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The Dialectic of the Limit: Knowledge, Truth, Thinking, and Being after Bataille and Lacan

Keywords

Bataille, fantasy, Lacan, limit, mysticism, inner experience

Abstract

In a series of presentations at Sainte-Anne Hospital, published in English under the title *Talking to Brick Walls*, Lacan offers one of the few explicit references to Bataille in his *œuvre*. He interposes a stark disagreement between himself and Bataille on the status of possible knowledge regarding ontological questions. Lacan reads Bataille as a mystic who proposes that the pursuit of knowledge is a futile task and that knowledge of being is *only* possible *per viam negativam*. In order to advance this reading, Lacan emphasises Bataille's fixation with "nonknowledge." At first glance, one can understand why Lacan identifies him as a mystic, and many commentators on Bataille's writings offer similar reading; however, this ignores subtle nuances of Bataille's arguments regarding what he calls "inner experience." More crucially, it ignores his explicit rejection of mysticism on the very basis of the knowledge that results from nonknowledge. This comparison frames a problem for fundamental ontology, of which I hope to elaborate only one aspect: The incompleteness of thought implies a non-relation between thought and being, and we can have a knowledge about this non-relation through an analysis of the limit as phantasmatic and structural rather than as real.

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Dialektika meje: vednost, resnica, mišljenje in bit po Bataillu in Lacanu

Ključne besede

Bataille, fantazma, Lacan, meja, mysticizem, notranje izkustvo

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Povzetek

V seriji predavanj v bolnišnici Sainte-Anne, objavljeni pod naslovom *Je parle aux murs*, Lacan poda eno redkih eksplicitnih referenc na Batailla, ko vnese strogo razhajanje med njima glede statusa mogoče vednosti o ontoloških vprašanjih. Lacan Batailla bere kot mistika, ki trdi, da je zasledovanje vednosti brezplodno in da je vednost o biti možna zgolj *per viam negativam*. Da bi podkrepil to branje, poudari Bataillovo fiksacijo z »ne-vednostjo«. Na prvi pogled se Lacanova identifikacija Batailla z mistikom zdi razumljiva, in mnogi komentatorji Batailla ponujajo podobna branja; pa vendar, na ta način se izgubijo pretanjene podrobnosti Bataillovih preudarkov glede tega, kar poimenuje »notranje izkustvo«. Še bolj bistveno, na ta način se izgubi njegova eksplicitna zavrnitev mysticizma na podlagi prav tiste vednosti, ki izhaja iz ne-vednosti. Ta primerjava zastavlja problem za fundamentalno ontologijo; v besedilu nameravam razviti le en vidik tega problema: nesklenjenost mišljenja implicira nerazmerje med mišljenjem in bitjo, in do mišljenja tega razmerja se lahko dokopljemo z analizo meje, ne kot realne, temveč kot fantazmat-ske in strukturne.



Introduction: The Mystics Do Not Know

In a series of lectures given at Hôpital Sainte-Anne from 1971–72, Jacques Lacan interposes a disagreement between himself and Georges Bataille on the status of nonknowledge. On a surface reading of Bataille one can easily understand why Lacan identifies him as a mystic, and as such someone who believes that there is a “whole truth” or a truth about truth.¹ If we accept that account, then we should also understand this disagreement as implying that the two thinkers’ deeper projects are not compatible, since, on Lacan’s reading, Bataille’s alleged mysticism is diametrically opposed to the epistemological and ontological precipitates of psychoanalysis. However, on my reading, Bataille’s *œuvre* provides a consistent account of the relation between the architectures of thought and of being, respectively; his examination is founded on a latent reappraisal of the ontological category of the limit. In this structural account, Bataille defines the contours and dynamics of nonknowledge and subjective destitution in a decep-

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¹ Jacques Lacan, . . . or Worse, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 154–57; Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 58.

tively rigorous manner, and, moreover, in a way that is consonant with Lacan's own. Both thinkers identify how symbolic discourse is founded upon the structural incompleteness of thought, defining it as something with a mere "structural" limit rather than a "real" limit. Both Bataille and Lacan also describe how we can derive a "knowledge about truth" (*savoir sur vérité*) or a "new knowledge" from the examination of the limit implied by this incompleteness.² This comparison not only establishes a manner of future exegesis of both *œuvres*, but frames how we can investigate two fundamental ontological and epistemological questions anew: *What is the relationship or delimitation between thinking and being, and what constitutes knowledge about this relationship?* The conclusions that I extract through my comparison are thus: *The incompleteness of thought implies a "non-relation" between thought and being, and we can have a knowledge about this non-relation through an analysis of the limit as phantasmatic and structural rather than as real.*

There are, on my count, only five explicit mentions of Bataille across Lacan's *oeuvre*, a strikingly low number given his biographical proximity to Bataille and his explicit discussion of figures close to Bataille—for instance, Maurice Blanchot and Pierre Klossowski—on the topics of fantasy, anxiety, and subjective destitution.³ Lacan pinpoints his perceived disagreement with Bataille in proclaiming:

[My followers] heard fairly well, as well as they can, what I said about knowledge as a fact of this correlate of ignorance, and this troubled them somewhat. I don't know what got into some of them, *it was something literary of course, stuff lying around in the writings of Georges Bataille*, for instance, because otherwise I don't think they would have come across it. I'm referring to non-knowledge.⁴

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What exactly is the debate here and what are its stakes? There are two main thrusts of Lacan's critique of this notion of nonknowledge.

² Lacan, . . . or Worse, 154–57; Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 58.

³ Jacques Lacan, "Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IX: L'identification, 1961–62" (unpublished typescript, June 27, 1962), PDF document.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls: A Series of Presentations in the Chapel at Sainte-Anne Hospital*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 9; italics added.

α) First, ignorance has a correlate knowledge, so Lacan says in the same lecture where he dismisses Bataille.⁵ This is fundamental to psychoanalysis, since there is some knowledge supposedly obscure to the analysand. You go to analysis because you have a symptom—*I'm impotent* or *I compare myself to others obsessively and compulsively*, and so on—and this symptom has an unconscious cause, and psychoanalysis renders a knowledge of this cause. This knowledge has three aspects: knowledge as *symbolic*, knowledge as *unconscious*, and knowledge as *jouissance of the Other*.⁶ It is symbolic because it concerns the subject's relation to meaning, discourse, and the signifier. It is unconscious because it is not decided upon by the conscious subject; it is "formed" and framed within the unconscious fantasy of the subject. Finally, it is the *jouissance* of the Other because it concerns the object that the analysand supposes or fantasises the Other desires. Knowledge acquired through analysis concerns this object, *l'objet a* more precisely, and its place in the unconscious economy of fantasy relative to the Other. Hence, knowledge and *jouissance* occupy equivocal positions for the subject, since what it is we do not know concerns what we unconsciously believe the Other enjoys and why our phantasmatic logic leads to the production of a particular symptom. Now, if one claims that in the end there is only nonknowledge, then Lacan's rebuttal is that nonknowledge only names the moment of the subject's confrontation with what it was already barred from prior to analysis, namely the *jouissance* of the Other or the "cause" of the symptom. In other words, nonknowledge is a feature of the architecture of thought rather than a truth that says something about this architecture. Put in a reductive manner, coming to knowledge of the Other and what a particular analysand unconsciously fantasises must be the enjoyment of the Other is partially the aim of analysis. This implies that there must be a knowledge that we can access if we hope to explain why psychoanalysis functions at all.

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β) The second criticism more directly concerns questions related to ontology and epistemology. On Lacan's reading, Bataille's proposition regarding non-knowledge implies that there is a biunivocal or one-to-one relationship between thought and being. First, let us momentarily accept Lacan's reading wherein Bataille features as a sort of mystic. Lacan sums up his definition of mysticism

⁵ Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls*, 4–5, 9.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 15.

with the following: “It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it but know nothing about it.” The mystic is someone who touches the outer rims of human experience, near the alleged divine, and comes that much closer to absolute knowledge, only for it to decay in the mundane realm post-climax. At first glance, this provides us with a working-definition of nonknowledge as it figures in Bataille’s thought and even seems to exactly describe his own account of the experience of the limit. In *L’expérience intérieure (Inner Experience)*, he chronicles several limit-experiences approximate to religious ecstasy, often consciously using religious and mystic lexicons to trace the outline of something that he apparently knows nothing of. The result, on that reading, is that there is a relationship between thought and being *qua* the alleged divine, ineffable, or mystical. Therefore, the mystic,⁸ experiences the Divine *per viam negativam*. Put differently, the phenomenal world is incomplete for the mystic but the alleged divine world is complete. In the case of eschatological mysticisms, like the one expressed by John of the Cross, the incompleteness of the phenomenal world is promised to one day be completed. This is a problem for Lacan since it misses what the limit-experience of the mystic exposes: that the symbolic structure of thought is incomplete, and its relation to being is not biunivocal, as many mystics would have it.

Bataille offers no such promise and does not produce a mystic theology *per viam negativam* either. My reading becomes more plausible upon close examination of Bataille’s direct engagement with the Christian mystic, Angela of Foligno. He quotes and then comments on Angela’s words, writing,

“God,” said Angela of Foligno, “gave his son, whom he loved, a poverty such that there never was and there never will be a poor man equal to him. And yet he had

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore, 1972–1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 76.

⁸ Now, Lacan does specify further distinctions of mystical experience on the basis of the absence of a sexual relation. There are differences between logically feminine and masculine mystical experience as a consequence of different relations to symbolic castration. The questions such partitions raise, as well as their logical foundations, should not be underestimated in their significance for psychoanalysis, political philosophy, queer theory, and fundamental ontology. For more on this issue, see Lorenzo Chiesa, *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 3–14; Guy Le Gaufey, *Lacan and the Formulae of Sexuation: Exploring Logical Consistency and Clinical Consequences*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (London: Routledge, 2020), 15–20.

Being as property. He possessed substance and it was his such that that belonging is above human speech.” This only concerns Christian virtues: poverty, humility. [. . .] The destitution and death should be the beyond required for the glory of He *who* is eternal beatitude [. . .], a truth as ruinous could be nakedly accessible for the saint. Still: starting from an ecstatic vision, it can’t be avoided.⁹

Bataille’s criticism is that Angela evades the knowledge about truth that her words silhouette. Though God has Being as a property, her ecstatic vision depends upon an experience of destitution of, at least, the feeling of having substance. This Christian mystic thus stands out for Bataille because something in her vision relates a knowledge about the truth about her incompleteness as it is reflected in the Son. The poverty of this Son potentially ruins the supposed sovereignty of the Father insofar as the completion of God’s trinitarian existence depends upon a destitution (of substance) and a death (the Crucifixion). Nonetheless, the saint insists that He retains a minimal determination as a substantial entity, lest we conclude that the Father himself may depend on the deprivation of substance, and thus lose his status as ontologically All, Whole, and One, as is typically posited in Christian mysticism and trinitarian theology. Furthermore, though she claims that this property is “above human speech” she offers no examination of what this implies about speech other than that it is an inadequate mode of expressing something about the Divine or Being. She speaks about experiencing it, but she also claims that she *does not know* what she experiences.

Certainly, Bataille admits his own proximity to Angela and other mystics; yet one should not conflate a proximity to mysticism as agreement. Bataille indicates where this proximity with mysticism becomes opposition. In recounting his participation in an orgy, Bataille writes: “No blame, no shame. Eroticism—the women flaunting their heavy breasts, the crying mouths, which is the horizon—is even more desirable to me if it is removed of all hope. It is not the same as mysticism whose horizon is the promise of enlightenment.”¹⁰ The “horizon” in the orgy denotes the limit before an abyss, and experience of this abyss signifies a loss of a sense of self. Again, the mystic insists upon a vision of completion. The phenomenal world appears incomplete, but an experience of the

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⁹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 19.

¹⁰ Bataille, *Guilty*, 11; translation modified.

alleged divine promises knowledge of the true wholeness of Creation. Thus, the mystic insists that beyond the horizon of an ecstatic experience there stands God. For Bataille, this is representative of what he calls dogmatic mysticism in the opening of *L'expérience intérieure* because it insists on a conclusion that does not follow from the ecstatic experience of subjective destitution ostensibly relayed by mystics.¹¹

Following her own analysis of Bataille's critical, complicated proximity to a mystic like Angela, Amy Hollywood attempts to establish a parallelism between Bataille and Lacan. She cites a lengthy passage concerning Angela and John of the Cross from *Séminaire XX*, where Lacan notes how it is possible for mystics, no matter their physiologically male or female sex characteristics, to expose the operations of the phallic function.¹² Here, the phallic function really is "discursive thought" as Bataille formulates it, since the subjective destitutions experienced by the mystics are submitted to the rules of a symbolic discourse. In other words, the mystics are not mystics all day, every day. They are not constantly in the throes of ecstasy. They submit their experience to the phallic function when they *write or speak about their experience*. Lacan is thus claiming that rendering the mystic experience in language is tantamount to a return to the domain of the phallic function and symbolic castration. Hollywood suggests that for both Lacan and Bataille, something in the mystic evasion of the phallic function in subjective destitution is worth valorising.

Importantly, Lacan himself would not assent to Hollywood's argument for a convergence between himself and Bataille. Recall again that "the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it but know nothing about it" and that, at least in *Je parle aux murs* (*Talking to Brick Walls*), Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure* is such a testimony, according to Lacan.¹³ Furthermore, these testimonies ignore the correlate knowledge of ignorance or unconscious knowledge. The kernel of the second Lacanian criticism (β) is present in this characterisation of mysticism and Lacan's association of Bataille with this mysticism. Hollywood's reading of Bataille casts him as the mystic that Lacan con-

¹¹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 9.

¹² Lacan, *Encore*, 70; quoted in Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 65.

¹³ Lacan, *Encore*, 76.

demns in *Je parle aux murs*, and so we cannot accept her claim that *Séminaire XX* is a retroactive defence of Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure*.¹⁴

I contend, however, that these associations are not circumspect, despite Hollywood's otherwise careful analysis of the differences between the two thinkers and mysticism. Knowledge does not concern what lies beyond the phallic function necessarily. It instead concerns the logic of the relations that result from what I call the dialectic of the limit exposed by Bataille. For now, though, let us dwell on why Lacan is not himself a staunch supporter of mysticism as Hollywood suggests.¹⁵

The first (α) and second (β) criticisms already detailed both arise from Lacan's quadrangulation of knowledge, truth, being, and thought. The first step in this analysis is establishing the "problem" with truth for Lacan and what he means by "knowledge about truth." As I suggest in this essay's opening paragraph, knowledge about truth corresponds to this new knowledge of a new relation to structural incompleteness, but before we can establish that argument we need to understand what truth in a "pre-reflective" sense might signify for Lacan.

Knowledge about Truth: The Question of Lacan's Relation to Philosophy

Truth, for Lacan, is not *totally* devoid of value; it is just that there are different ways of relating to the notion of truth that are more suspect than others. In this regard, Lacan comes close to so-called "anti-philosophy" as Alain Badiou defines it. On the definition of anti-philosophy, I *partially* concur with Badiou that "the basic gesture of every anti-philosophy involves a destitution of the philosophical category of truth."¹⁶ Indeed, Lacan himself subverts the typical privilege afforded to truth, claiming that "truth is situated by assuming that aspect of the real that acts as a function in knowledge, which is then added to the real [as a supplement]."¹⁷ Badiou himself, however, recognises the need for more ex-

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¹⁴ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 149–50.

¹⁵ Hollywood, 149–50.

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-Philosophy 3*, trans. Kenneth Reinhard and Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 8.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 443; my translation.

egetical vigilance when it comes to considering Lacan's relation to philosophy and truth. He incarnates this vigilance when explaining that

it's perfectly possible to argue that Lacan [. . .] re-established the category of truth. In this re-establishment we find, of course, the gesture of destitution of the philosophical category of truth, while, at the same time, Lacan had to traverse that category. In his traversal of it, he set it aside in favour of another concept that he put in the very place of the analytic act.¹⁸

It is not that Lacan proposes truth is devoid of value, but rather that it serves a function for the speaking subject in establishing a prosthetic, obscuring relationship between thought and being. We can have a knowledge of such truth-effects and the semblances they generate. Badiou perhaps oversteps in claiming that Lacan simply puts truth in "the very place of the analytic act," though. Certainly, Lacan re-establishes a notion of truth insofar as one can have a knowledge of its function *qua* meaning, thinking, and being, and this arguably is a knowledge that springs from analysis, but it is not the sole remit of psychoanalysis for Lacan. After all, the mystics come close to exposing this function of truth in its effects. However, they shirk from the consequences that Lacanian analysis allegedly arrives at.

So, Lacanian psychoanalysis is distinct from mysticism, but all of this begs the question of what psychoanalysis *exactly* is as distinct from philosophy, assuming there is any distinction at all. On this question, Badiou maintains a sharp distinction between psychoanalysis and philosophy, while still noting Lacan's more nuanced "dstitution" of the category of truth. In some regards, his starting point is not entirely incorrect. Lacan views psychoanalysis as not only opposed to a supplementation of the truth of being but also as a discourse which reveals how and why a problematic notion of truth is summoned by the subject to fantasise that the circuit between being and thought is *really* complete. Badiou provides a partially correct formulation of why one might accept that psychoanalysis and philosophy are opposed in writing that "the philosophical operations claim to be coextensive with truth. Philosophy describes itself in a quasi-generic way as a search for truth. But it is clear that the analytic act is anything but

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¹⁸ Badiou, *Lacan*, 23.

a search for truth.”¹⁹ That final sentence falls short of the mark since psychoanalysis is the establishment of a knowledge about truth, a claim which will unfold below. Nonetheless, it is a “method” of locating and identifying the characteristics of a particular analysand’s fantasies, which is to say that Lacanian analysis aims at dispelling problematic (for the analysand) symptoms by establishing a knowledge of the truth undergirding the symptom. It is a discourse which would not be a semblance, to provide a stereotypically Lacanian formulation.

Yet, this requires that psychoanalysis be a knowledge about truth in general, then. Badiou *almost* captures this aspect of Lacan’s argumentation when he writes: “For Lacan, as we see, the truth effect depends on the fact that, in knowledge, a real acts as a function, it functions. [. . .] That’s why psychoanalysis can in no way be understood as a search for truth. It can be an activation of a truth effect.”²⁰ And, in activating a truth-effect, psychoanalysis reveals what was added onto knowledge of the real or to being, depending on the question at hand. Psychoanalysis is thus a way of acquiring knowledge about what truth-effect the subject has adopted in order to suppose that the circuit between being and thought is completed or can be completed. So, the first (α) and second (β) Lacanian criticisms are related: psychoanalysis is a venture of establishing what knowledge of the conscious mind we can have on the basis of unconscious knowledge and *jouissance*, and more specifically how one’s symptom and fantasy supplement the apprehension of being with a truth-effect. We can further define psychoanalysis, then, as an analysis of *ontological misapprehension*. In contrast to another supplement to what is already a supplement, or a truth about truth, a *knowledge about truth* amounts to a knowledge of the misapprehension of the fundamental incompleteness of structure and the subsequent misapprehension of the non-relation between being and thought.

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To reiterate and take inventory: with Hollywood and against Lacan, I conclude that Bataille’s proximity to mysticism is not itself a mysticism of the ineffable or a simple theism. With Lacan and against Hollywood, though, I also maintain that there is a knowledge about truth, that Lacan’s psychoanalysis is not a mystical discourse of some “real” lying beyond experience and sensation, and that it is in fact an analysis of how discourses come to veil the non-relation between being

¹⁹ Badiou, 144.

²⁰ Badiou, 145. Badiou refers to Lacan’s quote previously cited in this article under note 17.

and thought. Close examination of Bataille's dialectic of the limit evinces how Bataille is in accord with Lacan, and what a knowledge about truth actually is.

Presentation of The Four Moments of the Dialectic of the Limit

Lacan's characterisation of nonknowledge in Bataille's thought is not infelicitous, but he ignores its place in a matrix of dialectically related moments, resulting in a common misreading that equates Bataille to a mystic. Nonknowledge is only one moment of what I call the dialectic of the limit. I read the following passage as a crystallisation of this dialectic: "But anguish [*l'angoisse*] is the horror of destitution and the moment comes when, in audacity, destitution is loved, when I give myself to destitution. Then knowledge returns, satisfaction, anguish again, I start over redoubling it up to the point of exhaustion."²¹ I call this a "dialectic of the limit" because the experience recounted and detailed in the writing of *L'expérience intérieure* is elsewhere called a "limit-experience" and exposes features of the ontological category of the limit. Namely, it exposes the structural and phantasmatic character of the limit, which implies that all delimitation and relationality are also structural and phantasmatic rather than *purely* ontological. Furthermore, it is a "dialectic" because of its transformation of contradictory categories into one another, like nonknowledge into knowledge or nonmeaning into meaning. I will illustrate this in detail below.

Now, the moments of the dialectic of the limit are thus: *first*, anguish—*second*, nonknowledge and subjective destitution²²—*third*, knowledge, and a reduplication of the process, which, I argue, implicates a *fourth* moment: knowledge about truth and the restitution of subjectivity. The fourth moment is what commentators on Bataille almost ubiquitously neglect, ignore, or miss. It is the establishment of a new relation to structural incompleteness, and thus constitutes a knowledge about truth *qua* knowledge regarding the limit.

Lacan does not acknowledge Bataille's position *vis-à-vis* the third moment, when "knowledge returns," and it is followed by a spuriously infinite process

²¹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 57.

²² I add "subjective" to "dstitution" because, (a) it is an uncontroversial addition since Bataille is referring to an evacuation of a sense of self-conscious and self-constituted consciousness, and (b) it resonates with the phrase Lacan uses to characterise what is written "on the ticket" when someone initiates analysis. Lacan, *Autres écrits*, 252; my translation.

wherein the entire series begins again: anguish—subjective destitution—knowledge *ad infinitum*. In this moment, subjectivity reëmerges and one can derive a new knowledge or simply another, different knowledge about oneself that will be subject to this dialectic of the limit and the travails of *l'angoisse* and subjective destitution inevitably again. In essence, one does not remain in nonknowledge forever and one's subjectivity is *necessarily* restored. The drama of existence must recommence, even after the torture, *le supplice*, that Bataille captures in *La somme athéologique* and whose structure recurs, more strongly than a leit-motif, across Bataille's *œuvre* after the writing of his own inner experience. The limit is surpassed, but is seemingly reconstituted in this restoration of subjective, discursive thought.

Accordingly, this dialectic does not end in a simple capitulation to a Sisyphean existence. In parallel to the third moment of “contestation” or knowledge *ad infinitum*, we can construct a knowledge about truth of this seemingly endless contestation of knowledge. By also neglecting this moment, Lacan neglects the way in which knowledge figures in relation to symbolic discourse, the real, and fantasy in Bataille's thought. This knowledge about truth is really the reconstitution of symbolic castration and the establishment of a new relationship to structural incompleteness. I suggest, echoing Mohamed Tal's own theoretical description of the “end of analysis,” that this end of a limit-experience is theoretically and practically consistent with major tenets of Lacanian thinking: the end of analysis is the establishment of a new relation.²³ Mirroring this, there is a possible opening created by the rupture of subjective destitution with or without the analyst's intervention that can allow one to establish this new relation.

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This is precisely what Bataille describes as his “limit-experience” and its ontological and epistemological results in the writing of *La somme athéologique*. He concludes that “the analysis of laughter [and inner experience as a limit-experience] had opened a field of coincidences between the facts of a *communal* and *rigorous* emotional understanding and those of a discursive understanding.”²⁴ Here, he communicates one aspect of his new relation to his symptom in the fallout of his subjective destitution. This “emotional understanding” signifies

²³ Mohamed Tal, *The End of Analysis: The Dialectics of Symbolic and Real* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 75–76, 115–24.

²⁴ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 5.

an individual and imaginary knowledge of oneself while that “discursive understanding”—which will interest us at the close of this chapter given its implications for an ontological account of the limit—constitutes a knowledge of the phantasmatic logic one’s identification seemingly necessitates. Such, “new-rosis,” to borrow Tal’s pun, has a formalizable structure as well as implications for the philosophical exposition of the (non)relation between being and thought.²⁵ All of this to say that a limit-experience *can* involve a “new” identification and a knowledge about truth, and analysis, in Lacanian practice, promises such a limit-experience.

Despite not advancing a clinical practice, Bataille’s dialectic of the limit nonetheless expresses a homologous process and end. Bataille is not so far from Lacan on these questions and problems concerning knowledge, nonknowledge, truth, being, and thinking, I proffer, then, a Lacanian criticism of Lacan’s dismissal of Bataille.

The First Moment: Anxiety and its Object-Cause

Bataille himself presents the moments of the limit-experience of anguish as interlinked in a dialectical relationship. At first, they are opposed, but in opposing one another they become essential to one another. So, in fact, it is possible that one oscillates between anxiety and subjective destitution in experience, anxiety culminating in nonknowledge and destitution only when the subject’s experiences of herself and the world are evacuated of meaning or sense. This is homologous to Lacan’s characterisation of *l’angoisse* in *Séminaire X*, where he explains how anxiety is a signal of the subject’s structural incompleteness; it is a “function of lack,” in his own words.²⁶ In signalling the subject’s structural incompleteness, *l’angoisse* functions as *both* a defence against *and* a necessary condition of subjective destitution.²⁷ Bataille presents this in writing: “Nonknowledge is first of all *anguish* [*l’angoisse*]. In anguish appears nudity, which leads to ecstasy. But ecstasy itself [. . .] slips away if anguish slips away. Thus, ecstasy only remains possible in the anguish of ecstasy, in the fact that it cannot be satisfac-

²⁵ Tal, *End of Analysis*, 75–76.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 131.

²⁷ Lacan, 138.

tion, grasped knowledge.”²⁸ Anguish is at once a possible obstacle and a necessary condition for the experience of subjective destitution, according to Bataille.

For both Lacan and Bataille, anguish emerges when the object-cause of the subject’s desire appears where it should be absent, and its appearance at once renders the subject dispensable by removing the lack that they phantasmatically maintain as motivating the Other’s desire *for* the subject. Anxiety is a defence from the realisation that lack is itself generated by the signifier and the intrusion of the real would mark an intrusion of the Other’s unmediated desire, resulting, Lacan tells us, in subjective destitution. In a state of anxiety, the object appears right where it should be lacking, and it testifies to an uncanny, alien, and unconscious alterity within the subject’s unconscious fantasy. The abstract categories which allow a subject to orient themselves through relations and delimitations depends upon this “interior” alterity, the Other. In short, anxiety signals the *certain* solubility of the delimitations and relations enframed by fantasy due to its basis in *nothing other than the signifier*.

Bataille himself explicitly recognises the phantasmatic relations and frame of the subject and the object-cause of the limit-experience. He writes that upon the restitution of thought and subjectivity,

I arrive at this notion: that the subject, object are perspectives of being at the moment of inertia, that the intended object is the projection of the subject *ipse* wanting to become everything, that all representation of the object is phantasmagoria resulting from this foolish and necessary will.²⁹

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The limit between subject and object is phantasmatic or phantasmagorical, for Bataille, because this division only exists in order to ossify two concepts for the ease of dialogue between speaking beings. The limit-experience sunders these divisions, relations, and delimitations, demonstrating that these words and images produces a symbolic lack.

At this stage in my theoretical argument, this comparative reading of Bataille and Lacan already verifies the symbolic production of a lack or a negativity in

²⁸ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 57.

²⁹ Bataille, 58–59.

the real or in being. It is not a *real lack*, but a supposed lack attributed to the real *qua* the structure and economy of fantasy as I have just detailed it. Again, Bataille assents to this description in calling the delimitation between subject and object and the lack produced by signification “phantasmagoria.”³⁰ The limit-experience, especially that of anguish, exposes these operations’ and their functions’ dependence on this symbolically produced lack. Furthermore, both Lacan and Bataille are arguing that this lack is phantasmatic, existent only with a fantasy proper to, even constitutive of (“necessary” in Bataille’s own words), subjectivity.

This portrait of fantasy bears upon the fourth moment of the dialectic of the limit and the knowledge about truth. However, for now, it is enough to conclude that for both Bataille and Lacan, anxiety is framed within fantasy as well as that the subject maintains a phantasmatic relation to an object whose appearance causes the signal of anxiety to begin. Once it has begun, anxiety may defend against the second moment of this dialectic or serve as its necessary condition: subjective destitution.

The Second Moment: Nonknowledge and Subjective Destitution

In *Méthode de méditation*, Bataille distills the conclusions and principles he took away from “Le Supplice,” “The Torture,” which led him to his own limit-experience. Bataille entitles the final part of this work “La Nudité.” He opens, “In the end everything puts me at risk, I remain suspended, stripped bare [*dénudé*], in a definitive solitude. [. . .] What I see and what I know no longer have meaning, no longer have limits [. . .].”³¹ “Nudity,” in naming this state of suspension, characterises subjective destitution as a process related not only to knowledge and meaning, but limitations and boundaries. The prosthetic, phantasmatic “defences,” of which we can count anxiety amongst, fail, and the subject is destitute. In this state, there is no knowledge of or relationship to the subject, other subjects, or object. This is why it is a state of nonknowledge, proximate to the state of ecstasy communicated by mystics.

³⁰ Bataille, 59.

³¹ Bataille, 201; translation modified.

Yet, this state of nonknowledge is ephemeral, dialectically transforming on its own terms into two distinct forms of knowledge. Bataille writes,

Nonknowledge lays bare [Le non-savoir dénude].

This proposition is the summit, but must be understood in this way: lays bare [*dénude*], therefore I see what knowledge was hiding up to there [i.e., the point of subjective destitution], but if I see I know. In effect, I know, but what I knew, non-knowledge again lays bare. If nonsense [*non-sens*] is meaningful [*est le sens*], the meaning [*sens*] that is nonsense loses itself [and then] becomes nonsense once again (without possible end).³²

The subjective destitution resulting from nonknowledge is in a dialectical relationship with the third moment, that of grasped knowledge, in that it renders explicit what was implicit in the first moment and the knowledge that precedes even anxiety. Namely, that all meaning derives from nonsense losing itself. In losing itself, it logically becomes meaning. Note that this would accord with Badiou's definition of typical anti-philosophy. However, Bataille's dialectic of the limit and Lacan's notion of the knowledge about truth are different than a mystical arrest in nonmeaning or nonknowledge. Again, nonknowledge is merely a moment of the dialectic of the limit. It is not a truth about truth in the guise of a quietist resignation to a spurious infinity of possible knowledges. The distinction between the third and fourth moments of the dialectic of the limit clarify why. In sum, subjective destitution results in a kind of knowledge. Two knowledges more precisely, captured by the third and fourth moments of this dialectic.

The Third Moment: Knowledge *ad infinitum* and Contestation

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And this is indeed a knowledge, because the third moment is a necessary precipitate of the negation of knowledge and meaning that characterises subjective destitution. Bataille himself spells this out as a dialectical process predicated on language and discourse supplementing something, because "nudity [and] supplication are first notions added to others. [. . .] They are themselves reduced to the state of subterfuges."³³ Through this third moment, discursive thought adds meaning to subjective destitution, and in so doing, further supplements the

³² Bataille, 57; translation modified.

³³ Bataille, 20.

phantasmatic circuit that “fills in” the incompleteness of structure. Nonknowledge and subjective destitution are “reduced to the state of subterfuges” in that they do not themselves coalesce into propositions without the intervention of “discourse,” and better yet, without the symbolic itself as the “universe of discourse,” as Lacan formulates it in *Séminaire XIV*.³⁴ In short, they only temporarily sabotage grasped knowledge within discourse since the dialectic results, in one register, in the reduplication of “grasped knowledge” within discourse *ad infinitum*.

On the intervention of discourse in the dialectic of the limit, Bataille writes that “this is the work of discourse within us. And this difficulty is expressed in this way: *the word silence is still a sound*, to speak is in itself to imagine knowing, and to no longer know, it would be necessary to no longer speak.”³⁵ Discourse, here, should be understood as the intervention of the symbolic and as that which determines our existential status as speaking beings. Bataille provides an illustrative example of this with the word *silence*: it is still a sound, or otherwise still a signifier with a signification, leading him to claim that the audacity of speaking is itself a pretension to knowledge. Bataille laments the futility and failure of his endeavour in the very first pages of *La Somme athéologique* because this submission of silence to knowledge and meaning is an unavoidable result of the dialectic of the limit.³⁶

Moreover, this unavoidable result helps clarify Bataille’s rejection of mysticism as dogmatic. This further problematises Lacan’s interposition of a disagreement between himself and Bataille. Bataille explains that

[inner experience], born of nonknowledge, remains there decidedly. It is not ineffable, one does not betray it if one speaks of it, but to questions of knowledge, it steals from the mind the answers that it already had. Experience reveals nothing and cannot be the basis of belief or set out from it.

³⁴ Jacques Lacan, *La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967* (Paris: Seuil, 2023), 34–36.

³⁵ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 20.

³⁶ Bataille, 4–5.

[Inner experience] is questioning (testing), in fever and anguish, what man knows of the facts of being.³⁷

Here then is the definitive evaluation of nonknowledge and its place within dialectic of the limit. It remains part of that second moment, but it is not ineffable as the mystics dogmatically claim. In contrast to the mystics, Bataille's nonknowledge cannot be a foundation of truth or belief. Additionally, this third moment gives way to a spurious infinity in the Hegelian sense. This "new" knowledge amounts to the production of finite, determinate *some things* rather than an absolute knowing that grasps the true infinity and cannot serve as the basis for an infinite judgement in the Hegelian sense of those terms. This third moment is the realisation of knowledge as a spuriously infinite process of questioning, or testing, or, as Bataille puts it more definitively elsewhere, "contestation."³⁸ So, the third moment leads back to the first.

This mirrors movements of other processes described in other works by Bataille. Notably, the dialectic between transgression and taboo in *L'érotisme* follows the structure described in the first three moments of the dialectic of the limit. Bataille, on this matter, is often misrepresented as a liberator of libidinal energies, a proponent of the emancipatory potential of transgression.³⁹ For example, Tim Themi understands transgression as affording some access to our "true" animality.⁴⁰ However, this reading neglects the discursive construction of animality, something Bataille characterises as poetic and synchronic with the emergence of the concept and image of humanity.⁴¹ This means that for Bataille, the social bond, transgression and taboo, and the concepts of animality and humanity function only within symbolic discourse and do not themselves serve as coordinates of the Lacanian real, of nature, or of being *tout court*. They are part of semblance and discursivity, and Themi overstates their correspondence

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³⁷ Bataille, 9.

³⁸ Bataille, 19–23.

³⁹ Cf. Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (an Essay in Atheistic Religion)* (New York: Routledge, 1992), xx–xxi.

⁴⁰ Tim Themi, *Eroticizing Aesthetics: In the Real with Lacan and Bataille* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 15.

⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 35.

to the Lacanian real by claiming that Bataille posits a *real* or “true” animality.⁴² The recurrence of this structure and its structural, phantasmatic economy cements Bataille’s implicit argument that this dialectic of the limit holds significance not just for the first-person expression of an individual limit-experience but is part of the economy of thought and structure itself, an economy necessitated by the fact of our structural incompleteness.

This brings us to the fourth moment of the dialectic of the limit, a knowledge in parallel to the third moment of grasped knowledge and contestation.

The Fourth Moment: The Restitution of Subjectivity and Knowledge about Truth

The third and fourth moments exist in parallel. At first, the “reduplication to exhaustion” characterises the spuriously infinite process of contestation, wherein “new” yet still incompletely structured knowledge and identifications are produced at the close of subjective destitution. This really marks another feature of the restitution of subjectivity, the reconstitution of symbolic castration in a new relation to the subject, and knowledge of the consequences of the structural incompleteness induced by symbolic castration.

Recall the moment Bataille draws our attention to an immanent contradiction in the signification of silence *qua* the word *silence*. Not uncoincidentally, Lacan formulates a similar idea in the form of an axiom in *Séminaire XIV*: “No signifier can signify itself.”⁴³ The word *silence* requires sound to be communicated in speech and thus is not silent. It communicates some knowledge, even if that knowledge is very minimal, in the form of a single word. Bataille’s dialectical example is a simple illustration of discursive reason or understanding in Bataille’s idiom, and symbolic discourse and its logic in Lacan’s idiom. Recognition of this nonknowledge/knowledge or nonmeaning/meaning dialectic is a necessary condition of apprehending a knowledge of the way in which truth is merely an effect rather than a first principle, an ideal unity of subjective and objective knowledges. The impossibility of signifying silence without destroying silence is the most basic example of the incompleteness induced by thought’s architecture.

⁴² Themi, *Eroticizing Aesthetics*, 4, 15.

⁴³ Lacan, *La logique du fantasme*, 34–36; my translation.

So, the reintroduction of the subject back into discourse after a subjective destitution is a repetition but not necessarily a reproduction of that “naïve” moment of knowledge that preceded the entire constellation. It is not necessarily a reproduction because this knowledge is transformed and amended, slightly different since it carries with it the knowledge of the limit and the structural incompleteness that necessitates an ontological category of the limit at all.

This structural incompleteness itself emerges as an effect of symbolic castration. There is no universe of signs, symbols, words, and meanings, without symbolic castration. In *Séminaire V*, Lacan claims that “the father is a metaphor. [. . .] The father’s function in the Oedipus complex is to be a signifier substituted for the first signifier introduced into symbolization, the maternal signifier.”⁴⁴ Though human infants will experience this first function of metaphor as the paternal metaphor through their father (or equivalent phallic, authority figure), it is by no means the only representation of castration. Indeed, even before the “naively real father” says “No,” the infant is already immersed in the universe of discourse. Thus, we need to mark the two distinct levels that Lacan’s arguments regard. The first is an ontogenetic level, where anxiety is an element of individual subject-formation. This is the “primordial” moment of anxiety introduced by symbolic castration. The second level is a phenomenological level, the one discussed in my explication of the first moment of the dialectic of the limit. In essence, the limit-experience of anxiety recapitulates the operation and effect of symbolic castration. This makes intuitive sense even if we consider this phenomenon without appeal to either Bataille or Lacan, since these limit-experiences wherein our sense of self is lost must necessarily entail a loss of something which “defined” our sense of self and the relations we maintained with other subjects and objects.

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This homology seems further evident when we consider Bataille’s own argument regarding the role of discourse in producing a lack, an argument he inherits from Alexandre Kojève. Christopher M. Gemerchak convincingly demonstrates how Bataille’s own “theory of discourse” hits upon the same radical lack constitutive of subjectivity. In a simple summation, Gemerchak concludes that “[for Kojève and Bataille] truth is not simply reality [. . .] but rather it is *revealed*

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. Russell Grigg (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 158–59.

reality. That is, it is reality *plus* the revelation of reality in human discourse. This is why the Real is a ‘discursive real.’”⁴⁵ Is this not to say that a revealed truth is always only a truth-effect of something else that functions, i.e. the real? What I’m suggesting, here, is that this is a proposition assented to by both Lacan and Bataille. This proposition concerns the relation between semblance, this notion of truth-effect as well as the peculiar, dubious relation between the architecture of thought and the architecture of being.

The Non-Relation Between Being and Thinking, or Knowledge about the Logic of Non-Relation and Fantasy

In bringing together illuminating passages from *Séminaire XVIII*, Chiesa summarises the relationship between semblance and truth-effect: “Psychoanalysis does not believe semblance to be an ‘artifact’ beyond which ‘the idea of something that would be other, a nature’ would arise, since ‘truth is not the contrary of semblance, but, rather, supports it.’”⁴⁶ Psychoanalysis does not produce more certain knowledge of physical nature in highlighting the flaws in current knowledge. Here, Lacan is quite explicit about that. Rather, nature, and our supposed knowledge of it, is always already mediated by a discourse which is a semblance founded upon symbolic discourse. Furthermore, this analysis allows me to articulate a degree of complexity that I have effaced thus far for the sake of simplicity. The truth-effect is not itself semblance. In Bataillean vocabulary, semblance corresponds to the third moment: knowledge *ad infinitum*. Be they socio-anthropological, political-economic, or mystic, these discourses which would be semblances are endless. This clarifies the relationship between the third and fourth moment. They are parallel knowledges, each born from the exigency of destitution in inner experience. Knowledge of the ephemerality of discourse that would only ever be a semblance *is not* the knowledge of the incompleteness of structure.

Chiesa draws out this distinction in his account of Lacan’s development from *Séminaire XVIII* through *Séminaire XIX*. He explains “that Lacan does *not* iden-

⁴⁵ Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative: Reading Bataille Reading Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 129.

⁴⁶ Chiesa, *Not-Two*, 83. Quotes from Lacan’s *Séminaire XVIII*: Jacques Lacan, *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 1971 (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 27, 13, 26; Chiesa’s translation.

tify truth with semblance: for speaking beings, semblance is nothing but the signifier, while truth amounts to the fact that for signifierness [*signifiance*] to be able to signify, ‘signifiers cannot be there all together.’⁴⁷ Since they cannot be there all together there is a structural incompleteness of thought itself. More to the present point, if truth were semblance, then it would itself be a truth about truth, the so-called mystical knowledge regarding the ineffable, a “fundamental” fiction undergirding a naïve conception of reality.

We should connect this argument to one made by Lacan nearly a decade earlier in *Séminaire X*, where he claims that the “site whence emerges the fact that there is such a thing as the signifier is, in one sense, the site that cannot be signified.”⁴⁸ Once again, there is some “site” or “fault” that necessitates symbolic discourse. Yet, symbolic discourse itself *repeats* that ontogenetic fault captured by the paternal metaphor and symbolic castration because the signifier cannot signify itself or its origin in being. In clinical terms, this is the rearrangement of a neurotic fantasy into a perverse fantasy. To simplify matters somewhat for the sake of illustration: if the neurotic were to turn his symbolic castration into what the Other lacks, this would entail a recognition that signifiers never exist “all together,” and this would make him a pervert. The symbolisation of an imaginary lack in anxiety as well as the attempt to symbolise the Other as lacking and castrated are means of defence against subjective destitution. In short, simply saying, “the symbolic is incomplete; the Other is castrated” is not knowledge about truth.

At this juncture, Tal’s careful distinction between “therapeutics” and “analysis” helpfully distinguishes the third and fourth moments of the dialectic of the limit I am presenting. He concludes that “if psychoanalysis partners with repetition as opposed to therapeutics, it is not to lead it to any fantasized success or consummation but rather to the realization of the very failure in *jouissance*” that leads to the limit-experience and subjective destitution, i.e. the “problem” that was there even prior to analysis (or to any encounter with therapy).⁴⁹ This further solidifies the claim that in the analytic situation repetition *re-presents* the ontogenetic

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⁴⁷ Chiesa, 83. Quotes from Lacan’s *Séminaire XIX: Jacques Lacan, . . . ou pire, 1971–1972* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 33; Chiesa’s translation.

⁴⁸ Lacan, *Anxiety*, 134.

⁴⁹ Tal, *End of Analysis*, 116.

fault that inaugurates the human infant into the orders of the symbolic and the real on the basis of a structural incompleteness. Again, the faults in symbolic discourse repeat themselves by being inscribed into the architecture of thought itself. This necessitates the conclusion that the knowledge Bataille describes in this fourth moment of the dialectic of the limit concerns amended knowledge of the structural and phantasmatic character of the limit *in toto*. This involves one's particular delimitations, but it also concerns the general problematic of the limit and ontological and epistemological questions regarding the *relation* or *limit* between the architecture of thought and the architecture of being.

Indeed, "the work of discourse" provides the "phantasmagoria" of completeness while simultaneously betraying the incompleteness of symbolic structure. What then does this imply about any statement or decision regarding "interior" structure's relation to "exterior" being?

Specifically, Lacan's attempt to clarify the relation (more properly understood as a "non-relation," as I demonstrate below) between structure and the real in *Séminaire XIV* with allusion to the "inverse eight" and the "cut Möbius strip" rests on the simple premise that the division between inner and outer is an amphibology, unable to be demonstrated logically in writing.⁵⁰ The "topological facts" are "favourable" images and symbolisations (Lacan designates them with both terms in these passages) in articulating the divided, which is to say *internally delimited*, character of the subject.⁵¹ This division concerns Lacan's play on the Cartesian *cogito*; it is a division between *Je ne pense pas* or "I do not think" and *Je ne suis pas* or "I am not."⁵² The former is a forced choice; we must necessarily choose it, because the latter cannot be chosen.⁵³ This division evinces the strange impossibility of determining the *real* location and features of the limit between inner and outer. This impossibility, Lacan tells us, belongs to "the dimension of the contestable," not due to error or defect on the part of the philosophers but as a "fact of structure."⁵⁴ This fact is that the Other is *structurally* lacking, but nonetheless, discourse ensues, structure perdures.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Lacan, *La logique du fantasme*, 181–89.

⁵¹ Lacan, 188; my translation.

⁵² Lacan, 188; my translation.

⁵³ Lacan, 188.

⁵⁴ Lacan, 184; my translation.

⁵⁵ Lacan, 184.

These propositions concern the structure and economy of *fantasy* as conditioned by these facts of structure. The symbolic and the real condition one another, but the problem is how and to what extent knowledge might pass over into the real and become something distinct from semblance. Given my preceding analysis of the frame, economy, and logic of fantasy, and my location of these aspects in both Lacan and Bataille's respective *œuvres*, our question now becomes, how does fantasy relate to being?

Here, then, my previous discussions and analyses of the lack in the Other, symbolic castration, repetition and the restitution of subjectivity, and the relation between thinking and being comes to a head. The use of this word *contestable* stands out in the present study given Bataille's own identification of this dimension of the contestable in that third moment of the dialectic of the limit. The question of how knowledge passes into the real is the question of knowledge about this dimension, its genesis, its economy, and its internal logic; in other words, the "work of discourse" *structurally*. Dispensing with the amphibology between inner and outer is a requisite, logical step to begin articulating this knowledge since that amphibology is *only* a consequence of structure and its incompleteness. Therefore, I suggest that "knowledge about truth" discussed in *Séminaire XIX* is this "analytic knowledge" that Lacan is trying to detail five years earlier in *Séminaire XIV*. If we accept that this fourth moment of the dialectic of the limit constitutes "knowledge about truth," then, by implication, we are dealing with a knowledge that has a peculiar relation to the real as opposed to "contestable" knowledge.

56 Fantasy circumscribes and even frames this dimension of contestation, and knowledge of this constitutes knowledge of the truth-effects upon structure as a result of the dialectic of the limit. Recall Bataille's claims regarding the relation between supposedly mystic nonknowledge and "scientific" knowledge: "[After subjective destitution], I know, but what I knew, nonknowledge again lays bare. If nonsense [*non-sens*] is meaningful [*est le sens*], the meaning [*sens*] that is nonsense loses itself [, and then] becomes nonsense once again (without possible end)."⁵⁶ The fourth moment concerns knowledge regarding what Bataille elsewhere describes as phantasmagoria, semblance, and discursive understanding concerns this dialectic of the limit between meaning and nonmeaning. Analytic

⁵⁶ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 57; translation modified.

knowledge entails recognising the “finiteness” of the Other, that guarantor of meaning, of course.⁵⁷ Yet, it must also entail a knowledge of the dialectic that necessitates the generation of meaning and the economy amongst, the subject, *l’objet a*, and the Other within the frame of fantasy. Otherwise, simple arrest at the third moment, that domain of contestation wherein the subject *might* impute a lack to the Other, would be an undialectical and purely structural *perversion*. It would not constitute a knowledge passing over into the real.

The logic of fantasy foments an *ontological* non-relation between thinking and being. Knowledge of this non-relation precipitates from this dialectic of the limit that exposes the limit to be, itself, *only* structural and phantasmatic. I say “non-relation” since a relation would belong to the realm of structure and fantasy as a consequence of the structural, phantasmatic character of the limit. Indeed, if one were to posit a quasi-Kantian, stark, and hard boundary between interior subjectivity and exterior being, one would be advancing a truth about truth; this would be a discourse that is a semblance since it would position the limit as something structural yet unaffected by either the real or its own dialectical, economic role within fantasy. The frame, economy, and logic of fantasy produce this paradoxical non-relation between thought and being. Subjective destitution lays bare the dialectic of the limit in exposing the phantasmatic character of the limit and its place within that frame, that economy, and that logic of fantasy. In laying bare this dialectic, a knowledge precipitates regarding the structural incompleteness of thought *and* its dependence on the very real that it simultaneously generated and inflected. That knowledge is a knowledge about truth-effects on both the symbolic and the real, effects marking the architectures of thought and being and not simply marking a naively interior or naively unreal error in the subject’s perception of being, the real, or the “exterior” world.

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This seems to be the conclusion Bataille brings us to in noting his so-called “difference from the phenomenologists” in a marginal, seemingly discarded note. The Gallimard editors append this note to *Le coupable*, and document and record its strange provenance in the notes to the fifth volume of his *Œuvres complètes*.⁵⁸ In this note, Bataille proclaims that this “difference from the phenom-

⁵⁷ Lacan, *La logique du fantasme*, 183–84; my translation.

⁵⁸ Bataille, *Guilty*, 213. Note in the original French published in Georges Bataille, “Notes,” in *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970–88), 5:541. Editorial commentary and guidance

enologists” is his “objectivity,” and more precisely his identification of the retroactive character of the object-cause in inducing a limit-experience.⁵⁹ Thus, the knowledge that Bataille claims is *ontological* and *objective* is, in a sense, knowledge regarding the structural, phantasmatic establishment of a causal relation between subject and object. Of course, as I have sought to demonstrate throughout this article, knowledge of what is in fact *not a relation* but nonetheless *must be related* constitutes knowledge about truth or analytic knowledge.

So, we come to the disagreement that launched this investigation. Lacan does not recognise the consonance between himself and Bataille on this issue. In bringing to light the proximity between Lacan and Bataille on the status of knowledge, its relation to an object, the Other, and, most importantly, the category of the limit, I do not claim that I fully justify characterising the logic of fantasy as a logic of non-relation. However, I have demonstrated that comparison between Bataille and Lacan can serve as a vehicle for more precisely determining *some* features of an ontology in the wake of their legacies. Such an ontology has no recourse to the ontotheologies of the mystics since it concerns a knowledge about the truth and the non-relation between being and thinking that ensures the generation of discourse despite the lack in the Other, the lack that mystics like Angela of Foligno cower from. Such is Bataille and Lacan’s mutual problematic and mutual departure from the mystics.

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⁵⁹ Bataille, *Guilty*, 213.

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