applies new approaches and methodologies to “modernist” works.’\(^6\) Whilst the two approaches are intertwined, I am principally concerned with literary portrayals and explorations of erotic acts and their meaning. As I explained in the Introduction, new studies are starting to analyse the relationship between modernist literature and eroticism, but with a focus on the erotic specifically in literature. Critics such as Boone, Seelow, Krouse and Schaffner and Weller have sought to explore the link between eroticism and modernism, but my intention is not to discuss whether the motivation behind modernism, its concerns and its literary structures, lends it a narrative interest in eroticism. Instead, I want to explore whether these contemporaneous thinkers share a common approach to eroticism and to its relationship with defining structures of human subjectivity and society. I do this via Bataille’s philosophy of eroticism which I have elaborated in Chapter One.

The first part of this chapter focuses on Lawrence. I analyse his ideas about eroticism and his key influences, including the sexologists and free love thinkers. However, there are aspects in Lawrence’s fictional erotic which subscribe less to his transcendent and useful erotic, and more to Bataille’s transgressive erotic. I read a Bataillean Lawrence as an alternative to other critical analyses of Lawrence’s work, focused on three key Bataillean themes in the eroticism of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

First, I discuss the continual theme of sacrifice in Lawrence’s presentation of erotic love in relation to Bataille’s exploration of the relationship between eroticism and sacrifice. Whilst sacrifice is a theme on which their erotics converge, they each portray it differently. Although Lawrence’s theoretical essays describe equality and communication between sexual partners, which enables them to reach a regenerative state of transcendence together, in both *The Trespasser* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* the female protagonist is described as a sacrificial victim.\(^7\) In *The


\(^7\) A full analysis of these two novels and Lawrence’s erotic theory can be found later in this chapter. An example of one of the essays in which Lawrence describes transcendence...
Trespasser Helena offers herself up lovingly as a sacrifice to Siegmund’s passion; in Lady Chatterley’s Lover Connie is sacrificed on the sword of Mellors’ penis so that she is born again as a woman. However, Bataille’s sacrifice is not a loving surrender nor a mystical rebirth, it is a near-suicide that reveals an otherness that is not a new form of human life but a threatening excess controlled by limits and ordering structures. It is transgression, very different from the state of transcendence that Lawrence wants his fiction to realise, as I will explain.

Second, I discuss the relevance of the sites Lawrence chooses for erotic experiences. Nature is an enduring theme in Lawrence’s fictional accounts of eroticism and provides the settings in which Connie’s erotic regeneration takes place. But it is also human civilisation which needs regenerating and I will therefore also discuss the opposition Lawrence explores between nature and culture, and his subsequent placing of eroticism: erotic love is always spatially situated outside the architecture of obscene society. I therefore discuss Lawrence’s approach to architecture in relation to Bataille’s, and compare ways in which they each choose to situate and structure transgression.

Finally, I discuss the ways in which Lawrence’s poetic language is central to his portrayal of erotic love. I find Lawrence does not simply describe erotic love in plot events and language which portray it as transgressive, but that his language creates erotic transgression within his fiction. The relationship between eroticism and transgression is interrogated in this literary analysis, in which I identify modes of poetic transgression that I derive from Bataille’s essay on poetry and sacrifice, ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’.

The remaining sections of this chapter read Anaïs Nin’s House of Incest through Bataille’s theory of eroticism. Nin was influenced by Lawrence and her Unprofessional Study of his work is useful in highlighting how her own erotic writing was influenced by his carnal descriptions of emotions, or what Nin calls ‘intuitional reasoning.’ Some of the key themes shared by Lawrence and Bataille are present in Nin’s fictional erotic also. Whilst sacrifice is less relevant to her erotics, she presents an architecture of eroticism that differs from Lawrence and Bataille’s but retains the structural and poetic presentations seen in their erotics. I discuss Nin’s


approach to poetic language and her use of architecture to write an embodied and psychological erotic. In Chapter Three I continue to discuss architecture, but this time out in the streets rather than in the pages of a novel.

Eroticism was more than a plot device or a provocative topic for Lawrence and Nin, it was central to their concern of exploring new forms of experience and the power of these experiences to transform the social norm. Whilst Bataille did not envisage a socially-useful project for eroticism, his notion of transgression is relevant to Lawrence and Nin’s attempts to find spaces, both physical and linguistic, in which to write about an experience that challenges boundaries and opens up new possibilities of thinking about human subjectivity.

**Erotic Transcendence and the Polarity of Sex**

Throughout his writing career D. H. Lawrence published essays in journals and magazines. As in Booth’s collection of essays, these are often read in relation to his fiction, particularly because key themes arise in both, including eroticism. From his early essay ‘Love’ (1918) to his response to the censorship of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ (1929), Lawrence discussed his vision for erotic love and the impact it has upon human relationships.

In ‘Love’, one of the earliest and also most idealistic of his essays, Lawrence develops a structure of erotic love that is based upon the balanced meeting of pairs. He states: ‘In love, all things unite in a oneness of joy and praise. But they could not unite unless they were previously apart.’

Although this image echoes Plato’s Aristophanic version of love, Lawrence instead argues that love is a unity of differences that should not dissolve those differences.

He writes:

> Only in the conjunction of man and woman has love kept a duality of meaning. Sacred love and profane love, they are opposed, and yet they are both love. The love between man and woman is the greatest and most complete passion the world will ever see, because it is dual, because it is of two opposing kinds. The love between man and woman is the perfect heart-beat of life, systole, diastole.

---

12 In Plato’s *Symposium* Aristophanes describes love as the search for the other half of one’s own essence, which was ‘split in two’ (191a): ‘Love draws our original nature back together; he tries to reintegrate us and heal the split in our nature.’ (191d). Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 24-30 (p. 27).
13 ‘Love’, p. 35.
The heterosexuality of Lawrence’s love arises, like his ideas about gender that emerge in his essays, from a view of the world as based on polarities. The perfection Lawrence believes in is not dissolution into unity but a relationship that maintains its duality. This duality refers not only to the male and female polarities but also to the sacred and the profane elements of love. The struggle between man and woman, and between sacred love and profane love will, if successful in achieving balance, result in the perfect balance of the rose and in light and dark, ‘two complete in opposition’ rather than ‘twilight in our souls’.\textsuperscript{14}

Man and woman must not collapse into one another, since this unity is a form of chaos. However, pulling violently apart and opposing one another is equally problematic. A mixture of sacred and profane love will create a relationship of understanding between man and woman, and will also mirror the structure of that gendered, polarised relationship: differences which commune but are not unified. Lawrence describes the perfect balance of ‘whole love’ in alchemical terms, as a reaction of elements of the earth:\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{quote}
All whole love between man and woman is thus dual, a love which is the motion of melting, fusing together into oneness, and a love which is the intense, frictional, and sensual gratification of being burnt down, burnt apart into separate clarity of being; unthinkable otherness and separateness.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Lawrence names this new form of existence brought about through erotic love ‘transcendence’ and ‘the perfection of the rose’.\textsuperscript{17} Love can be either sacred or profane, but these types of ‘half’ love end passionately in ‘flamboyant and lacerating tragedy’ or, despite the happiness of unity, in ‘poignant yearning and exquisite submissive grief’.\textsuperscript{18} Lawrence explains:

\begin{quote}
There must be two in one, always two in one – the sweet love of communion and the fierce, proud love of sensual fulfilment, both together in one love. And then we are like a rose. We surpass even love, love is encompassed and surpassed. We are two who have a pure connection. We are two, isolated like
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} ‘Love’, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 37.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 37.
gems in our unthinkable otherness. But the rose contains and transcends us, we are one rose, beyond.¹⁹

The transcendent rose is Lawrence’s vision of a beautiful and ethical humanity – a humanity that breeds respect for and understanding between differences. In one of his early stories it is a soiled rose that represents an ex-lover who has fallen from his revered and loved position,²⁰ and critics have noted that organic imagery in his fiction supports his ethical and philosophical outlook.²¹ From the alchemy of love to the transcendence of the rose, nature plays a compelling role in Lawrence’s erotic which I will examine in more detail in his fiction.

It is ironic that Lawrence himself displays a fervent lack of respect for difference when he states that it is only heterosexual love that is transcendent, and yet his thematic polarity continues in his later essays. In two long essays responding to psychoanalysis and its conception of the unconscious, Fantasia of the Unconscious and its predecessor, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, Lawrence continues his theme of oppositions which dynamise without collapsing into one another, as discussed in ‘Love’.²² In Fantasia of the Unconscious he thanks Freud for having brought sex into the sphere of discussion, but claims that it is wrong to state that sex is the motivation for all human activity. Instead, Lawrence explains it is the catalyst for other motivations, and the source that charges and refreshes us (F, 108).

Polarity is the root of the dynamism that drives life because it drives the sexual impulse. He says that the sexes are different from birth and casually characterises this as men being active and women being passive; he believes they should be kept separate until their sexuality has been fully awakened after puberty.²³

On mixing with one another, in becoming familiar, in being “pals”, they lose their own male and female integrity. And they lost the treasure of the future, the vital sex polarity, the dynamic magic of life. For the magic and the dynamism rests on otherness.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.
²² Both Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious were written and published in 1923, and since then usually published together in one book.
²³ Lawrence writes, ‘Man, acting in the passive or feminine polarity, is still man, and he doesn’t have one single unmanly feeling.’ (F, 102).
For actual sex is a polarity. And a polarity which rouses into action, as we know, at puberty. (F, 103)

Lawrence’s views on keeping the sexes apart until they are adults are strange to a modern audience and the reasons he gives for keeping the sexes apart, and the different roles he attributes to them, are sexist and limiting for women in particular. However, in this statement, he makes a number of significant claims about eroticism. He claims that the chromosomal sexes are opposed to one another in their essential make up, that this polarity is the source of eroticism or sexual life, and that the polarity and eroticism together are the dynamic force of life. His conception of gender identity is irrevocably linked to his conception of sex as eroticism, and this in turn is irrevocably linked to the ‘future’, the ‘dynamic magic of life’, or in other words the source of human life and development. He goes on to describe sex as:

[...] the bringing together of the surcharged electric blood of the male with the polarized electric blood of the female, with the result of a tremendous flashing interchange, which alters the constitution of the blood, and the very quality of being, in both. (F, 107)

The polarisation of the sexes physically regenerates the blood and the being of the participants, so that for Lawrence sexual regeneration is physical and ontological. Sexual activity, in its bringing of ‘new thrills of feeling, of impulse, of energy’ gives men a ‘new craving for polarized communion with others’ but this new craving, Lawrence claims, is not sexual in itself (F, 108). It is a sense of purpose and a desire to commune with others, but not in a specifically sexual way. It is in fact quite different, because this sense of purpose brings men together as one community, but sex individualises each man again and pulls him back out of the communal lack of identity. Together, these two impulses work to create a balanced man and a balanced society:

It cuts both ways. Assert sex as the predominant fulfilment, and you get the collapse of living purpose in man. You get anarchy. Assert purposiveness as

---

24 For a brief analysis as to how Lawrence’s ideas about sexual difference related to his views on the organisation of society, with a focus on his novels such as Women in Love, see Rachel Potter’s Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900-1930 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 51-54.
the one supreme and pure activity of life, and you drift into barren sterility, like
our business life of today, and our political life. You become sterile, you make
anarchy inevitable. And so there you are. You have got to base your great
purposive activity upon the intense sexual fulfilment of all your individuals. (F,
111)

The claims in this essay are fascinating in light of his presentation of sex and
society in later novels such as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. He claims that sexual
activity is integrally linked to the structure of society: man must commune with his
fellows but as an individual, and this individuality is maintained by sexual
experience. Industrial society in particular would have relied upon this structure and
male purposive activity. It is worth remembering, however, that women do not have
this sense of purpose and later I will discuss their treatment in his fiction. In ‘Love’
and in *Fantasia* Lawrence explicitly talks about polar opposites reacting to one
another: in ‘Love’ they communicate with one another and attain transcendence with
the right balance of sacred and profane love, but in *Fantasia* the emphasis is on a
sense of purpose the man gains from his polar opposite during sex and on
ontological energy. Both these contrasting positions, written five years apart, share
common themes: they both emphasise the social importance of erotic relationships,
whether through transcendence or regeneration.

Lawrence’s account binds a heterosexist argument to what he seems to argue
is a biological absolute. In this sense he is not unlike some of the sexologists before
him, who assume the biology of the human body is heterosexual and any other
sexual orientation is linked to a biological difference (Carpenter, Weininger and Ellis
for example). Yet Lawrence’s fiction is less bound to heterosexism: his male figures
often experience intimacy with other men and critics have discussed homosexuality
in Lawrence’s fiction. Lawrence’s fiction and non-fiction are divergent in the
notions of eroticism that they explore; heterosexuality is not the only topic to
undergo a literary transformation when compared to Lawrence’s discursive texts.

In light of his emphasis on the polar difference between genders, and the
need for their equal presence, it is perhaps surprising that it is the male sex organ
that Lawrence focuses on exclusively throughout his exploration in *Lady
Chatterley’s Lover*. Connie feels Mellors’ penis inside her ‘with a strange slow thrust
of peace, the dark thrust of peace and a ponderous, primordial tenderness, such as

25 For one of the earlier and influential accounts see Jeffrey Meyers, ‘D. H. Lawrence and
Homosexuality’ in *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet*, ed. by Stephen Spender
made the beginning of the world’ (LCL, 174). Lawrence is clearly equating eroticism, or, more specifically, the penis, with the source of life and the ‘beginning’ of the world and of being. The implications of his prioritisation of the phallus and Connie’s resulting wonderment are well discussed in Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics, and I will return to the topic of sexual inequality shortly. In spite of the biological differences and inequality inherent in Lawrence’s accounts of sexual love, what remains is that the ‘primordial tenderness’ between lovers brings hope of a renewal of the essence of life and reawakening of what is ‘sterile’ within humanity (LCL, 174; F, 111).

Sex has a crucial role for Lawrence: eroticism combines the sacred and the profane and recharges the body and being, it structures society and its absence has led to sterile business and politics. Its importance, however, must be uncovered and demonstrated, because sex is no longer erotic in modern civilisation. It is this ability of erotic love to be useful in some way – to drive a productive society and to bring about communion and transcendence – that sets Lawrence apart from Bataille, for whom eroticism, as a transgression, cannot be useful. However, when Lawrence writes the erotic in his fiction, his own model collapses and no productive communion between the polarised sexes is achieved. Instead, he writes Bataille’s model of sacrifice, as I will explain below.

In 1929, the year after Lady Chatterley’s Lover was published and the same year the police seized the typescript of the novel, Lawrence published the article ‘Pornography and Obscenity.’ In this text Lawrence echoes themes from the earlier essays we have discussed. He defines sex as ‘a very powerful, beneficial and necessary stimulus in human life,’ and states ‘we are all grateful when we feel its warm, natural flow through us, like a form of sunshine.’ Working from the basis that sex is necessary, natural and enjoyable, Lawrence defines pornography and obscenity as modern culture’s sordid distortions of sex. He argues that he writes against pornography, instead seeking to assert a different understanding of sex. Lawrence’s enemy throughout his article is ‘mob-meaning’: the meaning given to something by social values which stifle individuality and originality, in favour of an order in which society survives as one unthreatened unit. It is associated with shame, and the assertion of the mind over and above the body, which we will see illustrated in Lady Chatterley’s Lover. The public must learn to free itself from mob-mentality in order to really experience life. ‘The mob is always obscene,’ says

---

26 D. H. Lawrence, ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ in Sex, Literature and Censorship, pp. 69-88 (p. 73). Hereafter P. ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ was published in the July–September 1929 issue of This Quarter (Paris).
Lawrence, ‘because it is always second-hand’ (P, 71-2). The general public is vulgar because it is controlled by the ideals of society rather than thinking for itself.

Lawrence argues that this is the obscenity his own ‘obscenity’ is an effort to undermine: ‘if the use of a few so-called obscene words will startle man or woman out of a mob-habit into an individual state, well and good’ (P, 72). He uses shock tactics to erase the meaning ascribed to words by mob-mentality, intending to liberate the individual. Bataille’s perspective is quite different, given his assertion that shame about sex is part of what defines our eroticism and our humanity. There is no liberation from this perspective for Bataille, and whilst he also uses obscene words, he is unlike Lawrence in that he uses them to explore and draw attention to the erotic, the base and the shameful rather than to shock people into liberation from their shame.

Lawrence’s disillusionment with common society is a recurring theme in his work; his comments in ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ call to mind Mellors who, as Morag Shiach points out, comments derisively on the miners and local people and thus ‘extricates himself imaginatively from the economic relations and industrial forms of production that dominate the world around him.’ At the same time, Lawrence is disillusioned by the bohemian responses to sex and what he calls ‘free and pure’ sex, perhaps in a critique of free love. Sex that is overthought and conceptual is not bodily enough for Lawrence, as he suggests ‘mentalized sex until it is nothing at all, nothing but a mental quality’ (P, 82). As Michael Bell puts it, ‘pornography occurs for Lawrence when the mentalizing of sexual desire is motivated by denigration, conscious or otherwise, of the sexual other, or of the desire itself.’

Lawrence’s definition of pornography grows out of his argument about obscenity: the common form of sexual experience in modern culture is pornographic, since we are made to hide our physical sensuality and be ashamed of it. Lawrence defines pornography quite simply as ‘the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it’ and finds it ‘unpardonable’ (P, 74). British morality obscures sex and is a ‘grey disease’ since it has ‘driven sex into the underworld, and nudity to the W.C.’ (P: 74; 75). Morality has made something healthy and crucial to human life, squalid and vulgar. This provokes Lawrence to claim, ‘The greatest lie of all lies in the modern world is the lie of purity and the dirty little secret’ (P, 86). If purity is the elimination of sex then it is a lie about the human condition, a lie that turns natural, necessary and revitalising sexuality into a ‘dirty little secret’, and which stunts the energy and

27 Shiach, p. 195.
28 Bell, p. 52.
growth of man. Lawrence claims, ‘Without secrecy there would be no pornography’ and argues in favour of ‘a natural fresh openness about sex’ (P, 77). In order to foster this open and natural approach to sex Lawrence believes we must distinguish between the ‘creative flow’ of sex and the ‘excrematory flow’ (P, 76). He argues that ‘the secret of really vulgar people and of pornographical people’ is simply that ‘the sex flow and the excrement flow is the same thing to them’ (P, 76). Society has branded all taboos and transgressions in the same way but Lawrence believes some taboos, those surrounding excrement, are understandable whereas those restricting sexual activity do more harm than good. This is a simplistic argument from Lawrence, especially as anal penetration features in his fiction (LCL, 247), but he is making a simple argument in this essay to highlight and explain the role of sex in society.

For Lawrence, ‘sex is the fountain-head of our energetic life, and now the fountain ceases to flow’ (P, 83). He assesses what he believes to be the different approaches to sex, from scientific to secretive to sentimental, and Lawrence argues that man must ‘yield to the stirring half-born impulse to smash up the vast lie of the world, and make a new world’ (P, 85-6). There is a conscious project in this claim, which I believe is continued in his novels. Lawrence writes eroticism in order to regenerate humanity by revealing the essence of life, which is best reached by the states of experience created in erotic acts: states in which the powerful source of life is realised. However, in order to write regenerative eroticism, Lawrence intends to uncover sex from the secrecy shrouding and dirtying it in the vicious circle of civilisation. Not only has society disconnected man from the essence of his life, but it has also placed taboos fortified by its mob-mentality upon erotic writing.

It is clear that Lawrence’s views on obscenity and taboo differ from Bataille’s. For Bataille the taboo emerged at the moment that mankind distinguished itself – through its behaviour towards sex and work – from animals and nature. Taboo and its other will both always exist and are equally integral to the definition of man: this is the fact of humanity and of transgression. Bataille’s fiction often draws the sexual and the excremental together, reflecting his claim that eroticism arises from shame, and noting that the taboos placed on sex, filth and death mean they are all meaningful and transgressive. Bataille’s fiction plays with the role they share, with erotic scenes often depicting waste, excrement and death, challenging multiple taboos at once and exploring their interdependence. But for Lawrence there are some taboos formed in modern society that must be undone because they are harming society.
Schaffner and Weller mistakenly suggest that both Bataille and Lawrence believed ‘various forms of deviant sexuality to be […] cures for the perceived ills of modernity,’ claiming that for both of them ‘a reconnection with our “authentic” sexual desires […] being a precondition of not only individual but also of a more general cultural renewal.’ Whilst Bataille might suggest eroticism is a preferred type of transgression for societies wishing to avoid war, he does not advocate cultural renewal nor believe eroticism to hold such power as to bring one about – and whilst Lawrence does, he does not think of eroticism as deviant but rather as pure, and in need of un-dirtying. Eroticism is important to both of them, and it is often presented through similar themes, but there are crucial differences. Lawrence’s need to define a clean sex up to create an eroticism that can regenerate society is at odds with Bataille’s assertion that the taboos that give sex meaning (which gives rise to eroticism) are reflected in taboos against excrement and death.

In order to uncover the ‘fountain-head’ of life that is reached by eroticism, Lawrence must also distinguish sex from dirt, creativity from excrement, a division obscured by the values of modern society. Bell comments on this aspect of Lawrence’s erotic, stating that “Pornography, for Lawrence, inevitably shadows and threatens the erotic, but especially so in modernity.’ The divisions Lawrence explores are part of his approach to modernity and the problems he believes it raises, which he wants erotic love to overcome. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* Connie is situated in a world of dichotomies and only finds a sense of self when they are resolved through eroticism. Connie’s vitality and Clifford’s paralysis, the woodland nature and the dark colliery towns, Mellors’ subsistence and Clifford’s wealthy estate are just a few of the dichotomies the novel negotiates. But one in particular stands out in the novel: the polarity between the body and the mind. Indeed, Schaffner and Weller note that modernist literary erotics were often concerned with a ‘reconciliation’ of body and mind, and other dialectics: ‘For many modernists, it is not enough simply to privilege the erotic at the bodily or psychological level; rather, it is this very separation of spheres that has to be overcome.’ Other recent studies have also argued that modernists engaged with philosophical discourses that sought to look beyond a ‘mind/world opposition.’

29 Schaffner and Weller, p. 5.
30 Bell, p. 48.
31 Schaffner and Weller, p. 5.
One of the things that strikes Connie about the Midlands, and its ‘utter soulless ugliness’ compared to the communities with which she is familiar, is the stark division between the classes created by industry (LCL, 13). Connie believes the local working class families and aristocracy maintain a chasm between them:

It was not that she and Clifford were unpopular – they merely belonged to another species altogether from the colliers. Gulf impassable, breach indescribable, such as is perhaps non-existent south of the Trent. But in the Midlands and the industrial North, gulf impassable, across which no communion could take place. (LCL, 14)

Although the opposition at first appears to be an economic one between Clifford and the colliers, the text reveals that these two sides are in fact part of the same system and the real opposition is between this system and Connie. She feels her mental exhaustion at living with Clifford physically; ‘exasperation and irritation had got hold of her lower body, she couldn’t escape’ (LCL, 76). Her physical illness that so shocks Hilda is, according to Connie, boredom: her thinness is the physical manifestation of mental weakness and lack of activity (LCL, 77). What unites Clifford and the colliers but jars with Connie is their ‘strange denial of the common impulse of humanity,’ borne out in their forced division from one another but also evident within their separate lives (LCL, 14). The colliers treat Connie ‘as if she were a walking wax figure,’ and Clifford treats them ‘as objects rather than men, parts of the pit rather than as parts of life’ (LCL, 15). At Wragby there is a ‘methodical anarchy’; an order based on sterility and separation rather than an organic unity (LCL, 17). Clifford’s physical disability is only part of the problem: his emotional inhibition is apparent in his relationship with Mrs Bolton and his ‘passionless passion’ toward her, and in what Connie sees as his insistence on ‘turning everything into words’ and creating ‘phrases sucking all the life-sap out of living things’ (LCL, 112, 93).

Lawrence posits the opposition between body and mind as the central problem in the world and society of Lady Chatterley’s Lover. The novel seeks to find harmony between thought and action. Obscenity, which he writes against, ‘comes in when the mind despises and fears the body, and the body hates and resists the mind.’ At times in the novel he explores the impact the body/mind opposition has

---

33 Connie comes to the Midlands from her home in Scotland and time in Kensington in London.
34 D. H. Lawrence, ‘A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover’ in Sex, Literature and Censorship, pp. 89-122 (pp. 92-93). This essay is an extension of the Introduction to the 1929 Paris edition of Lady Chatterley’s Lover.
on the relations between different social groups and this is often through a criticism of the local architecture, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Connie is the central figure and he chiefly charts the impact of the binary opposition on her, treating her marriage as a particular instance or symptom of the society at a greater level. The effect the opposition has on sexual activity and erotic life is crucial to Lawrence’s understanding of how to overcome it as body and being are linked through erotic energy, which charges them both.

Whilst Lawrence and Bataille may have shared a similar heritage, it influenced their ideas in different ways. In Chapter One I noted that Bataille distinguished his ideas from the sexologists and their scientific approach (E, 7). Instead, Lawrence shows some similarities with their ideas and, in addition, those of the free love theorists who responded to the sexologists. Lawrence inherits from the free love thinkers an ethical project for erotic love, one that seeks – via Nietzsche’s proposition of the will to power – to create regeneration in society. This regeneration is a modernist project, indebted to Nietzschean philosophy, which stands against biological ideas of degeneration whilst critiquing and seeking to repair modern society. This approach differentiates Lawrence from Bataille, who has no major ethical project for eroticism.35 I examine the ideas behind this different approach now.

Situating Lawrence’s Regenerative Eroticism
Darwin’s notion of sexual difference and its role in natural selection set the agenda for social debates of the early twentieth century, with Otto Weininger’s quasi-science of sexual attraction and Carpenter’s theorisation of free love and homosexuality amongst the ideas that Darwin influenced. Lawrence’s ideas about eroticism emerged within this context.

When Lawrence describes erotic love as balanced meeting of opposites his argument echoes Weininger’s law of sexual attraction, which argues that opposing qualities are balanced out between individuals. The law he explains in Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles (1903) states that ‘It is always a complete Man (M) and a complete Woman (W) who strive to join in sexual union, although they are distributed in different proportions between the two different individuals in every single case.’36 He suggests age, as well as gender,

35 The need to accept the general economy has an ethical element, but this is more about acknowledging eroticism than using it for a project. I discussed this in further detail in Chapter One.
36 Otto Weininger, Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles, trans. by Ladislaus Löb (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 27. The text was
finds balance within a couple and this echoes the balance and proportionality that Lawrence believes is achieved by ‘whole love’. Lawrence’s image of the rose echoes the example of heterostylised flowers which Weininger uses to evidence his law (which in turn echoes Darwin amongst others). However, the image of the rose also relates to Bloch and Carpenters’ explanations of free love. Bloch claims that love is both physical and spiritual, claiming ‘just as the arborescence of the tree grows from, and is supplied with nutrient by, the root, so also the higher love is inevitably founded upon a sensory basis.’ In Love’s Coming of Age Carpenter advocates an emotional and spiritual love which starts as a sexual love but is transformed by the will. Pretending the passions are dirty, he argues, will only result in either the ‘thinning out of human nature’ due to ‘stunting the supply of its growth-material’ or ‘reactionary excess.’ Carpenter claims that sex and society are both in need of ‘regeneration’, another idea that is similar to Lawrence’s. Just as Carpenter argues that physical and higher love must each allow one another to exist, so Lawrence argues for a combination of sacred and profane love to create ‘a great concordant humanity.’ Lawrence never named Carpenter as an influence or cited his work, but there are parallels in their thinking and as well as divergences in their considerations of similar topics.

Lawrence’s notion of transcendence is key to his belief in the power of eroticism, and it is related to an essential idea that originated amongst free love proponents. Bloch and Carpenter were writing against biological ideas about breeding, such as Weininger’s argument that ‘those germs whose parents have shown the greatest sexual affinity will always thrive best,’ a development of Darwin’s claim that the strongest male and female mate, and their qualities are propagated in

reproduced between 1903 and 1932, and was first translated into English in 1906. Some scholars have noted that it was influential amongst modernist thinkers, including D. H. Lawrence, but it is unclear whether or not he read Weininger. For a useful discussion of this see Emile Delavenay, ‘Lawrence, Otto Weininger and ‘Rather Raw Philosophy’” in D. H. Lawrence: New Studies, ed. by Christopher Heywood (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1987) and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, D. H. Lawrence, Triumph to Exile 1912-1922: The Cambridge Biography, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

37 Weininger, p. 33-4.
38 Bloch, p. 5.
40 Carpenter, pp. 18-19.
41 ‘Love’, p. 38.
42 Lawrence never named Carpenter as an influence or cited his work, but there are parallels in their thinking and as well as divergences in their considerations of similar topics. Emile Delavenay examines the theoretical links between these writers, and also how their lives may have crossed. For example, Carpenter was a well known figure in the area Lawrence grew up in, often giving talks and contributing to local papers. See Emile Delavenay, D. H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Tradition (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. 19. Booth, on the other hand, believes there is no link between Carpenter and Lawrence other than a common culture. See Booth, p. 7.
their offspring to ensure the continuation of the species and nation. In contrast, Bloch suggests ‘The more perfect race that is to come must, in the fullest meaning of the words, be brought forth by love.’ Bloch’s new form of love will not just be commensurate to contemporary civilisation: it will continue to enrich and regenerate it. Bloch’s aim is to discuss how civilisation can develop, and is more concerned with self-overcoming than biological selection and breeding.

Lawrence transforms the problem posed by sex in the nineteenth century into a regenerative source of community purpose and selfhood, of communication with others whilst retaining identity, so that erotic love is a solution. Using sex to solve a problem, rather than treating it as a problem to be solved, is an interesting inflection of Victorian debates. It arises from the notion of regeneration, which itself stems partly from Darwinian theories of evolution and from Max Nordau’s notion of degeneration. But there is also another theory of evolution present in this model of thinking, one which Bataille and Lawrence both spent many years digesting and which also influenced the free love thinkers: Nietzsche’s will to power.

Discussing the work of Swedish free love activist Ellen Key, Bloch goes on to state that he attended public meetings and speeches with Key for the Association for the Protection of Mothers in 1905. The president at that time was Helene Stöcker, whom he notes trained under Nietzsche, and whom he says used a quote from Nietzsche: ‘Ye shall not propagate onwards, but upwards!’ This quote is from the section Of Marriage and Children from Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in which Nietzsche describes Zarathustra’s attempts to teach people how to self-overcome and move towards realising the Übermensch. In ‘Of Marriage and Children’, Zarathustra states ‘You should create a higher body, a first motion, a self-propelling wheel – you should create a creator!’ and claims ‘Marriage: that I call the will of two to create the one who is more than those who created it.’ These ideas are iterations of the will to power, a term Nietzsche first uses in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

---

43 Weininger, p. 40.
44 Bloch, p. 255.
45 Degeneration was published in German in 1892 and appeared in English in 1895. In it, Nordau argues that the social classes of the fin-de-siècle disposition are degenerate and their offspring will form a new sub-species, which, like all others, possesses the capacity of transmuting to its offspring, in a continually increasing degree, its peculiarities […] gaps in development, malformations and infirmities.’ Max Nordau, Degeneration, uncredited translation from the 2nd German edition (London: William Heinemann, 1913), p. 16.
46 Bloch, p. 274. Bloch does not quote the original Nietzsche.
48 See the sections ‘1,001 Goals,’ ‘Self-Overcoming’ and ‘Redemption’ in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.
Nietzsche says the will to power is the ‘unexhausted procreative will of life.’ The German *die Wille zur Macht* emphasises the power of creating or making through the word *Macht*; that life is the will to power means that it is a continual process of self-overcoming and creation. Rather than a single will which is permanent and unitary the phrase implies a collection of forces whose law is power. As Michel Haar puts it, there is no separate realm but all phenomena are these forces and they all constitute the will to power, thus obeying its ‘internal imperative: to be more.’ Growth and intensification without goal is the internal law of all life, but this growth can take two forms: progression and regression. Haar explains, ‘there appear right at the origin, at the very heart of the Will to Power, two types of force, two types of life: the active force and the reactive force, the ascending life and the decadent life.’ The will to power intensifies continually and must overcome itself in one direction or the other. It is Nietzsche’s belief that since all forces are struggling for domination, they necessarily not only promote growth and expansion but also form a hierarchy of domination that is in dynamic flux and expansion.

Nietzsche was highly influential during the early twentieth century, and in Bloch and Carpenter’s versions of free love we see notions of the regenerative force of the positive will to power and the goal of self-overcoming, in civilisation developing its higher spirituality and enriching human life. This is an alternative evolution to that of Darwin, Weininger and Nordau. Whilst free love starts to respond philosophically to the science of procreation, Lawrence developed this response even further. He claimed that erotic love would allow humanity to progress and develop, but only if the lovers retained their individual identities rather than merging with one another. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* Lawrence goes so far as to state that erotic activity charges the blood and the being of those involved: it is physically and ontologically regenerative, profanely and sacredly powerful. But still this regeneration relies on the opposition in the charges in the blood of each person, and these people are explicitly described by Lawrence as being of different genders. Lawrence believed genders are opposed and together create an erotic balance in their sexual relations, in contrast to the idea of sex-proportionality proposed by

---

49 ‘Of Self-Overcoming’, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 137.
51 Haar, p. 11.
52 For an account of how Nietzsche influenced Lawrence’s ideas about society, individuality and creativity see Shiach, pp. 157-159.
53 Nietzsche engaged with Darwinian ideas; for example he read Wilhelm Roux’s *The Struggle of Parts in the Organism*, 1881, a biological response to Darwin’s theory of evolution and sexual selection through competition and survival. See Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology, Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
Weininger and Carpenter amongst others, but he retained the principle of polarity between genders and the notion that this polarity informed erotic love.

Another key argument Carpenter makes, which we see used but transformed in Lawrence’s thinking, is that those of intermediate sex are useful to society by promoting understanding, specifically between men and women. Whilst he does not subscribe to Carpenter’s arguments about homosexuality, Lawrence does ascribe to eroticism the power to create understanding. For Lawrence, erotic love promotes communication and understanding between men and women, without them losing their identity to one another. Yet Lawrence frequently emphasises that for erotic activity to approach transcendence and really benefit society, it must be man and woman who are involved, because their opposition is essential to transcendence. Lawrence’s model is in this sense a homophobic appropriation of an argument originally intended to promote homosexuality.

Carpenter is not the only free love theorist Lawrence seems to echo. For example, the feminist Victoria Woodhull claimed the sexual instinct was ‘the fountain from which life proceeds’ in her 1874 speech, and similarly, in his essay ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ Lawrence claimed that ‘sex is the fountain-head of our energetic life’ (P, 83).\(^{54}\) Lawrence’s language and imagery – from plants growing towards the sacred, to fountains of life energy – replicate free love. His essentialism about the polar opposition between man and woman, his heterosexuality to the point of homophobia, and his assumptions about female passivity would have jarred with Woodhull and Carpenter, yet the influence of free love remains clear. Carpenter, Weininger and Nietzsche all influenced Lawrence, either directly or indirectly, in the connection he develops between eroticism and the regeneration of humanity.

Reading ‘Love’, Fantasia and ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ together, we learn that for Lawrence eroticism is the path to transcendence, the life blood of purposive action and civil development, but is being dirtied by society. These ideas span a decade between them but share a common narrative with one another and with Lady Chatterley’s Lover, in which we are cutting ourselves off from our source of vitality and human development and Lawrence must write eroticism, and we must experience it, if we are to thrive and flourish.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover is therefore, I believe, part of a project. Connie’s eroticism and our understanding of it are humanistically important. In the next part of

this chapter I will compare the experience of eroticism Lawrence elaborates in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* to that which he describes in his discursive essays. I have already noted that the novel sets up a world of binary oppositions that are presented as problematic: the division between Connie’s body and mind, reflected also in the division between the physical fabric and buildings of society and the human spirit, as I will explain, is a harmful division. Set against this, the polarity between the sexes and between sacred and profane love is presented as useful and, combined in erotic love, can be regenerative in its transcendence. Whilst Lawrence’s vision of eroticism differs greatly from Bataille’s, his erotic fiction shares with Bataille’s themes of sacrifice, architecture and poetic language. Reading a Bataillean Lawrence, rather than reading Lawrence through the sexologists and free love theorists, reveals fascinating areas of overlap between two very different erotic novelists which help to disclose common conceptions of eroticism in the first half of the twentieth century.

‘The Resurrection of the Body’: *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is D. H. Lawrence’s most explicitly sexual novel and it is the work in which he most thoroughly explores erotic activities and their wider impact and importance. Connie is married to Lord Clifford Chatterley, who is confined to a wheelchair after fighting in World War I. Following an unsatisfying affair with a guest of Clifford’s, Connie embarks on an affair with Oliver Mellors, the estate gamekeeper. Mellors is a character distinguished in his position between the lines of social strata. When Connie asks Clifford whether there is ‘something special’ about him, Clifford suggests he may have ‘improved on his position’ whilst serving in the army – noting that this is unhelpful to men who then have to return to ‘their old place when they get home again’ to service of the aristocracy (*LCL*, 68). In our and Connie’s first encounter with him, he roughly calls his little girl (also named Connie) a bitch for crying, and does so in strong local dialect that feels to Connie as if he has ‘hit her in the face’ (*LCL*, 58). Employed by Clifford, Mellors is clearly outside the aristocracy, but he is also situated outside the mining community, alone in the woods, in solitary employment on the estate. Shiach points out that ‘Mellors’s career stresses his agency, his capacity to choose particular places and forms of labour’ and as such is anachronistic.\(^{55}\) The second time Connie sees him, at his own cottage where she is delivering a message from Clifford, she sees him outside washing, naked from the waist up, and feels it ‘in the middle of her body’ (*LCL*, 66).

\(^{55}\) Shiach, p. 194. *sic*
Building on Connie’s carnal response to Mellors, over time their affair and affections develop, with sexual acts as snapshots of their relationship by emphasising their movement toward a common understanding and erotic bliss with one another. These first two meetings also act as snapshots or metaphors of Connie’s own journey in the novel, from an individual confused and remote from the dichotomous industrial society to a living body.

In Chapter XII Connie and Mellors’ relationship reaches a certain climax, which portrays the polarities of sex that Lawrence has described in his essays. Following an unsatisfactory encounter in which Connie’s ‘queer female mind stood apart’ Connie cries out to Mellors to stay and hold her (LCL, 172). By becoming ‘smooth and nestling’ in his arms Connie begins ‘to melt in a marvellous peace’ (LCL, 173). The peace and intimacy of their bodies stirs their desire, and Mellors strokes Connie’s skin ‘coming nearer and nearer to the very quick of her’ (LCL, 173). Lawrence describes a new reaction between them:

And she felt him like a flame of desire, yet tender, and she felt herself melting in the flame. She let herself go. She felt his penis risen against her with silent amazing force and assertion, and she let herself go to him […] She quivered again at the potent inexorable entry inside her, so strange and terrible. It might come with the thrust of a sword in her softly-opened body, and that would be death. (LCL, 173)

Several changes occur in this passage. Their melting into peace correlates with their separate yet parallel meltings into flames of desire. She is open to Mellors in this desire, rather than melting into him. Mellors’ penis is characterised by ‘force and assertion’ and thus Connie is respectful towards him, rather than ‘queer’ and ‘apart’, and embraces their physical gender difference. His potency is derived from his ‘strangeness,’ thus it is their difference that is crucial in the pleasure she feels. These changes from the earlier dismal sexual encounter represent a change towards transcendence in erotic love. Their difference is retained in the fiery melting and they enjoy their openness to one another as the sexual understanding between two different people, two separate yet touching and intertwining bodies. Connie’s body and mind are in accord; she responds physically to his caress and emotionally to the warmth of his arms.

As Lawrence argues should be the case in ‘Love’, the sacred and profane are mixed in Connie and Mellors’ eroticism. He describes their touching as ‘the sons of god with the daughters of men’, an image in which sacred and profane are separate
but connected \((LCL, 174)\).\textsuperscript{56} For Lawrence it is only through eroticism that we can achieve that specific connection between the sacred and the profane that can reveal to us the nature of our existence, the essence of our life. Whilst Lawrence’s sacred represents the mind and must be combined with the profane body, so that the sacred is connected with the senses and our carnality is purified, Bataille’s sacred is not something that can be wilfully fused with the body. Bataille’s sacred is continuity transformed by taboo. The sacred reveals how Lawrence and Bataille can discuss the same themes in relation to the erotic and yet have antithetical ideas about those themes. Lawrence’s sacred opens the path to transcendence but Bataille’s is instead linked to taboo and transgression. Lawrence’s fictional presentation of the erotic often appears to adhere to his own notion of transcendence rather than Bataille’s notion of transgression, but my analysis will reveal that Lawrence does not always uphold his own vision, instead portraying Bataille’s, particularly regarding another theme linked to the sacred: sacrifice.

In a conversation with Clifford once Connie is fully sexually involved with Mellors, Clifford relates to her a philosophical suggestion that the world is spiritually ascending and physically wasting. This conversation recalls an earlier idea introduced to Connie by Clifford’s friend Tommy Dukes, who claims ‘Give me the resurrection of the body! […] Then we’ll get a democracy of touch, instead of a democracy of the pocket’ \((LCL, 75)\). Now, when Clifford tells her ‘whatever God there is is slowly eliminating the guts and alimentary system from the human being, to evolve a higher, more spiritual being’, she is able to claim ‘I feel that whatever God there is has at last wakened up in my guts, as you call them, and is rippling so happily there, like dawn’ \((LCL, 235)\). Connie experiences spirituality in the form of God within the physical body, the sacred within the profane.

In Connie, Lawrence is illustrating the transcendence he describes in his discursive essays and in this novel both carnality and spirituality are brought together, as are Connie and Mellors. Shiach describes how Lawrence’s ‘Foreword’ to \textit{Sons and Lovers} is a ‘counter-Gospel’ to the metaphor of the Word made Flesh in John’s Gospel, so that in Lawrence’s version ‘the Flesh stands for all that is originary, unknowable and unutterable while the Word designates all forms of

\textsuperscript{56} In both \textit{The Rainbow} and \textit{Women in Love} Lawrence includes biblical references to the Sons of God and daughters of men. See \textit{The Rainbow} (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2001), p. 232 and \textit{Women in Love} (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1991), p. 273. It is interesting that man is aligned with the sacred and woman with the profane: if this alignment were to continue through other polarities then they would become hierarchies, which would undermine Lawrence’s notion of transcendence through equal communion. I will return to this idea shortly.
conscious human knowledge which are seen as derivative and contingent.\textsuperscript{57} Lawrence suggests that when we speak of ourselves as ‘I’ we refer to the Word, not the Flesh, but we often, as Shiach terms it, ‘misrecognise the hierarchy and attribute agency to ourselves as rational beings when we are simply playing out the logic of our species being.’\textsuperscript{58} Shiach believes this ‘ethical and philosophical position’ is evident in Lawrence’s fiction, in particular the metaphors he uses which draw upon nature such as the relationship between the fruit and blossom of the apple tree, both of which designate ‘the miracle of creativity’ but are only transient, with the seed, which carries within itself the possibilities of the tree and its fruit.\textsuperscript{59} Shiach says the seed is ‘closest to the flesh […] because its boundaries are beyond the imagination and it partakes of the temporal space of the infinite.’\textsuperscript{60}

Shiach relates this to the notion of productivity, drawing on further passages from Lawrence which describe flowers and bees, and the relationship between women as sources of energy in the home and men leaving to labour and return home after a productive day. But the point she makes is relevant to other themes in Lawrence; his use of nature in his metaphors relates to notions of creativity and, via the relationship between the sexes, the production of new life. Creativity is sexual, and relates to the natural cycle of reproduction, and natural metaphors in Lawrence not only express this notion of infinity of life but also the importance of the Flesh in creating that life, the human, his will and civilisation.\textsuperscript{61} Word is made Flesh, and God awakens in Connie’s guts: polarities communicate and the chasm between mind and body (that is so problematic in this mining town and, in Lawrence’s essays, in society at large) is renegotiated through eroticism.

The language Lawrence’s characters – and narrators, who are closely identified with characters – use to describe sexual experiences often serves to invigorate religious terms with a sense of carnality. Christ’s resurrection was bodily, a reanimation of his corpse, but Connie’s resurrection is felt within her guts and is erotic in its nature. Erotic love combines spirituality with the body: the suggestion that sacred and profane loves must mix, and that sons of god and daughters of men touch in Connie and Mellors’ embrace, show Lawrence, who was not a Christian,

\textsuperscript{57} Shiach, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{61} In this passage and Shiach’s reading, woman is more important as the source of Flesh and life than the human endeavour and productivity of the man, although in Lady Chatterley’s Lover the characters discuss whether woman is more than her ‘functions’ and ability to procreate (LCL, 74); this is characteristic of Lawrence’s complex attitudes to women and gender difference.
using biblical themes and language to evoke the erotic. For Bataille, Christianity is at odds with eroticism since ‘Christian religious feeling has by and large opposed the spirit of transgression’ (E, 118). Bataille presents Christian religion as an attempt to appropriate the sacred realm whilst denying that which creates it or makes it possible for us. He states:

In Christian sacrifice the faithful are not made responsible for desiring the sacrifice. They only contribute to the Crucifixion by their sins and their failures. This shatters the unity of religion. At the pagan stage religion was based on transgression and the impure aspects were no less divine than the opposite ones. The realm of sacred things is composed of the pure and the impure. Christianity rejected impurity. It rejected guilt without which sacredness is impossible since only the violation of a taboo can open the way to it. (E, 120-121)

Bataille gives the example of the devil, the ‘angel or god of transgression’, who retains his sacred character but is evil, so that emulating his sins is punishable by death by fire (E, 121). In ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ Lawrence argued that mob-mentality dirtied sex and made it impure. Bataille’s discussion of Christianity supports this idea of Lawrence’s, as Christian society, for Bataille, dirties transgressions other than the ‘experience of the divine’ – God, not sex, becomes the path to continuity (E, 118). However, Lawrence’s reconciliation of sacred and profane, spirit and body, Christianity and carnal desire, is not compatible with Bataille’s reading of Christianity. Bataille dirties Christianity, for example by placing God in a prostitute’s cunt in his novel Madame Edwarda, whereas for Lawrence the awakening of God in Connie’s guts is spiritual in a profound (or transcendent, as Lawrence would claim in his essays) sense that differs from the filthily carnal sacred Bataille writes.62

In the Preface to Madame Edwarda Bataille elaborates on his understanding of the connection between eroticism and death, and attraction and repulsion. He states that sexual life and death are both moderated by ‘the most ordinary social restrictions and prohibitions […] with equal force’ so that ‘each has come to comprise a sanctified domain, a sacred area’ (ME, 137-8). Elaborating on the

---

62 Bataille published his short novel Madame Edwarda in 1941 under the pseudonym Pierre Angélique with a Foreword in his own name; I will discuss the novel in more detail later in this chapter. Georges Bataille, Madame Edwarda in My Mother; Madame Edwarda; The Dead Man, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse (London: Marion Boyars, 2003), pp. 137-159. Hereafter ME.
perspective he put forward in texts such as *History of Eroticism* and *Eroticism* that humanity, eroticism and transgression come into being at the same moment, Bataille states that ‘what we call humanity, mankind, is the direct result of poignant, indeed violent impulses, alternatively of revulsion and attraction, to which sensibility and intelligence are inseparably attached’ (*ME*, 138-9). In the novel that follows this Preface, Bataille demonstrates the revulsive, filthy dimension to the erotic. For at the cusp of sexual pleasure there lies, for Bataille, ‘ecstasy’s extreme limit: horror’ (*ME*, 140). The opening sentence of the novel immediately sets the tone of the ensuing erotic: the narrator describes the ‘foul dizzying anguish’ that gripped him on a street corner as he watched ‘a pair of furtive whores sneaking down the stair of a urinal’ (*ME*, 148). The erotic of the novel is placed immediately, both physically— in the town, in the domain of prostitutes and public toilets— and metaphysically— in its proximity to anguish and human waste. This position could not be further from Lawrence’s biblical images of the resurrected body. Lawrence imbues carnality with spirituality to join the profane with the sacred, whereas Bataille dirties the carnal and the erotic to produce images that challenge the boundaries between profane and sacred, continuity and bounded humanity. The resurrection of the body is interesting because it is an erotic image of Lawrence’s which brings together themes present in Bataille’s theory of eroticism. The body and the sacred are linked with eroticism by both writers but through antithetical perspectives— Lawrence’s interest being in purity and regeneration, and Bataille’s being exploring taboo through shame and filth. The image of sacrifice will again bring all these themes together, but this time with clearer convergence.

The resurrection of the body is explored in Lawrence’s fiction and the transcendental rose is explored in his critical writing: together they form a single theme of erotic experience which is ethically powerful for Lawrence. Anaïs Nin noted a similar theme but she interpreted it as ‘intuitional reasoning’ (*US*, 18). Nin’s account *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study* is one of a handful of early studies to directly discuss Lawrence’s eroticism. She elaborates on Lawrence’s ‘resurrection of the body’ by analysing the joining of intellect and emotion as intuitional reasoning.

---

63 Again, the rose features in several of Bataille’s texts but in relation to baseness. For example, in ‘The Language of Flowers’ (published in *Documents* in 1929) Bataille writes that ‘even the most beautiful flowers are spoiled in their centres by hairy sexual organs’ and suggests ‘the interior of the rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty.’ See ‘The Language of Flowers’ in *Visions of Excess*, pp. 10-14 (p. 12). This is another example of Lawrence’s natural metaphors being used to portray wholesome regeneration in contrast to Bataille’s interest in the relationship between sex and dirt.
Nin describes Lawrence’s world as a world divided into different planes due to the complexity of human experience which gives rise to symbolism, because his aim is to present ‘the plane of subconscious life in continuous flow and movement’ (US, 15). Lawrence’s fiction expresses an evaluation of all things in terms of life and death, and searching for the essence of life in a thing in order to evaluate it means descending to the deeper plane of experience, to subconscious life, and determining its quality. Nin states: ‘Lawrence’s chief preoccupation is precisely the choice between life and death, or rather: between complete life and death. Livingness is the axis of his world, the light, the gravitation, and electromagnetism of his world’ (US, 17).

This deeper plane, then, is the essence of life, the pure meaning of what it is to be alive, and livingness is an ontological notion. That Nin uses the word ‘electromagnetism’ is reminiscent of Lawrence’s language in Fantasia of the Unconscious, in which he discusses the charges of the blood being magnetised between men and women. Like Lawrence, Nin situates life and being firmly in the body, both in her essays and in her fiction, as is discussed later in this chapter. The means of searching for and discovering the essential life in things is intuitional reasoning: seeing through the body, through the senses and instinct or ‘central physical vision’ rather than through the eyes and pure intellect (US, 18). Characters have a second current of life beneath that of everyday acts; the ‘articulateness of dreams, in symbols’ (US, 18). Rather than abstracting from the body as the intellect does, and seeing the world through the distorting light of abstract reason, there is a different source for understanding life that comes from a deeper place situated within the body, a deeper internal plane that Nin likens to Lawrence’s ‘dark gods’ within us (US, 18). The mode of sight Lawrence attempts to cultivate is one that comes from the body, because the essence of life itself is within the body. The mind and consciousness are always within the body, just as Clifford’s ideas are within the framework of Connie’s ‘body and sex’ (LCL, 16). Nin writes:

Lawrence believed that the feelings of the body, from its most extreme impulses to its smallest gesture, are the warm root for true vision, and from that warm root we can truly grow. The livingness of the body is natural; the
interference of the mind has created divisions, the consciousness of wrong-doing or well-doing.

Imprisoned in our flesh lives the body’s own genie, which Lawrence set out to liberate. He found the body had its own dreams, and that by listening attentively to these dreams, by surrendering to them, the genie can be evoked and made apparent and potent. (US, 19)

Nin’s notion of the genie within the body, its livingness and root for vision, supports the idea that Lawrence is exploring the dissolution of binary hierarchies such as that of body and mind, or intellect and emotions. For Nin, intuitional reasoning is both Lawrence’s tool for understanding being and his form of writing in which body and mind meet. His writing was a new form of life, revelatory and primitive, powerful in its originality and reality. Again, we return to the idea that sex charges the blood and being and can challenge the sterility of society (F, 107-111). Nin’s genie within the flesh contrasts Bataille’s Acéphale, another image of the body. Acéphale was both the name of a magazine Bataille set up with colleagues in 1936 and a secret society, about which little is known. The point of overlap between the two has perhaps become epitomised by André Masson’s drawing of an almost headless human body – almost, in that a skull is drawn in the place of the genitals. The drawing appeared in the first issue of Acéphale magazine in June 1936 along with a text from Bataille, ‘The Sacred Conspiracy’ which stated: ‘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.’

The beheaded man is transgressive as he has escaped the prison of reason and the structure of his body, but this man is also endowed with eroticism: the skull over the genitals links eroticism and death, Michel Surya argues, in much the same way as his fiction links the two. Lawrence’s erotic body portrays life force, which has the ability to reinvigorate the social order. Bataille’s erotic body expresses the transgression not only of the erotic but of death and disorder, rather than the hope of transcendence.

---

65 For a description of what is known about the society from letters and interviews by its members, see Michel Surya, Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography, pp. 247-255.
66 The drawing can be seen in Encyclopædia Acephalica, p. 13 or Visions of Excess, p. 180.
68 Surya, p. 236.
The transcendence Connie and Mellors seem to reach is no mean feat. In order for eroticism to overcome the chasm between body and mind, and commune the profane and sacred, other chasms must be negotiated which start to reveal to us the transgressive nature of this erotic. Mellors’ dialect and employment remind us of the class difference between the lovers. Connie’s return to Wragby and Clifford after each encounter with Mellors illustrates another social division, that she is someone else’s wife. On occasions when they withdraw into themselves away from each other’s touch after sex, there is a physical chasm between them as well as a social one. Yet Lawrence illustrates these social and physical divisions so that erotic activity can transcend them and Connie can melt in the flame of desire, representing Lawrence’s transcendent rose. However, a problem arises in that Connie’s erotic experience is akin to death. For the rose to exist she must retain her essence, not lose her life: dark and light must not become twilight. Yet Connie experiences ‘death’ at ‘the thrust of a sword in her softly-opened body’ (LCL, 173). That this daughter of man must die and be reborn in her erotic experience with a son of God does not conform to Lawrence’s model of essential difference and the erotic communion of two that do not merge into twilight. His vision of transcendence is not fully realised in his fiction, which instead portrays transgression through the image of sacrifice.

Lawrence’s portrayal of women is complicated to say the least. In Fantasia women seem to be excluded from the human community, instead sitting outside it to renew and individualise the men who go on to create great civilisations. This corresponds to his theme of polar opposites, which was present even towards the end of his life. In his article ‘Cocksure Women and Hen-sure Men’ (1928) Lawrence discusses the two types of confidence women have, the cocksure and hensure types, and states it is a ‘tragedy’ when women become more cocksure than men. Woman is to be the hen to man’s cock, in a typical example of what Simone de Beauvoir notes in his work when she says woman is ‘not an object confronting a subject, but a pole necessary for the existence of the opposite sign’. Yet in Lady Chatterley’s Lover Lawrence offers a more nuanced presentation of woman in the form of Connie, through whom he sympathetically analyses woman’s role as the matter behind male intellectual creation and a vessel for the production of heirs and

---

69 Such as in the experience in Chapter XII which I relate above, in which Connie shrinks away from Mellors (LCL, 171).
70 ‘Love’, p. 36.
continuation of society (LCL, 73-4). Connie holds some power through the narratorial voice aligned with her and in her sexual agency, and yet for Kate Millet the novel amounts to a ‘quasi-religious tract’ in which woman is granted ‘atonement’ in the form of ‘sight of the godhead’ as Connie is able to worship Mellors’ phallus in wonder.73 Millet says that Lady Chatterley’s Lover is a program for social as well as sexual redemption, yet the two are inextricable.74 However, Millet does not take Lawrence (or Tommy Dukes) at his word and does not believe the social programme Lawrence presents is one of erotic transcendence.

For Millet the ‘sexual redemption’ is redemption for woman and her gendered role, through a sexual and mystical act – ‘rehabilitating Constance Chatterley through the phallic ministrations of the god Pan, incarnated in Mellors’– rather than an erotic energy that restores communication between polarities such as mind and body, man and woman.75 Millet provides a specific feminist account of a theme that is regularly analysed by scholars reading Lawrence: religion and the sacred. Other scholars have noted that the meaning Lawrence attributed to sex and marriage depended in a large part on the sacred meaning he attributed to the phallus. Noting a letter Lawrence wrote in 1927 saying that ‘the phallus is a great sacred image,’76 Barry J. Scherr says that Lawrence’s vision of marriage was ‘profoundly rooted in Lawrence’s cosmic belief in “the phallus”’.77 There is, however, a more pertinent sacred theme in Lawrence’s erotic fiction, one that is linked both to Millet’s feminist critique and to Bataille’s notion of erotic transgression: sacrifice.

Themes of gender, pornography and the sacred in Lady Chatterley’s Lover all connect in the single enduring image of sacrifice. Whilst images of two-in-one and the resurrection of the body unite his literary erotic with his vision of erotic regeneration, sacrifice is a major point of divergence between Lawrence’s fiction and his theory. Sacrifice makes sex erotically transgressive rather than ideally transcendent, often due to the presentation of female sacrificial victims, a sexism in which Bataille and Lawrence are united.78 This reinstatement of the subject-object

73 Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (Aylesbury: Abacus, 1972), p. 238. In an oedipal reading Millet notes that Mellors is also Lawrence and his father: see p. 244-245.
74 Ibid., p. 243.
75 Millet, p. 242.
relationship undermines Lawrence’s transcendent communion – but it remains true to Bataille’s erotic in that it is a transgression. Below I explain why.

**Sacrifice and Transgression**

I earlier quoted a passage in which Lawrence described a pivotal point in Connie’s relationship with Mellors, in which she cries at her inability to love him then finally opens up to him fully, and which is described as her death upon his sword (LCL, 173). The four paragraphs that follow the image of death by the sword focus entirely on Connie: the feeling within her of deep oceans rolling away and disclosing her, her attribution of all her pleasure to Mellors’ (now wilting) penis, and her sensation that at the height of her orgasm ‘she was not, and she was born […] a sacrifice, and a new-born thing’ (LCL, 174). The description of pleasure leading to orgasm is of great rolling waves, the reason given for this pleasure is the phallus and, most importantly for us, the moment of orgasm itself and the change it brings about in Connie (so that she cries ‘It was so lovely!’ rather than bewailing her inability to love) is described as being sacrificed and reborn (LCL, 174).

It is possible that Lawrence depicts Connie’s orgasm as death due to his interest in Freud, who elaborated on the notion of the orgasm as a little death in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* But more importantly, the moment of death is for Lawrence a transition between one mode of existence and another: it heralds the change in Connie that allows her to love Mellors and should convey, to borrow Lawrence’s own terminology in ‘Love’, whole love. When Connie and Mellors achieve the ideal love, however, Lawrence’s one-sided narration creates potential problems. Connie’s love of Mellors’ body grants it a supreme status:

> How lovely, how lovely, strong, and yet pure and delicate, such stillness of the sensitive body! Such utter stillness of potency and delicate flesh! How beautiful, how beautiful […] And the strange weight of the balls between his legs! What a mystery! What a strange heavy weight of mystery, that could lie soft and heavy in one’s hand! The roots, root of all that is lovely, the primeval root of all full beauty. (LCL, 174-5)

*Eroticism*, however, clearly presents sacrifice as claiming a female victim and this theme is continued in many of his fictional presentations of erotic sacrifice too.

79 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, first published in German in 1920 as *Jenseits des Lustprinzips.*
It is not their union but the male genitalia that is the root of beauty, which he further builds upon when, as Mellors’ penis rises again, it is described as ‘the other power’ (LCL, 175). In his discursive prose Lawrence makes it clear that for understanding and transcendence to be achieved, polarities, including male and female, must be balanced in their power. All Mellors says in the text is that Connie is ‘his lass’ and that she should know he loves her because she felt his love (LCL, 175). Millet notes Lawrence’s lack of description of female genitalia for Mellors to wonder at.\(^80\) Whilst Mellors discusses and loves Connie’s body in an often worshipful way, we are not told that he experiences a parallel wonder of her breasts, her womb, nor that his own oceans parted to bear him up for sacrifice and rebirth. In fact, if we are to maintain the individuality and gender difference of Connie and Mellors, we might assume he has a different experience of erotic love and sexual orgasm – but this is not discussed. Booth is keen to point out that ‘Lawrence is part of an earlier social and cultural formation’ and he claims that whilst issues Lawrence raises are important, they are of his time and ‘he is not our contemporary.’\(^81\) Continuing this point, Booth claims that the best writing on gender in Lawrence ‘has explored Lawrence’s writing as a set of texts from the first part of the twentieth century that capture complex and often contradictory attitudes.’\(^82\) Lawrence discusses enduring concepts and ideas, from religion and eroticism to the development of Western industrial civilisation: that these are not mere topics but enduring concepts does not mean we should consider Lawrence as discussing his own truths outside of his cultural and historical moment. But nor is it the case that he was merely an objective or accidental snapshot of his time: he does not just capture attitudes, he critiques them and responds to them and reflects on them publicly in articles. When he talks about man and woman, he talks about their role as erotic beings and he discusses the possibility for transcendence – a metaphysical experience which he believed was socially important.

To truly understand Lawrence’s perspective on erotic regeneration and the relationship between man and woman, we must look at the philosophical level of his ideas and the recurring concepts and tropes, such as that of sacrifice. Lawrence’s eroticism is not simply a sexual act, a physical event in a specific moment in space and time; erotic transcendence is humanistically important, as his essays reveal. The novel presents the sacrifice of Connie quite clearly, and this act of violence upon only one of the participants undermines the potential of transcendence.

\(^{80}\) Millet, p. 239-40.
\(^{81}\) Booth, p. 3.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 4.
Further, sacrifice is not an accidental image in the novel but an enduring one in several of Lawrence’s texts in which women are regularly sacrificed for men – usually erotically.

Another novel in which Lawrence presents an erotic scene of sacrifice is his early novel *The Trespasser*. We accompany Helena and Siegmund on a brief holiday on the Isle of Wight. We know from the first two chapters that he will die, and that they are having an affair of which his family are aware. It becomes clearer throughout the novel that his death will be suicide. The novel is based on true events recounted to Lawrence by Helen Corke in 1909. She and her music teacher visited the Isle of Wight for five days together, after which he hanged himself. Although both *The Trespasser* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* discuss a scandalous extramarital affair, the sexual acts in *The Trespasser* are not as explicit and eroticism is not presented as a regenerative source in the context of social problems. Their chief similarity is in the erotic charge and its portrayal. In *The Trespasser* Lawrence is rehearsing the textual practices and focusing the erotic ideas that will come to fruition twenty years later in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

The focus of *The Trespasser* is erotic love: as one reviewer stated in 1912, ‘the story simply doesn’t matter; the characters even don’t matter. What is important is the curious mood of passion exhibited by Siegmund and Helena.’ As readers we follow them on a journey to fulfilment to become ‘Two-in-one’ just as Connie and Mellors chart a journey to sexual fulfilment (*T*, 32).

In one scene Lawrence hints that their love was consummated. In moving to sit beside Siegmund, Helena ‘seemed to be offering him herself to sacrifice’ (*T*, 39). She was ‘abandoned to him’ and Lawrence says there was a ‘good deal of sorrow in his joy’ (*T*, 39). Helena is an unmarried woman having an affair with a married man in England less than a decade after Queen Victoria’s austere reign has ended. To lose her virginity to Siegmund would have been a sacrifice that would have made her unmarriageable and changed the course of her life, if going on holiday with him had not already done that. But there is the added sacrifice that ‘abandoning’ herself to him changes him. Helena notices later that Siegmund’s mood has lifted and he is no longer ‘burning, volcanic, as if he would destroy her’ but ‘like the sea, blue and hazy in the morning’ (*T*, 39). Like the rituals that use the sacrifice of an animal to bring forth divine order and restore society to its balanced state out of a chaotic carnival, so Helena is burned up in Siegmund’s flames to return him to natural

---

84 Review of *The Trespasser* by F.G. in *Rhythm*, 2, 10, (1912).
peace. This is Lawrence’s bodily regeneration, the alchemical reaction in
Siegmund’s blood when his body meets Helena’s. She believed there was
‘something sacred’ in the new Siegmund, that she had ‘given him’ this new softness,
and finally that ‘She was the earth in which his strange flowers grew’ (T, 39-40).

The image of Helena as the earth and Siegmund as the flowers growing from
her, recalls not only Lawrence’s rose but also Bloch’s tree with its roots in the
physical ground whilst growing upwards to the spiritual skies. But in this vision, once
Helena is sacrificed, it is Siegmund alone who grows; she is the earth-object that
sustains and transforms him. It is a re-enactment of the relationship feminists such
as Luce Irigaray describe, in which woman is “‘Matter’” to the male subject, ‘upon
which he will ever and again return to plant his foot in order to spring further, leap
higher.’ Lawrence’s binary oppositions upon which erotic love is based (man and
woman, sacred and profane) have reinforced an age old binary hierarchy feminists
are still challenging today, rather than enabling transcendence. They are not ‘two-in-
one’ but one above another. As de Beauvoir puts it, ‘time and again he shows
woman secretly overwhelmed by the ardent, subtle, and insinuating appeal of the
male […] It is male animals that incarnate the agitation and powerful mystery of Life;
women feel the spell.’ She states that whilst man ‘is rooted in the sexual world’ he
is also the one to escape it, whereas ‘woman remains shut up in it’ or, as I would
articulate it, fails to transcend it.

Helena is the earth from which Siegmund flowers, and this is a sacrifice of her
own life and flowering. Connie’s erotic love for Mellors is a sacrifice on the phallic
sword and rebirth as a woman. In the short story ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’ we
witness the ritual sacrifice of a woman at the hands of priests of an exotic religion; I
will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter. The theme endures: Lawrence’s
erotic scenes become female sacrifices.

Whilst Lawrence deploys sacrifice as a metaphor for acts of erotic love,
Bataille unlocks another relation between sex and sacrifice. For him, they are
parallel acts of transgression that reveal within the profane world of man a sacred
realm of immanence. In Chapter One I explained that for Bataille the sacred
and profane, although interminably linked, are not brought together by erotic love but are
in a dynamic state of tension. The tension exists between the human subject and its
own dissolution, between the boundaries and structures of humanity and their own

85 Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell
86 De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, p. 249.
87 Ibid., p. 249.
undoing for the boundaries to unfurl and the subject to dissolve would be the death of humanity, an act of sacrifice.

In *Theory of Religion*, Bataille explains that man’s world is based on barriers against and transcendence over nature, thus the negation of immanence, yet humanity is also based on the acquisition of tools and the creation of work, so that its defining values are utility and duration. Sacrifice threatens the barriers of humanity: it reveals sacred immanence by negating utility and duration. Bataille claims simply ‘The principle of sacrifice is destruction’ and explains, ‘Sacrifice is the antithesis of production, which is accomplished with a view to the future; it is consumption that is concerned only with the moment’ (*TR*: 43; 49). When Bataille says ‘To sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give’ he is emphasising that the death, in the form of the end of a finite thing, is not what is important (*TR*, 49). What is important is death as the dissolution of boundaries, the very boundaries that create finitude stand against the infinity and continuity of sacred immanence, and in sacrifice we glimpse this immanence beyond but also within ourselves.

Eroticism and sacrifice are linked for Bataille. In *Eroticism* he explains that the orgasm is a moment in which human subjectivity undergoes a ‘little death’ which reveals continuity with the other suspended subject. Continuity is a form of life that is both an alternative to and the origin of humanity, both divided from and essential to human life and death. Just as sacrifice was a specific form of destruction that annihilated a subject or object’s ‘real ties’ to transcendence (*TR*, 43), subjection and, therefore, the world of humanity, eroticism repeats this act: ‘The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives’ (*E*, 17). Further, both sex and sacrifice contain a strong element of violence, since they threaten to violate the borders of the human, of the self. Bataille asks ‘What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners? – a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?’ (*E*, 17). Bataille identifies a link between eroticism and sacrifice that offers a philosophical explanation as to why Lawrence presents Connie as a sacrifice. However, there are important differences between Bataille’s model of eroticism and Lawrence’s goal of transcendence through erotic love.

The death of Connie and her rebirth with Mellors into transcendence is clearly not intended to be violation or murder. The sword of Mellors’ phallus is ritualised, thus the violence of sacrifice is annulled both by its metaphorical character and by the wonder of the transcendence that is meant to follow. For Bataille the violation of humanity is much more real – he discusses a violent threat to human subjectivity through the threatened destruction of the self and its boundaries, which would
include the boundaries between self and other, and self and immanence. This is clearly transgression rather than transcendence. Should Lawrence’s presentation of erotic love stray from his own model into Bataille’s, he risks failing to meet the demand of transcendence set in ‘Love’: it is my contention that this is exactly what Lawrence does in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Trespasser* due to his gender polarity and the trope of sacrifice. In using the image of sacrifice Lawrence moves away from his own ideal of transcendence through understanding into Bataille’s notion of transgression: a violence against the structures of humanity that puts the human into constant tension with its own undoing.

Bataille and Lawrence both equate eroticism with sacrifice, but one of the differences in their presentations of sacrifice is their approach to violence. Whilst Lawrence will talk about Mellors’ sword and Connie’s death he does not describe the violence implicit within his metaphor, whereas Bataille does equate metaphorical and erotic sacrifice with actual sacrifice and its bloody violence. Lawrence was interested in Aztec civilisation and in 1931 an article was posthumously published about New Mexico, in which he described ‘Red Indians’ as maintaining ‘a tribal integrity and a living tradition going back far beyond the birth of Christ’. His interest in the sacred rites of this civilisation and the practice of sacrifice is the topic of his short story ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’, which I will discuss later. In his article on New Mexico Lawrence even discusses Aztec sacrifices to the sun, suggesting the act is understandable because the sun ‘is of a brilliant and unchallengeable purity and haughty serenity which would make one sacrifice the heart to it.’ Lawrence describes the sacred purity and brilliance of the sun receiving the sacrifice rather than the violence of the offerings made to it, and the violence and fleshliness of the sacrificial scene in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* are not represented in the text. Sacrifice is an idea to Lawrence, and violence is repressed in his discussions and depictions of it – whereas Bataille’s discussions of sacrifice, even when metaphorical, relate to other texts in which he discusses death, taboo and the violence of spilled blood. At the same time that Lawrence was writing about the noble and pure sacrifice of the Aztecs, Bataille published ‘Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh’ (1930) in *Documents*, in which he compares automutilation to the ‘institution’ of sacrifice and notes different civilisations in which severed fingers were sacred offerings. He goes into explicit detail that sets him apart from Lawrence.

---


89 Ibid., p. 183.

Describing ‘the bloody orgies of Islamic sects’ Bataille describes how the participants enter ‘the horrible omophagous sacrifice […] smashing each other on the head with clubs or axes, throwing themselves on swords, or gouging out their eyes.’\(^9^1\) In later texts Bataille will describe cultures which commit sacrifice and the meaning of this act for the rest of the community, moving towards a theory of sacrifice in communities and economies that relates to his philosophy of humanity.\(^9^2\) Sacrifice is a theme for both writers, connected with eroticism and informed by acts of sacrifice in so-called primitive societies. However, for Lawrence its violence is constrained within the text in favour of descriptions of purity, regeneration and rebirth whereas for Bataille it can be a metaphor for orgasm, a poetic act, and equally a bloody act of violence upon a person’s body that can end in death.

Bataille often describes sacrifice and, at times, transgression as violent but in his discussion of eroticism and its relationship to death there is another very specific act of violence:

> In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner the dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. (E, 17)

Sex is sacrifice, Bataille tells us, because it dissolves the human subject to some degree. However, it is also sacrifice in that the male partner is the agent of dissolution: he witnesses the demise of a passive victim. Sex is the sacrifice of woman in which man is active, and he then treads upon his victim as a path to his own dissolution. Crucially, Bataille describes the very activity that Lawrence writes in his fiction.

> In sacrificing Connie Lawrence sacrifices his own ideal of transcendence, since there is no mutual understanding between male and female essences but the passivity of one beneath the other. The binary polarity is restored and though Connie experiences transgression and rebirth through her erotic ecstasy, she never transcends her submissive position in the hierarchical polarity of gender. The only transcendence possible in this passage would be Mellors’ transcendence over

\(^9^1\) Ibid., p. 67.
\(^9^2\) See, for example, the chapter ‘Sacrifices and Wars of the Aztecs’ in The Accursed Share, pp. 45-61.
Connie, making her his passive victim-object, just as Bataille describes man transcending nature in order to exist himself. Whether or not this occurs is irrelevant for Lawrence, because his ideal of transcendence was based upon two essences reaching communion without losing their essential opposition. When Lawrence writes Mellors and Connie together, he does not write the transcendental rose but writes, through sacrifice, the binary opposition (and hierarchy) that the novel depicts as damning society in the first place.

Lawrence is not alone in this model, as Bataille also depicted eroticism as sacrifice in his fiction such as his short novel *Madame Edwarda*, published in 1941 under the pseudonym Pierre Angélique. Set amongst the cityscape of Paris at night, the novel follows the narrator to a brothel and back out into the streets with Madame Edwarda, a prostitute he chooses there. The story reveals the divine anguish of eroticism, from the protagonists’ ‘icebound […] shock’ to Edwarda’s copulation with a taxi driver in the back seat of his car, sitting beside the narrator as he observes their ‘embrace’ which ‘strained to the final pitch of excess at which the heart fails’ *(ME: 149; 157)*. The notion of the heart failing from the excess of eroticism is more than a metaphor: in this novel Bataille explores in fiction the experiential counterpoint to the ideas he proposes in *Eroticism*. Edwarda proclaims that she is ‘GOD’ through the revelation of the ‘loathsome squid’ of her vagina, a variation of the carnality of Connie’s God in her guts and of Bataille and André Masson’s *Acéphale* *(ME, 150)*. In placing a skull over the genitals of the body, the drawing of the Acéphale places death in the erotic epicentre of the body and disrupts the order – and life – of that body. Edwarda’s revelation of the divine in her genitals, in Michel Surya’s words, shows ‘She is an excessive GOD. She is GOD revealed as DEATH.’

Death is the dissolution of the human subject, and the ecstatic excess of erotic acts is a form of death. Bataille explores this idea through Edwarda, who is ‘GOD figured as a public whore and gone crazy,’ as she writhes on the narrator, on a taxi driver, and on the pavement:

> When I saw Madame Edwarda writhing on the pavement, I entered a similar state of absorption, but I did not feel imprisoned by the change that occurred

---

93 The foreword appeared in his own name (referring to ‘the author’ of the novel as if he were a separate person) and also appears in *Eroticism; Madame Edwarda* was eventually published under his own name in 1956. Bataille’s thinking in *Madame Edwarda* therefore spans a fifteen year period that coincides with his work on *History of Eroticism* and *Eroticism.*

94 Surya, p. 307.
in me. The horizon before which Edwarda’s sickness placed me was a fugitive one, fleeing like the object anguish seeks to attack. Torn apart, a certain power welled up in me, a power that would be mine upon condition I agree to hate myself. The vertiginous sliding which was tipping me into ruin had opened up a prospect of indifference, of concerns, of desires there was no longer any question: at this point, the fever’s desiccating ecstasy was issuing out of my utter inability to check myself. (ME, 155-6)

This passage is important for two reasons: its sacrificial and spatial presentations of erotic transgression. First, it characterises erotic experience as approaching death – or, more specifically, of female sacrifice – similar to that explained in Eroticism in which the female, passive partner is killed so that the active, male partner can merge with her death and enter continuity. In her convulsions Edwarda paves the way to the narrator’s ‘similar state’ to hers, instigating ‘a vertiginous sliding’ which tips the male narrator into ‘ruin.’ Her loss of reason and command of her body accelerate into orgasm, which is construed as heart failure: death. His loss of self is prompted by her sacred cunt and its revelation of the divine, her madness, and her sexuality. She loses herself for the sake of his erotic experience.

Second, the novel deploys spatial imagery to present erotic transgression, using images of imprisonment, the horizon and sliding, so that loss of self is not only represented by death but by the disappearance of physical structures. Whether the erotic actor enters ‘a different waste “beyond”’ or senses that the city has disappeared and been replaced by ‘mountains at nighttime’ or ‘a starry sky, mad and void’ or the room disappears, the lesson is that built structures are broken and illusive (ME: 152; 152; 150). The experience of the erotic is a loss of structure, a dissolution of the city and its streets and buildings, replaced only by a limitless sky.

This is significant in Bataille’s fiction because it complements his description of transgression and, more specifically, my reading of it as a spatial rather than a temporal event. In Chapter One of this thesis I argued that transgression is characterised by an inherent dynamic challenge between structure and continuity, humanity and the other it shuts out in order to form and define itself. Madame Edwarda sets up this structural tension. Transgression is described and presented as the loss of structures and yet they are never truly lost; the threat of their loss proves their necessity for our humanity. Thus, appropriately, the novel also structures itself within the city with regular references to actual Parisian streets and locations.
Bataille both situates eroticism within particular spaces or sites, and uses spatial metaphors to demonstrate eroticism as a transgression, a breaking or wavering of boundaries. There is a dual function to the spatiality of eroticism. In the first aspect of spatiality, eroticism happens within a specific site which relates to its transgressive nature. Whether this site is the brothel (a house redesigned for sexual encounters) or the deserted streets and a taxi (the public realm without the public present), it is differentiated from the busy daily life of the city. There is even a scene in which Edwarda stands evocatively beneath an arch as if the entrance to a new space both frames her and characterises her, and through this arch the narrator follows her to her sacrifice, her orgasmic death that stimulates his own ruin (ME, 152). In the second aspect of spatiality, eroticism is characterised and described in spatial or structural terms. As a transgression, it threatens the defining structures of our humanity and this threat is visualised and understood spatially.

Even in the Preface to *Madame Edwarda*, Bataille demonstrates the essentiality of prohibitions surrounding sexuality by comparing them to a house. We live within our defining limits in the same way as we live within a building; we are no more able to ‘set fire to our house and take to the woods, returning to the good old days of animalism, of devouring whoever we please and whatever ordures’ than to remove sexual prohibitions and return to animal sex over human eroticism (ME, 138). There is therefore an architecture to eroticism, both in that it needs a particular space or site and is a spatial or structural event. In the next sections of this chapter I will examine how Lawrence situates eroticism and the links his fiction implies between the physical architecture of society and the defining structures of humanity. This will lead on to a discussion of other crucial structures for humanity, such as language, and ways in which erotic transgression might be manifest within those structures.

**The Nature and Architecture of Eroticism**

There is no doubt that for Lawrence, nature and eroticism are intimately linked. Connie has her first orgasm with Mellors as she lies outside ‘like an animal’ under the trees (*LCL*, 133). The hut by the chicken coup, where Connie and Mellors start their relationship, is described by Lawrence as ‘rustic,’ ‘unravished,’ and is compared to a mushroom (*LCL*, 87; 94; 86). Hidden in the woods in a basic state, without even a window, it is barely a habitation and is positioned clearly within the realm of nature – and of erotic activity. Even Mellors’ cottage is placed firmly in the woods and is described by Lawrence in very different terms from Wragby, to the
‘walls’ of which Connie hates to return, and the mining town over which the estate presides (LCL, 86).

The language of the novel also places eroticism in the natural realm. Connie does not merely experience her first orgasm in the woods; the regeneration of her body is described in terms that place the erotic and Lawrence’s attempts to write transcendence firmly amongst nature. For example, Mellors’ ‘penis began to stir like a live bird’ at the thought of Connie (LCL, 120). Similarly, when Connie returned to the woods after her first sexual encounter with Mellors, ‘she could almost feel it in her own body, the huge heave of the sap in the massive trees, upwards, up, up to the bud-tips’ (LCL, 121). Lawrence is using nature to accentuate the changes in the body after sexual awakening, comparing the life that is stirred to the ‘sap’ within nature and comparing the body to animals and plants. Mellors’ body is compared to the pistil of a flower and Connie’s tenderness is a hyacinth (LCL, 85; 119).

In her Unprofessional Study of D. H. Lawrence, Anaïs Nin argues that his approach to nature is about restoring life to the body, as ‘the idea of renewal takes the form of a burrowing into the earth, to the sources of life’ (US, 48). It is from the ‘warm root’ of the body that we can grow, and hence from the ‘warm root’ of the natural, physical world that our bodies are part of and which we live within (US, 19). Nin’s notion of renewal links both to Lawrence’s presentation of nature and his ideas about erotic love in his discursive prose, discussed earlier in this chapter. Lawrence is relocating the human in its natural environment, the one it seeks to destroy with industrialisation and move beyond with intellectual advancement – and he is also relocating the human in the body, which is resurrected and reconnected with the mind and the sacred. Eroticism relates to a dual relocation, of body and nature becoming structures or sites with which Connie is refamiliarised.

Fiona Becket claims that Lawrence’s work constitutes an ‘eco-poetics’ in that it ‘calls us at times into an ethical relationship with the material world’ in a way that is relevant today. Becket argues that in Lawrence’s work on ‘the nature/culture dichotomy interrelatedness, in particular, has a metaphorical and an ethical inflection.’ Earlier in this chapter I discussed Lawrence’s presentation of English society in Lady Chatterley’s Lover as comprised of binary dichotomies which eroticism can transcend. Becket suggests that ‘Lawrence’s poetic is rooted in the

---

95 However, Nin is keen to emphasise that for Lawrence there is no turning backwards; we can only reconnect with nature and vital sensory life in order to move forward. Industrialisation cannot be ignored but neither need it dominate the path of our future.
97 Ibid., p. 148.
imperative to contest the power of the oppositional modes of knowledge that define his culture. I agree with Becket’s point, but for her this means Lawrence’s treatment of nature is motivated by his project: he wants to use non-human nature (as Becket terms it) to contest the industrialised landscape and society. By my own reading, a further layer is added to Becket’s: a fascination with eroticism not only as a topic in his novels and an activity explored in their plots, but an interested use of eroticism to undermine the oppositional structure of society. Because this use of eroticism is interwoven with a motivated discussion of nature, sex has a place in Lawrence’s novels, and the mining towns and Wragby are not appropriate sites for eroticism. Wragby and Mellor’s hut are both built structures: they are different social and economic iterations of the same landscape, which is characterised by the forests, the mines, the miners and their aristocratic rulers. Mellors is placed away from the miners and amongst the nature of the estate; Clifford is placed in a privileged site and building that declares his wealth. On the social and economic continuum between them stands another form of habitation: the local towns, which are divorced both from Mellors’ nature and Clifford’s wealth.

When Connie is driven through Tevershall to visit the nearby town of Uthwaite, within Wragby’s seat, Lawrence describes the buildings and her response to them. He elaborates this description into a critique of industrial society and the new developments in English history. Connie is unimpressed by what she sees on her drive; the month of May is wet but is dulled further by the industrial influence on the area:

In spite of May and a new greenness, the country was dismal. It was rather chilly, and there was smoke on the rain, and a certain sense of exhaust vapour in the air. One just had to live from one’s resistance. No wonder these people were ugly and tough. (LCL, 152)

The smoke and exhaust are bonded to the rain and the air. They make the place unpleasant and breed ‘resistance’ in the people, making them ugly. In this society of tough people, trying to survive against the onslaught of industry, an ‘utter negation of beauty’ is evident not only in the people but in their town and buildings – from the ‘long squalid straggle of Tevershall’ to its individual component buildings (LCL, 152). These buildings are dark and ugly. There are ‘blackened brick dwellings […] mud black with coal-dust,’ and amongst them the ‘plaster-and-gilt horror of the cinema’

98 Ibid., p. 158.
and new school buildings, ‘all very imposing, and mixing the suggestion of a chapel and a prison’ (*LCL*, 152). The school girls Connie can hear singing are no better than their environment, ‘not like savages […] not like animals […] like nothing on earth’ (*LCL*, 152). She ponders, ‘What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical cells and uncanny will-power remained?’ (*LCL*, 152). Lawrence’s novel attempts to answer this question, and to seek experiences which will breathe new life into people and English civilisation.

The people and their environment demonstrate ‘the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling’ (*LCL*, 152). That which is human about people has been lost, and for Lawrence, that which is human is intuition, ‘the human intuitive faculty.’ The loss is demonstrated in the architecture of society, both the physical architecture of its buildings and the metaphysical architecture of the human disposition. It is all part of the movement of history which sees ‘great plasterings of brick dwellings on the hopeless countryside’ as ‘The industrial England blots out the agricultural England’ and ‘One meaning blots out another’ (*LCL*, 153). Lawrence even directly relates the architecture of buildings to the metaphorical architecture of society in *The Rainbow*, when he ends the novel by saying that Ursula saw in the rainbow ‘the earth’s new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.’

Lawrence therefore posits a link between the physical and metaphysical structures, or architecture, of humanity and mourns the loss of what he calls the human intuitive faculty in both. There is even an architecture to the people, as they become built industrial structures themselves: ‘They had perhaps some of the weird inhuman beauty of minerals, the lustre of coal, the weight and blueness and resistance of iron, the transparency of glass. Elemental creatures, weird and distorted, of the mineral world!’ (*LCL*, 160).

Shiach points out that in the novel the ‘industrial landscape dominates the lives of those who work in it, turning them from human flesh into soulless mechanism.’100 More than this, the industrial architecture of society seeps into the people and they reflect it back; the architecture of human subjectivity and human society are of the same substance. How can humans become more than the mere ‘animas of coal and iron and clay’ to which they have been reduced (*LCL*, 159)?

---

99 *The Rainbow*, p. 418.
100 Shiach, p. 186.
How do they overcome death? The answer Lawrence presents in the novel is the erotic regeneration of the body. Connie overcomes death when she is in the woods having sex with Mellors, and feels herself ‘melting in the flame’ of their passion, and dying upon ‘the thrust of a sword in her softly-opened body’: ‘She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman’ (LCL, 174). Erotic feeling and passionate acts make Connie a woman when around her industrial England is populated with ‘Men not men, but animas’ (LCL, 159).

What Nin called renewal is also relevant to Lawrence’s spatial politics, or spatial erotics. His chosen site for eroticism, natural realms away from industrial halls and towns, indicate a temporality that is cyclical rather than chronological like the industrial progress and its blotting out of the old countryside and its ways. Connie’s rebirth through sacrifice further reflects the new temporality of Lawrence’s chosen site for eroticism. The intuitive human faculty is reborn through eroticism. But although people are now of the mineral world, like buildings, eroticism can only transform the person away from the doomed architecture – and not the architecture itself, built whilst the intuition was dead.

Lawrence wants an awakening to nature away from the walls of society. Civilisation is its buildings: the metaphysical and physical structures are one for Lawrence. But he does not pull them down – he simply walks away from them and situates Lady Chatterley, both the newly born Connie and the erotic heart of the novel, elsewhere. In doing so Lawrence writes an architecture for eroticism: a natural structure outside the ugly and soulless habitations in which eroticism can take place, the body be regenerated, and (at least some) members of society become human again.

It is notable that within a year of one another, Bataille and Lawrence were both writing about industrial building structures (chimneys in particular) as fearful, and discussing architecture as a physical manifestation of the social order and systems of power. The image of the chimney reveals their different approaches to both architecture and modernity. Lawrence describes chimneys as ‘frightening’ and the new homes as a game of dominoes set out by ‘weird “masters”’ in Lady Chatterley’s Lover, whilst in his Critical Dictionary entries Bataille says chimneys have a ‘fearful rage’ and states that the buildings of Church and State impose ‘majesty and authority.’ ¹¹⁰ Both of these descriptions show an awareness that those in power create the architecture of both our streets and our society, but their responses to this perception differ. For Bataille, the chimney is a modern articulation

¹¹⁰ LCL, 154; EA: 51; 35. Lady Chatterley’s Lover was first published in 1928; ‘Factory Chimney’ and ‘Architecture’ were both published in 1929.
of both the transgressive, destructive waste of humanity and humanity's attempts to control and order that waste and the threat it poses. The chimney's very presence reveals that which it is there to hide. Bataille writes about the chimney to challenge the very notion of architecture and its role whilst acknowledging its necessity. Lawrence, on the other hand, sees chimneys as evidence of the damaging progress of industrial modernity. Our buildings are part of the foreign 'electric Thing' of the industrial age that is dividing us from our intuition and passion (LCL, 120). For Lawrence, erotic love can restore something of this to us, as can nature – they are part of the quality we have lost and they are also the route by which it will be restored. 'Rustic' buildings, like the hut by the chicken coup, are habitable extensions of this natural setting – and Mellors' home also. But Wragby Hall, and Stacks Gate with its frightening erections and domino houses, are not. Lawrence contrasts them to intuition and situates passion elsewhere but he does not transgress them and he does not need to – he does not want to transgress the problem but to transcend it through communication.

Again we see the clash between transcendence and transgression: whilst Lawrence finds a naturalistic site for his whole love and the purity of transcendence, what takes place within the site is instead transgression, a sacrifice. There is still, however, a wholesomeness to this erotic transgression that derives from Lawrence's enduring notion of sexuality as a life force, as he discusses in his essays, and is evidenced in the natural sites and metaphors in his novel. Compare Connie and Mellors' woodland scene to, for example, Bataille's base eroticism in whorehouses, streets and taxis in Madame Edwarda. Here we see a crucial hinge which both connects and differentiates their erotics: both Bataille and Lawrence write sacrificial, transgressive erotic experiences but the architecture of their eroticism differs greatly. Lawrence writes an architecture for eroticism. He designates specific sites which are appropriate for his vision of erotic experience. In his vision, eroticism is the regenerative life force and foundation of transcendence and can bring about social change. Whilst, I have argued, his vision ultimately fails, the setting for it remains intact in his novels. His architecture for eroticism is actually a denial of architecture, in that towns and their buildings are inappropriate sites and instead forests, remote cottages, rustic huts and, I will discuss below, caves are spiritually appropriate. Meanwhile Bataille, who also writes an architecture for eroticism, presents erotic activity as a transgression by definition and therefore does not attempt to find a location for a privileged act of transcendence. His eroticism is urban: Madame Edwarda is placed within the busy streets and buildings of the city. From the prostitutes ‘sneaking down the stair of a urinal’ to Edwarda’s brothel and
her public encounter with a taxi driver, the city provides the architecture for eroticism (ME, 148). This is a crucial intersection between their erotic fiction, which reflects their divergent perspectives yet similar practices: they both write sacrificial erotics that are architecturally conceived, even as their architectural visions are antithetical.

The importance of the sacrificial site, as an architecture for eroticism, endures in Lawrence's literature. The theme of sacrifice and the importance of its site are most clear in Lawrence's short story 'The Woman Who Rode Away'. There are parallels between this story, first published in 1925, and Lady Chatterley's Lover, which was published three years later. Set in Mexico, where Lawrence had been travelling in 1923, the story follows a white American woman as she travels away from her home and family in search of 'the secret haunts of these timeless, mysterious, marvellous Indians of the mountains'.

She is sacrificed by an indigenous community because, its leader tells her, 'when a white woman sacrifice herself to our gods, then our gods will begin to make the world again' (W, 72).

The woman’s relationship with her husband is described as passionless ‘invincible slavery’ based on moral attachment but lacking sensuality, as 'he never meant anything to her, physically' (W, 46). He is an 'idealists' with 'hatred' for the physical life (W, 47). Thus we have a physically and sensually remote marriage based upon the ideals and morals of the husband, but no bodily connection, which is similar to the relationship between Connie and Clifford. The story also includes (now deserted) villages based on the mining industry (of silver in Mexico, rather than coal as in the English Midlands) from which the husband has become rich through the work of others. And these others who are not only economically different but also ethnically different 'Indians' who see the woman as 'some strange, unaccountable thing' (W, 55) just as Connie notes the miners see her as a wax thing rather than a living woman (LCL, 15).

After meeting the men and asking to be shown their gods, to leave her own behind, the woman journeys with them to their community and is held in a windowless house. Throughout the journey and her stay, the notion of death is a constant refrain in the text. She is described as feeling that she has ‘died and passed beyond' and as being ‘aware that she had died' (W: 51; 57). Later, she specifically feels that this death relates to her sex, her ‘death’ and ‘obliteration’ apply to ‘the fallen individual independence of woman' (W, 70). Lawrence writes that she feels this keenly: ‘The sharpness and quivering nervous consciousness of the

---

103 Similar references to death appear, including W: 55; 52; 65.
highly-bred white woman was to be destroyed again, womanhood as to be cast once more into the great stream of impersonal sex and impersonal passion’ (W, 70-71).

Gender and ethnicity are linked here. The Indian describes to her the relationship between men and women in his community, and the need for a white woman to be sacrificed to ensure the relationship between the sun and moon is corrected, so that his community’s spiritual life can dominate that of the white community (W: 55; 72-4). It must be a white woman who is sacrificed: her gender is as relevant as her ethnicity. However, the sacrifice in this story is not meant to be erotic. As the woman tells the ‘Indian’ elders that she is tired and weary of her ‘white man’s God,’ she notes that the piercing look under which she is scrutinised contains ‘nothing sensual or sexual’ (W, 59-60). Instead their look has ‘a terrible glittering purity that was beyond her’ (W, 60-61). There are, however, similarities to Bataille’s notion of sacrifice. That she would have been afraid ‘had not something died within her’ is reminiscent of Bataille’s suggestion that sacrifice kills the utility of a thing but not the thing itself (W, 61). At this stage in the story the death she feels she has undergone could be the death of civilisation as she moves into the mountains beyond utility, taboo and the definitive structures of Western human civilisation, whilst of course she remains human in another sense. By this reading, she experiences transgression in which life and death, or humanity and the death of its defining structures, are in a state of conflict with one another. This story details a mystical, sacred transgression, from the woman’s search for another God, to her stay in a large house that is a temple and is attended to by priests, to the detailed descriptions of the sacred rites of the community (W, 66). We witness a spiritual journey rather than an erotic one yet, as Bataille’s thinking on transgression makes clear, there are similarities between the two.

As in Lawrence’s erotic transgression, this mystical transgression needs a site remote from civilisation. It is so remote that the woman must ride for days, crawl ‘from crack to crevice,’ stay captive in another community with houses that glitter and frighten her, until she is finally marched into the mountains to the site of her final sacrifice (W, 58-59). Whilst staying in the house, after consuming a strange drink, she enters into a physical communion with the nature surrounding her, in which her senses are attuned to the natural world:

---

So distinctly she heard the yapping of tiny dogs [...] keenly she detected the smell of smoke, and flowers [...] she felt as if all her senses were diffused on the air, that she could distinguish the sound of evening flowers unfolding, and the actual crystal sounds of the heavens, as the vast belts of the world-atmosphere slid past one another, and as if the moisture ascending and the moisture descending in the air resounded like some harp in the cosmos. (W, 66)

This is a more dramatic experience of nature than Connie Chatterley's. The skin of the body becomes translucent through the senses, and humanity and nature commune with one another – it is reminiscent of Lawrence’s description of the transcendent rose, or two in one, except the experience is with nature rather than another human. However, the image of sacrifice again undermines the transcendent potential. For, as if to prove that all transgression is in some sense erotic – and spatial – the story culminates with the woman’s sacrifice through the penetration of a male dagger, in a cave that is itself penetrated by an immense icicle. Millet suggests ‘Lawrence has plated the sexualised landscape to coincide with the sexual scenario.’¹⁰⁵ She describes the sexualisation of this sacrifice: ‘The act here at the center of the Lawrentian sexual religion is coitus as killing, its central vignette a picture of human sacrifice performed upon the woman to the greater glory and potency of the male.’¹⁰⁶

Whether we agree with Millet’s reading of the symbolic phallic penetration of the woman, there is a clear relationship between the site of sacrifice and the act of sacrifice. Throughout the story architecture is significant, from the ‘walled-in’ house and local ‘dead’ church and village the woman flees to the strange village in which she is held (W, 46). But this final transgressive act of sacrifice which is set up (but not described) in the closing pages of the story continues the trend of Lawrence’s erotic sacrifices in being drawn to a more natural environment. In fact this site is not only outside man-made architecture but is formed entirely by and of nature. The structure of the ice-penetrated cave combines the earth, the ice and the sun in a penetration that echoes through the cave three times. For whilst the woman’s body is about to be entered by a dagger, and an immense shaft of ice enters the cave, the cosmos also plays a role in that a ray of sun is to penetrate the ice. The ray of sun is significant for it relates the cave to the cosmos. For Bataille, the sun is the symbol of transgressive excess as it is the source of more energy than the earth

¹⁰⁵ Millet, p. 292.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 292.
can contain, and necessitates waste which undermines utility. In the final chapter of my thesis I return to the notion that the structure of civilisation sits within the greater realm of the cosmos, and that this relationship is significant for transgression. The transgression in this scene lies not only in the sacrifice but in the excess of the sun now present in our closed human systems of utility. This is at the heart of Bataille’s sacrifice: an abandonment of utility, a succumbing to eroticism and excess that remind us of the vulnerability of our humanity, and thus the dynamic tension of transgression is manifest in the conflict between ordered human life, and death.

In this story, the penetration of the sun in the ice, the ice in the cave and the dagger into the woman make transgression bodily, spatial and cosmic all at once. It is also erotic, for it follows Bataille’s description of erotic experience in which a passive woman is sacrificed for an active male (E, 17). For whilst the future king or ‘Cacique’ does not make the woman feel ‘sex-conscious’, she sees that he is ‘darkly and powerfully male’ (W, 68). Meanwhile she has ‘lost the power over herself’ and we now learn what the thing that she felt had died within her was: her womanhood (W: 68; 70). The same is true for Bataille, and whilst Bataille’s transgressive theory and Lawrence’s regenerative vision of eroticism differ, Bataille’s fiction and theory and Lawrence’s fiction all converge on the presentation of eroticism as a sacrifice that needs a site and needs a woman, that is transgressive and erotic, and that needs its own architecture, both physically and, as I will explain next, linguistically.

I have explained that for Bataille, eroticism is essential to humanity – we are human due to the taboo we place on sex and the value of utility through which we work and transcend nature. Eroticism is a transgression, which means it is a threat to the limits and structures crucial to humanity (the boundary created by taboo and the value of utility and rationality). Before continuing my discussion of eroticism and architecture in Anaïs Nin’s *House of Incest*, I would like to consider the relationship between eroticism and another defining structure of humanity: language.

In Chapter One I explained that language, as a structure that is integral to our humanity, is a potential site of transgression – and therefore of eroticism. Bataille is interested in the potential for language to be transgressive and I will now discuss how transgression is a linguistic act in Lawrence’s fiction.

**Erotic Language and Modes of Transgression**

In an essay published in *Critique* in 1946, ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’, Bataille proposes two different ways in which poetry can be transgressive. I will refer to these as *modes* of transgression in language, because they are not just approaches to discussing transgression but instigate or enact transgression. The
main focus of Bataille’s essay – the first mode of transgression in language – is actually the second one he introduces, whereby words are released from their use value or, as he suggests, sacrificed.

For Bataille, society has turned perceptible values into use values, meaning that things exist to humanity only in the capacity to be useful (JP, 148). Whilst Bataille’s analysis of poetry does acknowledge the role of its social context, he describes transgression in poetry not in a historical or timely sense so much as relating to the defining structures of our humanity (JP, 139). Poetry discloses and transfigures an emotion within a social era, but whilst the form of this act is timely, the act itself is bound to the definition of humanity rather than a specific era of human development. Bataille explains how the dominating concept of utility created the need for sacrifice:

Like our ancestors, we must take objects away from productive activity to the interest of the instant itself. But our ancestors reserved a ritual share of it: sacrifice, in a brief moment of anguish, cast to the wind a richness which – good sense would dictate – should be preserved for the future. This was the reverse of saving (especially of capitalist accumulation). (JP, 148)

The themes here are common to other aspects of Bataille’s work, such as his discussion of economics and utility in The Accursed Share. Sacrifice and, Bataille claims, poetry reverse the value of utility and process by which objects become remote to us, because each ‘returns an element of use value to the world of sensibility’ (JP, 148). Bataille suggests that whilst there are some integral differences between the two, poetry and sacrifice share the same aim: ‘to render palpable, and as intensely as possible, the content of the present moment’ (JP, 149). Both ‘withhold life from the sphere of activity’ so that a thing loses its use value and poetry obliterates not only its use value but also its otherness from the human (JP, 149). This means poetry is in a sense dangerous and sacred (JP, 148).

One example Bataille gives is from Victor Hugo’s poem Boöz Endormi, which imagines a god reaping ‘a golden sickle in the field of stars’ (JP, 151). Bataille states that in this poem ‘the object sold in ironmongers’ is carried away by the metaphor, and lost in a divine infinity (JP, 151). The metaphor here is doubled by

---

107 In 1946 when this essay was published, Bataille was shortly (in 1947, in other essays published in Critique) to continue work on The Accursed Share (published 1949): see Stuart Kendell, Georges Bataille (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), p.181. Bataille started to draft The Accursed Share earlier, in 1939, with ‘The Limit of the Useful’.

Bataille, for not only is the sickle lost in god’s field of stars, but in becoming something other than ‘the object sold in ironmongers’ it enters the sacred realm, freed from utility. Poetry has sacrificed a thing’s utility and revealed the instant and continuity instead.

In removing the otherness of a thing and removing the value of utility, poetry and sacrifice become forms of transgression – they threaten the defining structures of humanity. Bataille says that sacrifice ‘reveals immanence […] from which I am not clearly and distinctly separated’ (JP, 150). The language Bataille uses in this essay is reminiscent of *Eroticism*, in which he discusses the individual human subject challenging its boundaries and experiencing a state of continuity through sexual experience.

In *Inner Experience* Bataille also compares poetry and sacrifice. He explains that in reaching and expressing the ‘extreme limit’ (the limit or boundary of humanity), words are insufficient since they have an ordered and rational use for humans.\(^\text{109}\) It is in passing beyond this role and no longer representing objects in an orderly fashion, but instead beginning to communicate excess, that poetry frees words from their role in the human economy and thereby creates transgression within that economy:

Of poetry, I will now say that it is, I believe, the sacrifice in which words are victims. Words – we use them, we make of them the instruments of useful acts. We would in no way have anything of the human about us if language had to be entirely servile within us. Neither can we do without the efficacious relations which words introduce between men and things. But we tear words from these links in a delirium.\(^\text{110}\)

Whilst we need words to represent things, words are too branded with the human stamp of utility to truly communicate. Poetry tears words from their traditional servile role, thus sacrificing them and allowing them to communicate with, and communicate to us, the sacred. Poetry is the liberation of language from practicality. He gives another simple example:

\[\text{As many times as we use the words } butter, \text{ horse are put to practical ends, the use which poetry makes of them liberates human life from these ends [...] but, on the contrary, poetry leads from the known to the}\]

\(^{110}\) Ibid., p. 135.
unknown. It can do what neither the boy nor the girl can do: introduce the idea of a butter horse [...] No doubt I have barely enunciated the words when the familiar images of horses and of butter present themselves, but they are solicited only in order to die. In which sense poetry is sacrifice, but of the most accessible sort.\footnote{Inner Experience, p. 135-6.}

The poetic image is the destruction of the useful meaning of the word: its referential value, and with it its efficacy, are sacrificed. Poetry threatens reason, utility and thereby the defining structures of humanity.

Before discussing whether Lawrence creates this mode of transgression, I want to discuss the second mode Bataille presents briefly at the start of ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’ but does not explain in great detail. Bataille emphasises the musicality of language, in which poetry again moves beyond its efficacy in representing things, so that instead the form of language creates transgression. This is not an unusual view; over the centuries many writers have discussed poetry’s ability to evoke sentiment through rhythm, rhyme, sibilance, assonance and a wealth of other linguistic devices. If this was the extent of Lawrence or any other erotic writer’s command of poetry – language as something other than representative of things, becoming instead a series of sounds and linguistic stresses – it would not be inherently erotic. But Bataille’s brief description uses words that convey the notion that poetry can be transgressive in a way that is specifically erotic. Bataille says that the ‘cadence’, ‘leur élan’ and ‘volupté des sons’ lead us to ‘la sensibilité, et la porte aisément à l’aigu’ – the cadence, momentum or surge, and voluptuous or pleasurable sounds lead us directly to an acute or intense peak of experience.\footnote{Œuvres Complètes XI: Articles I 1944-1949 (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1988), p. 87. In the translated version (JP, 137) the texts states that a changing or musical rhythm, the ‘voluptuousness of sounds’ and their ‘recurrence’ and ‘surge’ transform language beyond its usual ‘constraint’ so that poetry ‘awakens the sensibility, and carries us directly to intensity.’} The words he has chosen – voluptuous, surge, peak – are physical and sensual. The terms in which Bataille describes this second mode of transgressive language make it clear that it is erotic, that the surge of poetic language is akin to the body’s surge towards orgasm. Bataille also makes the point that poetry leads directly to this experience, as it is the only means by which powerful emotion can be expressed (JP, 137). Poetry does not merely refer to the physical sensations of a character, it evokes physical sensations in the reader. There is a mutual relationship between poetry and our experience: ‘people have feelings that the poverty of a poetic technique can, strictly speaking, limit. On the
contrary, the liberty of feelings can liberate techniques’ (JP, 139). Our experiences and our form of communication structure one another to some extent, and poetry has the potential to both be innovated by emotion and to constrict emotion.

Poetic prose becomes bodily, physical, orgasmic and in doing so it enacts the thing it describes: erotic sensation. This is how it calls the structure of language into question to evoke or even enact transgression: the words reach beyond their representative, efficacious role and are acted out upon us as readers. In Chapter One I discussed Botting and Wilson’s description of Bataille’s Critical Dictionary entry ‘Formless’ as revealing the affects of words, so that their ‘affects exceed the work and continuity of observable effects and their causes.’

This excess produced by the affect of words is precisely the voluptuousness of poetry that leads us to extreme emotions, which Bataille describes in ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’.

There are therefore two modes of poetic transgression described by Bataille: the sacrificial and the erotic. In the sacrificial mode, poetry evokes things (the scythe, butter and horse) in such a way that they lose their utility, and then so do the words as they are no longer logically and usefully representative. In the erotic mode, words convey something carnal through voluptuous rhythms and sounds and evoke a carnal erotic experience in the reader, and again words lose their efficacious role.

It is clear from my summary that the two modes are related and call upon one another. In Chapter One I noted that Hussey, for example, says that transgression ‘brings together thought and experience in a moment which is both erotic and revelatory’, claiming all transgression is erotic. In both modes of transgression I have described, words are unbound from their logic and their utility is lost, or sacrificed. In both modes there is a challenge to, rather than an annihilation of the structure of language: poetry can be a challenging and evocative format of language but if language were to break down completely it would fail to communicate anything. Transgression is manifest in this dynamic of conflict between language maintaining its ability to define and order whilst challenging its own efficacy and structure. Considering the representation of erotic excess in Madame Edwarda, Bataille asks ‘what does truth signify if we do not see that which exceeds sight’s possibilities…?’ (ME, 141). This reminds us that language must express something that exceeds its rational structure without losing the qualities that enable it to communicate. Hussey states that transgressive experiences are ‘experiences which cannot be described adequately because they take place beyond language,’ and yet

113 Botting and Wilson, p. 6.
114 Hussey, p. 19.
Bataille illuminates two modes in which language be transgressive, if not describe transgression.\textsuperscript{115}

Bataille’s discussion of poetry and sacrifice illuminates the transgressive potential of poetry and the poetic potential of erotic literature. But Lawrence’s poetic techniques differ from those outlined by Bataille. Lawrence’s search for transgressive language took him in two directions: towards obscenity on one hand, and poetic language (which is not strictly poetry, though he did also write poetry) on the other. Both of these deserve consideration.

Lawrence’s obscene language was certainly transgressive of the social norms of his time. \textit{Lady Chatterley’s Lover} went on trial in October 1960 following the Obscene Publications Act of 1959, which deemed a book obscene if it tended to ‘deprave and corrupt’ those who read it.\textsuperscript{116} The novel’s obscene language and sexual plot were discussed at length in the trial and the novel was controversial right from its publication in 1928 (as were other novels by Lawrence, including \textit{The Rainbow} which was also banned). Lawrence had his own views on obscenity, explaining that his novels use obscene language to startle people out of their ‘mob-m mentality’: ‘if the use of a few so-called obscene words will startle man or woman out of a mob-habit into an individual state, well and good’ (P, 72). Lawrence also uses class in his novels, with Mellors’ language – from his conspicuous dialect to his choice of sexual words, such as cunt – placing him in another social sphere to Connie and thus highlighting the social transgression of their love. Mellors speaks obscenely but he also speaks in a particular Midlands dialect that sets him apart from Connie and the aristocracy. He fuses the two to upset Connie’s sister, Hilda, when she visits his home before she and Connie depart for Venice. Hilda suggests his dialect is affected and although Mellors responds aggressively, he slips out of his dialect later with Connie (\textit{LCL}: 243; 250). He tells Hilda her sister comes to him ‘for a bit o’ cunt an’ tenderness’ and in return she berates his ‘vulgarity’ (\textit{LCL}, 245). The vulgarity Hilda notes encapsulates both Mellors’ dialect and his obscenity, but his dialect serves to remind us and Hilda of his lower class status in comparison to Connie’s wealth and class. Language here is not transgressive in itself but signposts another transgression, reminding us that their affair flaunts social convention and class. Shiach illustrates how Connie and Mellors’ sexual relationship possesses ‘a freedom that is simply unavailable in the case of economic

\textsuperscript{115} Hussey, p. 5.
relationships.’\textsuperscript{117} Their passion is therefore represented as ‘transformative and transgressive’ in the novel, but Shiach describes a transgression of the economic situation that I would call generic, as it does not threaten the essence or existence of that economy as does Bataille’s notion of transgression.\textsuperscript{118} Mellors is not elevated within society and the novel ends before we witness whether Connie uses her capital to keep him. Their eroticism sits outside society, not merely outside marriage but outside the ‘functions’ of society, its system of aristocracy and the masses, and Mellors’ language serves to remind us of this (\textit{LCL}, 183).

Just as Connie and Mellors must find a place for their love and eroticism, so must they find a language, and this is another role obscenity plays in the text. Mellors introduces Connie to the word ‘cunt’ as if it referred to something entirely new, and intimate to her. He tells her ‘Fuck’s only what you do. Animals fuck. But cunt’s a lot more than that. It’s thee, dost see: an’ tha ‘rt a lot besides an animal’ (\textit{LCL}, 178). As Bataille points out that animals have sex, but humans have eroticism, so Mellors uses the word ‘cunt’ to explain something sexual beyond animality. The obscene word is used because it is obscene: unusual, radical, transgressive of everyday language. It is thus a new word for Connie, to define her physical intimacy with Mellors, and an unusual word deemed by Lawrence to be shocking enough to make readers reconsider sex (and then, through repetitive exposure to the obscene words in his text, find them less shocking and transgressive). However, he was aware that this intent might fail: the shock of Mellors’ obscene and lower class language seems to do little to awaken Hilda, as she leaves suggesting neither will find their affair has been ‘worth it’ (\textit{LCL}, 245). We also see in this use of language generic transgression, which I discussed in my Introduction. In generic transgression we see a provocative break from social norms that does not fully challenge the constitution of our society or ourselves, but can eventually be tolerated and managed. Unlike Bataille’s other sense of transgression, in which we see violence threaten humanity’s defining limits, the generic transgression of obscene language is local and contemporary and may, for example, only shock or threaten a particular social norm or era.

David Seelow points out that Connie and Mellors’ relationship ‘transgresses the taboo of marriage’ and that the narrative ‘enacts the dialectical movement between taboo (Clifford’s productive world) and transgression (the couple’s ecstatic, illicit sexual experience of expenditure).’\textsuperscript{119} Seelow also examines the ways in which

\textsuperscript{117} Shiach, p. 195.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 195.
\textsuperscript{119} Seelow, p. 122.
Connie’s orgasms are represented as loss, and suggests her experience of anal sex ‘involves what Bataille calls the dejecta; that is, those forms of animal sexuality: “excluded from a bright world which signified humanity.”’\textsuperscript{120} Seelow’s reading differs from my own in that he distinguishes between taboo and transgression as if they were each separate acts (economic productivity versus erotic experience) rather than one defining structure at the heart of humanity, two co-dependent elements in constant dynamic tension. But Seelow’s analysis is interesting because he comments on the text as an attempt to write transgression. Discussing Lawrence’s description of anal sex as a poignant death for Connie, Seelow writes: ‘Lawrence’s effort to imagine the sacred in this moment of ecstatic sexuality marks the closure of sexuality as the figure of transgression. Connie and Mellor’s next encounter leads her to pregnancy and their likely homogenization into a utilitarian economy.’\textsuperscript{121} Seelow suggests that on Bataillean terms this homogenisation means ‘Lawrence brings to closure the individual’s experience of transgression.’\textsuperscript{122} In the end, their relationship enters the human world of taboo and ‘transgression disappears when the limit is disclosed.’\textsuperscript{123}

Transgressive writing can, argues Seelow, only simulate transgression. Seelow is right that there is an inherent tension in communicating or, more specifically, writing eroticism which, as transgression, reaches something beyond or against our structures such as language. It may also be a valid point that the novel ends in silence when Connie and Mellors are on the verge of entering society together as an economic and family unit. But their sex was not just transgressive in its adulterousness, and Lawrence and Bataille do both attempt to write an orgasm – a transgression. Whilst some of Bataille’s novels represent the ‘little death’ of orgasm as silence – a little death of language – in others such as Madame Edwarda he does describe her ecstasy and the narrator’s ejaculations. And for his part, Lawrence does not merely attempt to simulate or describe the erotic in his text: contrary to Seelow’s perspective, I believe that Lawrence writes Connie’s most intense erotic experiences. He does not use words to clearly, coherently describe or represent orgasm. Instead, he writes words in such a way that challenges rational grammatical structures in favour of flowing lengthy and repetitive sentences. Language does not represent the force of an orgasm but enacts that force.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 123 quoting Bataille (AS, 62).
\textsuperscript{121} Seelow, p. 123. sic
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 123.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p.123.
Bataille’s modes of erotic transgression in language focus on poetry, and specific types or practises of poetry, whereas Lawrence fuses poetry and prose. Nin usefully explores how Lawrence’s prose becomes poetic. Nin calls *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* the ‘climax’ of Lawrence’s work since it is ‘at once his fleshliest and his most mystical work’ (*US*, 107). She suggests that through his use of poetic language, Lawrence provides the reader with a path to intuitional reason, or what I would term (as derived from the novel) the resurrection of the body. Nin argues that when Lawrence ‘projected his physical response into the thing he observed’ his writing took on a physicality itself and left a ‘physical impression’ on the reader, an argument similar to Bataille’s suggestion that poetry can have a carnal impact (*US*, 60). To express a whole fabric of experience and capture physical sensations in language Nin argues that Lawrence must fuse prose and poetry, must fuse the abstract meaning of words with a different meaning conveyed by the rhythm of the passage. In Lawrence’s prose ‘words almost cease to have meaning; they have a cadence, a flow, and Lawrence gives in to the cadence’ (*US*, 61). Poetry, lists, repetitions all create a rhythm of the prose, giving words meaning beyond their formal representation and making them a sensed, felt, physical presence. Similarly, Rachel Potter argues that Lawrence used ‘highly disorientating prose’ in a scene of sexual consummation in *Women in Love* to capture ‘the unconscious drives of the individual will.’¹²⁴ She argues that Lawrence is able to convey ‘a form of intuitive, bodily based knowledge which is beyond the reach of consciousness.’¹²⁵ Potter is less focused on the notion of eroticism as an experience of knowledge beyond the reason of consciousness as on Lawrence’s interest in ‘a subjectivity controlled by unconscious forms of will.’¹²⁶ But the point Potter makes is similar to that which Nin reads in Lawrence: he uses language to convey an experience that is intuitive, individual and carnal. Nin and Potter’s point that Lawrence’s writing is carnal or fleshly is interesting in light of Lawrence’s earlier essays in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, in which he describes the sexual role of the body. Eroticism is not just a carnal experience, it is driven by the ‘surcharged electric blood’ of the opposite sexes, which results in erotic contact (*F*, 107). The erotic is located in the body, and Lawrence’s erotic writing locates the body in language.

I believe that poetic prose can create the same erotic transgression as Bataille finds in poetry because it can also create an imperative towards a peak of emotion through voluptuous sounds and rhythms. One passage in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*,

---

¹²⁴ Potter, p. 53.
¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 53.
¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 53.
in which Connie reaches orgasm by going both deeper inside herself and further away from herself, and is ‘gone’ at the moment of climax, is helpful in demonstrating Lawrence’s poetic prose:

And it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves rising and heaving, heaving with a great swell, so that slowly her whole darkness was in motion, and she was ocean rolling its dark, dumb mass. Oh, and far down inside her the deeps parted and rolled asunder, in long, far-travelling billows, and ever, at the quick of her, the depths parted and rolled asunder, from the centre of soft plunging, as the plunger went deeper and deeper, touching lower, and she was deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed, and heavier the billows of her rolled away to some shore, uncovering her, and closer and closer plunged the palpable unknown, and further and further rolled the waves of herself away from herself, leaving her, till suddenly, in a soft, shuddering convulsion, the quick of all her plasm was touched, she knew herself touched, the consummation was upon her, and she was gone. She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman. (LCL, 174)

In this passage the syntactical structure of language usually provided by punctuation breaks down; the meaning created in the passage is other than that represented and defined by the words in a rational, mimetic system. Lawrence’s plentiful commas fracture the sentence rather than form it, and words and phrases are dislocated so that they do not have a rational, stable position within the sentence. The repetition of words such as ‘deeper’ and ‘plunging’ creates a rhythm akin to the waves that are used as an image to describe Connie’s physical and emotional experience. There is thus the fluidity of water and the ‘pulsing’ of waves in the form of the passage, as well as in the images it presents. The form and meaning of the passage are thus one, so that Lawrence’s words have a double significance, they not only describe Connie’s orgasm but they also repeat it and enact it – they are the erotic transgression.

The sacrificial mode of transgressive language Bataille describes is not present in this passage. Connie may be lost and born again, but no words representative of objects or other things are released from their utility. The ocean and its waves are a metaphor for Connie’s sensation: the ocean is not transformed, it is a point of reference we use to understand Connie’s experience. And yet the words here are more than merely representative: the passage builds, as does Connie’s sensation. Lawrence forces the words together so that the reader no
longer has time to consider their logical meaning but is carried away by the sense of urgency in their proximity to one another. When Lawrence says, 'as the plunger went deeper and deeper, touching lower, and she was deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed,' the phrase moves with the thrust of repetition and overflows with the urgency of the connective ‘and’, whilst building one phrase upon another without allowing the rest that comes at the end of a sentence. In this new context many words are transformed. Depth now implies both knowing and unknowing; it is paired (both by the meaning of the sentence and through the assonance) with disclosure, so that it is akin to revelation and understanding. But it is also repeated with a pace that overtakes us, and as the representational meaning of the word breaks down in the sentence the reader feels lost and ‘gone’ like Connie. The urgency and power of this depth is not frightening or awful because it is interwoven with the sibilance of words such as ‘soft’ and ‘rolled’, and with the image and syntactical reconstruction of gentle but mounting waves. The flux of the sentence cushions its power, so that when ‘suddenly, in a soft, shuddering convulsion, the quick of all her plasm was touched’, the sibilance and assonance of the sentence makes this touch gentle rather than cruel and violent.

Lawrence’s use of repetition could be an example of the ‘recurrence’ and ‘surge’ Bataille characterises within poetry, which can transform language beyond its usual ‘constraint’ but in doing so it demonstrates the inadequacies of language, the need to use its format to communicate experiences that are incommunicable through words alone (JP, 137). Scholars have noted that Bataille ‘shows the only thing worth communicating is the incommunicable itself,’ and it is unsurprising that Bataille, like Lawrence, negotiates the structure and format of language when trying to explore eroticism in his literature. At times Bataille describes orgasm through poetic techniques like metaphor, such as when the protagonist in Madame Edwarda explains his encounter with her: ‘her hand slid, I burst, suddenly, like a pane of glass shattering, flooding my clothes’ (ME, 149). The sentences that follow describe terror and shock, placing orgasm in the realm of horror. This description of orgasm is on the one hand poetic and abstract, using the image of a pane of glass, and on the other physical and dirty, in the flooded, soiled clothes. In other moments of eroticism Bataille’s texts disintegrate into long, undulating sentences split by ellipses of silence: ‘death itself was a guest at the feast, was there in what whorehouse nudity terms the pig-sticker’s stab……………………………………’ (ME, 151).

127 Mitchell and Winfree, p. xi.
Whilst Lawrence uses repetition and plentiful commas to fracture his sentences, Bataille uses ellipses and silence. Their techniques differ but, crucially, both of them are adapting literary language to communicate the incommunicable ecstasies of orgasm. We might think of this as the linguistic architecture of erotic literature: the linguistic structures that become threatened structures, breaking into silence and repetition as writers try to communicate an experience that threatens the structures we rely upon in our humanity. Eroticism calls for the syntactical architecture of language to adapt itself, and this call is answered in Bataille’s erotic mode of poetic transgression, in which the form (and structure, or architecture) of language creates the transgression.

Allison Pease argues that in the passage of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* discussed above, Lawrence appropriates pornography in his ‘stylistic repetition of words […] in a mimetic drawing out of the body’s movement towards climax.’ In her book *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* Pease argues that Lawrence does not undermine pornography because ‘he could not help but draw upon the linguistic conventions produced by that increasingly popular genre.’ Pease lists many of the tropes found in common pornography that are repeated in Lawrence’s text.

Whilst Pease may be right, the voluptuous language Lawrence uses and the syntactical structure of his text not only describe eroticism to us but create it. The orgasm is not only represented but recreated, or rather presented and created at once. Language transgresses itself by becoming meaning as well as representing or mimetically mirroring a separate meaning, a separate reality, and this transgression makes it erotic. The dark waves that rise in Connie climax in her death and rebirth. This is Lawrence’s effort to write a transcendent and regenerative eroticism, which he is at pains to differentiate from baseness and pornography. If we compare this to the shattering pane of glass Bataille’s protagonist describes when pleasured by a prostitute, an image is followed by a flood of semen, bringing the reader back to the

---

129 Ibid., p. 155.
130 The tropes Pease identifies range from the title’s sexualisation of an aristocratic lady, and the description of Connie’s pleasure in forceful and even volcanic terms, to the portrayal of anal sex as ‘a final frontier’ which, although invoked by Lawrence to ‘violate cultural taboos for his own ends,’ assimilates pornography to such a degree that the transgression is undermined (p. 160). Pease is not alone in claiming that other forms of sexual fiction influenced Lawrence. In her article ‘The Romance of Cliché: E. M. Hull, D. H. Lawrence, and Interwar Erotic Fiction’, Laura Frost explains how Edith Maud Hull’s sadomasochistic and sexually explicit Orientalist fantasy novel *The Sheik* (1919) influenced Lawrence and can be seen in the female lust for an exotic other. Laura Frost, ‘The Romance of Cliché: E. M. Hull, D. H. Lawrence, and Interwar Erotic Fiction’, in *Bad Modernisms*, pp. 94-118 (p. 97).

---

125
carnal reality of the sex act and the unromantic image of soiled clothes, Lawrence’s erotic is comparatively chaste. Yet both Bataille and Lawrence write erotic transgression and enact it in their texts, with different images and different approaches to transgressive language. It is important to note that the poetic language I am discussing here is tailored to both describe an erotic sensation in, for example, Connie Chatterley and potentially also create an erotic sensation for the reader. If it were simply to do one or the other it would not be transgressive in a way that is inherently erotic. The content and form work together to create, rather than just communicate, eroticism and in this combination poetic prose becomes erotically transgressive. In other words, we read about carnal and erotic acts in language which, in its voluptuousness and cadence, recreates that carnality and is hence erotically transgressive; if we were instead reading about a butter horse the voluptuous sounds would not be doubling the content in such an impactful way.

Nin’s *Unprofessional Study* of Lawrence raises some of the themes in Bataille’s essay on Jacques Prévert. She discusses the carnality of Lawrence and his use of poetic language in very different terms compared to Bataille, but to the same end: that modes of (erotic) transgression in language are elaborated. In her own fiction Nin describes erotic events in language which is itself transgressive, but there is also a clear link to spatial structures in her poetic configuration of transgression. In the following section of this chapter I will discuss how she does this and compare her architecture and language of eroticism to those we have examined in Lawrence, again using Bataille’s thinking.

**‘Building and adorning’: House of Incest**

Whilst writing her first book, *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*, Nin was writing diaries and therein discussing her sexual encounters with her husband and her lover, the writer Henry Miller. She was also writing early drafts of her first published work of fiction, *House of Incest*. In this short novel, written in a surrealist style that might be described as a prose poem, the plot and events involving the narrator are obscured by rich descriptions of sensations that are situated in a confused and illusory house.131 The literary construction of a house, which is echoed on another geographical scale in Nin’s later novels of the *Cities of the Interior* series, has been interpreted by critics as a discussion of the structure of...

---

selfhood or identity. Nin herself has compared the structure of the home to the structure of the self, but scholarly focus on this often neglects the erotic nature of the house.

Architecture and houses – in particular the relationship between real houses and imagined or dreamed structures – are themes that resonate throughout Nin’s work. In July 1932 Nin was writing House of Incest and relating it to writing ‘surrealistically’ and to ideas we see in her Unprofessional Study of Lawrence, when she talks about ‘the symbolism of our lives […] on two levels, the human and the poetic’ and her role as producing ‘a distillation’ and ‘visionary perception’ in her writing. At the same time, she writes about ‘the relation between architecture and the character of people,’ specifically their houses representing ‘their emotional attitude.’

She says she has been reading Spengler on ‘the Orientals’ and their houses and writes: ‘No windows on the outside, open on the inside, into a patio, a secret intimate life. And then the rooms all linked together by this patio. Luxury concealed. Thoughts concealed.’ In her next diary entry she talks about the inside of a manor house she has never entered, and how she ‘knows’ how it is furnished and what its rooms are like.

Nin projects her imagination into houses but also believes they represent the emotional state of those living in them, suggesting she can project herself into a new emotional state, or express her own state, by describing its house. In Anaïs Nin and the Remaking of the Self: Gender, Modernism, and Narrative Identity, Diane Richard-Allerdyce reads in Nin’s work (including fiction, criticism and her diaries) ‘a process of “narrative recovery”‘ against despair. Richard-Allerdyce combines psychoanalytic theory and modernist criticism to read Nin, and situates Nin within the body of modernism in particular due to Nin’s exploration of boundaries: ‘Acknowledging the paradox that Modern literature can encompass both flux and boundaries was a cornerstone of Nin’s own narrative theories.’

---

133 Ibid., p. 124.
134 Ibid., p. 124.
135 Ibid., p. 125.
137 Richard-Allerdyce, p. 5.
‘psychological rather than external landscapes’ therefore distinguish her as a modernist for Richard-Allerdyce.\textsuperscript{138}

The start of \textit{House of Incest}, which is also the birth of the narrator, is one of water and flux. Nin describes a barrier-less world which has a ‘changing face’ and the narrator has ‘chameleon eyes’ and an ‘uncompleted self.’\textsuperscript{139} There is little division between self and world: neither is distinct or complete but both are changing and becoming. Nin writes, ‘I sway and float, stand on boneless toes listening for distant sounds, sounds beyond the reach of human ears, see things beyond the reach of human eyes’ (\textit{HI}, 3). This statement is reminiscent of Bataille’s claim that poetry ‘gives expression to what exceeds the possibilities of common language’ and ‘uses words to express what overturns the order of words’ (\textit{JP}, 138).

In its poetic prose and in the scenes it conjures, Nin’s novel is clear in its transgressive potential. Barriers of humanity are disintegrating – or arguably, if this is a watery birth, not yet in existence – and experiences beyond human senses and reason are opening to the protagonist and, through this inhuman channel, to the reader. That which exists but which humans cannot hear or see, the otherness which Bataille would claim is the sacred and which is also erotic, mystic and poetic: this is Nin’s topic which she intends to write through the form of a building, a house.

Her next act is to enter a building and ‘swim through wall-less rooms’ (\textit{HI}, 4). Dream and sleep cover ‘the rigid city, the rigidity of the new world’ and create ‘portals’ which slide open to allow entry in a dream state (\textit{HI}, 4). Nin’s surrealist imagination tears down rigid structures of self and the city – and also of language, because in this other world ‘the water transmitted the lives and the loves, the words and the thoughts’ (\textit{HI}, 4). Communication becomes fluid. Nin has refigured the defining structures of our humanity to reveal ‘an ecstasy of dissolution’ (\textit{HI}, 5).

Before the novel takes the reader into the house of incest, its narrator describes a tour of imagined places, indoors and out. The geography of the novel is rich: the sea, an island, the streets and windows of the city all appear as the narrator and her companion Sabina pass through various houses and rooms (\textit{HI}, 10–12). Some places are described by their appearance but most often they are described through the physical impact on the body and the senses or their psychological impact on the self. For example, there is a room with ‘a ceiling threatening me like a pair of open scissors’ and a house that is ‘empty, sun-gla\textsuperscript{139}zed, reflectively alive’ (\textit{HI}, 17).

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{139} An\textsuperscript{a}is Nin, \textit{House of Incest} (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1994), p. 3. Hereafter \textit{HI}. 

Physical and psychological buildings interact: describing fear, the narrator explains her terror of ‘silence and of what will come out of this silence towards me and knock on the walls of my temples’ (HI, 31). Her response is to ‘knock on the wall, on the floor, to drive the silence away’ (HI, 31). Hence the fear of silence is experienced physically, in her temples that are ‘walls’, and she interacts with the walls of her room to banish the silence and the fear. Recent studies in modernist literature, for example the work of Ulrike Maude, look to the philosophy of phenomenology to discuss ways in which embodiment and sensory experience are foregrounded in the text, to present identity as bodily and perception as wedded to the senses. Maude suggests that in Samuel Beckett’s text, ‘hearing promises a certain expansion of corporal boundaries’ and that it ‘traverses obstacles that vision cannot overcome, transporting the subject across spatial and temporal confines.’

Whilst she does not prioritise hearing, Nin’s text here foregrounds the sensory but also psychological body, fusing phenomenological perspectives with psychoanalytic principles. Fleshly and psychological experience are interwoven through Nin’s imagined architecture. The metaphor of her temples being walls in this passage draws the body and the building together; this is a technique Nin often employs to double buildings and bodies. She writes that ‘The breath of human beings is like the steam of a laundry house’ or that ‘houses wink and open their bellies’ (HI: 16; 24). Architecture is a lived, carnal experience and the body is an inanimate, physical structure. In Chapter One I discussed David Farrell Krell’s argument that Bataille’s writing challenges the conception of space and body as neutral by writing an orgasmic body. Nin’s fiction achieves a similar impact as she uses poetry to blur the boundaries between architecture and the body, so that the sensing body becomes architectural and buildings become animate, even communicative through a wink of the eye. Further, the mind becomes architectural and the self becomes carnal, because feelings such as fear are also played out architecturally and experienced physically. Nin’s poetic metaphors create a barrier-less world of flux, not unlike the one she describes in the opening passages of the novel.

At times Nin’s poetic fiction closely maps Bataille’s transgression. She writes:

141 This is not to say that Nin was directly influenced by phenomenology but, as Maude herself states, modernists and phenomenologists shared certain concerns and were working in the same era (Maude, p. 5) much as Bataille, Lawrence and Nin were.
142 Krell, p. 146.
The world is too small. I get tired of playing the guitar, of knitting, and walking, and bearing children. Men are small, and passions are short-lived. I get furious at stairways, furious at doors, at walls, furious at everyday life which interferes with the continuity of ecstasy. (HI, 28)

Here Nin turns the narrator’s dissatisfaction with daily tasks – many of which are associated with limited, traditional female roles – into a fury at architectural, physical limitations and boundaries. The ‘continuity of ecstasy’ outside those walls and structures – physical and metaphysical – echoes Bataille’s description of erotic transgression in which we glimpse the threatening and enthralling continuity against which the self is defined. Transgression is present in Nin’s erotic, as it is in Lawrence’s, yet there are divergences between all three thinkers. One such divergence is that for Nin, limitations and boundaries are frustrating and are related to sexuality and gender, rather than being a necessary part of the human condition as they are to Bataille. But for all three, transgression takes on a sense of spatiality.

Nin has blurred the defining human structures of the body and of architecture so that both overflow into one another in the ‘continuity of ecstasy.’ This is transgressive because of the tension she portrays between one defining structure and another (whether body, building or the psychology of the unified self) and between each of these and its undoing (continuity). Further, it is revealed through the poetic technique of metaphor. If a house winks and opens its belly, it is sacrificed in the first mode of poetic transgression that Bataille describes in ‘From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert’. The object that the word ‘house’ signifies for us has been sacrificed because we now imagine a carnal building that has a belly and communicates with us, with a wink. We can apply Bataille’s terminology here but Nin has her own, which would be to say that her novel is creating her own form of intuitional reasoning or central physical vision, which she identified in Lawrence.

The influence Lawrence has over Nin’s thinking is evident in her Unprofessional Study and House of Incest but he is by no means the only influence. Nin’s suggestion that Lawrence undertakes an evaluation of all things in terms of life and death (US, 16) is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s revaluation of all values,143 and her discussion of the subconscious revealed in his work reflects her interest in psychoanalysis.144 Yet the narrator of House of Incest refers to states of sleep which

143 See, for example, Nietzsche’s Foreword to Twilight of the Idols, trans. by Richard Polt (Cambridge: Hackett, 1997), pp. 3-4.
144 Whilst writing her Unprofessional Study Nin undertook psychoanalysis with René Allendy, and she later saw Otto Rank. For details see Bair, pp. 154-8 and pp. 186-199.
lend the house a dream element. Moments of obscurity in Nin’s account of Lawrence, such as her impressionistic focus on symbols and dreams, and her lack of development of terms such as the subconscious flow of life, the body’s genie and intuition, is likely to be caused by her engagement in surrealism. Nin’s study analyses binary oppositions as central to Lawrence’s fiction, but in surrealism terms, thus emphasising the reality/dream divide.

Nin focuses on the importance of the imagination in Lawrence’s work, arguing it is crucial to the literary impact of his symbols. Symbols are Lawrence’s chosen form of communication and means of exploring the essence of life. Nin opens her work by claiming Lawrence’s world ‘cannot be entered through the exercise of one faculty alone: there must be a threefold desire of intellect, of imagination, and of physical feeling’ (US, 13). This world of interpenetrative layers can only be expressed through symbolisation and imagination. Things alternate and intertwine because of the mobility and flux at the core of life, because of ‘The becoming always seething and fluctuating’ (US, 32). Symbols are representative beyond their immediacy, revealing a current of life of which they are only the simplest visible crystal, and the imagination complicates and deepens to reveal different aspects of a thing. Symbolisation and imagination thus work together to create a depth and volume in literature.

Nin’s ‘symbols’ are similar to André Breton’s images in his 1924 Manifesto of Surrealism, which epitomise the revolutionary potential of the imagination. In an image two different ideas or elements are drawn together not by reason but by imaginative potential, and together they create a spark that gives the image its power. Breton explains that it is from ‘the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, the light of the image,’ and this light is so powerful that ‘the images appear like the only guideposts of the mind.’ For Breton, the image is the key to accessing the deeper levels of the mind and for Nin, Lawrence’s symbols activate the imagination to probe new depths of the experience of being alive. Nin’s ‘subconscious flow of life’ is a surrealist interpretation of what Lawrence determines as the essence of human life. Nin argued that Lawrence’s deeper plane of experience is created not only by his use of symbolisation and imagination but also by his writing of what she calls bodily dreams. Nin argues that there is no boundary between dream and reality, and that people who believe in this boundary ‘want to return to the first peace and security’ just as those who believe in absolutes try to create a stable ideal (US, 30). Imagination draws the dream-reality from the

145 The narrator ‘slept’ beneath levels or storm and ‘awoke at dawn’, (Ht: 4; 5).
146 Breton, p. 37.
symbol, which exists on the level of everyday reality. For example, Ursula’s encounter with the horses in *The Rainbow* is for Nin a bodily and emotional dream since in Lawrence’s fiction ‘dream and reality are often interwoven just as they are in our own natures’ and just as reason and intuition are interwoven (*US*, 30). The dream initiates a journey into the symbolic and imaginative; the horses are symbols of Ursula’s current state of life but they are symbols complicated and deepened by the dream’s imaginative character. Nin believes this passage in Lawrence forces us to use intuitional reason, forces us to use our imaginative faculties to relate to and understand the symbol of the dream.

The *House of Incest* is a bodily dream, like the ones Nin explores in Lawrence – but the architecture of the dream is significant. As the protagonist enters the house, the poetic and architectural transgression becomes erotic. Nin’s house has familiar elements – rooms, stairs, windows and a garden – but their appearance, use and connections between these elements take us away from a traditional home and into a surreal building born of an eroticised imagination. Nin writes:

> The rooms were chained together by steps – no room was on a level with another – and all the steps were deeply worn. There were windows between the rooms, little spying-eyed windows, so that one might talk in the dark from room to room, without seeing the other’s face. (*HI*, 33)

Communication is transfigured by the house. People can stand in different rooms on different levels, unable to see one another in the dark, and yet they can communicate with one another. Nin describes ‘a room which could not be found’ in the house, ‘a room without a window where the mind and blood coalesced in a union without orgasm and rootless like those of fishes. The promiscuity of glances, of phrases, like sparks marrying in space’ (*HI*, 34). The architecture is fully eroticised by this description, in which a room is a spatial embodiment of a promiscuous marriage, defined by communication between two, coming together without coming.

The journey outside (or maybe further into) the house brings a city and a forest. The city outside the house is ‘rent by lightning’ and is left ‘sinking with the horror of obscenity’ (*HI*, 36). The forest is reminiscent of Octave Mirbeau’s *The Torture Garden*, which Nin cites as an inspiration.\(^{147}\) Bodies and plants merge as there are ‘decapitated trees’ and ‘women carved out of bamboo […] faces cut in two

\(^{147}\) *Stuhlmann*, p. xi.
by the sculptor's knife' (Hi, 36). Frightening at times, Nin's transgression is always extreme in its physicality, whether the site is a body, a building or a landscape that is transfigured by sensuality. In his first Manifesto Breton states:

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.\textsuperscript{148}

The beauty and liberation of the surreal plane of life are that which Breton aims for and that which Nin finds in Lawrence's fiction and his intuitional reason. And this attempt to interpenetrate dream and reality, sensuality and logic, is evident in Nin's own fiction, particularly in the boundaries she blurrs - architecturally and imaginatively - in her House of Incest. Deborah L. Parsons says that in House of Incest, 'the female narrator lives almost entirely within a surrealistic dreamworld of her own making, in order to escape the fragmentation and facelessness threatened by the city outside.'\textsuperscript{149} Whilst this is true, the dreamworld of House of Incest is not simply an escape but an act of construction. Nin is creating a place of eroticism. Parsons explains that Nin and other female writers 'construct heterotopic cities within the pages of their texts, combining the real with the imaginary to create their own psycho-urban space.'\textsuperscript{150} But there is also a psycho-erotic space which, reflecting the intimacy of erotic desires and experiences, is located in the private space of a house rather than the vaster, public level of the urban city (where her Cities of the Interior novels are located, for example). Rather than reclaiming and reimagining the public realm through the act of writing, in House of Incest Nin reclaims and reimagines her sexuality. Her later works of fiction continue this approach. There is not the scope here to examine the complexities in all of Nin's five novels that comprise the series Cities of the Interior, but it is worth noting that there are continued tropes such as the double city, which includes an interior labyrinth of human emotions and an exterior physical inhabited city.\textsuperscript{151} Two examples of the architectural embodiment of emotions (which are thereby doubles

\textsuperscript{148} Breton, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{149} Deborah L. Parsons, Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 167.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{151} The interior city in Seduction of the Minotaur is an underground labyrinth the protagonist played in as a child, and also 'the subterranean chambers of memory.' Anais Nin, Seduction of the Minotaur (Athens: Swallow Press/ Ohio University Press, 1961) pp. 72-77.
of the architecture in the *House of Incest* are the ruined city of *Seduction of the Minotaur*\textsuperscript{152} and ever-expanding building that is the heart in *The Four-Chambered Heart*\textsuperscript{153}.

Like *House of Incest*, *The Four-Chambered Heart* explicitly links the physicality of the erotic and loving body with architectural structures. The childhood home of Nin's protagonist Djuna is as surreal as the house of incest, and similarly takes on a metaphysical role in representing Djuna's body.

The house in which she had lived as a child was the house of the spirit which does not live blindly but is ever, out of passionate experience, building and adorning its four-chambered heart — an extension and expansion of the body, with many delicate affinities establishing themselves between her and the doors and passageways, the lights and shadows of her outward abode, until she was incorporated into it in the entire expressiveness of what is outward as related to the inner significance, until there was no more distinction between outward and inward at all.\textsuperscript{154}

Nin's narrator discusses the four-chambered heart metaphysically as the building which represents, and is the form taken by, emotional connections with other people. Relationships are extensions built onto the heart which thereby create a complicated architecture which links the interior and exterior of the human until there is 'no more distinction' – no boundary. Nin writes buildings that are undoing their own walls and yet the architecture remains, and this tension between architecture and its collapse is transgression. It is architectural through sensual and confused descriptions, a different use of language to create architectural transgression than we saw in Bataille's Critical Dictionary entries on architecture. It is also notable that the text above, in which Nin writes about 'an extension and expansion of the body' is described in an extended sentence, in which commas act as hinges between further images and thoughts. The sentence grows and images are introduced like the passageways and rooms the sentence describes: the linguistic architecture recreates the physical architecture.

Parsons discusses how women are both locked out of the city (because early twentieth century morality reserves autonomy for men) but also part of it. Parsons uses Nin's diaries to interpret Nin's *Cities of the Interior* and other novels as

\textsuperscript{152} *Seduction of the Minotaur*, pp. 59-62.
\textsuperscript{154} *The Four-Chambered Heart*, p. 77.
creations of new, imagined cities born from the psychological experience of Nin and her female protagonists, so that ‘the exterior and interior cities become one, as the urban landscape acts as both a thematic and structural model.’ Nin describes streets which in turn are used to describe the characters who walk them, through descriptions of their psychological and emotional responses to their surroundings. As such her fiction is often configured by urban architecture, yet it is interesting that Nin’s construction of her erotic imagination and expression of internal psychology take the form of a house.

In an essay that analyses the shifting boundaries of the domestic, Tim Putnam discusses the history of theories of the home and notes ‘the petty-bourgeois model in which domestic privacy is celebrated as a separate sphere for the creative achievements of the protected female.’ He argues that ‘Home-making establishes proximate relations between aspects of spatial and artefactual order, social practice, discourse and the imagination.’ It is important that we consider the ways in which Nin’s ‘home-making’ is an imaginative act establishing her relations with the social order outside the home.

It is possible that Nin’s *House of Incest* is the creative achievement of a female protected by her banker husband: perhaps the site of her sexual creation was limited to the home because women were allowed precious little public autonomy at that time. Whilst women like Madame Edwarda may have been comfortable convulsing on streets and under public arches, scholars have pointed out that the city was not entirely open to all women. But Nin rejected such protocol: her diaries track her movements across the globe from a young age and, at the time of writing *House of Incest*, she was regularly taking walks and meeting Henry Miller, amongst others, in Clichy and at night in streets cafes and bars. As Anna Snaith points out:

155 Parsons, p. 166. For a full description of Nin’s novels and her own descriptions of Fez as the city of her imagination and diary in her journal (in particular the volume *Fire*) see pp. 159-172.
158 Parsons, for example, notes that women gained more freedom in accessing the city during the late nineteenth century onwards but this increasing freedom was ‘limited’, pp. 40-43.
The situation of women in the city had to have been a combination of danger and freedom, of conspicuousness and anonymity [...]. The transitions taking place in the period, the boundaries and codes being transgressed by women’s presence, mean that their purpose and position within the city was multifarious.160

Whilst Nin’s *Cities of the Interior* novels and indeed sections of *House of Incest* demonstrate the changing boundaries between public and private areas and women’s access to them, the site of eroticism in *House of Incest* is a renegotiated house rather than a renegotiated city. I believe a house was the site for this erotic act of imagination due to its intimacy. And where would incest take place other than inside the household unit and within the walls of the home? Nin does not just place sexual transgression in the home, she fabricates a house of it. Eroticism is the material of the novel and of the walls, staircases and windows.

Geographer Gillian Rose charts a history of the body in Western society to explain that the white man was privileged in his ability to ‘transcend his embodiment by seeing his body as a simple container for the pure consciousness it held inside.’161 Women and black people were instead ‘others […] trapped inside their brute materiality.’162 Rose explains that female fertility increased their significance as physical bodies and meant that ‘women were understood as instinctive, natural mothers’ with their place ‘therefore argued to be in the privacy of the domestic home.’163

The reduction of a life and a consciousness to the physicality of the body and to a second container, the home, was a challenge female writers had to overcome.164 Jane Garrity has discussed how British female modernists including Virginia Woolf depicted the body and the architecture of the home as part of their ‘construction of new national fictions’ during a period of crisis in Britain, between the wars.165 She suggests that ‘spatial arrangements reflect and reinforce gender

---

161 Gillian Rose, ‘Some notes towards thinking about the spaces of the future’ in *Mapping the Futures*, pp. 70-83 (p. 73).
162 Rose, p. 73.
163 Rose, p. 73.
164 For an analysis of how another woman writing in a similar period to Nin, Virginia Woolf, has been associated with the private sphere of the home and its related concerns, see Snaith, in particular pp. 8-9 and pp. 11-13.
inequalities’ and that a reorganisation of domestic space could have political significance.\textsuperscript{166} She states:

> If the home is an imagined collectivity that has national significance, and if, as several theorists have suggested, the home itself is a figure for woman, then we can begin to understand why, for several British female modernists, the task of rebuilding the edifices constructed by the male imaginary is of paramount importance.\textsuperscript{167}

Writing the home was a way of writing a new female space, and the metaphor was significant for rethinking the body and also writing, as Garrity points out in one example: ‘Woolf deploys spatial and architectural metaphors to critique masculine literary space as inhospitable and to suggest that women must rebuild the dwelling.’\textsuperscript{168}

Whilst Nin was not politically motivated (nor British, like the women Garrity discusses) she deploys similar tactics. Her aim is not to write her own nation but her own eroticism, and like Woolf she uses architectural metaphors to create a literary space for her female imaginary, which is to be a bodily erotic. She doesn’t just critique patriarchal space in her novels, she uses language and literature to become an architect of an entirely new house – and an architect of her own erotic sexuality in so doing. Nin’s body is not limited to the domestic sphere of the home: the house of incest is born of the erotic sexuality of her body. The *House of Incest* is an erotic act: it creates Nin’s sexual state, a double of her own erotic emotional self. Just as the characters in her novels are often doubles of herself or other characters in other novels, so the house is a double of the text that creates it and the woman who creates it. This plethora is in itself an act of erotic excess – a mirror of an erotic state, reflected in its own image repeatedly.

Discussing the relationship between modernism and spatiality, Andrew Thacker suggests that the stream of consciousness technique is evidently temporal, but it also has a spatial element because it is ‘a method for moving between inner thoughts and outer reality.’\textsuperscript{169} He explains, ‘the interiority of a psychic space is often profoundly informed by exterior social spaces.’\textsuperscript{170} Nin is doing precisely this, and

\textsuperscript{166} Garrity, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p. 304.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., p. 304.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., p. 5.
when she discusses building and adorning the four-chambered heart, which she understands as an extension of the body, she is also building and adorning a fictional architecture which is both a reflection and a renegotiation of the social spaces available to her.

The final chapter of *House of Incest* begins, ‘I walked into my own body, seeking peace…’ again making the body a space or structure that can be entered (*HI*, 43). This chapter includes a mythical conversation with ‘The Modern Christ’ (*HI*, 47) whose body opens and interacts with the garden, which presents the same notion (although through a different approach) to Lawrence’s protagonist in ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’ sensing the elements around her and in her garden (*W*, 66). Beyond the house of incest is ‘daylight’ and the final image of the novel is of a woman dancing towards that daylight (*HI*: 49; 51). The journey in Nin’s novel repeats Lawrence’s transgressive journeys out into nature, away from architecture, and in Nin’s novel, out into the sun. The daylight at the end of Nin’s novel could be a symbol of hope and light, or of energy and excess as it is for Bataille. However, for Nin the movement is not an attempt to find a place that will accommodate transgression, because in Nin’s novel a transgressive place is created through the poetry and rich descriptions within the novel – a house of incest is created and it doubles and communicates the erotically ecstatic body.

The link between writing one’s eroticism and writing as architecture is articulated by Nin herself in her diaries. When Nin describes moving through a building or city, her sentences often recreate this process: running on with commas acting as doorways or hinges linking images as they would link rooms. Her linguistic architecture thus re-presents the literary and erotic architecture she writes, and writes about, in her texts. She describes her diary as a labyrinth and also describes it as having ‘walls and fortresses’ through which she will forever walk.171 Her diary is a city, but it is also an act of sensuality: ‘I can find no other way of loving my Henry than filling pages with him when he is not here to be caressed and bitten.’172 Writing is an act of building but it is also an act of erotic love: the *House of Incest* combines all three – writing, eroticism and constructing a building – at once.

---

Literary and Architectural Eroticisms

D. H. Lawrence and Anaïs Nin approach the architecture and transgressive poetics of eroticism differently. The spatial sites Lawrence chooses in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* create an architecture for eroticism – a space in which eroticism, transgression, can take place. The sites in *House of Incest* and some of Nin’s later novels are not simply sites, they are linked to and form part of the human psychology, sensual experience and self. Nin hereby creates an architecture of eroticism – a spatial structure that is erotic and is transgressive in and of itself.

With regard to the other defining structure I discuss, language, both writers create a literature of erotic transgression using modes of poetic transgression. Their examination or disclosure of the erotic both presents eroticism as transgression and creates transgression. They both write about erotic experiences as breaking with everyday experiences and challenging the defining structures of human civilisation. Within their literature they negotiate these structures, including architecture, language and the boundaries of the human subject, to convey eroticism as transgression. In Lawrence’s fiction, erotic experience is akin to sacrifice and death (even though his discursive essays present it as transcendence and communion) and in Nin’s fiction it is akin to the body’s boundaries becoming translucent so the subject can sensually communicate with other phenomena beyond it (such as rooms, buildings and ‘ecstatic continuity’). They both explore the notion that the defining structures of human life (the boundaries of the body, the self, architecture and language) are called into question by erotic experience but without that humanity being lost completely. Erotic transgression is, therefore, a dynamic tension between those structures of humanity and their other, which would also be their undoing.

Between the architectures for and of eroticism on the one hand and transgressive literature on the other is a third notion: the linguistic architecture of erotic literature. One of the reasons erotic literature is erotic, rather than just transgressive in general (aside from the argument that any form of transgression implies eroticism) is that it describes erotic acts. The voluptuousness of sounds, Bataille argues, elicits a carnal response but this is in part because form and content interact. Lawrence’s repeated soft and sibilant sounds, Bataille’s broken exclamations and ellipses, even Nin’s expansive passage-like sentences are the linguistic architecture of erotically transgressive literature. This linguistic architecture differs for each of them but relates to Bataille’s erotic mode of poetic transgression, which relies upon form over (and yet in relation to) content to create transgression. It is also significant that whilst Bataille describes the erotic mode of poetic
transgression in 'From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert', he only gives examples of the other, sacrificial mode. Lawrence and Nin bring Bataille’s voluptuous poetics to life in their texts, writing transgression in ways that we can identify through his philosophy but which also expand upon it through new examples that differ from his own use of language to create transgression, such as he does in the Critical Dictionary and Madame Edwarda. The content of their erotics also differs from his. Bataille explored eroticism in relation to obscenity, waste and baseness as he sought to explore the role of shame in sex and the relationship between attraction and repulsion. Yet the erotic is human before it is perverse or extreme, and in Lawrence and Nin we see how Bataille’s philosophy of eroticism bears out in erotics that are not necessarily identified as obscene. I have said that Lawrence’s erotic fiction included generic transgression (as well as Bataillean transgression) in the form of love that crossed social class and marital boundaries, but many of the erotic acts in this novel are heteronormative. Nin’s eroticism is more surreal and hints at incest, but her sensory descriptions do not depict perversion or baseness to describe erotic human contact.

It is significant that these three thinkers, exploring eroticism during the same 40-year period, present the erotic through themes of architecture, sacrifice and through modes of poetic language. There is a clear convergence in their presentation of eroticism and the themes through which they explore it, even as their perspectives on these themes differ. Some of these themes are already understood to be relevant to modernism.

Regarding spatiality and architecture, for example, Thacker states that modernist writing often oscillates between the ‘twin spatial visions’ of space and place. In geographical theory ‘space indicates a sense of movement, of history, of becoming’ and ‘place is often thought to imply a static sense of location, of being, or of dwelling.’ Thacker suggests that critics should consider how places represented in modernist texts might ‘offer an endorsement or contestation of official representations of space.’ This reflects Bataille’s argument that architecture represents the ‘ideal nature’ of society and his Critical Dictionary entries contest that ideal, aligning him with Thacker’s description of modernism. If modernists are interested in new structures of society and individual consciousness, contesting the ‘official representation’ of spaces, or of specific places and buildings, would have an

---

173 The theory, philosophy, literature and architecture I discuss in this thesis fall broadly within that 40 year period between Lawrence’s ‘Love’ (1918) and Bataille’s Eroticism (1957).
174 Thacker, p. 13.
175 Ibid., p. 13.
176 Ibid., p. 3.
impact on human civilisation. I believe this is what Lawrence was aiming to achieve. The attitude or soul of the people is described as ugly and having lost humanity, and the architecture of their physical environment reflects this too. Structures of society and human civilisation are mirrored in the human being and in the built environment. Lawrence’s characters escape the architecture of society in their eroticism – he offers us alternative sites for the regeneration he wants society to undergo.

The challenge of using language to communicate the incommunicable – of using words, grammatical structures and literary formats to convey physicality and sensual experience – could also be interpreted as a modernist concern. Indeed, there are recent studies in modernist literature which discuss how the body and sensory perception are manifest in the text and its representations. Modernism pushed boundaries and taboos, as the trial of Lady Chatterley and the scholarly research on censorship have shown. It is relevant to modernist studies that Nin and Lawrence both write about eroticism or, as I have argued, do not merely write about it but write it, by creating it through literary transgression.

Regarding eroticism in relation to modernism, I have argued that scholars have failed to identify the importance of eroticism due to a focus on sex interpreted as gender or orientation. Whilst collections such as Modernist Erotics start to analyse the characteristics of erotic modernist fiction, there is still little written on why eroticism was relevant to modernist interests, and what the textual themes and devices they employed to represent and create eroticism tell us about eroticism itself. It is significant for Bataille’s thinking that both writers present eroticism as transgression and create transgression in their erotic texts. It is significant because both writers proffer other ideas as to what eroticism is: Lawrence describes an ideal transcendence achieved through communing without subsuming otherness, and Nin, without offering a notion of what eroticism is, connects it to the relationship between the body, dream realms and literature. Yet their presentation of the erotic maps onto Bataille’s description of transgression: they describe and even create transgression – of physical structures and spaces, within language, and of other structures such as the relationship between the body and the mind, the senses and the self.

This could be because they share Bataille’s cultural heritage. Some of the figures that influenced and interested Bataille directly and indirectly were also significant for Lawrence and Nin: Freud, Nietzsche and Breton amongst others. The shared approach to eroticism could be grounded in notions of humanity, sex and

177 See, for example, Ulrika Maude, Beckett, Technology and the Body.
178 For example, Potter’s Modernism and Democracy.
literary development that were common to their time. Our understanding of modernism is continually changing and expanding. Perhaps the relationship this chapter has uncovered is between modernism and the notion of transgression, not only in the sense that Mao and Walkowitz note (of modernism challenging common social and literary norms, although this observation is valid too), but of the notion that there are defining structures essential to our humanity that are less stable than we would like to imagine. The unreliable narrator, the stream of consciousness technique, experiments with new formats of literature and language – these all questioned the notion of a unified and dependable selfhood and identity, and the ability of language to communicate our experiences. The commonality could therefore lie in the notion of transgression – that the otherness the structures of humanity are defined against is by that definition always there, threatening the stability of those structures. Eroticism would therefore be of interest both as an instance of transgression and as a topic through which to explore the notion of structures of humanity and their transgression. Future studies in modernist literature could elaborate on the practice of eroticism further, and also consider Bataille’s relationship to modernism in more detail.

Continuing my current task of elaborating what transgression might look like, my thesis will now move from one structure to another. Words and grammar structure and rationalise our experience into something intelligible and communicable, and our built environment is the physical structure our bodies inhabit and act within. In the next and final chapter of my thesis, I will consider this relationship in reverse: how does architecture create or express erotic transgression, and what is the relationship between these two metaphysical structures – language and architecture – which form our experiences and our civilisation?
Chapter Three
Architectural Transgression: Eroticism, Poetry and Excess in Architecture

The Possibility of Transgressive Architecture

Anaïs Nin’s architectural transgression found a literary format. The walls were made of words, and the words conveyed erotic impulses and experiences; transgression was architectural because she created a house of incest in her literature. In this final chapter I explore the different ways in which transgression may be possible in architecture. The practice of transgressive architecture is a humanist matter: it is about renegotiating the structures we use to interpret the world, experience it and live it – in Bataille’s terms, the structures we use to be human.

There are many different ideas put forward as to ways in which architecture might be transgressive. The issue of Architectural Design dedicated to transgression, mentioned earlier, proposes different examples of the architecture of transgression. Most of these conform to the notion set out by the editors of the issue, in which transgression is a break from the norm: ‘pushing the boundaries of what architecture is, and what it could or even should be’ and transgression as ‘crossing social and political barriers.’ In the majority of the articles transgressive architecture either breaks from the usual processes of production or types of buildings (products) created, is used to drive cultural change due to the (perceived) privileged cultural position of architecture, or does both of these. I am less interested in the first of these three which in Architectural Design includes anything from un-commissioned architecture to architecture designed by people who are not trained architects, and is concerned with the boundaries of professional conduct rather than the defining structures of humanity. However, the second is relevant to my project because it implies the intention of the architect to use transgression to create cultural change. The italics in the last sentence highlight three different elements which I find interesting: all hinge upon the notion that architects can influence political and social power structures through their buildings. This is

3 See, for example, the article by Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou, ‘Tactics for a Transgressive Practice’ in Architectural Design, November/December 2013, pp. 59-65 which states, ‘aaa has broken the rules of the ‘commissioned project’, proposing unsolicited interventions. We have transgressed the professional regulations in order to allow users to have access to the design process’ (p. 61).
4 In their article Mosley and Sara say that architecture has ‘political and cultural power’ because it demarcates and redefines territory. See ‘The Architecture of Transgression: Towards a Destabilising Architecture’ p. 15.
arguably different from Bataille’s point in his Critical Dictionary entry ‘Architecture’ that ‘society’s ideal nature – that of authoritative command and prohibition – expresses itself in architectural constructions’ and that architecture imposes that ideal nature upon us (EA, 35). It rather means both that architects can influence the way in which society’s nature is imposed upon us and that they may want to. I therefore differentiate between progressive architecture, which is designed to instigate social or political change, and transgressive architecture, which I will discuss in more detail throughout this chapter but which might be thought of as architecture that does not completely silence otherness and does not fully order the excess that threatens to overwhelm it.

In the first part of this chapter I consider ideas about transgressive architecture put forward by figures who have read and discussed Bataille including Denis Hollier, Bernard Tschumi and Greg Lynn. I discuss what each of them suggests transgression and transgressive architecture could be, and compare their thinking to my reading of Bataille. In the second part of the chapter I step outside the theory and into the built environment, to consider whether the city of Chandigarh in India is transgressive. I chose Chandigarh for a case study because Nadir Lahiji argues not only that Chandigarh demonstrates expenditure but also that this is the case because Le Corbusier read Bataille’s work The Accursed Share and engaged with Bataille’s ideas whilst designing the city.  

I therefore examine Lahiji’s claims about the expenditure he sees and whether, if present, it would constitute in Chandigarh an example of transgressive architecture. My inquiry raises questions about ways in which architecture could be transgressive, whether transgression can have a social impact, and the extent to which Bataille’s ideas directly influenced Le Corbusier. Having been led there by Lahiji’s speculations, I therefore extend my analysis of the city to discuss ways in which it can be considered transgressive in modes that accurately reflect Bataille’s transgression as I read it. For me, this means architecture that makes visible its agency in ordering excess, and which structurally poses the possibility of its own de-structuring.

**Writing and Designing Architectural Transgression**

Thus far in my thesis, transgressive places have only existed upon the page. Lawrence’s sites of sexual activity outside the ‘squalid’ and ‘dismal’ towns and Nin’s erotic and elaborate house are imagined places built of language (LCL, 152). It is appropriate to start my assessment of transgressive architecture inspired by Bataille

---

with Hollier, who recasts this relationship when he defines both architecture and
language as form. He argues that both architecture and language structure human
experience and they both must acknowledge the human need for transgression. We
have seen this idea elsewhere in both Bataille’s texts and in critical appraisals of his
work. In Eroticism Bataille said that prohibitions provide ‘that calm ordering of ideas
without which human awareness is inconceivable’ (E, 38). Language and
architecture also calmly order ideas and our world, as I have discussed, and are
therefore structures in which transgression must occur.\(^6\)

Hollier writes that, for Bataille, ‘transgression is transgression of form.’\(^7\) He
argues that Bataille’s style of writing plays with syntax and introduces heterogeneity
as a means of undermining form and hierarchy, and that it therefore transgresses
form and is anti-architectural. That Bataille’s writing must retain some sense of form
in order to convey meaning leads us, through Hollier’s reading, back to the
manifestation of transgression as a challenge within a form or structure that tends
towards its own de-structuring. Such is the importance Hollier believes architecture
holds for Bataille that Hollier interprets the image of Acéphalus as an image of
imprisoning forms, as being about man’s relation to not only his finite body but also
to architecture. Hollier points out that Bataille’s aphorism accompanying the image
was ‘Man will escape his head as a convict escapes his prison.’\(^8\) I have discussed
elsewhere in this thesis other architectural metaphors in Bataille’s texts, for example
in the Preface to Madame Edwarda Bataille compares the prohibitions surrounding
sexuality to a house to demonstrate their essentiality (ME, 138). For Hollier, such a
metaphor would further evidence the relationship between language and
architecture.

Reading Bataille’s first ever article ‘Notre-Dame de Rheims’, written following
the German assault on the cathedral during the First World War (in 1914), when he
was still a Christian, Hollier claims that for Bataille Christianity is a ‘vast ideological
system symbolized and maintained by architecture.’\(^9\) Hollier states:

In order to loosen the structure that is hierarchical and at the same time
creates hierarchy, Bataille will introduce the play of writing. Writing in this
sense would be a profoundly antiarchitectural gesture, a nonconstructive

---

\(^6\) See Chapter One, ‘Defining Structures of Humanity’.

\(^7\) Hollier, Against Architecture, p. 24.

\(^8\) Hollier, Against Architecture, p. xii.

\(^9\) Hollier, Against Architecture, p. 23.
gesture, one that, on the contrary, undermines and destroys everything whose existence depends on edifying pretensions.\textsuperscript{10}

For Hollier, form suppresses heterogeneity and violence, and whilst the temptation writers face is to succumb to form, he believes Bataille resists this temptation. Bataille ‘was able to save the violence of desire from the temptation of form’ and it is this ‘refusal that produces the heterogeneity […] that will be indicated by the term \textit{writing}.\textsuperscript{11} Hollier hence redefines writing, taking Bataille as his inspiration, and offers a reading of transgression that focuses specifically on transgression of two structures or forms: language and architecture. In calling his book on Bataille \textit{Against Architecture} Hollier proposes that Bataille is against form and hierarchy, but that these concerns are always inherently architectural.\textsuperscript{12}

That Bataille might be writing ‘against’ architecture suggests not only that his writing is opposed to it but that he is alongside or touching the structure, up against it; this recalls Bataille’s description in \textit{Eroticism} of the formation of humanity as ‘building up the rational world’ and creating ‘bounds’ that try to constrain violence and excess (\textit{E}, 40). Again we see evidence of a dynamic structure that is not absolute but is threatened by transgression. A structure or form is defined by that which it stands against, by its boundaries and that which those boundaries aim to exclude just as much as what remains included. This is the case for humanity and the taboo, value systems, architecture, and language that bound it.

There is, for Hollier, a structuralist imperative behind his argument: one that provides an interesting reading of Bataille but is influenced by other thinkers.\textsuperscript{13}

Addressing the link between architecture and language, which he observes in Bataille’s writing and its relationship to form, Hollier claims that at the moment that linguistics was conceived it was explained in architectural terms (such as the very term ‘structuralism’) which have since persisted. These terms mean that language

\textsuperscript{10} Hollier, \textit{Against Architecture}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{11} Hollier, \textit{Against Architecture}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{12} The original book, published in French, is titled \textit{La Prise de la Concorde}. Hollier himself translated the title into \textit{Against Architecture}.
\textsuperscript{13} In his ‘Introduction: Bloody Sundays’, Hollier notes that it is anachronistic to associate Bataille with structuralism or poststructuralism, as he died before either became established, but Hollier maintains that Bataille acts as a precursor to poststructuralism because, like those involved with the later movement, his texts show ‘a desire to loosen the symbolic authority of architectures.’ (\textit{Against Architecture}, p. ix). Hollier wrote \textit{Against Architecture}, or \textit{La Prise de la Concorde} in 1972, at a time when structuralism and poststructuralism were being discussed critically by many scholars and critics who were contributing to the \textit{Tel Quel} journal, which often included articles on Bataille. For a discussion of Bataille’s influence on Roland Barthes’s structuralism see Patrick ffrench, \textit{The Cut}, pp. 6-7. For a summary of thinking behind \textit{Tel Quel} and its contributors’ interests in Bataille, see Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack, ‘Introduction’, \textit{The Tel Quel Reader}, pp. 1-8.
has an inherent and intense relationship with architecture. He suggests, via Ferdinand de Saussure and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, that ‘linguistic analysis be thought of as dominated by the importation of an architectural vocabulary’ noting as evidence the dominance of the word ‘structure’ to ‘describe practically all organizations and all systems.’

Hollier explains:

There is consequently no way to describe a system without resorting to the vocabulary of architecture. When structure defines the general form of legibility, nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid. Architecture under these conditions is the archistructure, the system of systems […] it organizes the concord of languages and guarantees universal legibility.

In being a dominating system, and in generating the only vocabulary that makes systems comprehensible, architecture becomes an organising and structuring power. As such it wields as much influence over language as it did over society, through the dominance Bataille argued it had over the street. Hollier claims that Bataille’s ‘violent syntax undoes the meaning of all words’ and that he writes ‘against the word, against the sentence’ in order to ‘rediscover the glossopoetic energy that makes writing something that works on language.’ This is how Bataille’s writing is anti-architectural and, as architecture is ‘the system of systems’, Hollier suggests that transgression of one structure is transgression absolutely. If language undermines the basis of one of the structures essential to human experience and existence – such as itself, or architecture – then it undermines the structure of humanity in general.

A building and a work of literature might both demonstrate the internal structural relationship between taboo and transgression within their form and might reflect or draw upon one another’s forms, as I have argued Nin’s *House of Incest* does and as we will see Bernard Tschumi’s architectural projects aim to do. In either one, this internal conflict will be a threat to the condition of humanity, but the two remain different. Language may have an impact upon our senses and our bodies, as Bataille suggests it might when he discusses the voluptuous or pleasurable sounds of poetry, but architecture’s impact on our bodies differs because it is a physical structure we move within and encounter directly through touch as well as

14 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p. 32.
15 Ibid., p. 33.
16 Ibid., p. 27.
other senses.\(^\text{17}\) Language and architecture are different instances of defining forms and structures, both of which we live within and through which we are structured and limited, and transgression would manifest differently in each of them. Hollier is right that heterogeneous writing could be anti-architectural but at the same time we must remember that it is not transgressive architecture – it is transgressive language and the two are related but not identical, although both imply transgression at a human level. Hollier does not claim otherwise, he argues that Bataille writes against architecture – but unlike Hollier, I want to find out what architecture that is against architecture, that demonstrates an internal threat to its own order, might look like.

Hollier’s analysis of Bataille belongs precisely here within my thesis, at the gateway between two different structures and their transgressions. He is right that the two are related and his analysis is useful in understanding their similarities, but I will now consider the difference between modes of transgression in each. This is a question that architects have considered themselves, often influenced by Bataille. Architect and theorist Greg Lynn explores how architecture could become formless, taking his cue from Bataille’s Critical Dictionary entries including ‘Formless’, and from *Eroticism*. He compares architecture to language and states that the ‘formless’ might be written into buildings.

Developing Bataille’s argument that architecture is the next stage in human development, because it represents the next stage of rationalisation and categorisation of form, Lynn describes it not only becoming a body but dictating what a body might be:

Architecture’s provision for structure, use, and shelter necessitates an absolute and exact delimitation of internal volume from external forces. To signify this rigid sense of the interior, architecture frequently invokes the paradigm of the inviolate interior of a living body. Le Corbusier’s Modular provides an obvious example of the alignment of the body with measure. Of course, the paradigmatic body is both docile and static; its particularities of culture, history, race, development, and degeneration are repressed in favour of a general model.\(^\text{18}\)


Lynn asks us whether architecture that designs to and for the body might start to limit our experiences and claims that architecture is a paradigmatic body built for the homogenous body. ‘Geometry provides the apparently universal language with which architecture assumes to speak through history, across culture, and over time’ but, Lynn asks, what if we changed that language? To think about a form of writing that would allow architecture this flexibility, Lynn turns to Bataille’s ‘Formless’ and suggests ‘the formless might also be written within architecture by architects.’ He continues:

*Formless writing within architecture leads […] toward a different kind of alliance between geometry and the organism, resulting in anexact, multiplicitous, temporary, supple, fluid, disproportionate and monstrous spatial bodies. Unlike exact geometry, formless writing accommodates differences in matter by resisting any reductions to ideal form. Because of this hesitation to arrest forms once and for all, their descriptions become more compliant to the base matter they signify.*

Lynn is arguing that architecture is a form of writing that, to escape a prescriptive and restrictive organicity of geometry, should be a formless writing rather than a form of writing. It should exploit the elaborate multiplicities which occur within the interior of its organising skin.

Lynn’s argument is an architectural version of Hollier’s, in which he claims that architecture should take on the qualities of the word ‘formless’. Whilst Hollier claims that heterogeneous writing is against architecture, Lynn tries to inject the instability of language into architecture to disorder architecture and its stabilising, projecting structure. The argument is an interesting one and is an imaginative use of Bataille. Through his reading of Bataille, Lynn raises questions about architecture’s problematic role in prescribing structures upon society and humanity, and to this Lynn introduces the question of the body, adding that architecture also prescribes an ideal and homogenous bodily form. Lynn’s response is architectural: he develops original, plastic forms with an external envelope that depart from traditional geometric designs, which he calls ‘blobs’. But Lynn’s critique takes us no further.

---

18 Ibid., p. 39.
19 Ibid., p. 42.
20 Ibid., p. 42.
21 Ibid., p. 42.
22 For further detail on Lynn’s architecture and his blobs see *Folds, bodies and blobs: collected essays*. Examples of buildings are available on Lynn’s website: <http://glform.com/> accessed 26.2.15.
than asking how architecture’s standard structure can be re-imagined through the notion of formlessness. Does a manipulation of form, so that it is more fluid, reveal destabilising formlessness within the building? This manipulation might be an example of progressive rather than transgressive architecture, in that it rearticulates architecture’s logic and order but does not create or reveal instability within an architectural structure. This strategy of overcoming an old architectural paradigm uses Bataillean ideas but it creates a new and original form (Lynn’s blobs) rather than exploring an otherness or excess that could destabilise and undermine the notion of form, or undermine a building’s efficacy or ability to project order.

Aberration and Revolution

Like Lynn, French architect, writer and academic Bernard Tschumi has discussed Bataille’s works on transgression. He uses language not against architecture, but as a source of inspiration to consider new forms of or roles for architecture. Tschumi believes transgression is possible in architecture. His account draws on Bataille’s discussion of eroticism but is also inspired by architectural projects derived from literary texts. Whilst language and architecture are different types of structures, Tschumi uses transgression in one to inspire the other.

In 1974-75 Tschumi taught what he called ‘literary projects’ at the Architectural Association (AA) in London (AD, 145). These briefs had a common theme, one which he only fully realised years later when he collected his essays in the volume Architecture and Disjunction. These texts all interrogated the relationship between the structure of a space and its ‘programme’, the ‘programme’ being an architectural term used to consider the events that happen in a space, or the use it was designed to meet.

In these literary projects students read novels by writers such as Edgar Allen Poe, Franz Kafka, and Italo Calvino, and were tasked with turning events or programmes from the novels into architectural works. At the same time Tschumi was teaching in the United States of America as a visiting professor at Princeton University. At Princeton he set the students a site in London’s Covent Garden and tasked them with deriving architecture ‘by analogy or opposition’ with extracts from James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake (AD, 146). For Tschumi the text was ‘fundamental’

23 Text in this section is edited from the article ‘Two Modes of a Literary Architecture: Bernard Tschumi and Nigel Coates’ which I wrote with Claire Jamieson and is due for publication in Architectural Research Quarterly later in 2015.

24 Collecting his earlier essays in his book Architecture and Disjunction in 1996, Tschumi wrote a new introduction which explained how the idea that architecture is disjoined runs through the essays and his approach to architectural practice. See ‘Introduction’, AD, 2-23.
to these projects, ‘in that it underlined some aspect of the complementing (or, occasionally, lack of complementing) of events and spaces’ (*AD*, 145). In his essay ‘Space and Events’ (1983) Tschumi explains that during these taught projects the text provided a ‘framework for the analysis of the relations’ between the programme and the site (*AD*, 146). Beyond being a source of inspiration, the novels he worked with revealed a fundamental relationship between literature and the design of buildings and spaces: ‘The unfolding of events in a literary context inevitably suggests parallels to the unfolding of events in architecture’ (*AD*, 146). He developed this relationship by discussing structural similarities between literature and architecture, and he went on to suggest that architects could employ the devices writers use to manipulate form and structure. Tschumi describes the artistic manipulation of plot but also grammar and language as practices architects should consider employing when creating physical spaces:

To what extent could the literary narrative shed light on the organization of events in buildings, whether called ‘use,’ ‘functions,’ ‘activities,’ or ‘programs’? If writers could manipulate the structure of stories in the same way as they twist vocabulary and grammar, couldn’t architects do the same, organizing the program in a similarly objective, detached, or imaginative way? For if architects could self-consciously use such devices as repetition, distortion, or juxtaposition in the formal elaboration of walls, couldn’t they do the same thing in terms of the activities that occurred within those very walls? (*AD*, 146)

Tschumi here suggests that buildings could be manipulated like sentences in a novel are manipulated. The relationship is metaphorical, whereas when Hollier described Bataille’s writing as anti-architectural he was suggesting that when writing challenges form it also challenges architecture, the ultimate form. Their approaches to the relationship between literature and architecture are very different.

In his next taught projects at the AA, the Soho projects of 1978-9, Tschumi moved away from literary inspiration but continued to consider the relationship between spaces and events. Students designed a series of interlocked, ‘extreme’ institutions along a central strip of Soho in London.25 Each of the institutions ‘represented an extreme within its (functional) type, either because of what it

---

instituted (crime, madness) or the aberration of its context (a stadium in Soho? a ballroom in a churchyard?). That Tschumi defines these institutions as aberrations suggests they are departures from the world around them and their immediate physical environment. Students were asked to look at the urban environment in Soho and design further aberrations: ‘We consciously suggested programs impossible on the sites that were meant to house them: a stadium in Soho, a prison near Wardour Street, a ballroom in a churchyard’ (AD, 147).

The institutions had specific building types and programmes, and the relationship between the two was ‘reinforced by numerous historical precedents.’ For example, a project on a prison raised ‘uncomfortable issues on the role of the architect. If the architect is to determine the organisation of spaces, he cannot always avoid becoming a critic, a social commentator – or alternatively a staunch defender of disciplinary systems’. Tschumi’s concern with the role of the architect refers to the way in which someone must decide upon the relationship between a space and the events that happen within it. He wanted students to push the relationship to its own limit, and to consider how spaces can accommodate events that are at odds with their design and structure. He illustrates this thinking with examples: ‘Pole vaulting in the chapel […] sky diving in the elevator shaft […] Or vice versa: the most intricate and perverse organization of spaces could accommodate the everyday life on an average suburban family’ (AD, 146-7).

By this time Tschumi’s ideas about juxtaposition, inspired originally by literature, were central to this approach and would go on to form his concept of disjunction. In his Introduction to Architecture and Disjunction in 1996, reflecting back on his influential literary projects at the AA, Tschumi explains disjunction:

Over the next decade I kept exploring the implications of what had at first been intuitions: (a) that there is no cause-and-effect relationship between the concept of space and the experience of space, or between buildings and their uses, or space and the movement of bodies within in, and (b) that the meeting of these mutually exclusive terms could be intensely pleasurable or, indeed, so violent that it could dislocate the most conservative elements of society. (AD, 16)

26 The Discourse of Events, p. 52.
27 The Discourse of Events, p. 52.
28 Ibid., p. 52.
Architecture is disjoined and dissociated because at its heart there is a fundamental chasm between space and its use, or rather between the concept of a built environment and its design in an architect’s studio on the one hand and, on the other, the experience of space by people once it is complete and in use. Architecture cannot, Tschumi argues, be separated from its use, yet it is designed and planned before it can be used. The space and the events which happen within it are ‘mutually exclusive’ and have no causal relationship; however, they rely on one another for existence (AD, 16). Tschumi’s suggestion that disjunction entails pleasure or violence connects with his reading of Bataille.

Thinking further about the ‘dis-joined, dis-sociated’ nature of architecture, Tschumi later claims he found ‘allies’ in other fields such as literary theory and film criticism (AD, 17). For Tschumi, the disjunction of architecture is part of a contemporary condition which other critical fields were also examining in their own way: architecture is indelibly woven into a wider cultural discourse. Tschumi believed architecture should ‘borrow’ from other fields of thought, that it must ‘import and export’ in theory and in practice (AD, 17). For critics this has made him a poststructuralist, with Mary McLeod categorising his work as the ‘superimposition of systems.’

Tschumi’s interest in Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction is also well documented. But my focus here is on how Tschumi himself described his work, and the ways in which he considered transgression to be possible in architecture. He explains that when he started to consider the idea of disjunction, he found that work in other fields of thought helped to ‘substantiate the evidence of architecture’s disassociations’ (AD, 17). For Tschumi, these other ideas stem from the thinkers he called his allies, including Foucault and the Tel Quel group, in particular through their ‘rediscovery of Bataille’ (AD, 17).

Georges Bataille was an important figure for Tschumi. The article ‘Architecture and Transgression’ (1976), in which Tschumi discusses disjunction and its impact, opens with a quote from Eroticism in which Bataille explains that transgression needs a boundary in order to arise. In the article, Tschumi goes on to discuss

---

31 ‘Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it’ (E, 67; AD, 65).
eroticism in architecture and the intimate relationship between their form and structure.

Eroticism and the relationship between life and death are two ‘correspondences’ Tschumi applies to architecture in order to explore its paradox, which is that it is caught ‘between sensuality and a search for rigor, between a perverse taste for seduction and a quest for the absolute’ (AD, 69). Bataille’s discussion of eroticism and death proves useful to Tschumi’s analysis. Tschumi states that ‘Architecture has the same status, the same function, and the same meaning as eroticism’ (AD, 71). In saying this, he argues that this is the case because they both involve ‘mental constructs and sensuality’ at once (AD, 71). Both of them are personal and universal at once: ‘on the one hand, there is sensual pleasure, the other and the I; on the other hand, there is historical inquiry and ultimate rationality’ (AD, 71). Tschumi builds on Bataille’s assertion that eroticism is ‘assenting to life up to the point of death’ to claim that the relationship between life and death needs rethinking in architecture (E, 11; AD, 74). It is worth unpacking this claim and understanding Tschumi’s reading of Bataille and how it relates to his practice of architecture, because it gains a political imperative for Tschumi and eventually leads to his proposal for a transgressive architecture.

Tschumi says that ‘Each society expects architecture to reflect its ideals and domesticate its deeper fears’ and architecture usually obliges (AD, 72). In society death was excluded, and this taboo included rot and decay; reflected in architecture, the taboo meant that ‘putrefying buildings were seen as unacceptable, but dry white ruins afforded decency and respectability’ (AD, 73). Suggesting that architects can be ‘comfortable in front of the white ruins of the Parthenon’ Tschumi compares this to another ruin, the ‘derelict Villa Savoye’ as it stood in 1965, Le Corbusier’s building left to ruin so that its ‘squalid’ state resulted in a ‘campaign to save the threatened purity’ of the building (AD: 72; 73). Tschumi instead suggests that ‘the Villa Savoye was never so moving as when plaster fell off its concrete blocks’ (AD, 75). Other works by Tschumi, such as his Advertisements for Architecture posters (1975), also explore eroticism in Le Corbusier’s abandoned Villa Savoye, by charting its decay and ‘sensuality’.

Summarising Bataille, he claims ‘Since eroticism implied sex without reproduction, the movement from life to death was erotic’ and this leads him to suggest ‘the moment of architecture is that moment when architecture is life and death at the same time, when the experience of space becomes its own concept’ (AD, 74). He suggests that the intersection of life and death is on the one hand

32 See the Advertisements in Architecture and Disjunction, p. 75 and p. 64.
eroticism, and on the other rot; this is ‘the very point that taboos and culture have always rejected’, a metaphorical rot wherein architecture lies and which ‘bridges sensory pleasure and reason’ just as Tschumi believes eroticism does (AD, 76). In his article ‘The Pleasure of Architecture’ (1977) Tschumi explicitly says that disjunction makes architecture erotic, stating ‘Neither space nor concepts alone are erotic, but the junction between the two is’ (AD, 89).

The motivation for Tschumi to bridge sensory pleasure and reason, and to find what he characterises as the rot and eroticism in architecture, also playfully called its point of eROTicisim is that this for him explores disjunction (AD, 70). He believes that disjunction can be the point from which a new architecture develops, but for him this development is transgression:

Architecture seems to survive in its erotic capacity only whenever it negates itself, where it transcends its paradoxical nature by negating the form that society expects of it. In other words, it is not a matter of destruction or avant-garde subversion but of transgression. (AD, 78)

For Tschumi, ‘the ruling status of social and conceptual mechanisms eroding urban life is […] to be transgressed’ (AD, 78). He characterises transgression as revolution – the absolute removal of those mechanisms and their rule – or as development towards the next mechanisms that will supersede current ones. He concludes:

Whether through literal or phenomenal transgression, architecture is seen here as the momentary and sacrilegious convergence of real space and ideal space. Limits remain, for transgression does not mean the methodical destruction of any code or rule that concerns space or architecture. On the contrary, it introduces new articulations between inside and outside, between concept and experience. Very simply it means overcoming unacceptable prevalences. (AD, 78)

Tschumi wants transgressive architecture to be a new articulation of the relationship between concept and experience, which is brought about by the disjunction between the two. For Tschumi, the ruling mechanisms or forms of society and culture are transgressed, and he wanted to use this to enable architecture to find other structures rather than merely reflecting existing power structures. Lynn did not discuss transgression as revolution because he did not talk about changing the structure of social and political power, but both of them link Bataille to the idea that
new architectural structures (and the societies, subjects and bodies they order) could be possible. Later, Tschumi came to the conclusion that disjunction is a new definition of architecture which provides the ground for transgression of the status quo:

There is no social or political change without the movements and programs that transgress supposedly stable institutionality, architectural or otherwise [...] there is no architecture without everyday life, movement, and action [...] it is the most dynamic aspects of their disjunction that suggest a new definition of architecture. (AD, 23)

By this account, Tschumi believes the disjunction within architecture is its means for political change, in which architecture will transgress political and social orders rather than reifying and projecting them. Reflecting on his teaching, Tschumi explained that this perspective was the focus of earlier projects at the AA, through which he posed the question, ‘How could architecture and cities be a trigger for social and political change?’ (AD, 6). Considering ways in which architecture could avoid being a neutral backdrop to a social or political ideology or even reaffirming that ideology, Tschumi started to think about ways in which it could become a force for change or, if not causing the change directly, ‘accelerating’ it (AD, 15). Coming to the idea of exploiting internal contradictions within a social or political system to catalyse a revolution, Tschumi sought to understand what the internal contradictions in architecture might be. He came to the conclusion that the disjoined nature of architecture is its revolutionary potential. Uncertainty and the pleasure and violence of disjunction can be used to develop ‘a new definition of architecture’ (AD, 23).

Transgression for Tschumi is an act that crosses social and architectural norms to trigger revolution and is to be brought about through disjunction, the juxtaposition within architecture and what he also called its point of eROTicisim. Nearly forty years after the article ‘Architecture and Transgression’ was published there is evidence that Tschumi continues to understand transgression in this way, in an interview with him published in Architectural Design (2013) with the same name as his earlier article. In response to one of the questions posed by the guest editors of Architectural Design he says:

Transgression is a fundamental concept, like the boundary between life and death. So it has always been there and it always will be. What changes is its type or nature. For example, let’s take the concept of cross-programming or
trans-programming, i.e. combining programmes that are usually kept separate. For a long time, a building was meant to be either a church, a town hall, a shop, or a school, each with its own typology. To suggest that one could combine and intersect different programmes was once very unusual and quite transgressive. Today trans-programming and cross-programming are our new norm. Now, with airports and museums becoming shopping malls, conference centres and tourist attractions, cross-programming has become acceptable. But there will always be new modes of transgression, small or large scale, social or philosophical.33

Transgression is here a change to the way buildings function and the example Tschumi gives is about designing more than one function into a building, or enabling more than one type of event to take place within it. This is even less extreme than pole-vaulting in a chapel, but still qualifies as transgression for Tschumi – which has now become appropriated within culture. Lawrence’s obscene language played a similar role. His attempt to shock people into new ways of thinking through obscenity was censored, and now his novel is widely available as a literary classic. These are examples of generic transgression but transgression meant something more than this for Bataille.

Considering Tschumi’s argument in relation to my reading of Bataillean transgression, there are problems with Tschumi’s vision of using transgression to create revolutionary change, the first being that, to Bataille at least, transgression is useless by definition. In Eroticism, for example, Bataille explains that transgression is ‘a movement which always exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order’ (E, 40). Architects who choose to try to use transgression to effect change in the state (or rather, in the state’s articulation of power through architecture) will encounter the problem that using transgression will assimilate it into the social order therefore undermining it as transgression, rendering it useful and no longer other. This is not a problem for Tschumi in and of itself; his reading of Bataille is driven by inspiration rather than philosophical rigour, so that ideas originally introduced by Bataille often diverge and take on another meaning.

His ‘pole vaulting in the chapel’ example is architecture in which disjunction is born from an event that contrasts with the built structure and its social and political implications (AD, 146-7). Tschumi’s revolution is problematic because whilst disjunction is at the heart of architecture, the violence he wants to exploit and the

33 ‘Architecture and Transgression: An Interview with Bernard Tschumi’ in Architectural Design, November/December 2013, pp. 32-37 (pp. 36-37).
transgression he wants architecture to embody are, instead, imposed on architecture by him. The chapel is already there – someone pole vaulting in it does not change its socio-political status: a tension between space and event does not undermine or threaten the structure and its status. Tschumi’s progressive architecture is inspired by the idea of transgression but it is not itself transgressive because the programme or use of the building is determined not by the architecture but by its users. This could happen to any architecture, anywhere, and it would not change the order and efficacy of the architectural structure. In other words, the structure and what it stands for (order, logic, majesty) remain unchallenged by the unusual activities happening within it.

Tschumi’s other example is the sensual rot in the derelict Villa Savoye. Again, rot happens to architecture: the Villa Savoye was designed to be a functioning home and this programme seems to have been at one with its space. Only when it is abandoned does it meet Tschumi’s vision of transgression and this is as a result of the decay that happens to it, not as a result of its own disjunction. This example is different because a building that is rotting is arguably in a state of dynamic tension between its existence and its demise: it has not been designed to rot, but the rot is destabilising the building and its structure and also making it unusable – useless, in opposition to the value of utility. Rotting architecture is potentially transgressive because it challenges a structure that is still present. We can compare this to the shrapnel marks in the Neues Museum in Berlin. In both cases, the architecture displays the violence done against it (the bloody violence of war or the organic and sensual violence of decay and death) and therefore displays otherness encroaching upon it and its order and efficacy. We can think of this as what I will call the incidental mode of transgression in architecture: excess that is not introduced by the architectural design but which threatens its stability by making violence apparent. The instability to the structure is visible and the rot and shrapnel are not covered over, but they are incidental because they have happened in spite of the architecture itself, the building and design, rather than as a result of it. I would therefore contrast this with what I will call essentially transgressive architecture, architecture that acknowledges the human need for transgression within its design, rather than architecture that demonstrates a threat to itself through incidental decay which, of course, could happen to any building. The incidental and essential are both modes of transgression, but the former is the result of an external violence or decay, whereas the latter is determined by the building’s structure and potentially designed into it. When Bataille said that architecture speaks and imposes the ideal nature of society he was saying that churches, state buildings and the factory
chimneys that hide and dispose of waste silenced excess. My question remains: in what ways can the architecture we encounter and in which we live, speak and project anything other than this ideal structure?

All three of the figures I have discussed thus far in this chapter consider the role of language in architecture. Hollier compares language to architecture and believes heterogeneous language can undo the prescriptive power of architecture’s structure. Lynn looks to reproduce the affect of the word ‘formless’ in architecture and suggests that architects design ‘Formless writing within architecture.’ And Tschumi’s notion of architecture as disjunction is informed by a comparison between the manipulation of architectural and literary devices. Hollier would propose a structuralist explanation for this common theme, as he has said that ‘There is consequently no way to describe a system without resorting to the vocabulary of architecture.’ Although it is informed by the critical discourse of structuralism, Hollier’s point is similar to one that I made in the conclusion to my previous chapter. I suggested that the notion of defining structures was common to thinkers in Bataille’s period and that with this idea comes the notion of transgression. It is significant that all these figures engage with Bataille’s point that architecture is an influential structure within human experience, and they explore it in relation to another such structure, language, and its creative manipulation – or sometimes, transgression – in literature. It is possible, then, that the commonality lies not in the era and its discourse on structures but in the notion Bataille himself noted: that the structures being discussed help to define and form humanity. Thus far, Bataille’s philosophy of the human subject is unchallenged by the erotic novelists and architectural critics I have discussed. The second half of this chapter continues to consider the influential role of architecture in reifying and projecting political, cultural and social systems through a case study of a city built from scratch for a newly created political state in India in the 1950s, Chandigarh.

The New City of Chandigarh

Whilst Tschumi was influenced by Bataille’s notion of transgression through Eroticism, and Lynn discussed Bataille’s Critical Dictionary entries, Le Corbusier read The Accursed Share and is believed to have been influenced by Bataille’s descriptions of the economics of expenditure. Le Corbusier was Bataille’s contemporary and arguably the most famous and influential modernist architect. Phillip Duboy and Nadir Lahiji have both discussed Le Corbusier’s notes on The

34 Lynn, p. 42.
35 Hollier, Against Architecture, p. 33.
*(Accursed Share, notes he finished writing in 1953 in a copy Bataille personally sent him with a handwritten inscription declaring his ‘admiration and sympathy.’* The book was displayed at the exhibition on Le Corbusier held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1988. Beyond this contact, there is little to suggest that the two thinkers influenced one another substantially. Whilst Le Corbusier’s reading of *The Accursed Share* offers some evidence that he reflected on Bataille’s ideas in this book, in this chapter I stage a further encounter of ideas by exploring ways in which the architecture and urban design of Chandigarh could be transgressive.

Duboy states that Le Corbusier read *The Accursed Share* on a flight to India whilst he was working on Chandigarh. Duboy and Lahiji believe Bataille inspired Le Corbusier’s ‘Open Hand’ monument at Chandigarh. Lahiji states:

Le Corbusier’s reading of the idea of potlatch in *La Part Maudite* reinforced his philosophical conviction about his gigantic, humanistic mission in the Chandigarh project: a plan for a newly born nation of India in need of its own singular transition to a modern state.

Lahiji’s research comprises a thorough examination of Le Corbusier’s notes in his copy of *The Accursed Share* and of the potential synthesis between his ideas and Bataille’s. In Lahiji’s reading there are three ways in which he sees Bataille’s influence on Chandigarh, which might result in transgressive architecture, depending on how we interpret them. The first is that the urban plan is acephalic, the second is an expenditure of wealth in the form of an urban plan that projects potlatch, and the third is the Open Hand as a symbol of personal sacrifice. In Lahiji’s text these three notions are interrelated and he does not distinguish between the headless figure of Acéphale, expenditure and sacrifice as different ideas. Whilst he does not connect them with transgression, I will discuss ways in which they could be considered transgressive. In connecting the ideas, for example, he suggests both that Chandigarh ‘projects an image of expenditure and distribution of wealth and space for a new India’ and that the ‘expenditure of space in Chandigarh knows no boundary; it is a sacrificial giving of space, returning to the sun its gift of accursed

---

36 Lahiji, p. 50.
38 Lahiji, pp. 50-51. (Lahiji discusses Duboy here.)
39 Ibid., pp. 51-52. Lahiji references an essay by Stanislaus von Moos in this sentence, and this essay explains the politics behind Le Corbusier’s vision for Chandigarh but does not attribute Bataille any influence; this link is asserted by Lahiji only.
For Lahiji, Chandigarh's urban planning and architecture represents Le Corbusier's intellectual, ethical, economical, social but also profoundly personal interpretation and re-presentation of Bataille’s related ideas of the gift, sacrifice and expenditure. Lahiji also believes that Le Corbusier and Bataille may have met or shared friends, but his discussion here remains speculative.  

Whilst Lahiji interrogates in detail the specific passages of *The Accursed Share* which Le Corbusier annotated or underlined, none of Le Corbusier’s notes refer specifically to Chandigarh. There is no way of proving that Le Corbusier may have altered his plans to account for his reading of Bataille's work and interest in the role architecture plays in the notion of transgression and related notion of expenditure. But this does not stop us interrogating that role ourselves. The urban planning of the city of Chandigarh has been referred to as both an authoritarian ‘logocentric synthesis’ and as an “excessive” expenditure of space. Whether Chandigarh imposes a logic of authority upon people or whether it acknowledges their need for expenditure may not be compatible outcomes. This is because for Bataille, architecture silences the ‘unquiet elements’ of society in favour of authority which, as Hollier points out, excludes otherness such as expenditure. This begs the question as to whether Chandigarh, indeed any architecture, can incorporate or make visible otherness within its design without imposing logic upon it.

---

40 Lahiji, p. 54.
41 Lahiji notes that only 51 copies of *The Accursed Share* were printed, and one of these was sent from Bataille to Le Corbusier. As one of the few intellectuals to have read Bataille’s work when it was initially published, Lahiji claims Le Corbusier must be part of Bataille’s inner circle; this is quite a stretch given the others Lahiji names met with Bataille regularly. Lahiji also names, amongst others, Michel Leiris, André Masson and Maurice Blanchot (Lahiji, p. 51) – all of whom met Bataille at some point (see French, *The Cut*, pp. 57-58). Lahiji notes a series of possible opportunities for the two to have met or read one another’s works. These range from Bataille’s colleague Arnaud Dandieu’s involvement in *Plans* in 1931, a journal which counted Le Corbusier amongst its editorial board members, and Le Corbusier’s own contribution to the journal *Minotaure* in 1936, which Bataille and André Masson founded in 1933 (pp. 51-52). Le Corbusier contributed the article ‘Louis Soutter, L’inconnue de la soixantaine’ in *Minotaure* 9. What we do know given the book he sent and its inscription, is that Bataille had admiration for Le Corbusier and would therefore be familiar with his ideas and his works, and Le Corbusier was familiar with *The Accursed Share*.

42 I discuss the relationship between transgression and expenditure, in particular in the context of architecture, later in this chapter. I conclude that the symbols of expenditure present in the Capitol are not the same as actual expenditure. The story of Chandigarh is one of the management of excess and change as a response to anticipated excess, so that expenditure is only transgressive in the generic sense – despite Tschumi’s examples of change and development as instances of transgression. Management of excess retains the restricted economy and is therefore not Bataillean transgression.

44 Lahiji, p. 54.
My discussion of Chandigarh concerns three topics: Le Corbusier’s intentions for his architectural design; the social and cultural influence of both architecture and the architect’s intentions; and transgressive architecture both in its own right and in relation to the other two topics. My case study involves analytical readings of critical works by both Le Corbusier and Bataille, and also my own observations of the city during a visit I undertook in March 2013.\(^{46}\)

In 1947 a treaty granted India independence from Britain, but one of the conditions was that Pakistan and India were separated and that parts of the Punjab, including its capital Lahore, were ceded to Pakistan in 1948.\(^{47}\) The Indian state of Punjab needed a new capital for its government. An undeveloped area of land below Simla, at the foot of the Himalayas, was selected for the new city. Two British architects, husband and wife E. Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, heard about a possible commission via the Royal Institute of British Architects, but this was only one of the avenues the Punjab Government were exploring and instead American Albert Mayer was commissioned to plan the new town and Matthew Nowicki was appointed as architect.\(^{48}\) However, Nowicki died suddenly in 1950. The masterplan prepared by Mayer was near-complete but Fry and Drew were contacted towards the end of the year and invited to take the plan forward and design the buildings. Fry points out that if he and Drew had no other commitments, they would have taken on the commission for the entire city;\(^{49}\) instead, Drew (to Fry’s concern\(^{50}\)) recommended Le Corbusier.\(^{51}\) Drew had attended conferences of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (or Congrès internationaux d'architecture
moderne, CIAM), and been impressed by Le Corbusier.\textsuperscript{52} CIAM was a group of European architects dedicated to new approaches to architecture and urban planning, founded in 1928 and organised by Le Corbusier. It was often considered an extension of Le Corbusier’s own ideas about architectural design and his high density cities, which became known as the International Style,\textsuperscript{53} although few of the city developments said to characterise this style actually originated in CIAM.\textsuperscript{54}

Le Corbusier was the architect of the Capitol buildings and the park they sit within and, as advisor on the rest of the city, developed the masterplan (which Mayer had started) over two months in 1951.\textsuperscript{55} Fry suggested that Le Corbusier be put in charge of the Capitol complex, ‘as offering him the plum of the cake and befitting his eminence’ and suggested he and Drew take on the rest of the city but, Fry reflects, ‘I was underestimating the value he [Le Corbusier] put on the enterprise.’\textsuperscript{56} Given CIAM’s preoccupation with urban planning, and Le Corbusier’s own publications about modern architecture which connected new forms of buildings with new structures of city plans, it is perhaps unsurprising that Le Corbusier took an interest in the plan and modified Mayer’s existing efforts by drawing upon his own theory of urbanism.

Chandigarh is comprised of themed and numbered sectors: blocks of buildings bounded by roads and each dedicated to specific civic uses. The colleges and museums are in the education and culture-themed Sector 10, the bus station and shops are side by side in the commercial Sector 17, and the housing is in Sectors 22 and 24. The sectors are linked by a system of seven roads (called ‘Les Sept Voies de Circulation’ or 7Vs), designed by Le Corbusier specifically for Chandigarh at a time of new and emerging vehicular technologies. The seven roads each cater for different types and speeds of traffic.\textsuperscript{57} Fry explains the system that Le Corbusier drew before him, in which each sector was ‘bounded by fast traffic roads’ and was ‘entered midway along its sides by a slower moving road, a ‘bazaar’ road

\begin{enumerate}
\item This phrase was coined at an exhibition of modern architecture at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1932. See \url{<http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/press_archives/1930s/1932>} accessed 4.1.15.
\item Fry, ‘India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 5.
\item For a detailed description see Madhu Sarin, ‘Chandigarh as a Place to Live In’ in \textit{The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier}, pp. 374-411 (pp. 383-386). First published in 1975 in \textit{Built Environment Quarterly}.
\end{enumerate}
giving access to a loop road’ and to housing. Fry concludes that each sector was ‘crossed from top to bottom by a “bonde verte” a strip of open space […] a park strip we could call it’ which included ‘schools, health and social centres and the means of recreation.’

Le Corbusier designed several buildings in Chandigarh including the state museum and art college, but most famous are the buildings he designed in the double-sized Sector 1, the Capitol. Here he designed four buildings of which three were built, and three monuments of which two were built years after he left India, following much persuasion on his part. The buildings are the Secretariat, Assembly and High Court (with the Governor’s Palace remaining unbuilt) and the monuments are the Open Hand and the Tower of Shadows (with the Modulor remaining unbuilt).

All three buildings are constructed of concrete and share certain symbols and architectural design solutions. One such solution is the *brise-soleil*, a shading device on the front of buildings, which is used on the Secretariat, High Court and buildings throughout the city including the art college and various shops, restaurants and hotels. Indian architect Charles Correa describes Chandigarh as having made popular ‘in situ concrete, handcrafted formwork, an architecture of hot, vivid color, deep shadow, and tropical sun.’ He explains that Chandigarh had a profound impact on India both by creating ‘architecturally conscious communities’ and by describing a new ‘standard vernacular for public works departments all over this subcontinent.’

The management of excess is a theme within Chandigarh. Built for a greater population than originally scheduled to inhabit it, the city was designed to outgrow itself and give birth to an ever expanding circumference of new sectors. In addition to the planned population growth, the city was also designed to accommodate the excesses of nature. In 1955 a dam over 20 metres high and 4km long was built to extend the Boulevard des Eaux, with work taking place before the Monsoon rushed down from the Himalayas in July and August. This transformative architecture

---

60 The Museum of Chandigarh and Le Corbusier Centre in Chandigarh both chart the history of the city and Le Corbusier’s work. In both are letters Le Corbusier wrote to officials requesting that the Open Hand is built. One example is on display at Chandigarh Architecture Museum, a letter from Le Corbusier to Dr M. S. Randhawa, Director General of Department of Agriculture, New Delhi, dated 1964.
62 Ibid., p. 197.
63 Le Corbusier, Œuvres Complètes VI, p. 51.
created a lake and irrigation for the dry land and is another example of the city being
designed to accommodate excess, in this instance an excess of monsoon rain and
floods from the mountains. Architecture that accommodates excess is not
transgressive as it is designed to incorporate excess and thereby retain the
composure of the society (and the structure intended for it).

Chandigarh was a unique opportunity for Le Corbusier to act as both architect
and urbanist, and realise the ideas and research of his theoretical work in an
entirely new town to be built and designed from scratch. Whereas his reimagining of
Paris as a *ville radieuse* (radiant city) in 1935 was never realised, he could now
create on the ground the built environment he had previously only sketched and
described. His earlier ideas are therefore relevant to the decisions he made at
Chandigarh and his intentions there, and must be considered if we are to
understand the input Bataille may have had into his thinking in the 1950s.

Le Corbusier’s early publications, *Vers une Architecture* (1923) and
*Urbanisme* (1925), share core themes by discussing the built environment as a
tool. In *Vers une Architecture* Le Corbusier proclaimed that ‘The house is a
machine for living in,’ and in *Urbanisme* he moves his focus from individual
buildings or components of an environment to the city itself, stating ‘A town is a
tool.’ The use of geometry and poetry to create harmony in the built environment is
an enduring message through both works, as are the industrial metaphors of tools
and machines to express our relationship to our living spaces. It is worth quoting
the initial paragraphs of *Urbanisme* in some detail, to appreciate the connections Le
Corbusier draws between geometry and poetry, and the structures and operations
of human civilisation:

A city!
It is the grip of man upon nature. It is a human operation directed against
nature, a human organism both for protection and for work. It is a creation.

---

64 Le Corbusier, *Œuvres Complètes VI*, p. 51.
65 Le Corbusier’s redesign of Paris was published in a book with the sale title as his idea:
*Ville Radieuse*. I discuss this in detail in the following pages.
66 Both works include collected essays earlier published in the journal *L’Esprit Nouveau*
from 1920 onwards.
67 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. by Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover
essays published in *L’Esprit Nouveau* in 1920-23 and collected in 1923.
68 Le Corbusier, *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning*, trans. by Frederick Etchells (New
*Urbanisme*, originally published 1929.
69 The opening pages of both works discuss geometry and poetry, see *Towards a New
Architecture*, pp. 1-3 and *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning*, p. xxi.
Poetry is also a human act – the harmonious relationships between perceived images. All the poetry we find in nature is but the creation of our own spirit. A town is a mighty image which stirs our minds. Why should not the town be, even to-day, a source of poetry?

Geometry is the means, created by ourselves, whereby we perceive the external world and express the world within us. Geometry is the foundation.

It is also the material basis on which we build those symbols which represent to us perfection and the divine […] Machinery is the result of geometry. The age in which we live is therefore essentially a geometrical one.\(^{70}\)

It is the focus on geometry and the technology of machines which characterised Le Corbusier as the architect of the modern movement, but in his account poetry is also important.\(^{71}\) He describes geometry and poetry as human acts by which we create and interpret the world, which for Le Corbusier makes them, in a sense, metaphysical acts. He believes these ‘human acts’ create a mandate for the work of architects: they must use poetry and geometry to create the physical world, to impose order on the natural world and create a functioning environment for human life.

At this early stage there are themes which are common to those Bataille was exploring in the late 1920s, most notably the power of the built environment to structure human life. Both thinkers consider the development of humanity as an act upon and against nature. For Le Corbusier, architectural acts are related to the formation of mankind from nature, a topic Bataille discussed in great detail many years later in *The Accursed Share* and *History of Eroticism*. Synergies in their ideas probably point to a common discourse during that time; they would have encountered similar critical thinkers and there is some overlap in the journals they read and to which they contributed.\(^{72}\) Considering one of their synergies by way of example, Le Corbusier’s assertion that geometry is human and should be the basis for human buildings ‘which represent to us perfection’ is reminiscent of Bataille’s

---

\(^{70}\) *The City of To-morrow and its Planning*, p. xxi.

\(^{71}\) For a discussion of the role of technology in Le Corbusier’s thinking and work, see Manfredo Tarufi, ‘“Machine et mémoire”: The City in the Work of Le Corbusier’.

\(^{72}\) For example, as mentioned in an earlier footnote, Le Corbusier contributed the article ‘Louis Soutter, L’inconnue de la souxantaine’ in *Minotaure* 9 in 1936, which Bataille and André Masson founded in 1933.
dictionary entry on architecture in 1929, which says architecture is the ‘expression of the true nature of societies’ and that its ‘mathematical order’ is ‘really the culmination of the evolution of earthly forms […] the human form’ (EA, 35). But there is a crucial distinction to draw: Le Corbusier is praising the notion of architectural order whilst Bataille writes against it, using his Critical Dictionary entries to make us reconsider architecture and, if we agree with Hollier, writing to undermine form and structure. There are other differences in their thinking, too. Amongst these is Le Corbusier’s description of poetry as ‘the harmonious relationships between perceived images,’\(^{73}\) which lacks the sensuality and carnality of Bataille’s description of poetry as the ‘voluptuousness of sounds’ that ‘carries us directly to intensity’ and has little to do with harmony.\(^ {74}\) Later in this chapter I will discuss whether the relationship between poetry and geometry can be the basis of transgressive architecture, and how this both differs from and relates to the transgressive language of erotic poetic prose that I discussed in Chapter Two.

Ten years after *Urbanisme*\(^ {75}\) Le Corbusier elaborated one of his most famous concepts of city planning, explained in a book of the same name, *Ville Radieuse* (1935).\(^ {76}\) The *ville radieuse* is both the unrealised plan Le Corbusier imagined for Paris, and a coherent series of urban planning principles which were collected in his book and some of which were realised (such as individual housing projects including the Unité d’Habitation of Marseilles, 1946-5 and Berlin, 1957). Inscriptions on the title pages of the book dedicate it to authority and further inscriptions on the title page revisit earlier themes in Le Corbusier’s thinking:

- Plans are not politics.
- Plans are the rational and poetic monument set up in the midst of contingencies.
- Contingencies are the environment: places, peoples, cultures, topographies, climates.

---

\(^{73}\) Le Corbusier, *The City of To-morrow and its Planning*, p. xxi.

\(^{74}\) Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes XI*, p. 87 or JP, 137.


They are, furthermore, resources liberated by modern techniques. The latter are universal.
Contingencies should only be judged as they relate to the entity – “man” – and in connection with man, in relation to us, to ourselves:
a biology
a psychology.77

This inscription makes clear that humanity is the purpose and guiding principle of architecture and urban planning – and the latter are acts of rationality and poetry, continuing to develop Le Corbusier’s earlier themes. I want to consider the conceptual ideas of the ville radieuse carefully, alongside evidence that Chandigarh was designed to be a ville radieuse. This is important if we are to consider Lahiji’s argument seriously, and so that we can assess the extent to which The Accursed Share influenced Le Corbusier’s architecture compared to his own ideas about the politics and anthropocentric status of the city.

The first page of Ville Radieuse states a ‘Decision’ that ‘We must undertake the redistribution of land in the country and the cities […] for the common good’ (RC, 1). Le Corbusier’s politics is complex and developed in different directions throughout his career, but the themes of ‘the common good’ of humanity, and respect for authority, remain in his work in different guises. The ideas elaborated in Ville Radieuse are wide ranging: they confront the standardisation of modern construction methods and of construction products; the growing and changing phenomena of cities and the politics needed to govern them; and the life of human beings in the machine age.78 But there is also the presentation of a new form of city planning, the ville radieuse, which Le Corbusier believes is needed to help cities and buildings adapt to rapidly changing social contexts: ‘All cities have fallen into a state of anarchy, following the irremediable development of a machine age. They need to be thoroughly straightened out’ (RC, 47). Le Corbusier goes on to explain that regulations about buildings need to change to fit the machine age and modern living standards, but before this can happen new techniques and ‘NEW ARCHITECTURAL AND CITY PLANNING PROPOSALS’ are needed (RC, 47).

Less than a decade after Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover we see a different attitude to the industrial age in Le Corbusier’s texts. Lawrence had Connie baulk at

77 The Radiant City, title page.
78 For a summary of some of the influence behind Ville Radieuse, such as Saint-Simonian and Fourierist philosophy and his critique of Ebeneezer Howard’s garden city movement, see David Pinder, Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in 20th-Century Urbanism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 82-86.
the ugliness of the mining town and its people, who had become ‘Elemental creatures, weird and distorted, of the mineral world!’ due to industrialisation, which was ‘blotting out’ the old England (LCL: 160; 153). By contrast, for Le Corbusier the city must be designed for the machine age and the changes it will bring – ‘blotting out’ is the ideal, as Le Corbusier’s complete redesign of Paris in his Ville Radieuse showed.

The ville radieuse is Le Corbusier’s new architectural and urban planning proposal which he explains in theory, and also describes in practice through a range of plans and images. The principles are: breathing cities in which ‘The suburbs must be eliminated and nature brought into the cities themselves’; habitation to include education and sport; circulation on grids instead of streets; the skyscraper; reorganisation of the functions of the city and zoning; and the notion of the ‘Biological Unit’ or cell – rooms scaled to suit the human body (RC: 104; 112; 119; 127-8; 140-1; 143). The notion of scaling architecture to the body was another of Le Corbusier’s defining concepts, which he called the Modulor. He broke down the dimensions of a typical human body (or ideal body, as Lynn has critiqued) and designed buildings and rooms to fit around it. A famous image, often a sculpture or an engraving within a building, represents the measurements used and their relation to the human body (one version is outside the Chandigarh Architecture Museum, Fig. 1).

There is also a political stance articulated within Ville Radieuse. Le Corbusier believed that ‘All men work’ and are ‘capable of making judgements about things concerning their own trades’ (RC, 192). The trades would form ‘our edifice of authority and power […] hierarchy of responsibility’ so that authority and responsibility was directly related to areas in which people have knowledge and could make informed judgements (RC, 192). This was a ‘pyramid of natural hierarchies’ ruled by authority and administration (RC, 192). David Pinder explains that in the late 1920s Le Corbusier became interested in ‘regional syndicalism, a loosely defined political movement that was opposed to contemporary capitalism and parliamentary democracy.’79 This was known as planisme which, Pinder states, was ‘a neo-corporatist technocratism.’80 Pinder explains: ‘This advocated the election of a multi-layered administrative hierarchy constituted by professional associations or syndicats based on people’s trades, to provide an “organic” social body and to ensure “expert” direction of the economy.’81 This stance arose from Le

79 Pinder, p. 83.
80 Ibid., p. 83.
81 Ibid., p. 83.
Corbusier’s dissatisfaction with the public housing being delivered in France, and a subsequent disillusionment with capitalism\textsuperscript{82} (he worked on Russian projects including plans for the Palace of Soviets in Moscow in 1930).\textsuperscript{83} In planisme politics and urban planning were to meet in one form and one administration, Le Corbusier’s ‘pyramid of natural hierarchies’, both reflecting the organic body of the populace and connecting the existing system of work with the way in which they are directed politically (RC, 192). As Pinder points out, Le Corbusier’s political vision entailed a central role for ‘experts, planners and administrators’ and in the \textit{ville radieuse}, a city plan that used this central role and ordered people accordingly was elaborated.\textsuperscript{84}

Elements of the \textit{ville radieuse} and Le Corbusier’s political and social intentions are clearly present in the design of Chandigarh. The green spaces integrated into the city and its housing are akin to the green spaces outside houses to integrate space for sport and meditation into daily life (RC, 65). The circulatory grid of roads or seven \textit{voies} are akin to the simpler classification of roads described in \textit{Ville Radieuse} to separate high-speed vehicles from other vehicles and pedestrians (RC, 122). The zoning of functions is also clear in Chandigarh, as each sector has a defined purpose.\textsuperscript{85} Fry and Drew were present when Le Corbusier developed the plan for Chandigarh. Although it was initially to be a revision of the existing plan by Albert Mayer, Drew says Le Corbusier ‘hardly glanced’\textsuperscript{86} at Mayer’s plan and Fry describes how Mayer was encouraged to sign a plan very different from his own.\textsuperscript{87} In an essay published twenty years later, Fry describes the process of Le Corbusier adapting Mayer’s plan by adding uniform sectors, and describing the centre as the stomach and Capitol, which he moved to higher ground, as the head.\textsuperscript{88} In an unpublished manuscript titled ‘India’ Fry gives the following description of the planning process:

Without pausing Le Corbusier drew a heavy line from the railway across the site, murmuring as he drew it “Avenue de la gare, rue commercial” and

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 83.
\textsuperscript{83} Biography at Fondation Le Corbusier, see <http://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr/corbuweb/morpheus.aspx?sysId=15&IrisObjectId=6943&sysLanguage=en-en&itemPos=1&sysParentId=15&clearQuery=1> accessed 5.3.15.
\textsuperscript{84} Pinder, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{85} RC, 140-141. A detailed example of the zones of a town are described in the plans for the city of Nemours; see pp. 314-415. Zones here include the port and industrial city, residence, business city, civic centre and amusements.
\textsuperscript{86} Drew, ‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{87} Fry, ‘India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{88} Fry, ‘Le Corbusier at India’, p. 354.
brought it to a halt in the middle of the Plan. “Voila, nous sommes au milieu de le cite.” “Voia le ventre, l’estomac. Et la tête?...”

The stomach, or commercial city centre, and the head, the Government and the top of the ‘pyramid of natural hierarchies’ show how the zoning of the ville radieuse is clearly elaborated in the plan for this new Indian city (RC, 192). The bodily metaphors are common for Le Corbusier, as elements of the ville radieuse are elaborated through a series of metaphors of the human body. The section titled ‘Exact Respiration’ begins by explaining the role of the lung, and elaborates techniques for indoor respiration and the circulation of air in buildings in different climates and conditions (RC: 40; 47). The ville radieuse is ‘The rebirth of the human body’ because it accounts for all the body’s needs, including those that arguably relate more to human development than simply bodily development: ‘satisfaction of psycho-physiological needs, collective participation and the freedom of the individual’ (RC, 7).

Manfredo Tarufi rightly warns against oversimplifying Le Corbusier’s architecture by reading it ‘in the light of the evolution of his urbanism.’ However, there is a clear relationship demonstrated by Fry’s account, and Chandigarh can be thought of as a ville radieuse adapted to India and its people. That this grid is integrated into, quite literally, the body of the city, is pertinent. The head, stomach and lungs of the city now sit within a logical frame whilst maintaining their organic relationship with one another, providing circulation and efficient movement as Le Corbusier intended. There are adaptations but the principles and intentions of the ville radieuse are maintained in Chandigarh.

Le Corbusier’s method is to impose the elements of life he believes fundamental to humanity – geometry and the machine, and poetry, conceived as harmony – onto spaces to create an optimum architectural, or harmonious, environment. This method risks being prescriptive as Hollier, via Bataille, notes architecture can be. But before we examine the influence of Le Corbusier’s

90 Tarufi, p. 209.
91 One example of how the ville radieuse was adapted is the development of seven types of roads, which work to create the grid system of Chandigarh, and the inclusion within the ’7Vs’ (roads) of the bazaar. This model of planning performed several functions: it created a logical grid to serve traffic and fast vehicles as well as traditional methods of transport including cycling and walking, hence accounting for modern development as well as the public need to reach certain amenities easily and more often. The bazaars are a development from Le Corbusier’s previous masterplans, although the success of their execution and that of the other roads for leisure and commerce is debated. See, for example, Correa’s comments on the ‘India of bazaars’ and Sarin’s on the failure of the Sector 17 chowk which I discuss later in this chapter.
architecture on the society and people of Chandigarh, I want to consider Lahiji’s interpretation and whether Bataille’s ideas may have played a role in Le Corbusier’s design intentions.

**Intentions: Le Corbusier and Bataille**

Lahiji’s assessment of Chandigarh traces three Bataillean influences in the city which might elucidate architectural transgression: visions of expenditure and sacrifice (although he does not differentiate between the two) that I will come to shortly, and the suggestion that the urban plan is accephalic. I have argued above that Chandigarh is an adapted version of Le Corbusier’s *ville radieuse*: Lahiji does not agree and claims that the plan at Chandigarh ‘was different from that of Ville Radieuse in its fundamental philosophical premises and in its architectural concept.’

Lahiji attributes Chandigarh’s departure from Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse* of the 1930s and its ‘fundamental ideology of central economic planning with authoritarian political control’ to his reading of Bataille’s ideas about potlatch and economics of transgression. Whilst *planisme* was ‘the very essence of a centrally organized society with a political leader,’ Bataille was critical of it in the 1930s whilst working on *Acéphale*. Lahiji quotes Stoekl’s explanation as to how the Acéphale or headless man’s body parts in André Masson’s drawing ‘create another head.’ The nipples, bowels and genitals form a face so that the Acéphale ‘has lost a head, a principle of organization and order, only to mutate and develop another, more hypnotic, doubled and doubling (replicating) face.’ For Lahiji, the same applies to Chandigarh:

In Le Corbusier’s idea of *Ville Radieuse*, there was no “acéphalic head” as (dis)organising principle, but rather it was the very “head” at the top of a hierarchy that was the organising principle. This plan was compatible with Dandieu and Aron’s authoritarianism and the imperative of a center.

[...] At Chandigarh, Le Corbusier transcends the *planisme* of the 1930s and the authoritarianism of *Ville Radieuse*. The Chandigarh plan is clearly a plan

---

92 Lahiji, p. 51.
93 Ibid., p. 54.
94 Ibid., p. 53.
97 Ibid., p. 53.
without a head, and free of hierarchical distribution. It is a potlatch of an “excessive” expenditure of space; its structure is a disarticulated and disjunctive (de)composition. In this plan, Le Corbusier frees himself from the anthropomorphistic body of Ville Radieuse and authoritarian control and achieves a body (dis)organisation akin to André Masson’s Acéphale.98

We understand Lahiji to be saying that Le Corbusier’s desire for a new plan for a new India, as a departure from the authoritarianism of planisme and Ville Radieuse, succeeds because a new centralised plan emerged, which was distorted and distorting like the acephalic head. There is also the expenditure of space, which Lahiji likens to potlatch. He claims that Le Corbusier’s notes on the section of The Accursed Share that discusses the Marshall Plan show Le Corbusier’s ‘affirmation’ of ‘Bataille’s thesis’ here, and that this reading is brought to life at Chandigarh.99

Lahiji’s analysis usefully details the sections of Bataille’s text to which Le Corbusier paid the most attention, and reflects upon some of Le Corbusier’s notes. However Lahiji does not read Bataille’s text closely enough to explain precisely what it is about Chandigarh that makes it an architectural expression of Bataille’s expenditure. His argument that Chandigarh is a ville radieuse without a head, but with a distorted and therefore distorting face within its form, would be a better evidenced argument if Lahiji was able to show how the urban planning in Chandigarh creates this alternative face. But he does not, and this is perhaps because Chandigarh is only a mildly adjusted ville radieuse rather than a fully distorted and transgressive one. Other critics, including William J R Curtis, read Chandigarh as a failed anthropomorphic city, rather than a wilfully transgressive one, but I believe it is neither.100 As I detailed above, Fry describes Le Corbusier working on the plan and relating it directly to his anthropomorphic version of the city, the Ville Radieuse, as he worked. I believe that the most significant influence over Le Corbusier’s urban design of the city of Chandigarh comes from his own ideas for a ville radieuse.

Aside from the acephalic head, Lahiji also argues that Bataille’s notions of potlatch and expenditure are present in the urban plan of Chandigarh. Le Corbusier’s principles of urban planning, in part articulated in his notion of the ville radieuse, in some ways connect it with the notion of expenditure Bataille presents in The Accursed Share. For example, both Bataille and Le Corbusier share a belief in

98 Ibid., p. 54.
99 Ibid., p. 54.
the importance of raising the standard of living for people around the globe, as I will explain below. However, this is not an entirely original idea and whilst they may have shared it, we cannot know that reading it in *The Accursed Share* is what influenced Le Corbusier. I will now explain why this is the case, by examining Lahiji’s claim that sacrifice is evident in Chandigarh, staring with his assertion that Chandigarh is ‘a potlatch of ‘excessive’ expenditure of space.’ I will consider Lahiji’s reading of sacrifice in more detail, discussing what these ideas mean in *The Accursed Share* and comparing Bataille’s ideas to Lahiji’s analysis of Chandigarh. This will help me to determine whether Le Corbusier’s intentions at Chandigarh could have been influenced by Bataille, before I move on to consider whether Le Corbusier’s design intentions in turn influenced society, and whether they demonstrate transgression in any way.

In his Preface to *The Accursed Share* Bataille says that the topic of his work is ‘the movement of energy on the earth’ of which he says ‘the movement I study’ is ‘that of excess energy, translated into the effervescence of life’ (*AS*, 10). Bataille explains that energy is spent either through ‘productive expenditure’ or ‘nonproductive expenditure’ (*AS*, 12).

Bataille’s thesis in *The Accursed Share* is that ‘the global movement of energy […] cannot accumulate limitlessly’ but, problematically, mankind denies the ‘useless consumption’ implied by this global excess of energy (*AS*, 23). He believes the ‘human mind’ considers only restricted economies and considers organisms and enterprises ‘in terms of particular operations with limited ends’ (*AS*, 22). Bataille explains the contrast between this way of thinking and the general economy:

Changing from the perspectives of restrictive economy to those of general economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking – and of ethics. If part of a wealth (subject to a rough estimate) is doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use without any possible profit, it is logical, even *inescapable*, to surrender commodities without return. (*AS*, 25)

The general economy is the economy beyond the bounds of human structures of existence. It is the economy in which waste and the expenditure made necessary by excess energy, or nonproductive expenditure, take place – examples of which include eroticism and potlatch (*AS*, 35). The general economy could be considered

---

101 Lahiji, p. 54.
transgressive in that it is both necessary to our existence and counter to the restricted systems and limited ends humanity constructs of life, although Bataille did not discuss it as transgression at this stage in his thinking.\textsuperscript{102}

Looking over Le Corbusier’s copy of The Accursed Share and the passages he underlined or annotated, Lahiji states that he read Bataille’s chapter on The Marshall Plan carefully and argues that the notes demonstrate that Le Corbusier affirms Bataille’s thesis.\textsuperscript{103} In this chapter Bataille elaborates his notion of expenditure and the general economy in relation to international economic development and the Marshall Plan. This plan was an aid programme (and repayment scheme) the United States of America distributed to European countries with struggling economies after the expense of World War II. Basing his analysis of the Plan heavily on that of the economist François Perroux, Bataille explains that this plan moves from a classic economic model which treats individual interests as isolated, to a general model which takes global and shared interests into account. The US had the option of retaining its own wealth whilst other economies struggled – with the threat that some would turn to communism under these conditions, and with Stalin presenting a looming threat in the USSR – or it could choose another economic model:

Established within the limits of the capitalist world, according to the rule of isolated profit – without which no transaction is conceivable – it had to renounce its founding principles, in order to maintain them, renounce the condition without which it could not continue to exist […] François Perroux has very rightly drawn a definition of the Marshall Plan from this fundamental opposition: It is, he says “an investment in the world’s interest.” […] There is “a collective supply, meeting a collective demand.” (AS, 176-7).

Bataille explains that this shift in economic models is necessary because ‘each isolated entity on earth, in all of living nature, tends to grow’ and yet ‘Considered in the aggregate, the growth of living particles cannot be infinite. There exists a point of saturation of the space open to life’ (AS, 180). No longer thinking in terms of financial exchanges, Bataille is talking about life organisms and the general economy of the planet – the planet being the spatial boundary that occasions the

\textsuperscript{102} In Chapter One of this thesis I discuss how the notion of transgression developed in Bataille’s works; whilst he used the word in Eroticism I believe it also relates to ideas of expenditure in The Accursed Share and his earlier essay ‘The Notion of Expenditure’.

\textsuperscript{103} Lahiji, p. 54.
need for expenditure, as I discussed in Chapter One in light of Nick Land’s reading of Bataille. In other words, space is the limit on exponential growth and is therefore integrally linked to the production of excess and the need for its expenditure. Linking financial and organic economies, Bataille states ‘it has to be granted that life or wealth cannot be indefinitely prolific and that the moment always arrives when they must stop growing and begin to spend’ (AS, 181). Bataille wants to relate expenditure to both the political condition of his time and the human condition in general or, more specifically, the conditions of human existence. As such it is metaphysically relevant because its structure is relevant across so many levels of human operation. When we consider Bataille’s comments in light of his Preface to The Accursed Share, in which he says he is discussing ‘the play of forces based on the laws that govern us’ we see that his discussions of the Marshall Plan and human organisms all relate back to conditions that define our humanity (AS, 12). Our humanity is based on our ability to siphon off energy or parts of the general economy to create our own restricted human economy.

From a political perspective, Bataille says the conflict of the post-war period ‘is the struggle of two economic methods’ and it is the role of the Marshall Plan to negotiate them, which it does by offering ‘an organization of surplus against the accumulation of the Stalin plans’ (AS, 173). It is an economic battle rather than an armed one; war is avoided because ‘the opposed forces are different in nature economically’ and therefore ‘they must enter into competition on the plane of economic organization’ (AS, 173). The Marshall Plan integrates national economies, or rather, ‘integrates each economy into the world’ through mutual dependency (AS, 178). Such a perspective is reminiscent of the next volume of The Accursed Share, which remained unpublished during his lifetime. In this work, The History of Eroticism, Bataille describes the exchange of women between families to create an early community and the taboo of incest, and thereby eroticism and human civilisation. National economies are like families that exchange wealth to create a communal economy between them. However, for the current moment he continues his political theme and relates the Marshall Plan to Marxism: ‘An operation in the interest of the world is necessarily based on this unquestionable principle: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”’ (AS, 178). The politics of production lead, for Bataille, to expenditure: ‘Mankind is at the same time – through industry, which uses energy for the development of the forces of production – a manifold opening of the possibilities of growth and an infinite capacity for wasteful consumption’ (AS, 181).
The boundless energy of the sun, of life, must be expended uselessly, because the extent to which it can be used for growth is spatially limited: there is not enough space to grow, production cannot be infinite so waste is essential. The same is true of civilisation and the concept of labour, and for human beings as living organisms: the surface of the planet is a boundary that imposes the need for either a limit or expenditure upon any system that is growing – whether it is growing usefully or for no reason at all. The global relationship between the US and Europe is an economic step change that starts to acknowledge the need for expenditure. Here a national economy is opened up to other national economies, forming a global economy – but Bataille does not suggest this is a general economy. The step change in economics is similar but the scale is not. The general economy would not be a financial model, it would exist beyond the restricted systems of money and international political relations. What this also reveals is that the step change from national to global does spend excess but for a reason: to avoid international political threats to national stability. This form of expenditure is therefore not transgression, because it is useful and adopts a new system instead of becoming a source of instability within the current system.

What is perhaps unique to this period of Bataille’s writing is that rather than emphasise the violence and ruthless contradictoriness of excess, he examines how the Marshall Plan avoids war in a way that nearly sees him ascribing a use value to particular forms of excess (the utility being that it helps to avoid war). Surplus can be used to raise the standard of living, as the US has done by instigating the Marshall Plan rather than growing whilst other nations suffer. Bataille emphasises the threat of war and makes the following important claim:

\[
\text{Mankind will move peacefully toward a general resolution of its problems only if this threat causes the U.S. to assign a large share of the excess – deliberately and without return – to raising the global standard of living, economic activity thus giving the surplus energy produced an outlet other than war. (AS, 187. Italics Bataille’s own.)}
\]

A peaceful expenditure is thus described by Bataille, one in which people benefit from better lives rather than a violent war. The United States of America must take

---

104 Bataille does acknowledge the violence of excess in his descriptions of Aztec sacrifice on the preceding pages (AS, 52-61) but he later emphasises that all transgression is violent, for example when he compares erotic transgression to bloody sacrifice in *Eroticism* less than a decade later.
on the role of the wealthy merchant demonstrating potlatch to the people of his community, but the community is the world.\textsuperscript{105} This is uncharacteristic of Bataille’s other discussions of expenditure: in \textit{Eroticism}, for example, sex and death are described as ‘the boundless wastage of nature’s resources’ which are opposed to the urge to live but are also the necessary culmination of life (\textit{E}, 61). When Bataille says in \textit{Eroticism} that ‘Life is a swelling tumult continuously on the verge of explosion’ he describes no peaceful antidote to that explosion (\textit{E}, 59). Perhaps the ethical dimension of Bataille’s argument in \textit{The Accursed Share} is due to the political nature of his argument in this work and other events in his life at this time. Michel Surya argues that Bataille was involvement in politics during the end of World War II and the start of the Cold War until 1953, just shortly after \textit{The Accursed Share} was published.\textsuperscript{106} The same ethical imperative in \textit{The Accursed Share} is an almost-silent theme in some of Bataille’s earlier works too – I have already discussed the suggestion in ‘Architecture’ that architecture’s power over society is problematic. Later works such as \textit{Eroticism}, however, do not offer us alternative forms of expenditure – they argue its necessity and violence. That Bataille wants to avoid war does not therefore mean he is completely opposed to violence, as he explores in intimate detail the internal violence of eroticism and sacrifice. His argument in \textit{The Accursed Share} is that since expenditure will always happen, we ought to have a lucid consciousness of it and expend in ways which are amenable rather than self-destructive.

Bataille concludes that ‘the easing associated with an upward adjustment of living standard, implies the value of a setting in place of social existence’ that is akin to ‘the transition from animal to man’ (\textit{AS}, 190). The solution as to what to do with surplus is a continued growth in the standard of living that, like man’s transcendence of the natural world, is merely the use of energy for the development of civilisation. Bataille says ‘It is as if, in this way of looking at things, the final goal were given’ and that goal is the development of human civilisation, through the use of energy and its employment to produce surplus (\textit{AS}, 190). But of course it is not this simple and the notion of a final goal is, as Bataille adds, ‘obviously an illusion’ (\textit{AS}, 190). He has explained this illusion in the preceding paragraph:

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{105}The system of ‘gift-exchange’ between Aztec merchants, and the potlatch demonstrated by wealthy members of society are explained in \textit{The Accursed Share}, pp. 64-77.

\textsuperscript{106} Surya, p. 363. For a detailed discussion of the intellectual era of the late 1940s and early 1950s in relation to Bataille’s intellectual and political texts, see Surya pp. 363-386.
The beings that we are are not given once and for all, they appear designed for an increase of their energy resources. They generally make this increase, beyond mere subsistence, their goal and their reason for being. But with this subordination to increase, the being in question loses its autonomy; it subordinates itself to what it will be in the future, owing to the increase of its resources. In reality, the increase should be situated in relation to the moment in which it will resolve into a pure expenditure. (AS, 190)

The growth toward pure expenditure that Bataille speaks of is, I believe, the same that he later articulates as ‘assenting to life up to the point of death’ – his definition of eroticism (E, 11). The logic of The Accursed Share is applied in Eroticism but the subject of expenditure moves from the political to the erotics of intersubjective relations. Whilst the logic remains the same, in The Accursed Share he does not relate expenditure to eroticism specifically, but suggests that the increase in the standard of living can only result in pure expenditure, like every other growth or accumulation of surplus. Successive restricted economies are still part of the movement of growth, and when no more growth or increase in restricted economies is possible, the result will be pure expenditure: orgasm, sacrifice, forms of poetry and, as discussed above, war.

Le Corbusier’s belief in raising the standard of living does not necessarily mean he agreed with Bataille that this movement was a form of expenditure that amended economic systems, and that would eventually lead to expenditure once excess could not be spent raising living standards any further. In The Accursed Share Bataille presents expenditure as a necessary outcome of energy and growth, whilst offering an ethical trade-off between raising the standard of living and war as a suitable, temporary solution of expenditure in our current restricted economy. There is room to share the wealth before its excess fully overwhelms our system. Le Corbusier may have understood Bataille’s argument and reflected on it, but there is no evidence that Le Corbusier wholly subscribed to the ideas Bataille proposes. Le Corbusier was often at pains to describe his own work as an attempt to improve people’s lives. In a postscript in the 1964 reprint of Ville Radieuse Le Corbusier congratulates himself in the third person (‘mr. le Corbu’) for having ‘posed the problems of 40 years in the future 20 years ago!’ (RC, 347). He says that the “‘Mister NOS!’” should have realised that ‘these plans were filled with the total and disinterested passion of a man who has spent his whole life concerning himself with his “fellow man,” concerning himself fraternally’ and that this justifies the extent to which he ‘upset things’ (RC, 347). In his early essays he argues that ‘various
classes of workers in society to-day *no longer have dwellings adapted to their needs*’ and through his vision architecture should meet those needs.\(^{107}\) This was not at odd with his *planisme*, because different classes can still have access to the same amenities. Charlotte Benton suggests that the proposal for a single residential area in the city was ‘classless’ but it should be noted that the equality Le Corbusier aspired to create was about a shared standard of amenity, not a single form of wealth.\(^{108}\) Le Corbusier talked about different classes of workers and types of homes to accommodate them but in Chandigarh they were all to have access to the same amenities.\(^{109}\) For example, the logical grid at Chandigarh served the ideal of equality: as Fry notes, basic necessities and leisure spaces were all ‘within minutes walk’ from every dwelling, regardless of whether the residents were ‘rich or poor.’\(^{110}\) Drew described the importance of Chandigarh being the first Indian city with water born sewage, electricity and drinking water in the homes.\(^{111}\) A modern standard of living, above that of other Indian cities, was enshrined in the plan of Chandigarh, and throughout Le Corbusier’s career he described the importance of architecture serving the demands of modern life.\(^{112}\)

The improvement of living standards for people in India linked, for Le Corbusier, both to his own belief in technological progress to improve lives and to the notion of a global economic system that was to include India, much like that Bataille describes the US as having acknowledged in the Marshall Plan. Stanislaus von Moos notes that in letters to the Indian Prime Minister Nehru, Le Corbusier discussed the relationship between the US and USSR and quoted a manifesto he had written in 1949, stating ‘The modern world has made all things interrelated. The relations are continuous and contiguous around the globe, affected by nuances and diversity […] The question is man and his environment, an event of local as well as global order.’\(^{113}\) This echoes the description Bataille elaborates of the global


\(^{111}\) Drew, ‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, pp.6-7.

\(^{112}\) Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 3 is one example.

\(^{113}\) Von Moos, p. 447. Von Moos does not add the date of the letter, but notes in the footnotes (p. 455) that the quote is from Le Corbusier’s 1949 manifesto for the Congrès
economy in the passages Le Corbusier annotated in The Accursed Share, which was published the same year that Le Corbusier wrote this manifesto. However, Le Corbusier’s ‘global order’ and Bataille’s ‘general economy’ are quite different. Bataille’s example of the Marshall Plan presents two different economic systems that the plan negotiates between, which might between them form a global economy in which different global powers work together. But the general economy exists outside such human international relations, it refers to the infinite energy and waste that restricted systems try to manage. The global economy would only be another restricted economy.

This means that Le Corbusier’s attempts to raise the standard of living at Chandigarh, even if this is through the excessive expenditure of space that Lahiji sees in the city, are not transgressive. The expenditure of excess could in theory be transgressive but in this instance it is useful and preserves, by adapting, a restricted economy. As with the US through the Marshall Plan, expenditure here does not threaten an economy nor introduce an integral challenge to its own stability.

Intentions: The Symbolism of the Open Hand

The Open Hand is one of Le Corbusier’s most significant symbols and sculptures. It was an enduring image that spanned his life’s work but found its home in Chandigarh, where it is a huge bronze sculpture erected above a concrete rectangular open theatre (Fig. 2). Drew explains that Le Corbusier dated works twice, once with the date of preliminary sketches and the second when it was executed; the dates on a painting he gave her entitled Woman with Open Hand attribute it to Paris 1932 and Chandigarh 1952. We therefore have to think about what the Open Hand meant to Le Corbusier as a symbol, and what it meant for him in its context of Chandigarh in assessing whether, as Lahiji claims, its expression at Chandigarh was influenced by Bataille.

Lahiji argues for an autobiographical influence, claiming that Le Corbusier related personally to Bataille’s reading of the gift and potlatch. In The Accursed Share Bataille explains that in potlatch, a gift is given by a community chief to show his excessive wealth. Whereas some gifts are given to ensure a circulation within

---

Mondial des Partisans de la Paix, who wanted a pro-Communist manifesto from him. He wrote this instead. The event was held in Paris in April 1949.

114 We do not know exactly when Bataille sent Le Corbusier the book, but we know that the architect finished reading it on 19 November 1953, the date he wrote on the last page of the book to indicate he had completed it (Lahiji, p. 50). The Accursed Share was published in February 1949 and the Congrès for which Le Corbusier wrote the manifesto text was held in April 1949.

115 Drew, ‘Le Corbusier as I Knew Him’, p. 366. The image is reproduced on page 368.
the community, and a future return on the gift (such as when a father offers his daughter to another family, in the hope that his son will soon be offered a wife, which for Bataille is the basis of the incest taboo, eroticism and humanity), other gifts from chiefs earn nothing but status and prestige (AS, 67-72). Lahiji quotes Le Corbusier’s annotations which state ‘the unselfish practice of painting is an unflagging sacrifice, a gift of time, patience, and love, expecting no material reward.’ Lahiji argues that Le Corbusier saw his art as a gift which earned him no further currency or exchange, not even prestige. As such he claims that ‘Le Corbusier’s ultimate self-sacrifice culminated in his idea of la main ouverte, or “Open Hand.”’ The personal resonance of sacrifice which Lahiji presents is convincing if we think of potlatch as a sacrifice of wealth and riches, but it is Le Corbusier’s notes and Lahiji’s argument which conflate sacrifice and the gift, which are quite different in Bataille’s thinking.

For Bataille, sacrifice is an act of destruction that negates utility and duration so that humanity as a concept or form of existence dies (TR, 43). Sacrifice is in this sense an act of expenditure, as is potlatch, but in potlatch the gift that is given or spent is excessive wealth that proves the giver’s wealth and earns them prestige in return. Le Corbusier is instead talking about a personal sacrifice, the act of gifting his time and skills: this is different from Bataille’s sacrifice. It is not so different from Bataille’s potlatch though, as Le Corbusier is arguably gifting his wealth of time and skill in the hope that he will be acknowledged. Often Le Corbusier’s own descriptions of the Open Hand are reminiscent of potlatch, such as when he says it is a symbol that ‘to receive the created riches, to distribute [them] to the peoples of the world, should be the sign of our epoch.’ There is also a passage in Le Corbusier’s Œuvres Complètes which discusses his personal involvement in his work at Chandigarh:

India has the treasures of a proud culture; but her coffers are empty. It must be made clear that it was without thought of profit that we undertook and participated in the task of which we here speak. It had to be decided that there would be no financial gain, but instead we would give all our time, all our

---

116 Lahiji, p. 55.
117 Ibid., p. 57.
118 I analyse sacrifice in Bataille’s work in Chapter Two, ‘Sacrifice and Transgression’.
119 Lahiji, p. 60 quoting Mary Patricia May Sekler, ‘Le Corbusier, Ruskin, the Tree, and the Open Hand,’ in The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier, pp. 42-95 (p. 83).
hearts, all our energy, all our knowledge [...] It was not only necessary to give
one’s all, but to look forward to the possibility of a dramatic achievement.\textsuperscript{120}

To give one’s all for no payment or benefit other than the hope of something
greater, ‘a dramatic achievement,’ contradicts accounts in which Le Corbusier
apparently requested higher fees for his work.\textsuperscript{121} But if we take Le Corbusier at his
word this account supports Lahiji’s reading, especially when a later passage
suggests that when the buildings and the spaces between them are finished and
achieve ‘a rigorously concerted symphony’ then people will ‘cease their complaining
and, instead, give thanks!’\textsuperscript{122} The notion that thanks are to be expected at the end of
the development is relevant in light of Bataille’s argument that the excessive gift
shows the power of the giver, as the poorer recipient can only offer their gratitude.

A decade after he finished his notes in \textit{The Accursed Share}, in which he
bemoaned the lack of recognition his work received, Le Corbusier is still
preoccupied with the same notion: that he was gifting ideas and work to his ‘fellow
man’ disinterestedly, with no hope of recognition or return – and yet writing about
his generosity is something of a demand for recognition (\textit{RC}, 347).\textsuperscript{123} In 1961, he
inscribed the words ‘La main ouverte’ alongside a passage in a French translation of
Nietzsche’s \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}.\textsuperscript{124} The passage is from Zarathustra’s
Prologue:

\begin{quote}
Behold! I am tired of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much
honey; I need hands outstretched to take it. I should like to give it away and
distribute it, until the wise among men have become happy in their folly and
the poor men happy in their wealth.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

This text in particular supports a personal interpretation of the Open Hand, albeit a
very confident one in which Le Corbusier would be comparing himself to
Zarathustra. But the notion of a hand receiving and sharing wisdom reflects
Bataille’s reading of potlatch and the luxurious distribution of profit, which potentially

\textsuperscript{120} Le Corbusier, \textit{Œuvres Complètes VI}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{121} Drew, ‘Le Corbusier as I Knew Him’, p. 372.
\textsuperscript{122} Le Corbusier, \textit{Œuvres Complètes VI}, p. 56. He is talking specifically about the
landscaping in the Capitol, not across the whole city.
\textsuperscript{123} I earlier discussed a postscript from Le Corbusier dated March 9, 1964 in which he
congratulated himself on his futurist ideas and describes his concern with fellow man.
\textsuperscript{124} Inside cover of \textit{The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier}. It is also worth noting that
Tarufi described the Open Hand as relating to the eternal return (p. 214) but he does not
explain his reasoning.
\textsuperscript{125} Nietzsche, \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, p. 39.
signals a Bataillean influence on Le Corbusier’s best known sculpture and symbol. Whilst Lahiji saw sacrificial symbolism in the Open Hand, it would be truer to say that it symbolised potlatch: Le Corbusier’s luxuriant offering of his own gifts in the hope that he will be celebrated as a result.

The Open Hand was also a political symbol, in that it related to the politics of shared wealth on a grander scale than Le Corbusier’s personal potlatch. Chandigarh is in many ways a city characterised by politics. It was created to be the capital of a new state and the Capitol buildings were to house government work.\(^\text{126}\) India’s new and first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to create a modern India at one with technology; he stated ‘We cannot keep pace with the modern world unless we utilize the sources of power that are available to the modern world.’\(^\text{127}\) India needed ‘the factory and all it represents’ in order to maintain political independence.\(^\text{128}\) Le Corbusier’s earlier publications glorified the mechanical age and elaborated how a new city should look and operate in the modern age: he fitted the brief for the architect of a new state capital city perfectly.\(^\text{129}\)

The political significance of the Open Hand is compelling in light of the political power Bataille and others have ascribed to architecture. Le Corbusier’s contemporaries and critics have commented on his interest in politics – not simply on the planisme in his theoretical texts but on the power and authority they perceive within his design and planning and which play out in his Western design strategies across the globe. For example, Drew states that Le Corbusier ‘had something of the dictator in him which is reflected in his planning,’\(^\text{130}\) that he sought ‘hierarchy in the programme of the Secretariat building, almost inventing it, as though the governor or heads of department would address a crowd below,’\(^\text{131}\) and that he ‘had an elevated idea of Government.’\(^\text{132}\) Tarufi is critical of Le Corbusier’s urbanism, which he calls a ‘naïve overdetermination of the authority of the plan – le despote – as

---

\(^{126}\) A good summary of the creation of the Punjab state and Chandigarh as a political capital can be found in von Moos, p. 419 onwards.
\(^{128}\) Ibid., p. 417.
\(^{129}\) Although as I noted at the starts of this chapter, it was Jane Drew who recommended him when she and Fry were approached to work on the city. Drew, ‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 2.
\(^{130}\) Drew, ‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 12. Drew goes on to note that this was in her view ‘needed’ in an India ‘where so much is without order or logic or structure’ (p. 12).
\(^{131}\) Manuscript for a talk Jane Drew gave in Bristol, England on Friday November 22\(^\text{nd}\) 1989 at an event celebrating Le Corbusier’s centennial; the typed manuscript is dated October 1989. London, V&A, RIBA Archives, MS Fry and Drew, Box 25 Folder 2, p. 21.
\(^{132}\) Drew, Le Corbusier centennial talk, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 22.
logocentric synthesis.' He says that Le Corbusier’s faith in a centralised pyramid of power described in Ville Radieuse and typical of planisme requires that people surrender to ‘total immersion in the flow of this process.’ By Tarufi’s description, in Le Corbusier’s urbanism it is not just buildings which impose ‘a logic of majesty and authority’ over people but the entire arrangement of those buildings in a city as an effective state system: urban planning processes people (EA, 35).

On the other hand, architectural critic Curtis has said that the Capitol buildings were ‘monumental statements of power’ that are capable of ‘transcending limited political rhetoric.’ There is evidence that the political rhetoric Le Corbusier hoped to convey through the Open Hand differs from the logic and authority of other elements of his architecture. Stanislaus von Moos quotes a letter to Nehru in which Le Corbusier urges him to erect the Open Hand as a sign ‘open to receive the newly created wealth, open to distribute it to its people and to the others. The “Open Hand” will assert that the second era of the machine age has begun: the era of harmony.’ Le Corbusier himself identifies the Open Hand as symbolising the receiving and sharing of wealth, but he also relates this directly to the benefits of the machine age. Von Moos’s essay explains how a new India was, for both Nehru and Le Corbusier, an India in which technology and modern machines were prevalent for the population and the means of modernisation. As von Moos explains, Nehru’s policy focused on ‘the establishment of an economy that would enable the new nation to survive within the given system of the industrialized world.’ The Open Hand is therefore a symbol of India’s entrance into the ‘global order’ Le Corbusier proposed in CIAM – it symbolises India’s entrance into what Bataille might call the restricted economy of international relations, a step beyond national economies into a global economy, but nonetheless restricted.

But the Open Hand is also a solar symbol and this, I believe, means it not only places Chandigarh and India in a restricted, global economy but also relates the restricted economy of humanity to the cosmological economy of solar energy and the relations between celestial bodies. The crescent shape is a recurrent theme

---

133 Tarufi, p. 209.
134 Ibid., p. 209.
135 Whilst most of Le Corbusier’s post-1922 urbanist projects are ‘dominated by a conceptual poverty that inevitably minimizes the complex problems inherent in the contemporary city and countryside,’ Tarufi believes Chandigarh’s Capitol is a rare exception and I shall discuss why he believes this to be the case later. See Tarufi, p. 208.
137 Von Moos, p. 447. Von Moos does not add the date of the letter.
138 This theme is explained through the whole of the essay, and in contrast to the pre-industrial India with self-sufficient villages (isolated economies, by Bataille’s understanding of economics) proposed by Mahatma Gandhi. See, in particular, von Moos, pp. 416-419.
139 Von Moos, p. 417
linking the different buildings in the Capitol. Curtis notes, for example, that the upturned crescent on the Assembly’s funnel was designed with ‘the curves of the sun at solstice and equinox’ in mind, and that its crescent curve ‘echoes the Open Hand.’ These crescent symbols are visible on the funnel of the Assembly (Fig. 3) and in the *brise-soleil* of the Secretariat (Fig. 4). The Secretariat also has a half crescent shape on the roof (Fig. 5) beneath which I saw Capitol staff sitting and enjoying the shade when I visited. From the top of the Secretariat, the Assembly can be seen facing the High Court: the arches of the High Court are seen to echo the curves of the Assembly funnel and the Open Hand sits between them, almost linking them by holding them together, its finger and thumb pointed towards each. From the Open Hand the Secretariat acts as a backdrop to the Assembly and its half crescent sits snugly behind the crescent on top of the Assembly’s funnel (Fig. 6). From the High Court, from between its brightly coloured pillars and playful oval cut-outs, the curved funnel of the Assembly echoes the curves of the oval holes (Fig. 7).

Curtis says the crescent symbols of the Capitol buildings reflect the ‘planetary crescent paths’ in which Le Corbusier was interested. Curtis argues that the crescent shapes also echo the horns of the bull that would have been incorporated in the Governor’s Palace, thus bringing the buildings of the Capitol into relationship with one another, but also to trace the path of the sun. Curtis compares the ideas to the Jantar Mantar observatory in Delhi (which Le Corbusier visited and wrote about) and to the Pantheon in Rome and Indian temples, which use a beam of light to penetrate symbolic darkness in the buildings. The Assembly was designed to achieve the same effect, as Curtis notes ‘a ray of light was to penetrate the

---

140 Particular symbols and shapes act as tropes in Le Corbusier’s work and serve to link different components of an area, such as buildings and monuments in different spaces across a site, together. The crescent shape is the one I discuss here because, as I argue below, it not only links the buildings together but through it the meaning of its symbolism links them also with the cosmos. But other symbols and shapes also reoccur to link the Capitol buildings to one another and to other buildings in Chandigarh. One of the more functional of these is the *brise-soleil* which is designed to provide shade in hot climates – which of course also means it also relates to solar energy, but in a less symbolic way than the motif of the crescent. For example, the grid of the *brise-soleil* of the Assembly is a pattern that is repeated, its sharp lines lining up with those of the High Court’s *brise-soleil* across the water, ahead of it (Fig. 14). Some of the houses also had the patterned brickwork of the *brise-soleil* that can be seen on many of the commercial buildings on the outskirts of Sector 22 (Fig. 15) and, in a different variation, in the Capitol.

shadows on the opening day of Parliament.' The Tower of Shadows is another of Le Corbusier’s monuments to the sun: its open structure creates a play of shadows and sunlight, celebrating the movement of the sun across the sky and the structure it gives to our day. Curtis argues that the theme of the cosmos is maintained throughout the Capitol and is used to relate history to modern technology: ‘Between the buildings he envisaged other cosmic signs illustrating his belief that human institutions and technology must harmonize with natural laws.’

Whether or not Le Corbusier specifically aimed to balance the sun, or nature, with technology, the importance of the sun is clear in Ville Radieuse when he explains that there are human laws and natural laws. The natural laws are thus:

We live in the presence of three spheres:
Our dictator: the sun.
The globe on which we live out our destinies: the earth.
And a companion forever whirling around us: the moon.
This single fact already sets limitations upon all our activities:
The 365 days of a solar year, the inevitable track upon which our bodies, our hearts, our minds must move: a year, four seasons: the intense cold of weather; the tender hopes of springtime; the burning heat of summer; the melancholy twilight of fall. (RC, 76-7)

This section of Ville Radieuse expresses clearly the importance of cosmic forces for Le Corbusier; far from being remote, they structure our time and our experience. He states, ‘The sun governs our lives by determining the rhythm of our activities: a 24-hour cycle’ (RC, 65). Although this text dates from two decades before Le Corbusier started work on Chandigarh, we have already discussed how the city bears many of the elements of the ville radieuse. Whilst Le Corbusier’s notes on India show his interest in pointing the way to the cosmos, his notion of the city designed for human life also described the sun’s importance.

The cosmos and the path of the sun rule the human day and time for Le Corbusier and must also rule architecture and the development of civilisation, specifically India’s civilisation. In his notes on the Jantar Mantar in Delhi, built by Jai

---

144 Curtis, ‘Le Corbusier: Nature and Tradition’, p. 23. See reproductions of Le Corbusier’s sketch showing how this would work: Fig. 33 on p. 22.
145 I was denied entry to this part of the Capitol during my visit. For an image of the Tower of Shadows and other buildings and monuments in Chandigarh see the ‘Introduction’ on the website of the Chandigarh College of Architecture at <http://cca.nic.in.introduction.htm> accessed 5.3.15.
Singh in the eighteenth century, Le Corbusier wrote that the ‘astronomical instruments of Delhi [...] point the way: re-link men to the cosmos.’ The Open Hand also points the way, I believe, to the cosmos which includes the source of infinite solar energy that establishes the existence of both the human, restricted economy and the general economy.

It is also possible that Le Corbusier linked the sun to expenditure, as Bataille describes it in *The Accursed Share*. Bataille discusses the wealth of energy from the sun and its role in creating excess, claiming that ‘Solar energy is the source of life’s exuberant development’ (AS, 28). Even if there was no direct link between their ideas, the exuberance of the sun’s energy plays a role for each. As an open hand in the glaring sun Le Corbusier’s monument acknowledges the futility of attempts to control energy, it celebrates solar energy but lets it slip through its fingers and does not attempt to direct it. The bronze hand shines and reflects the sun’s energy up and out. It is open and does not attempt to hold the sun’s energy and accumulate it, but remains empty in its openness and therefore expends energy rather than accumulating it. There is therefore an image of expenditure at the heart of Chandigarh, in the Capitol designed to be the head ordering both the new city and the new state.

The Open Hand brings a form of sculptural and symbolic unity to the other elements of the Capitol, by repeating the form of the crescent in its site at the centre of the Capitol. But it also serves to remind us of the relationship between India and the globe, and humanity and the cosmos, in creating a crescent shape through the human hand and in being a gesture of sharing upwards and outwards, towards the heavens and across the world. The governing forces of our lives are acknowledged within the forms and motifs of the Capitol, the ordering head and administration of a new city in a newly formed India. However, Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh may also be seen as an attempt to humanise expenditure – and such an attempt would contrast with Bataille’s understanding of expenditure. Le Corbusier might see the Open Hand as symbolic of his generosity but he could not generously share the solar energy it reflects, as this would suggest he (or any human hand) could control expenditure or direct it in some way.

Le Corbusier was reading Bataille’s *Accursed Share* at the same time that he was designing the Capitol and his Open Hand finally found a home. The extent to which Le Corbusier analysed the detail and understood the complex ideas in Bataille’s text remain questionable. But Le Corbusier’s notes in *The Accursed Share*...
and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* prove synergies in his and Bataille’s thinking that, as Le Corbusier reflected on them, may have influenced his own ideas and their iteration at Chandigarh. I am convinced that he linked the Open Hand to the notion of shared global wealth, to what he saw as his own act of potlatch, and to ideas about economies beyond our restricted circulations of wealth and finance through the notion of solar energy and its defining role for humanity. I am not convinced that he fully understood or agreed with Bataille’s ideas about expenditure nor that he tried to design the notion of expenditure and its transgressive potential into Chandigarh, even if his design of the Open Hand was inspired by his own interpretation of it in relation to his other ideas.

Two further questions remain in light of Bataille’s texts about the role of architecture and the notion of transgression. Although I do not believe Le Corbusier intended to design architectural transgression I must still consider, first, whether his true intentions were influential upon the people and political and social systems of Chandigarh and second, whether its architecture is transgressive in any way, even if it was not intended to be.

**Influence: Evaluating the Impact of Le Corbusier’s Intentions**

The vision Le Corbusier set out for a better modern world in the *Ville Radieuse*, and the discussions of Chandigarh and its standard of amenity recorded in text by Fry, Drew and Le Corbusier himself, all suggest that the city was designed to provide a high quality of living that would hopefully pull India into a new age. There is not the scope in this thesis to fully assess how Chandigarh performs today in terms of the quality of life and economic wealth of India and its other cities, nor would such an analysis address the true nature of my question. In asking how influential Le Corbusier’s architecture and architectural intentions have been, my question arises from reading Bataille’s ‘Architecture’, in which he states that architecture expresses ‘authoritative command and prohibition’ opposes ‘all unquiet elements’ in its logic (*EA*, 35). The question I ask at Chandigarh is therefore whether the spaces and places are used as Le Corbusier intended them to be used, and therefore whether their logic and authoritative command are executed upon the people and society there. Le Corbusier may have hoped that when people did what his architecture was designed for them to do, this would result in a better quality of living - my question is whether people are doing what the architect intended, not the subsequent impact on their quality of life. (Had Le Corbusier willingly designed transgressive architecture I would look for transgressive behaviour – but he did not, he designed a city with set activities throughout the zones, a city with authority over its people.)
Further, Chandigarh poses a useful setting for this question due to a perceived tension between the architecture there and Indian culture. One common architectural criticism of the city is that the design did not have enough in common with Indian life. For example, the grid-system Le Corbusier designed for the city has been well commented on, its functionality often being interpreted as a strait-jacket for a varied and changing modernity. Curtis is one of the critics to claim ‘Le Corbusier’s principle of discrete zoning is singularly ill-matched to the complex uses and mixed-economics of Indian life.’ Charles Correa and Madhu Sarin, two Indian architects, have both discussed Chandigarh’s successes and failures from the perspective of the Indian population in great detail. Correa believes Le Corbusier captured the ‘raucous’ India of the bazaars, but Sarin says the chowk of Sector 17, the city centre, is a place of ‘concreted barrens’ rather than ‘interest and activity.’ Sarin says that street traders, ‘the hawker or the rehris (barrows) have been banned from the city centre.’ This perceived tension between the cultural practices of a place, and the design intentions of an architect reshaping that place, echoes Bataille’s assertion that architecture imposes logic rather than merely reflecting a system, making Chandigarh an appropriate place to test Bataille’s idea. Is the raucous India of the bazaars silenced by Chandigarh’s authoritative plan? The reality falls somewhere in between.

One example in Chandigarh would be Le Corbusier’s management of leisure time, which Hollier has compared to sacrifice, the killing of time. Le Corbusier believed that new and future machines would reduce the working day from eight hours to five, and he predicted that ‘leisure time made available by the machine age will suddenly emerge as a social danger’ (RC, 64). After time needed for sleep and work, ‘we are still left with eleven unoccupied hours’ and Le Corbusier argued that ‘this still vague notion of “leisure time” had to be transformed ‘as quickly as possible into a disciplined function’ (RC, 64). Le Corbusier’s sentiments at the start of the 1930s express with precision the power of the guiding principle of use value which Bataille was already starting to explore in early essays, and would discuss in more detail in The Accursed Share and its sister volumes. That leisure time was a threat to society, and that it needed to become a ‘disciplined function’ reflects precisely the notion of waste and need for use-value that Bataille came to discuss and that Hollier traced in the role of the museums, a clean killing of time. The solution was that

---

149 Correa, p. 197.
150 Sarin, p. 386.
151 Sarin, p. 386.
‘sport should be a daily matter’ and should take place ‘directly outside the houses’ (RC, 65).\textsuperscript{152} Leisure was an architectural problem, to which the ville radieuse could happily propose a solution.

The green spaces throughout the housing and other sectors were another distinct feature of the city. In addition to the green spaces outside the housing there is a larger strip of green throughout the city, which Drew described as: ‘A green area stretched right through the centre of every sector, so that recreation space was immediately available. This green stretched up into the mountains.’\textsuperscript{153} This in particular is relevant to Le Corbusier’s ville radieuse urban concept. In 2013, signage for Chandigarh’s leisure valley reiterated his ambition for green space in words reminiscent of those he uses in Ville Radieuse, which outlined green spaces outside houses to integrate space for sport and meditation into daily life (RC, 182) (Fig. 8). The leisure valley and gardens are well used, the rose garden in particular retaining its tranquillity away from the traffic of the roads (Fig. 9). People I met in Chandigarh often proudly told me it is a ‘clean and green’ city: taxi and rickshaw drivers, and friendly passers-by who spoke to me in the street all used this phrase. The green spaces outside the houses were often in use when I walked through them, with the young using play areas and older people relaxing on benches or walking (Fig. 10). This is one way in which people still adhere to the architectural and urban design.

This is not to suggest that each of Le Corbusier’s intentions is observed to the letter. During my visit street traders were apparently banned from the shopping area of Sector 17 but instead they were evident under the parasol along the shops in Sector 22, adding to the vibrancy of this other sector.\textsuperscript{154} To an extent the architectural authority has been maintained, but that it is reinforced by local laws shows both the extent of its authority within the town’s administration and also its need for support. People do not always follow the path that architects and urban planners design for them. People write their own incidental pathways upon the rational script of the city, much as Michel de Certeau suggests walkers write the

\textsuperscript{152} Italicus author’s own.
\textsuperscript{153} ‘Reflections on my Life and Work’ Typed manuscript titled by Jane Drew, noted ‘Architecture SA’ and dated 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1993. London, V&A, RIBA Archives, MS Fry and Drew, Box 25 Folder 3, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{154} Sarin says that street traders, ‘the hawker or the rehris (barrows) have been banned from the city centre.’ (p. 386). Whilst I was unable to verify whether these laws still exist during my visit, the scarcity of street traders in this area suggests the laws still apply.
city. But this is incidental and occasional; the mass-management of the city and the uses of its zones adhere to Le Corbusier’s vision.

In fact, the authority of Le Corbusier’s plan has been maintained but it has arguably silenced ‘unquiet elements’ more successfully than he intended, as Le Corbusier’s hope for an open and inclusive Capitol complex is ultimately overcome by the success of his authoritative plan. This is because the political authorities entrenched in the buildings there used the ‘head’ of the Capitol to rule the city remotely, rather than the Capitol being an organic part of the city and the daily lives of its people. The Capitol was designed to be the ruling head of not just the new city, but the new state, and it was also designed to be used by the political workers and others in the city – in particular with its large amount of planned green space and features, such as monuments, between the buildings. But the Capitol complex and Open Hand are both physically and bureaucratically remote from the city. Having obtained permission letters to enter these state government buildings, I was shown around one of them by armed guards. The Open Hand is open to public access, but the road to reach it is deserted, bordered by barbed wire and behind a line of armed security guards (Fig. 11). Le Corbusier placed the Capitol at the top of the city rather than in its centre. The idea was that the head should sit atop the city to rule it, but instead Le Corbusier created the conditions for the separation of the politics of the city from its daily society and business. The concrete courtyard surrounding the Open Hand was empty and silent during my visit; as I left a group of three young adult Indians arrived and took photographs of one another there. The Denys Lasdun RIBA archives include leaflets and correspondence relating to a conference held in Chandigarh in January 1999 to celebrate the city’s history; architect Charles Correa wrote some of the letters concerning Lasdun’s invitation to speak at the conference. Photographs in Lasdun’s file show the conference in this courtyard outside the Open Hand. However, this use of the courtyard only reinforces the role of the Capitol as a reserve for privileged groups of people rather than the general population of India.

Certeau explains that ‘the geometrical space of urbanists and architects seems to have the status of ‘proper meaning’ constructed by grammarians and linguists.’ He states that the walker ‘creates a discreteness, whether by making choices among the signifiers of the spatial ‘language’ or by displacing them through the use he makes of them.’ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 100 and pp. 98-9 respectively.

The people of the city broadly adhere to the plan’s specially designed sectors and their intended uses. The tension between the architecture of Chandigarh and culture of India is not the structural conflict characteristic of transgression. Instead, any potential conflict has been resolved by the authority of the architecture and urban design. If transgression is present, is it in the generic form rather than what I define as Bataillean transgression. Tschumi’s vision of transgression as a change that spurs new ideas in architecture, and Lahiji’s vision of an expenditure of space in the city are not transgression as Bataille imagined it, and Chandigarh is relevant to this distinction. In Chandigarh potential changes and threats to the stability of the urban realm, to its system of political rule and of spaces themed by their utility, are managed. Excess is not the same as transgression when it is spent in a way that maintains the dominant structures of power, and the structures upon which our restricted human economies depend.

Transgression: Excess in Chandigarh’s Architecture

One final question remains: are there any unquiet elements present in Chandigarh despite the successful authority of Le Corbusier’s design? I earlier described the incidental mode of architectural transgression, now I will explore other modes in the city and its architecture. Architectural critics talk about the unity of opposites in Le Corbusier’s work. For Lahiji, this is visible in the male rationality of the Modulor within forms of the female body, and Peter Serenyi sees Le Corbusier as ‘juxtaposing rather than fusing’ opposites, including ‘history and modernity […] utopian and pragmatic, puritanical and hedonistic, male and female.’ Pinder says Le Corbusier’s theoretical thinking is characterised by dialectical thinking through oppositions such as freedom and order, individuality and collectivity, and Curtis describes a ‘harmony’ between nature and society. Tarufi sees ‘a number of bipolarities’ including ‘nature and artifice, Apollo and Dionysus, the archaic and “futurable.”’ Whilst the tendency to read Le Corbusier in this way risks oversimplifying the different stages of his career and different elements of architecture which he identified and to which he sought to bring unity, there is a pairing which I think is worth exploring further in his work. This is the relationship between geometry and poetry, which Le Corbusier discusses in his text Urbanisme;

157 Lahiji, p. 63. Lahiji is describing the chapel at Ronchamp.
159 Pinder, p. 84.
161 Tarufi, p. 207.
he does not refer to this as an opposition but as a pairing between two different impulses which he believes express the human world, and which must be harmonised in architecture. In Le Corbusier’s architectural projects this is expressed through the pairing between technology and sculpture. Through an examination of the pairing of technology and sculpture within the Capitol, I find that utility and excess are conflicting elements that both define and destabilise the architecture in their conflict. It is excess, rather than poetry, that leads to this transgression although it is his concern for sculpture and poetry that leads to that excess.

Drew says of Le Corbusier that ‘all his buildings were really sculpture’ but she suggests his sculptural work ultimately had a technological and useful role.\textsuperscript{162} Using the plasticity of concrete to create original forms, Le Corbusier’s buildings are, Drew argues, attempts to solve problems of context (such as the hot Indian climate) within the form of the buildings, rather than through added devices. Drew states, ‘He tried where ever possible to do without mechanical devices to cool his buildings by trying to make the building form itself do the work.’\textsuperscript{163} She reflects on his work at Chandigarh:

He was determined at that time to deal with all the problems of climate, water drainage, shade, light etc, and so on so far as he could by the form of his buildings and to wed them to the form if possible poetically, he wanted to maximise and dramatisre this – a good example is the way he spouted water from the High Court roof onto a lot of pyramid shaped forms. His High Court parasol shaped roof to shade the sub roof and the complicated form of his brise-soleil. His use of ramps rather than stairs for movement.\textsuperscript{164}

The example Drew gives of a water spout is used in other forms in the Assembly and State Museum, both of which collect water in a concrete gutter running along the top of a roof and direct it into a pool at the foot of each building (Figs. 12 and 13). This device captures periodically heavy Indian rain and usefully removes water from the roof of the building, to cool the air and to create an attractive public feature. This architectural solution is included in the form of two buildings in different sectors of the city, connecting them thematically. Curtis makes a similar point when he describes ‘unifying theme or leitmotiv of the Capitol was established as the parasol

\textsuperscript{162} Drew, ‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{163} Drew, ‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’, V&A, MS Fry and Drew, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{164} Drew, Le Corbusier centennial talk, V&A, MS Fry and Drew
or protective, over-hanging roof, supported on either arches, piers or pilotis.¹⁶⁵ He explains the potential uses Le Corbusier discovered in it such as protecting buildings from sun or rain whilst allowing a breeze to pass through, but also: ‘Brise-soleil screens of various kinds could be suspended, attached or built up in front, generating openings and entries or allowing the eye to penetrate the depths of the buildings or even beyond them to mountains and sky.’¹⁶⁶ The water pool and the views through the brise-soleil both demonstrate how an architectural solution can have an artistic, visual role as well as a technical one.

Le Corbusier designed buildings and plans for the machine age, but he sought to marry utility with the sculpted form of his architecture. Technology is not overlooked but his buildings perform the functions that machines could be used to perform, such as cooling and shading. Returning to Drew’s suggestion that Le Corbusier’s useful architectural forms were sculptural, this raises the relationship between poetry and geometry that Le Corbusier proposed in his earlier texts – that the two must unite in architecture as they are united in human life.¹⁶⁷ Le Corbusier had a very different notion of poetry than Bataille, based on harmony rather than excess. However, crucially, one of Le Corbusier’s symbols brings excess into his architecture and the poetic (in his sense of the word, and therefore harmonious) interplay between his solar symbols shares that excess further.

Various scholars have set out their perspective on poetry in Le Corbusier’s architecture. Tarufi says there are ‘Interruptions, slippings, and distortions’ which ‘dramatize’ the forms in the Capitol.¹⁶⁸ The forms also play ‘metaphoric games’¹⁶⁹ according to Tarufi: he suggests, for example, that the cone of the Assembly Hall’s skylight recalls both ancient minarets and industrial cooling towers.¹⁷⁰ Tarufi says the ‘tension’ between the forms of the buildings (and presumably within them, when a single form recalls ancient and modern architecture at once) is a ‘dialogue among symbols that have lost the codes that once gave them the value of names’ and refers to the symbols as ‘the ‘words’ of the architecture.’¹⁷¹ Tarufi only briefly mentions Bataille in his essay and he does not mention Bataille’s fiction, but this notion of slippings within a code calls to mind Roland Barthes’s description of

¹⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion of the role of technology in Le Corbusier’s work see Tarufi.
¹⁶⁸ Tarufi, p. 213.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 213.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 213.
¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 213-4. Tarufi suggests there is no interplay between the architectural ‘words’ which is quite a different point from my own; instead he believes they relate to something more primeval than one another. See pp. 213-214.
metonymy.\textsuperscript{172} Although it is not Bataille’s own vision of poetry, the trope of metonymy which Barthes brings out in Bataille’s \textit{Story of the Eye}, is significant. It is consistent with my reading of transgression (as internal instability in a structure we rely upon for our humanity) and also helps to illuminate why the solar symbols in the Capitol might be a source of transgression. Barthes suggests the egg, bull testicle and eye metonymically shift in Bataille’s novel to write a story of a transgressive object, the eye in its many forms. Barthes explains:

Bataille’s eroticism is essentially metonymic. Since the poetic technique employed here consists in demolishing the usual contiguities of objects and substituting fresh encounters that are nevertheless limited by the persistence of a single theme within each metaphor, the result is a kind of general contagion of qualities and actions […] all these associations are at the same time identical and other.\textsuperscript{173}

Barthes argues that this poetic technique creates transgression:

\textit{[T]}he word becomes blurred; properties are no longer separate […] the transgression of values that is the avowed principle of eroticism is matched by – if not based on – a technical transgression of the forms of language, for the metonymy is nothing but a forced syntagma, the violation of a limit to the signifying space.\textsuperscript{174}

Even with Tarufi’s games of slippage between architectural elements, any architecture could create a harmonious relationship between repeated forms and images. This notion of poetry does not necessarily correlate with the ‘recurrence’ and ‘surge’ that, for Bataille, transforms language beyond its usual ‘constraint’ so that poetry ‘awakens the sensibility, and carries us directly to intensity’ (JP, 137). However, what is potentially transgressive is that these symbols and motifs refer to something beyond that building, evoking something that threatens its stability – the excess of the sun and the impotence of humanity in the context of the celestial paths that rule our days and our time. \textit{The result is that useful architecture contains}

\textsuperscript{172} Referring to Le Corbusier’s Icarus-like attitude to technology, Tarufi suggests he ‘going beyond’ and that this is the phrase Bataille would use. See Tarufi, p. 214. Lahiji noted that Tarufi was the only historian to consider Bataille in his analysis of Le Corbusier (Lahiji, p. 54).
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., pp. 125-6.
within it a reminder of excess that cannot be managed. The building does not become useless and its physical structure is not undermined, but the defining human structures it both reflects and projects are threatened – thus demonstrating essential transgression. In calling it essential transgression, I am arguing that the excess that cannot be managed is determined by the architectural structure and/or design rather than an incidental addition or modification (like rot or shrapnel marks). It makes the architecture a structure that contains within itself unmanageable excess that could undermine it. In much the way that Bataille’s vision of the human being entails it performing its humanity against excess, so too is Le Corbusier’s concrete building threatened by the excess of the sun which it shares and distributes amongst the city through its architectural imagery but cannot under any circumstances control – though it must stand against it to create our habitations and culture.

There are common themes here that we have seen in other examples of transgression. In ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’, Lawrence’s story culminates with the woman’s sacrifice through the penetration of a dagger, in a cave that is itself penetrated by an immense icicle, which in turn is penetrated by a single ray of the sunlight, lined up perfectly so that the time and place of the sacrifice are cosmically significant. That Le Corbusier’s Assembly building has a similar ray of light that hits the main political chamber on the opening day of parliament demonstrates that for both Lawrence and Le Corbusier, the celestial significance of a specific time and place are in some way sacred. But the key analogy I want to draw here is between the poetic layering of an image: the triple penetration of dagger, icicle and ray of light all link to one another and to the significance of the sun’s energy, and the cosmos beyond the human world through that ray of light. Similarly the crescent shapes across the Capitol repeat one another and refer to the sun’s energy, as do the Tower of Shadows and the ray of light in the Assembly. I earlier discussed Curtis’s assertion that the crescent form in the Capitol refers to the paths of the planetary bodies, and that the Open Hand is a metamorphosis of the crescent form. The crescent in the funnel of the Assembly hall on top of the Parliament building, the Open Hand, the bull’s horns and silhouette of the unbuilt Governor’s Palace, the portico of the Parliament building: all of these repeat an image that interplays with its other forms across the city, in other buildings and monuments.175 The interplay is not necessarily excessive, but the notion to which these symbols and motifs refer is: the sun, its celestial governance and its excessive energy.

175 Curtis, Ideas and Forms, pp. 196-7.
Le Corbusier’s solar excess shows a connection between his thinking and Bataille’s. It is this energy which, via the human hand, becomes a form of gift that shows the potential (yet ultimately unknowable) influence of Bataille on le Corbusier, specifically through the iteration of the Open Hand that he chose for Chandigarh. By presenting an excess that cannot be managed, the Open Hand creates transgression: the hand and the repeated motif it shares through the city introduces the instability of solar excess into a closed system, creating transgression without annihilating that system. Again, we see common themes in the era Bataille and Le Corbusier shared. The significance of poetry and its relationship to structure, in the way that the two relate to the notion of humanity, are shared interests for Bataille and Le Corbusier. But there are differences in their perspectives too. The humanity of the Open Hand is rendered futile – by Bataille’s thinking, the excess of the sun bears down upon the planet uncontrollable by any human hand. Yet the architecture demonstrates transgression because the hand still stands, even as the excess energy of the sun bears down upon it and all around it, and is shared between the buildings in the solar motifs they each include.

The architecture of Chandigarh’s Capitol is transgressive – not necessarily because Le Corbusier read Bataille and intended to create excess, and certainly not in its influence over the people and culture of the city. The architecture is transgressive because of its combination of solar symbolism and urban utility, because the Open Hand introduces solar excess that is unmanageable for architecture and for humanity (we might say it is out of our hands) and yet is repeated within the architecture and its celestial forms that are in (poetic, for Le Corbusier) harmony. In its unmanageability it represents a threat to architecture’s – and to humanity’s – stability and utility. The threat is never realised, which is how the dynamic (dis)equilibrium of transgression is established.

As I have said, this transgression does not appear to influence the behaviour of people, nor the politics or culture of the city and the Indian state over which it presides. What is interesting is that the intended authority of the plan is influential: sixty years after its design and construction, Chandigarh’s themed grid and roads maintain their intended uses, as do the plethora of public green spaces, steering the population towards certain behaviours in certain areas. Can transgression ever present a challenge to this authority? Can it undermine architecture’s attempts to silence excess, and enable that excess to drive social change, as Tschumi hoped? The answer to these interrelated questions is no, for two reasons.

First, architecture cannot undermine its own attempts to silence excess but it can contain within itself evidence of the challenging relationship between its
authority and excess. Transgression is manifest as the dynamic tension between excess and the silencing of excess, or between the management of expenditure and the threat that excess might one day be spent in unproductive ways. Transgression is not absolute expenditure, which would undo both the authoritative structure and our humanity, as it would undo a structure through which our humanity creates itself.

Second, transgression cannot be used to influence people towards change. I explained in Chapter One that for Bataille a process of exclusion forms humanity, and as Stoekl points out, matter that cannot be assimilated is Bataille's base matter, ‘charged matter that defies assimilation into any scientific or classificatory grid.’ For Bataille, architecture repeats the process of becoming human because it also draws structures and designs out elements of society that do not conform to its ideal state. Once something is included it acquires a use value and becomes part of the human economy: it is no longer base or transgressive. This applies not just to physical materials used in architecture, but to the use of transgression in general. Transgression cannot be used because it is manifest through the struggle between utility and that which threatens utility, and therein threatens to undo the structures we rely upon to be human. There can be no end to this struggle as it would also be the end of humanity. Therefore, when Tschumi tries to use eroticism to unlock the potential of architecture to effect social change – rather than represent and reinforce state power and systems of control – either the transgression or its efficacy will fail.

Transgression may occur, but this doesn’t mean that we can use it to unlock and harness the energy of excess. The moment that excess is harnessed or becomes part of a project, it is no longer excessive or erotic.

If transgression in architecture does not undermine architecture’s authority and control of excess, and cannot drive social and political change, what is its meaning? This is a notion I discussed in Chapter One. By expressing the radical contingency of the defining structure that constitutes humanity, architecture is more human. It does not forego its authority and its projection of state power completely, but it acknowledges the human condition. This is something that is ethically important in my reading of Bataille’s thinking. In Chapter One I argued that for us to be human, to fully express and allow what defines us as human to exist, we must explore ways of thinking – and ways of writing, and of designing and building our physical environment – that express the dynamic between excess and taboo. I argued that an important project would be to explore this structural relationship, and

176 Stoekl, Bataille’s Peak, p. 20.
how we acknowledge it and make it visible in structures that are essential to our humanity. Here we have architecture that does that. It does not make that architecture less authoritative or more enjoyable, but it means that architecture is more ethical – more human – because it acknowledges the human need for transgression and does not – cannot – cover it and hide it.

On the surface, this is quite a different form of human-centred ethics than that which Le Corbusier himself hopes his architecture can achieve. Le Corbusier believed architecture and urbanism had an integral role in helping civilisation to work: ‘Body, family, studies, meditation, collective activities, all these are vast functions requiring buildings and sites: architecture and city planning’ (RC, 65). Describing how city planning can help people have healthy bodies and minds and be more efficient, by providing the right sites for work, sport and meditative activities, in the right places, Le Corbusier emphasises that this makes architecture political and ethical: ‘Architecture and city planning will thus become extensions of the ethical, sociological and political sciences. Politics will thus resume their true purpose, which is to lead towards the realization of a given era’s destiny – society and implements’ (RC, 67).

That architecture’s role is to create an optimum human environment, and that it expresses an era and its people and development, makes it humanist – buildings and places express and recreate the structures that enable humanity to be human, and live in comfort and in a way that best expresses their needs and natures. As Bataille has made clear, this structure can then control and restrain humanity – like language can – something that Tschumi in particular sought to challenge and of which Le Corbusier arguably sought to take advantage to order society. We might also say that architecture and urban planning are an extension of the human, or the next stage of human development, as Bataille claimed. It amounts to the same thing: architecture responds to our humanity and in a sense recreates it, by creating the structures that we create to understand our world, and making the world in accordance with them. Le Corbusier’s urban planning of Chandigarh responds to his notion of humanity, but the architecture of Chandigarh’s Capitol complex, in my view, responds to Bataille’s because it iterates the dynamic conflict between structure and transgression at the core of our humanity.
Conclusion
This thesis has explored Bataille’s theory of eroticism and discussed erotic and other modes of transgression in two of the structures through which we maintain humanity, language (in the form of erotic literature) and architecture. The modes are different in each structure. In erotic literature I identify and explore what I call the sacrificial and erotic modes of poetic language. In the sacrificial mode, poetry removes the efficacy of language by evoking things in such a way that the things lose their efficacy, so that language is no longer logical and representational, its utility sacrificed. In the erotic mode, the surge and voluptuousness of poetic language is akin to the body’s surge towards orgasm. In this mode, form and content combine in poetic language to describe but also create erotic sensations and, ultimately, transgression. The modes of literary transgression that I discuss focus on the impact of language and, in calling them sacrificial and erotic, I use them to describe how language renders itself transgressive and the nature of the resulting transgression. The two architectural modes of transgression I discuss instead describe how transgression comes about, whether through things that happen to the architectural site – incidentally, like rot or shrapnel marks – or are contained within its structure or design – essentially, like the excess present in Le Corbusier’s solar imagery. In all four modes, what is important and what connects them is the potential disruption posed to structures that we perform to define and create our humanity.

The relationship between language and architecture rests on this, their shared role as defining structures which can display the ongoing dynamic conflict between order and excess, between form and that which it excludes, a conflict that characterises transgression. My thesis explores these modes of transgression through a Bataillean lens that sees transgression as a phenomenological fact because it is related to the fabric of our experience as human subjects. I have used Bataille’s transgression as a point of departure but I have also expanded upon it. For example, whilst Bataille describes how architecture silences excess, I have explored what unsilenced excess might look like and identified modes of transgression in architecture. Similarly, whilst Bataille describes modes of transgression in poetry in his essays, he does not call them modes and he only gives examples of one, the sacrificial.1 I have found examples of the erotic, in texts by Lawrence and Nin. Beyond poetic language, I have also found erotic

---

1 Bataille mentions the image of the sickle in Victor Hugo’s poem Boöz Endormi (JP, 151) and the image of a butter horse (Inner Experience, p. 135-6). See my discussion in Chapter Two, ‘Erotic Language and Modes of Transgression’.
transgression in the content and location of their fiction, and in the spatial structures they describe. If I had defined transgression as the questioning of specific social structures, rather than defining human structures, I would also have found it in the form of sexual relationships they present, which deviate from the social norms of their time in crossing class and gender boundaries. Nin’s house of incest, of course, also refers to the original taboo Bataille believes to have formed humanity and civilisation. My reading of Lawrence, Nin and also Tschumi in his discussions of revolution has therefore generated a clearer understanding of two different ‘transgressions’ Bataille discusses. Bataille often uses the word ‘transgression’ to refer to what I call generic transgression, which challenges norms without threatening our ability to be human. Eroticism and the modes of transgression I elaborate in this thesis are quite different.

Reading Lawrence and Nin’s fiction through Bataille’s theory of eroticism has brought to light the importance of the erotic in their works and their artistic visions, and has found themes around which all three figures converge. As such my approach contributes to an emerging area of research in literature. Building on the work started in, amongst others, Seelow’s *Radical Modernism and Sexuality* and Schaffner and Weller’s *Modernist Eroticism*, I define eroticism via Bataille and apply this definition in my analysis of modernist literature. This takes us beyond the study of gender or sexual orientation in fiction, and also adds to the characteristics Schaffner and Weller identified in modernist erotic fiction by finding key themes in both erotic fiction and erotic theory in the modernist period, such as sacrifice, architecture and poetic language. This thesis raises questions about modernism that it cannot answer within the scope available, concerning not only the status of Le Corbusier’s modernist architecture in relation to debates about literary modernisms but also Bataille’s status in relation to modernism. Mao and Walkowitz have argued for a reconsideration of the definitions and producers of modernism and such a reconsideration could find a place for Bataille, whose transgressive approach and interest in eroticism clearly intersects with concerns of other modernists. Other critics, such as Schaffner and Weller, categorise Bataille as a modernist through his fiction. My thesis has not defined him as a modernist but has read him in relation to modernists, through a focus on his philosophical approach in my analysis of modernist literature and architecture.

Whilst Bataille, Lawrence and Nin’s erotics converge around shared themes, their approaches to these themes differ greatly. The role of space and structure in

\[2\] *Bad Modernisms*, p. 1.
transgression emerges strongly in erotic fiction by both Nin and Lawrence, which in turn contributes to the reading of Bataille’s notion of transgression and of his novel *Madame Edwarda* offered in this thesis. Lawrence’s architecture for eroticism seeks separate sites and structures for erotic regeneration, away from the industrial dirt of the towns – a completely different approach to architecture compared to Bataille, whose Edwarda is a woman of the streets in a novel that is situated in a dirty urban scene. Nin’s architecture of eroticism differs again, as her house and other built structures are not only sites of eroticism but are described and defined through their sensual impact on the body and are used to portray the body’s erotic sensations. These fictional architectures must be differentiated from the linguistic architecture of erotic literature that also emerges in works by Bataille, Lawrence and Nin. The difference is that the linguistic architecture is not driven by events in the plot or poetic images in a novel, but by syntactical structure. Sentences do not always describe structures but can take on their own unique structure. For example, sentences that contain the threat of silence, repetition and stuttering are syntactical structures that reveal the threat to syntax, a threat to their own ability to communicate. In other words, the linguistic architecture of erotically transgressive literature is itself transgressive, manifesting the dynamic conflict between the structure of language and the threatening silence of that which it cannot name, explain or recreate through content or form. The attempt to communicate incommunicable eroticism is transgressive and human, and results in an architecture that suits its paradoxical nature.

Bataille uses his Critical Dictionary to reveal the structural roles of, and relationship between, architecture and language. He uses their relationship to challenge architecture through language, in a dictionary that exposes the waste and excess in architecture and in words, an excess which they cannot order and control despite this being their purpose. This is an architectural transgression enacted through language, and Nin also creates architectural transgression but by writing buildings that are carnal and that have ‘no more distinction between outward and inward.’\(^3\) These are two different approaches and techniques which both challenge our very existence by undermining not just architecture and language as *structures* but our ability to *structure*, our ability to perform our humanity. My point here is that Nin demonstrates other ways to linguistically transgress architecture that Bataille did not employ but that fit with his philosophical concerns. Lawrence shares with Nin and Bataille the act of textual transgression to create eroticism through – between

\(^3\) *The Four-Chambered Heart*, p. 77.
the three of them – the sacrificial and erotic modes of poetic transgression. Bataille’s theory offers a route in to my analysis of architecture, sacrifice and poetic language in relation to eroticism and transgression, and in turn Lawrence and Nin speak back to Bataille by showing different architectures, sacrifices and poetic texts which converge with his own visions of the erotic. The interaction between different figures in this thesis has thereby provided new perspectives on many of their texts and ideas.

In physical architecture, the modes of transgression I discuss are based on my reading of Bataille’s key ideas but emerge through critical discussions of his work by architects and architectural critics, many of whom discuss his ideas in relation to language and literature. Crucially, this thesis engages with current ideas about architectural transgression via a return to Bataille, whose notion of transgression inspired current thinking that has since departed from the key defining tenets of his transgression. Architectural studies of transgression could continue the return to Bataille that I have started here, to focus on essential transgression and the manifestation of threatening excess within (un)stable structures. This reintroduction of Bataille’s philosophy could prove a fruitful addition to current ideas about transgression as a divergence from common modes of architectural practice and regular building forms.

I have suggested that the notion of defining structures was common to thinkers in Bataille’s period and that with this idea comes the notion of transgression. It is not surprising that even decades later architects, who by nature engage with one defining structure, look to language for inspiration and compare their form and role. It is possible, then, that the commonality lies not in the era and its discourse on structures (which elicit the notion of transgression) but in the notion identified by Bataille that the structures being discussed help to define and form humanity.

We might even say that for Bataille, what defines humanity is not the order and form we create to be human, but the need to constantly, continually create and perform that order. Transgression is a moment or event in which the (transgressive) otherness, excess and energy that are counter to our order, and against which we perform, threaten to overwhelm our order – or any defining structure, and therefore ourselves. Sacrificial and erotic transgression in poetic language and incidental and essential transgression in architecture are all examples of this event in which a threat to our stability is made apparent. Bataille discussed some examples of transgression, but by reading literature and analysing architecture in light of his philosophy the notion of transgression is enriched by new examples and the modes
I have derived from them. In transgression we painfully realise our radical contingency. Bataille identifies this painful realisation as a harrowing (inner) experience of anguish, an anguish we revisit in transgressive literature and architecture but which is perhaps removed by rigorous academic discussions of transgression. In the Introduction to this thesis I noted that Bataille’s career referred to obscenity and baseness throughout, ‘from his early texts such as the novel Story of the Eye (1928) and his essays of 1929 on architecture’s attempts to hide the “dire filth” of waste to his dissection of the relationship between the “biological disorder” of the rotting corpse and erotic behaviour in his major work Eroticism (1957)’ (EA, 51; E, 46). I have concluded this thesis with a neat summary of what I have called modes of transgression – a word that perhaps enacts the role Bataille attributed to the factory chimney, sorting and obscuring that excess that academia cannot process unless it is sorted and obscured. In the final sentences of this thesis it therefore makes sense to refer to a point Bataille made, which was the basis of transgression. Despite my best efforts in this thesis, there will always remain that which ‘exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order’ (E, 40). As we read Bataille, Lawrence and Nin, visit the architecture of Le Corbusier and Tschumi, and write about all of their realms of eroticism and modes of transgression, we must acknowledge our own human need to silence excess and, in our defining state of conflict, also continue Bataille’s efforts to communicate the incommunicable.
Bibliography

Primary Texts


----- *My Mother; Madame Edwarda; The Dead Man*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse (London: Marion Boyars, 2003)


-----The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge, ed. by Stuart Kendall, trans. by Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001)


-----‘Cocksure Women and Hen-sure Men’ in Selected Essays (London: Penguin, 1950), pp. 31-34

-----Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)


-----*The Rainbow* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2001)


-----‘The Soiled Rose’, *The Blue Review*, 1, 1 (1913), 6-23

-----*The Trespasser* (London: Granada, 1982)


-----*Women in Love* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1991)


-----*The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of our Machine-age Civilization*, trans. by Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux and Derek Coltman (London: Faber and Faber, 1967)


----- *The Four-Chambered Heart* (London: Virago, 1996)


**Secondary Texts**


Boldt-Irons, Leslie Anne. ‘Sacrifice and violence in Bataille’s erotic fiction: Reflections from/upon the *mise en abîme*,’ in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 91-104


-----*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999)


*The Discourse of Events*, ed. by Nigel Coates and Martin Benson (London: Architectural Association, 1983)


-----‘Le Corbusier, the Relevance of his Work in Chandigarh for India’. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, RIBA Archives, MS Fry and Drew, Box 4 Folder 1

-----Le Corbusier’s centennial talk, Bristol, England on Friday November 22nd 1989, manuscript is dated October 1989. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, RIBA Archives, MS Fry and Drew, Box 25 Folder 2.


F.G., Review of The Trespasser, Rhythm, 2, 10, (1912)


The Tel Quel Reader, ed. by Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998)


Guerlac, Suzanne. “‘Recognition’ by a Woman!: A Reading of Bataille’s L’Erotisme’, Yale French Studies, 78 (1990), 90-105


Habermas, Jürgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005)


Hugo, Victor. Boöz Endormi in Légends des Siècles (1859)

Hussey, Andrew. The Inner Scar: The Mysticism of Georges Bataille (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA; Editions Rodopi B.V., 2000)


Irwin, Jones. Derrida and the Writing of the Body (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010)


Kinsey, Alfred. The Gall Wasp Genus Cynips: A Study in the Origin of Species (University of Indiana, 1930)

-----The Kinsey Reports, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 1948 and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, 1953


Krauss, Rosalind. “Informe” without Conclusion’, October, 78 (1996), 89-105


Millet, Kate. Sexual Politics (Aylesbury: Abacus, 1972)


Nordau, Max. Degeneration (London: William Heinemann, 1913)


Parsons, Deborah L. Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)


-----“Truman’s Apotheosis: Bataille, “Planisme,” and Headlessness’ in *Yale French Studies*, 78 (1990), 181-205


Appendix: Photographic Images
All images taken in Chandigarh, India, in March 2013

Fig. 1: Le Corbusier's Modulor outside the Chandigarh Architecture Museum

Fig. 2: The Open Hand
Fig. 3: The Assembly

Fig. 4: The Secretariat
Fig. 5: Roof of the Secretariat

Fig. 6: View of the Assembly and Secretariat from the Open Hand
Fig. 7: View of the Assembly from inside the High Court

Fig. 8: Signage in Chandigarh’s leisure valley
Fig. 9: The rose garden

Fig. 10: Green spaces outside housing
Fig. 11: The Open Hand viewed from the road, behind barbed wire

Fig. 12: The water feature of the Assembly
Fig. 13: The water feature of the state museum

Fig. 14: View of the Assembly and, in the distance, the High Court from the roof of the Secretariat
Fig. 15: Typical *brise-soleil* on commercial buildings in Sector 22