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To Love is to Battle: Nietzsche Bataille Paz

35-44 minutes



Part I: A philosophical exorcism

The philosophical poltergeist —A while ago I tested myself. For a full week, I kept track of how many of my waking hours I spend reading Nietzsche or about Nietzsche, thinking about his philosophy, discussing it with others, writing about it. The results were terrifying: for six to eight hours every day, Nietzsche and his philosophy were at the center of my thought. There is no point in denying it: I am obsessed. Friedrich is everywhere, that mischievous philosophical poltergeist, making cracks in the walls of my assumptions.

Tragedy —If, like me, you are haunted by the philosophical poltergeist and feel the temptation to identify yourself with Zarathustra's disciples, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that the book is meant as a *tragedy*: in the end Zarathustra fails to communicate and returns to his cave.

A photograph —Perhaps Nietzsche's final years can serve as a sad metaphor for his philosophical shortcomings. In any case, there is immense cruelty in whoever took that late photograph: Nietzsche with skin like cardboard, more plant than human, his eyes staring into nothingness. Unable to talk, locked up inside himself, stuck with inner experience and nothing else. Alone, terribly alone in the cave of his own mind; withdrawn from life, much like the ascetics he censured.

The dangers of discipleship —And so Avital's refrain comes back again and again: "one pays heavily for being one of Nietzsche's disciples." To put it briefly, I no longer know how to live my life. I am on board with almost everything that Nietzsche condemns, but I am not sure that there is anything left after him. Friedrich came into my mind with his famous hammer and wrecked everything, but he did not manage to build anything in place of the old idols.

The problem of action —Yes, it is impossible to live without values. Yes, man is a valuing animal. Yes, the values of the West are life-denying. Yes, these values have been engaged in a process of nihilist self-destruction ever since Plato. Yes, we must become re-valuators, free spirits: makers of the world anew. Yes, yes, yes. But for all that yea-saying, I still do not know *what to do*. What does "human being is something that must be overcome" mean? Nietzsche is the teacher, so he gets to ask: "what have you done to overcome him?" I am just a disciple, my questions must be more modest: "what *can* be done?" Bataille then comes along and screams: "WHAT CAN A CLEAR-SIGHTED PERSON DO IN THIS WORLD, HAVING INCONTROVERTIBLE DEMANDS WITHIN?"

The odd thing about Mr. Nietzsche — On the same subject, if a little more calmly, Bataille writes:

“What is odd in Nietzsche’s doctrines is that they cannot be followed. Ahead of you are unfocused, at times dazzling radiances. Though the way to them remains untraceable . . . [Both] *superman* and *eternal return* are empty as motives of excitement or action, are inadequate compared to Christian and Buddhist motives. The *will to power* is in fact a paltry subject for consideration. Having it is one thing —but this doesn’t mean you should give it your attention . . . What Nietzsche perceived was the falseness of preachers telling us to do this or that . . . In the end, the only knowledge that Zarathustra’s disciples gain is to repudiate their master.”

The Over-Nietzsche —Reading Bataille I feel like I am conversing with a fellow traveler. Like me, he is one of Nietzsche’s disappointed disciples, trying to overcome the failed teacher. Hence *On Nietzsche*: in French, the title can mean both “about Nietzsche” and “over and above Nietzsche.” Bataille is making a daring attempt to be one of the “philosophers of the future” called for in *Beyond Good and Evil*. In a playful style —a *gay* style, if you will— he is searching for an answer to the question of action that replaces the failed teaching of the overman. What Bataille finds in his daring experimental excursion into the dangerous fields of post-Nietzsche ethics is *jouer* —the French word for both “game” and “gambling.” Bataille encourages us to take our chances, to risk ourselves. Risk, chance, game; all these words refer to the same action—an attempt at *communication*, at going beyond being. Bataille suggests a transgression of the limits of being as the ultimate affirmation of life: “To risk is to touch life’s limit, go as far as you can, live on the edge of gaping nothingness!”

The Prison House of the Body —And yet, Bataille does not go far

enough. At the end of the day he is still trapped: “In the prison house of the body what can we do, other than provoke glimpses of something beginning beyond the walls?” He has overcome most of Nietzsche’s “defeat and blind error, his impotence,” but he has not managed to go beyond perspectivism’s ugly cousin — solipsism. As such, he writes: “The bottom line is: anyone and everyone is a part of me. Fortunately, we don’t usually notice this. But lovemaking brings out this truth. Within me, only a faltering is left, only a burning ardor, only living and dying — because of my hope.” Hope and a demonic laughter — Bataille’s laughter is that of the madman looking in the mirror — are the only surcease left for him. At the end of June 1944, alone in his countryside house, going crazy from “drinking too many aperitifs,” isolated from his friends and lovers by a war that seems at the same time remote and utterly threatening, Bataille breaks down: “How under these conditions to justify the world? Or better — how to justify *me*? How can there be a desire to exist?” His state is not altogether that different from the Nietzsche of the 1899 photograph. (To Georges’ credit, by the end of the month he will have found some solace in his lover’s presence. That is a very significant fact that will be discussed later on with greater detail. For the sake of narrative coherence, though, let us withhold Bataille’s final realization of the power of empathy for the moment.)

Return to Mexico — It always returns, like Zarathustra’s vision of the howling dog: the monstrous sight of nocturnal Mexico City seen from a descending airplane, its electric tentacles reaching farther and farther from the valley up the slopes of the volcanoes. I hate this city almost as much as the later Nietzsche hated Germany, and yet I always come back, with the regularity of

economic crises and lunar eclipses. There is no imperative bringing me here: I could have easily stayed in New Haven for the week, reading, writing, getting the job done; or I could have gone to London and seen plays and stared at paintings and drunk pints and pints of bitter beer. Instead I've chosen to return, like the prodigal son or a small asteroid trapped in the orbit of a lifeless planet. And this time around, with a return to Mexico comes a return to Octavio Paz. Alongside Nietzsche, he is one of the writer-ghosts that populate my mind —though he is more of a King Hamlet than a poltergeist. I love and hate him, very much in the same way that I relate to my family and to my country. At times his poetry strikes me as sentimental or excessive, or not surreal enough, or arrogant and pedantic. And yet other times I read through *Piedra de Sol* with genuine poetic emotion, feeling boiling neurochemicals run wild through my nerves, as if I were touching truth with the tips of my fingers. His position as Mexico's national poet is also difficult because it makes him inescapable; he seems to be behind each and every of my thoughts, in the same way that Hölderlin haunts the background of Nietzsche's writings. Despite their political differences, he was an acquaintance of my grandfather —in fact, in an act so transparently oedipal as to be ridiculous, I stole my copy of the first edition of *Piedra de Sol* from his library— and my great-uncle made his career in literary criticism by writing a book on him. And so there is an element of profound discomfort when, as the aircraft finally lands, I re-read *Piedra de Sol* side by side with Bataille and begin to wonder if there may be an answer here to Nietzsche's failure to communicate:

| *para que pueda ser he de ser otro,*

salir de mi, buscarme ente los otros,
los otros que no son si yo no existo,
los otros que me dan plena existencia

Part II: Bataille drank too much last night

The Hangover —I write under the effects of a dire hangover. Overcome by over-vulnerability and infinite sadness, in a state of absolute physiological and spiritual defeat: I'm going under. I rescue myself from a guilty conscience —I really should have stayed in and written this paper last night— by remembering Bataille's own descriptions of this pathetic iteration of the decline that follows the summit. They are brief, but they say all there is to say: "unpleasant effects from drinking today," "at present I'm a bundle of nerves, in a bad way from drinking." There are many sections of *On Nietzsche* —perhaps most of the book— that smell of hangover: Bataille wakes up late in the afternoon, takes an aspirin, and scribbles down a couple of lines. Although there are some sections that have the brilliance of moments of ecstasy, they are few and far in between. *On Nietzsche*, I am willing to uphold, was largely written during a series of very unpleasant hangovers.

Inner and Outer Experience —The fundamental characteristic of the hangover is hypersensitivity. This is both physiological —you close the blinds and beg your roommates not to play loud music— and psychological —you are driven to tears by the most horrible of clichés, i.e. the Mexican national anthem. However, the most painful hypersensitivity of the hangover is that it makes you aware of the enormous gap that exists between inner and outer experience: it increases your propensity for sobbing. By making you hyper-aware of your body through discomfort and pain, the hangover makes obvious a fact that, you fear, is always true, but

you can almost always ignore: outside of your self there is only nothingness. When hung-over you feel irremediably alone: you have your upset stomach, and nothing else. It is, more than anything else, a state of amplified anguish.

The Sovereign Desire —It is this feeling of being imprisoned within inner experience that Bataille is trying to overcome. Here begins his rewriting of Nietzsche: the will-to-power is refined, redefined, narrowed down and corrected: “The Sovereign Desire of beings is what is beyond being. Anguish is the feeling of danger related to this inexhaustible expectation.” Bataille understands that life is not *desire-to-desire* or *will to will that wills itself*. It is, rather, a will with whose object is *to go beyond*:

*I go forth an arrow
shooting out
of the night*

To be alive, then, is to share Zarathustra’s condition at the beginning of the First Part of the Tragedy: “[I am] like a bee that has gathered too much honey.” There is an *overflow*, certain *superabundance* in being: excess that cannot contain itself and that pushes to break out. Nietzsche’s mistake is to think that such superabundance can and *should* be turned entirely *inwards* and made into a self-cannibalizing desire-of-itself. To live as Nietzsche would have you live is to renounce life, to surrender to anguish and barricade inside yourself —it is, in other words, the ultimate nihilism: “*we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!*” The 1899 photograph comes back yet again, a haunting reminder of the consequences of a complete turning away from the world: “the absence of *communication* (an egotistical folding back into self) clearly evokes the greatest condemnation.”

Communication and risk —Bataille's entire *praxis* flows from this first reformulation of Nietzsche. Unlike the *will to power*, the *sovereign desire* contains within itself a call for action: "As *sovereign desire* eats away and feeds on our anguish, on principle this engages us in an attempt to go beyond ourselves." This attempt takes the form of an effort at *communication*: you must try to break the barrier between inner and outer experience. Of course, this is *risky* business:

Communication cannot proceed from one full and intact individual to another. It requires individuals whose separate existence is *risked*, placed at the limit of death and nothingness; the moral summit is the moment of risk taking, it is a being suspended in the beyond of oneself, at the limit of nothingness.

I only communicate outside of me by letting go or being pushed to this outside. Still, outside of me, I don't exist. There's no doubt in my mind that to let go of existence inside me and to look for it outside is to take a chance on ruining or annihilating precisely whatever it is without which the outer experience wouldn't have appeared in the first place —the *self*". . . We are crushed by twin pincers of nothingness. By not communicating, we're annihilated into the emptiness of an isolated life. By communicating, we likewise risk being destroyed.

If you are to communicate, you must risk yourself —take your chances, make a gamble. You will be met by *ravishment*: "a joy so untamed . . . that there would be no way of knowing if it came from my laughter or dying."

Altercation, Laceration —Bataillean communication is a kind of battle. It is altercation first and foremost; it "cannot take place

without wounding.” If you truly want to communicate with the outside world, you have to be ready to receive “a wound that lacerates integrity.” If the skin —or, why not, the *hymen*— of your being is complete and unbroken, then the world cannot reach you: you are sealed inside yourself, alone. You can only truly engage with the world through conflict:

(These burning trajectories only replace isolated humanness if there’s some consent, if not to annihilation, then to risking yourself, and in the same impulse, risking other people. All communication participates in suicide, in crime . . . By destroying the integrity of existence in myself and in others, I open myself to communion —I attain a moral summit.

And as such you *desire* conflict:

(Everywhere the conflict of things explodes. But isn’t this something we desire? Even the conflict between K and me; opening inside like a wound, it’s a never-ending flight robbing me of life, leaving me like someone falling on some unseen step. And, despite my fears, this is what I want.

When you risk yourself for the sake of communication —when you step forth to receive the wound— you reach the *moral summit*. You are at your “best” —for lack of a “better” word— when you put yourself on the line, when you play the most dangerous game with the highest stakes possible —and the world penetrates you, and you penetrate the world, and the divide between inner and outer experience is dissolved —if only for a glorious moment of infinite pleasure or pain. *O victory forget your underwear we're free!*

The Loathing of monks —Morality stands in the way because it constitutes an imperative to *play it safe*. By “[proposing] the good

of beings as an end that finds accomplishment in the time to come,” morality encourages you to *conserve yourself* —after all, you are being told that you should aspire to *salvation*.

Communication, however, requires an immense expenditure of energy: it can only exist if there is “a savage eruption towards an inaccessible summit.” All moralities are, in a sense, calls to moderation and silence. Because of this, Bataille writes: “I loathe monks. For me, turning away from the world, from chance, from the truth of bodies is shameful. No greater sin exists.” Reading this I can’t help but asking: to what extent was Nietzsche a monk?

Methods of laceration —Or, ways of risking yourself in order to communicate. They are many and diverse, but all of them transgress both the limits of morality and the limits of being. Some examples:

Sacrifice (human, of the Son of God, or otherwise): “Sacrifice is . . . the means by which humans once universally communicated among themselves and simultaneously communicated with the ghosts they understood as populating heaven or hell.”

Murder in general: “Sinners get off on the results of the crimes that they have committed. For believers, just the imagery is enough.”

Terrifying? Yes. But it is important to keep in mind that we are flying on a-moral territory, far behind the enemy lines —*beyond good and evil*.

Art: Here I exercise my judgment and list poetry *despite* Bataille: for him “art constitutes a minor free zone outside action, paying for its freedom by giving up the real world.” I believe my fellow traveler makes a mistake here. After all, poetry can *most certainly* wound you —and whoever hasn’t suffered/enjoyed a true

altercation with a poem is either reading bad poetry or reading it poorly.

Inebriation: “When drinking, it’s natural to flow into the next person.”

Lovemaking: “More often than the sacred object, desire has as its object the flesh; and in carnal desire, an interplay of communication appears in all its stringent complexity.”

Some problems arise when we try to transform these methods into practical guidelines for action. Murder and human sacrifice seem unpalatable even to die-hard post-nietzscheans, and not all of us have been blest with the gifts of the muse. The amplified anguish of the hangover makes it unsustainable to use inebriation as our main method for laceration. It then follows that we —who are searching for a way to live and a solution to the problem of action —are left only with lovemaking. Its importance as the premier method for ~~laceration~~ ~~altercation~~ communication is starting to become more and more evident.

Calling things by their name —To put it simply: Bataille’s praxis consists in daring to try to have sex with the world.

Lovemaking —Lovemaking is the ultimate act of communication; it “renders [the lovers] mutually penetrable to each other.”It is infinitely superior to religious practices (the inversion of the *Symposium* should not go unnoticed):

Canal love, because not “sheltered from thieves” or vicissitudes, is greater than divine love. It risks me and the one I love . . . In carnal love we ought to love excesses of suffering. Without them, no risk would exist. In divine love, the limitation of suffering is given in divine perfection.

You place yourself in the hands of a being as overflowing and isolated as yourself; you wound and are wounded in turn —and through these wounds the world comes in. You are swept in a cycle of union and disunion: “Right away, the beloved gets strangely confused with me . . . [Then] the beloved turns aside —is different from me . . . without this difference, this abyss —*my recognition of this beloved would have been in vain.*” This coming together/apart —this uncanny sameness/difference— breaks down the inner/outer dichotomy that is the source of all anguish: here is *something* —or rather *someone*— outside of myself, that causes such an impact in me that her independent reality cannot be denied. What is more, she seems to respond to me in the same way: I exist for her in the same plane of reality that she exists for me. I’m inside of her, she is inside of me (her teeth and fingernails have broken my skin), what do inside/outside, she/me mean anymore? My inescapable perspective becomes less and less well delimited: I loose myself, she looses herself —we loose our *selves*. We die —*la petite morte, c’est la sommet moral*— and then live again; we cease to be, go *beyond being* —and then come back tired, confused, *lacerated*. Lovemaking brings forth *transparency*, which “isn’t the abolition of individual isolation but transcends it. It is not a *state* of theoretical or fundamental unity, but a chance that occurs in risk.” To reduce it to its minimal expression: “the communication of two individuals occurs when they loose themselves in sweet, shared slime...”

The problem of metaphor (an aside) — Since we are exploring communication as a viable praxis, it is essential that we settle the problem of metaphor. Up to which point should we take all this talk about *laceration* literally? Are lovers to take knives at each other

and carve out bleeding wounds? Would not the more extreme forms of S&M —i.e. murdering your partner at the moment of greatest pleasure— account for the highest summits, the greatest risks, and the most intense transgressions of the limits of being? There is no morality to stop us . . . So why shouldn't we? Because when altercation is consciously taken to its last consequences *for its own sake* it becomes, in a sense, masturbatory. If what you are *getting off on* —Bataille's terminology; or at least his translator's— is *transgression itself* then you cannot truly reach the summit —you are consciously looking for it. If you completely objectify your partner, you preclude communication from taking place: you might as well play with yourself. You need a subject —not a plaything that you can snuff.

Summit and decline (back to our main discussion) —For a moment, anguish is overcome and desire is sated. Inevitably, the uneasiness returns: after reaching the highest height the only path left leads down. If the *sovereign desire* represents Bataille's version of the *will to power*, then *summit and decline* is his rewriting of the *eternal return of the same* —and the cryptic command to “become who you are” is transfigured into *risk yourself, take your chances, make your gamble*: “For those I'm attached to, I'm a provocation. I can't stand seeing them forget the *chance* they could be if they took risks.”

Nothingness — Yet, for all the explosive music of victory and liberation, Bataille is still haunted by *nothingness*. Nihilism and solipsism —the insidious shadows of Nietzsche's ghost — creep and slither between the lines of his diary, becoming stronger each day that passes. With no news from Normandy and with his lover threatening to leave, Bataille finds himself alone, waiting, drinking

too much night after night —waking up hung-over and hypersensitive. The sentences fall heavier each time, like ever-larger drops of poison: “It is important to show that with communication or physical lovemaking, desire takes nothingness as its object . . . The beyond of my being is first of all nothingness” As the summer of 1944 progresses, Bataille falls pray to the magnified anguish of the hangover: “my obsessive need to make love opens on death like a window on a courtyard.” There seems to be nothing outside: he fears more and more that he is irremediably alone. The lamentations cannot but evoke pity: “Eleven more days of solitude!” The joy of lovemaking now appears illusory: it all took place in my (his) head. “What was I desperately in love with? A glimpse, an open door.” The most painful part of that last sentence is left unwritten; it is implied that the door was not crossed—that it *could not have been crossed*. And then, towards the end of June, Bataille hits rock bottom with a bottom line that we have seen before already, and that is the epitome of defeat:

[The bottom line is: anyone and everyone is a part of me. Fortunately we don’t usually notice this. But lovemaking brings out this truth. Within me, only a faltering is left, only a burning ardor, only living and dying —because of my hope.”

If everyone is a part of me, then the world outside of me does not exist and I sink into solipsism. Lovemaking becomes glorified masturbation, and all altercation mere masochism. It turns out that communication —the bringing of the outside to the inside and *vice versa*— is impossible, and that we are forever trapped inside ourselves. Outside of ourselves there is only nothingness, and we are never more alone than when we make love. Bataille wastes

away, “feeling that *by [himself] he doesn’t exist.*” One pays heavily for being one of Nietzsche’s disciples.

Friend, sister —Then, in the very last entry of June 1944 —before the book takes on more political concerns— something remarkable happens:

[This morning. Depressed following a night of ungrounded fears, insomnia —sounds of massed planes filling her with dread— K started softly shaking. Frail, despite her appearance of being spirited, playful, and full of zip. Generally, anxiety prevents me from noticing such an unfounded distress like this. Empathizing with my woes and hardships —ruts that turn into a way forward for me— she laughed with me good-naturedly. Surprised suddenly to think of her —against the odds— as friend, sister even . . .

It is a modest, subdued ending, considering the raging battles that preceded it. Communication definitely takes place here: Bataille and K risk themselves by admitting to each other that they suffer, and the bittersweet feelings of empathy and shared pain softly lacerate them. “Friend, sister even:” a part of me, she shares my woes —and by sharing them provides me with surcease from them. There is an outside, the not-me is not nothingness —she is lying in the bed next to me, and she is very real. *Otherness* exists, and I can access it if reach with my hand. Presumably she feels the same way. United in anguish, hand in hand like Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost*. For once, communication has won the battle against anguish —or has it managed to traverse *The Labyrinth of Solitude*? Quietly, from the distance, almost like a whisper, Octavio’s lines return:

para que pueda ser he de ser otro,

*salir de mi, buscarme ente los otros,
los otros que no son si yo no existo,
los otros que me dan plena existencia*

Part III: Paz está ebrio de soledad y de amor

Cosmic drunkenness —If Bataille is the writer of hangover; Paz is the writer of inebriation. His drunkenness, however, is not a state of stupor but rather the anxious ecstasy resulting from a voracious imbibing of the world. Betraying the poet's heavy debt to Whitman, *Piedra de Sol* is a stream-of-consciousness rhapsody of all things: its contents range from the bombing of Madrid by Franco to the Aztec myth of the cyclical creation and destruction of the world. Still, the poem remains lucid and controlled: each line is a perfect *endecasílabo*, an eleven-syllable meter most closely associated with the poetry of the Spanish Golden Age. Moreover, as a final note makes clear, the poem has 584 lines, the exact number of days of the cycle of Venus. *Piedra de Sol* is at the same time modern and archaic, free-formed and formally strict, lucid and inebriated: an ordered collage of collapsing paradoxes. That is precisely the main poetic procedure of the work— *Piedra de Sol* moves forward by breaking down oppositions: inner/outer, self/other, being-is-becoming/eternal-return-of-the-same.

Eternal cycles — *Piedra de Sol* is a poetic picture of the eternal return. The structure of poem itself is one overarching cycle, taking its title from the name given by the Spanish *conquistadores* to the rotating calendar of the ancient Mexicans. It begins and ends with the same six lines:

*un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,
un alto surtidor que el viento arquea,*

*un arbol bien plantado mas danzante,
un caminar de río que se curva,
avanza, retrocede, da un rodeo
y llega siempre*

Significantly, the last line is an *hemistiquio* —half-line— that ends in a colon, anticipating a clause that never arrives. The poem ends but does not really end; rather, it begins anew, eternally recurring. The content of the poem is also organized in a cyclical pattern, in which the narrative voice moves from the anguish of decline:

*busco sin encontrar, escribo a solas,
no hay nadie*

To the ravishment of the communicative summit —glorious and despairing at the same time:

*las máscaras podridas
que dividen al hombre de los hombres,
[...] se derrumban
por un instante inmenso y vislumbramos
nuestra unidad perdida, el desamparo
que es ser hombres, la gloria que es ser hombres*

The voice then returns again to a state of anxious solitude:

*quiero seguir, ir más allá, y no puedo:
se despeñó el instante en otro y otro*

Only to begin the search for communication anew —*un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua...*

Nothingness/Otherness —Despite the cyclical nature of this advance, halfway through the poem the narrative voice undergoes a conversion. After the first decline, the voice suffers from despair similar to the one experienced by Bataille at the end of June 1944. The original response of the voice is to take refuge inside itself, overcome by the same fear of annihilation that seems to permeate Nietzsche's gradual retreat from the world:

no hay nadie, no eres nadie

[...] un hoyo negro

y en el fondo del hoyo los dos ojos

de una niña ahogada hace mil años,

miradas enterradas en un pozo,

[...]miradas que nos miran desde el fondo

de la vida y son trampas de la muerte

Bataille's lapidary bottom line —“outside of me there is only nothingness”— echoes here: the *fondo* of the dark well that is existence outside myself is pure emptiness, and any temptation to communicate is a trap set by death. And yet, the next lines —which stand at the geographical and temporal center of the poem— constitute a radical turn that contains Paz's revisions of both Bataille and Nietzsche:

—¿o es al revés: caer en esos ojos

es volver a la vida verdadera?

The outside-of-my-self, Paz discovers, is not death —but rather life. To describe this outside as *nothingness* is to fundamentally misunderstand it —a better word for the not-me is *otherness*.

The new Sovereign Desire —Paz's movement from *nothingness* to *otherness* is grounded in his rewriting of the *sovereign desire*. In the place of Bataille's *will-to-go-beyond-being*, Paz establishes a *will-to-go-beyond-the-self* as the principal engine behind chance taking:

*¡caer, volver, soñarme y que me sueñen,
otros ojos futuros, otra vida,
otras nubes, morirme de otra muerte!*

The fundamental desire of human beings moves from the *ontological* to the *psychological*. A desire to go beyond being is a will for non-being —a nihilistic will-to-nothingness. However, a desire to go beyond one's *self* is a desire for the world and all that there is in it. It is, in other words, a desire for *life*:

*¡espacio, espacio,
abre la mano, coge esta riqueza,
corta los frutos, come de la vida,
tiéndete al pie del árbol, bebe el agua!*

For Paz, life is first and foremost *interaction/altercation* with the world —an altercation that, unlike what the defeated Bataille seems to believe, is not condemned to failure from the start.

Anguish/Solitude —With this redefinition of the desire that lies at the bottom of human being, Paz also revises the anxiety that accompanies that desire. Bataille's *anguish* becomes *solitude*. The most succinct definition of this new concept is given in the final chapter of *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, a work that can be read as the theoretical version of *Piedra de Sol*:

La soledad, el sentirse y el saberse solo, desprendido del mundo y ajeno a sí mismo, separado de sí, no es característica exclusiva del mexicano. Todos los hombres . . . se sienten solos; y más: todos los hombres están solos. Vivir es separarnos del que fuimos para internarnos en el que vamos a ser, futuro extraño siempre. La soledad es el fondo último de la condición humana . . . El hombre es nostalgia y búsqueda de comunión. Por eso es que cada vez que se siente a sí mismo se siente como carencia de otro, como soledad.

This version of the anxiety of being addresses the fear of solipsism and the desire for communion more explicitly than Bataille's *anguish*:

invisible camino sobre espejos

que repiten mi imagen destrozada

In the end it is a matter of accuracy: Nietzsche's arrow misses the mark, Bataille's gets closer, and Paz hits the target. The opposition to overcome is not *being and nothingness*, but *self and otherness*. You exist only insofar as you come in contact with the world, but the fact that you are aware of your own existence as separated and independent from everything that surrounds you fills you with *anguish solitude*. The good news is that the gamble of communication *can* be won, that if you risk yourself you *will* come in contact with the world. There are no guarantees as to what form this altercation will take —“*el desamparo que es ser hombres, la gloria que es ser hombres*”— but what is certain is that you will feel *alive*, that you will *be* alive.

Laceration/Inscription —Paz retains Bataille's notion of *laceration* as the method through which the inner/outer dichotomy collapses.

Piedra de Sol is full of images of wounding and tearing:

abres mi pecho con tus dedos de agua

[...]no hay nada en mi sino una larga herida

However, these wounds in the integrity of the self are also described as acts of writing:

armada de navajas invisibles

una roja escritura indescifrable

escribes en mi piel y esas heridas

como un traje de llamas me recubren

Laceration, then, becomes *inscription*. The marks made in the self by its altercation with the outside world remain in time —and what is more, they are loaded with meaning. This is how the opposition between eternal return and being-is-becoming is resolved: through each cycle of *communication* and *solitude*, the self accumulates *inscriptions* that remain in the next cycle. Our being is always the same —the unending rotation of the sunstone, the unchanging weight of endless desire— and yet we are constantly changing. The opposition between everything-remains-the-same/everything-changes is collapsed: both propositions hold true. Your self, that which you are, is nothing else than the sum of these *inscriptions*, the collections of scars that the world and your lovers made on the skin of your being each time you risked yourself. This is how you *become what you are* —other people write on you. Bataille is shaped through his encounters with K; Nietzsche is who he is because Wagner and Lou Salomé wrote themselves painfully in his memory; Paz is the poet he is because of his blissful/despairing altercations with Eloisa, Perséfone, and María.

One of the greatest insights of *Piedra de Sol* is that the *corredores sin fin de la memoria* form a bridge between the *vida por vivir* and the *vida ya vivida*, between being and becoming.

Perspectivism rescued from solipsism —By understanding that our perspective comes to be what it is by the *inscriptions* that *otherness* makes in us; Paz has rescued the disciples of Nietzsche from the prison-house that their teacher built for them.

Lovemaking again —Paz understands lovemaking as the ultimate act of *inscription*. If Bataille laments the fact that he was desperately in love with an open door he never crossed, Paz sees lovemaking as the *opening* of that door:

*amar es combatir, si dos se besan
el mundo cambia, encarnan los deseos,
el pensamiento encarna, brotan alas
en las espaldas del esclavo, el mundo
es real y tangible, el vino es vino,
el pan vuelve a saber, el agua es agua,
amar es combatir, es abrir puertas,
dejar de ser fantasma con un número
a perpetua cadena condenado
por un amo sin rostro*

Paz has understood that physical love is the most direct encounter with *otherness*, a fierce battle against solitude. To make love is to be as alive as possible, to engage with the world fiercely. It allows you to interact with others in a way that is not herd-like:

lovemaking is thoroughly rebellious and transgressive:

mejor el crimen,

los amantes suicidas, el incesto

[...]el adulterio en lechos de ceniza,

los amores feroces, el delirio,

[...]el sodomita,

[...]mejor ser lapidado

en las plazas que dar vuelta a la noria

que exprime la sustancia de la vida

Perhaps what Zarathustra needed to find in order to teach his doctrine without creating a new herd was not a crowd, nor disciples, or even friends —but a lover.

Open your self —In physical love, mutual *inscription* transforms the lovers' perspectives to such a degree that, for them, the world is born anew. Lovemaking, Paz has discovered, is not only the dissolution of the dichotomy between inner and outer experience —but also the very revaluation that Nietzsche called for and was unable to achieve. Nietzsche failed because he refused to make love, perhaps because he confused risking his integrity with surrendering his *will to power* to an object outside his self. Bataille was onto something and did not ultimately fail —after all, the last entry in his diary shows him stumbling almost by *chance* onto *otherness*. Yet his attempt at describing a *praxis* for the revaluation falls apart because of his insistence on an ontological beyond —a hinterworld, perhaps?— that is simply inaccessible to human beings. Paz, however, provides us with a framework for

understanding our anxieties and desires, as well with as an answer to the question of action, which can be summarized by the prescription that the narrative voice makes at the very end of *Piedra de Sol*:

*puerta del ser: abre tu ser, despierta,
aprende a ser también, labra tu cara,
trabaja tus facciones, ten un rostro
para mirar mi rostro y que te mire,
para mirar la vida hasta la muerte*

Everything is here: risk —*abre tu ser*—, communication —*mírame y déjame mirarte*—, becoming —*aprende a ser*—, inscription —*labra tu cara, trabaja tus facciones*— eternal return —*la vida hasta la muerte*. All oppositions have been collapsed; the world is new.

The end —After Nietzsche has destroyed the idols; you are left free to engage with those you love and with the richness of the world. Enjoy them, battle them —inscribe yourself in the memory of those around you, and let them inscribe themselves in yours. Risk yourself, put yourself on the line, and take your chances. Regain *el olvidado asombro de ser hombres*. Become what you are.

*—¿la vida, cuándo fue de veras nuestra?
¿cuándo somos de veras lo que somos?
bien mirado no somos, nunca somos
a solas sino vértigo y vacío,
muecas en el espejo, horror y vómito,*

*nunca la vida es nuestra, es de los otros,
la vida no es de nadie, todos somos
la vida —pan de sol para los otros,
los otros todos que nosotros somos—,
soy otro cuando soy, los actos míos
son más míos si son también de todos,
para que pueda ser he de ser otro,
salir de mí, buscarme entre los otros
los otros que no son si yo no existo,
los otros que me dan plena existencia*

Sinceramente,

NMMP