

Bataille with Picasso: *Crucifixion* (1930) and *Apocalypse*¹

C.F.B. Miller

[History and the Science of Knowing] together, comprehended History, form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute Spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone.

G.W.F. Hegel²

In the course of the ecstatic vision, at the limit of death on the cross and of the blindly lived lamma sabachthani, the object is finally unveiled as catastrophe in a chaos of light and shadow [...].

Georges Bataille³

Picasso is a problem in the postmodern reception of *Documents*. The historical contact between the artist and the magazine is well known; its radicality remains obscure. Recent work – Sebastian Zeidler on Carl Einstein’s art theory, T.J. Clark on Michel Leiris’s ultra-humanist Picasso – shows *Documents*’ use-value for Picasso criticism.⁴ Such interventions help correct the Bataillean bias in the dominant reinscription, promoted by Rosalind Krauss and others associated with the journal *October*, of *Documents* as the vehicle of the *informe*. But what is the relation of Picasso to the *informe*? The problem is that this reinscription, by means of a strategic set of negations and deferrals, has displaced Picasso from the historical centre of *Documents* to the margin of its theorisation;⁵ a decentering consistent with Krauss’s project for an ‘alternative history’ of modernism, whereby Marcel Duchamp trumps Picasso, ‘against the grain’ of Greenbergian teleology.⁶ As such the Kraussian *informe* suppresses the historicity of the moment of *Documents* in Georges Bataille’s theory, when avant-garde painting – Picasso’s in particular – was a privileged surface for the deconstructive operations that Bataille pursued thereafter through the fields of politics, poetics and philosophy.⁷

In Krauss’s wake, art historians have reconnected Picasso with Bataille, often on the basis of iconography.⁸ This approach echoes art history’s inaugural (to my knowledge) ex post facto appropriation of *Documents*: the 1969 *Burlington Magazine* article in which Ruth Kaufmann set out to establish indices between the magazine and Picasso’s 1930 *Crucifixion*.⁹ Kaufmann argued that the *Crucifixion* [fig. 1] and ‘Soleil pourri,’ the piece Bataille contributed to the *Documents* ‘Hommage à Picasso,’ converged in the domain of what she called ‘primitive sacrifice.’¹⁰ There is an heuristic spark in this, with apocalyptic potential; but Kaufmann’s adherence to reference smothered the flash, imposing fallacious iconographical ‘identification’ on the picture.



I'll come back to the detail of this fallacy. Here I want to note the overarching illogic – the reaction-formation – of Kaufmann's analysis. Faced with the *Crucifixion*, Kaufmann presupposed an iconographical aetiology, so that the 'image evolved from Bataille's article or perhaps from conversations he had had with Picasso about it.'¹¹ It is unlikely that Bataille and Picasso conversed much in 1930; Leiris was Picasso's inside man at *Documents*. What is beyond reasonable doubt is that 'Soleil pourri' was published *after* Picasso painted the *Crucifixion*.¹² So the priority iconography grants the word over the image has prompted the historian to reverse chronology. The logocentrism of which this subreption is a symptom has enervated the historiography of Picasso's relationship with the interwar avant-garde. One might better reverse the paradigm and ask: what is the function of Picassian painting in the Batailleian text?¹³ I want to use Bataille to think Picasso; but I also want to use Picasso to think Bataille. Here the vector of this use-value is a painting: the *Crucifixion* of 7 February 1930.



Fig. 1: Pablo Picasso, *The Crucifixion*, 1930, Oil on plywood, 51.5 x 66.5 cm, Musée Picasso, Paris. Giraudon/Bridgeman Art Library. © Succession Picasso/DACS 2007.



A strange crucifixion this, and a strange Picasso. So strange, indeed, as to figure – or disfigure – a blind-spot in Picasso scholarship. Cruel and hilarious, anti-modern, radically inscrutable, this little oil-on-plywood painting (51.5 by 66.5 cm) has achieved a status of glaring obscurity in the artist's reception: it gets reproduced in colour and large format, it has been the centrepiece of exhibitions, the literature in general extols it as exceptional;¹⁴ yet, in the scant commentary, timorousness undercuts the lofty claims, historicism defers to *Guernica*, discourse lapses without self-criticism.¹⁵ The bathos, displacement and disavowal are telling. In certain crucial (dis)respects, Picasso's *Crucifixion* is an impossible object of conventional inquiry. *The Crucifixion*, it is written in the ledger of art history. But if it is *the* Crucifixion, with a capital C, then the predicate's crossed out. It's Crucifixion under erasure. It is/isn't the Crucifixion: the copula bifurcates.

But it is *La Crucifixion*. What can we recognise (what can we know through iteration of the same), according to this name? In 1946 Alfred Barr laid out the recognisable parts of what he termed, in a rather too sweet-smelling evocation of the rotten, the *Crucifixion*'s 'potpourri of traditional iconography':

The figure on the ladder driving a nail, the miniature mounted figure delivering the lance thrust, the soldiers in the foreground throwing dice on a drum head for Christ's cloak – these motives are fairly clear. At the extreme left and right are the empty T-crosses of the two thieves whose bodies, apparently, are those lying in the left foreground. The rough round shape in the upper left hand corner is perhaps the vinegar-soaked sponge, enlarged to gigantic size and isolated like one of the objects in the traditional paintings of the symbols of the Passion.¹⁶

Barr's itemisation of motifs already indicates the torment to which the painting puts the traditional crucifixion iconography. Picasso de-positions the thieves from their normative places, on their crosses, at either side of Jesus. In the Gospel narrative we hear nothing more of the thieves after they have had their legs broken, at which point Christ has already uttered the *consummatum est*;¹⁷ but Picasso's Christ is still being crucified, while the thieves have met their doom. This subverts the Bible syntagm. And the low move with which Picasso jumbles the thieves' bodies (a fall mimicked by the red bird at left – an unholy spirit) undoes the theological formatting of Dysmas and Gestas (to give the Good and Bad Thieves their apocryphal names), which bipolarised them according to the dexter/sinister logic of Christ's right and left hands, the dualism between salvation and damnation.¹⁸

Again, the Longinus figure spearing Christ may be 'fairly clear,' but he's heterodox. Like the deposed thieves, he does violence to narrative time. In the gospel according to John the spear in the side comes after Christ is finished, whereas Picasso's Christ seems as yet only to



have received two of his nail-wounds, so that his excruciation should be only just beginning.¹⁹ But if it is the wound, it is dry; it emits no salvific blood and water – the symbols of the Eucharistic and baptismal sacraments, the foundations of the Church.²⁰ Similarly, Longinus's role as a symbol of paganism's redemption – tradition identified him with the centurion who realised Christ's divinity – is immediately undermined by the unusually clear reference Picasso makes in the figure to the *corrida* picador, forcing analogy between Christ and the bullfight bull, in a piece of anthropological relativism.

The unstable ontology of Picasso's *Crucifixion*, the fissure in its nomination, performs the double-coded operation of parody.²¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the *para-* in the *para-ode* can signify both 'beside' and 'beyond,' adjacency and separation, similarity and difference. As against the unity of the theological symbol, this is scission in process: a *cleaving*. Yet it is not merely a matter of specific adjustments to the orthodox iconography. With a fissile compression that Philippe Sollers once described as 'nuclear,' Picasso exacerbates the force of the split between theology and its other through another double stratagem.²² On the one hand he deploys a painted variant of the collage method to intrude heterogeneous figures from his recent production into the closed system of the theological image, generating an excess of meaning unassimilable to that system. There is the lunar, clawed jaw of the feminine heads from the end of 1929,²³ the screaming bacchante,²⁴ the skeletal feminine face,²⁵ the face with three dots for features,²⁶ the frontal/profile woman.²⁷ The grinning carnivalesque entity on the horizon at right is so weird as to displace any definition, a resistance that points to the second stratagem by which Picasso exceeds the iconography: by sacrificing the icon itself.

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In 1933 Max Raphael submitted Picasso to ideology critique. His matter was the narrative laid out in the retrospective he had seen the previous year at the Zürich Kunsthhaus. In Raphael's eyes the unfolding of Picasso's production described a trajectory of spiralling idealism. Whereas the *papiers collés* had staged the contradiction between idealism and materialism, the cubism and classicism of 1915-1925 had excluded materialism and dialectics, contriving an ersatz opposition between 'abstract idealism' and 'idealising realism.' Yet the latest work was worse:

Picasso's latest (surrealist) period presents sociological interest only to the extent that, in its relation to Gothic stained-glass windows and by the methodical consummation of its initial mysticism, it confirms our classification of his work as reactionary and in the Christian-European tradition.²⁸



Though Raphael mentions no images by name, a number of pictures exhibited at Zürich might fit this description: the 1931 *Pitcher and Bowl of Fruit*,²⁹ for instance, or the 1932 *Girl before a Mirror*.³⁰ But of all the paintings shown, surely the most remarkable and blatant grab at the 'Christian-European tradition' was the 1930 *Crucifixion*.³¹

Raphael construes Picasso's recent output as irrational idealism, anti-modern mysticism – in his words 'devoid of dialectical sense' – that mimes the medieval without gaining dialectical purchase on it. Under the aegis of scholasticism, Gothic art and architecture figured the dialectic between absolute spirit and material finitude; but notwithstanding their evasive nostalgia for the pre-modern, Picasso's 'symbols' cannot assimilate this medieval dialectic:

Because of the absolute dualism of their content and the magic effect they produce, these symbols could never figure within the boundaries of Catholicism. The latter is too well protected by the Church and its ideological arm, neo-Thomism, to be very deeply shaken by such romantic revivals.³²

The tenor is that Picasso's medievalism seeks and fails to negate Catholicism, though Raphael's rhetoric is slippery – it is unclear whether the 'absolute dualism' of Picasso's symbols consists in their (as it were pagan or satanic) opposition to Catholicism, or (less likely, but more interestingly) an internal scission. But Raphael's judgement – and this is implicit in the term of exclusion, 'magic' – bespeaks an apprehension of alterity to dialectical reason.

Raphael's reference to Thomism is a reminder of an ecclesiastical history that normative accounts of the historical avant-garde ignore. Neo-Thomism was the Church's chosen armour against the errors of modernity. From Leo XIII's 1879 Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* onwards, popes aggressively remobilised Thomas Aquinas's thirteenth-century synthesis of patristic theology with Aristotelian ontology and dialectical logic, promulgating it through schools and seminaries, in order to repel secularism on the ground of rational discourse.³³ Aquinas's system, by which man reasoned through analogy from nature to God, was considered supremely integrated; in 1930 the neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain asserted its having 'definitively established the order of Christian economy,' from a 'summit of knowledge which is architectonic *par excellence*.'³⁴ This classical-metaphysical theology, in Leiris's words an 'instrument of reaction,' enjoyed considerable currency in France in the 1920s.³⁵ The interwar French *renouveau catholique* – which recruited Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob and Pierre Reverdy – assumed neo-Thomism, embodied by the aforementioned Maritain, as its intellectual standard.³⁶ It is the *systematicity* of the Thomist cosmos that has led Denis Hollier to pose it as the architecture against which Georges Bataille's writings militate;³⁷ and comparably, Picasso's *Crucifixion* ruptures any chain of analogy or reasoning from its material surface towards a theological idea. It is in the context of a



reactionary Catholic humanism, whose metaphysics privileged intelligibility, that we might view the *Crucifixion*.

Perhaps the Church as a political institution had little to fear from Picasso's painting, though the shrillness of interwar Catholic responses to surrealist provocation betrays anxiety.³⁸ For Raphael, it is the *a-dialectical* structure of this painting that fails to engage its theological mirror-image. I would suggest that, rather than to a simply *mystical* irrationalism (a catch-all for reason's others), it is to factors of structure and operation that we might look in order to explain Raphael's presentiment that a painting like the *Crucifixion* does not supersede the Thomist idea. On the one hand, the *Crucifixion* performs a parody, and as such maintains a split position vis-à-vis its object, rather than mastering and interiorising it. On the other, I would argue that the *Crucifixion* is heterogeneous to the dialectics Raphael invokes because of its *anti-idealism*, and the downward thrust with which it collapses difference.

Yet while Raphael sees neo-Thomism and its Picassian shadow as mutually exclusive, he is categorical about the crypto-Christian essence of the latter:

The perversion of Picasso's historical instinct reached its culminating point in the course of his surrealist period. Up until then he had always been, at least within the boundaries of art, active and revolutionary. Now it is purely reactionary contemplation that comes to the fore. Its ultimate basis is God, whether one is conscious of this or not, and regardless of whether one sees in all religion, as Freud does, an illusion that is nearing its end. As long as atheism is not based upon dialectical materialism, one merely replaces one word with another.³⁹

At this point the Nietzsche of the *Genealogy of Morals*, the Bataille of 'Le bas matérialisme et la gnose,' and perhaps the Picasso of the *Crucifixion*, emit a guffaw at the idealist or theological basis of faith in the truth of dialectical materialism. Against Raphael, with Bataille, I want to argue that the *Crucifixion* is anti-theological, or, better, *atheological*. But first I'll address its anti-modernism.

The reactionary *perversion* Raphael imputes to Picasso's 'historical instinct' implies a teleology by which medievalism instates regression to the pre-modern. In fact the return of Catholicism that the *Crucifixion* represents in Picasso's production might, by its historical situation, verge on such a turn (or overturning), since the early-twentieth-century Catholic revival imagined itself as a return of the medieval. Thus Catholic youth movements in 1920s France routinely used chivalric emblems in their insignia,⁴⁰ and medievalism, as anti-modern nostalgia for pre-Reformation integrity and Gothic triumph, obtained across the French Catholic spectrum, from far right to Christian democrat. In effect this was the conservative, even proto-fascist, activation in political discourse of what Ernst Bloch called *Ungleichzeitigkeit* – 'non-

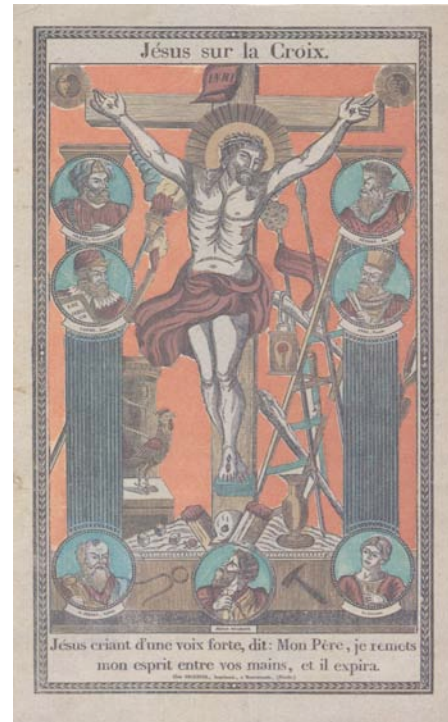
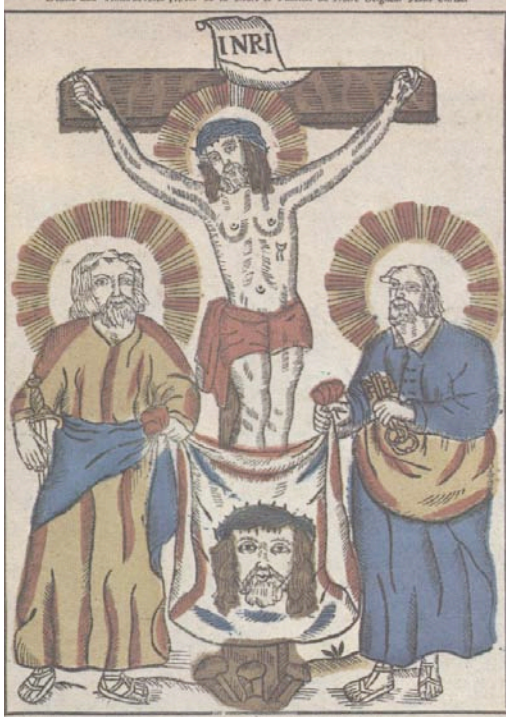


contemporaneity.⁴¹ Though it dethrones hierarchy and unmakes the phallic subject, the *Crucifixion* does stage violent anachronism between Picasso's most avant-garde monsters and methods, and a Catholicism enmeshed with medievalism. Collage-like, it invades the theological scheme with what Raphael called 'symbols' – figures irreducible to propositional logic – from Picasso's late-1920s production. In the terms of Raphael's critique, these 'cannot figure within the boundaries of Catholicism'; and yet, in the *Crucifixion*, Picasso stages the intrusion. This is an *atheological* non-contemporaneity.

The temporal contradiction between medieval iconography and avant-garde incursion overarches a multiply anguished internal time of the image. In the passages of paint that might denote sky, Picasso contrasts ante-meridian cerulean blue and lemon yellow, against afternoon Prussian and cadmium, and dawn-dusk scarlet, while the black and white of the central chiasmus is like a lightning-flash at midnight. The Biblical crucifixion brought cosmic disorder (an eclipse, an earthquake),⁴² but in Picasso's *Crucifixion* the time of the Biblical narrative concertinas and flips. Thus Christ is an infant, speared in the side though he is not yet fully crucified, while the thieves lie at bottom left, deposed prior to the God-man. This parodies the medieval habit of presenting different stages of the narrative simultaneously, but the crushing of diurnal time (the suspension of *temporal* distinction), and the flash of contact between pre-modern and modern, also concur with the apocalyptic operation of the picture, which will in due course reveal itself as this essay's *eschaton*.

Picasso's *Crucifixion* is on the scale of a devotional image, and, given this scale, the crude outlines, and flat, bright colours, I want to propose a specific type of religious image as the object of parody, or frame for Picasso's intervention. The type of image to which I refer, though a 'low' genre, encapsulates Raphael's objections to Picasso's medievalist mode, being at once a locus of Christian faith, contemplation and the medieval. I mean the *image d'Epinal*, in its subcategory of devotional *images de piété* depicting the Crucifixion [figs. 2 and 3]. Typically these prints, intended for domestic consumption, used simple inks in a format that posed either conventional personnel on either side of the crucified Christ, or Jesus alone amid his equipment. The scratchy haloes of the *image de piété* compare with the ragged radiation around the red and yellow figure at the right of Picasso's *Crucifixion*; likewise, the incongruous green thing at the left of the (de)composition, which Barr identified as a disproportionate vinegar-soaked sponge, might parody the logic of the *arma christi*. The early-twentieth-century historiography of the French popular printmaking tradition conferred upon it autochthonous authenticity, tracing an unbroken line of inheritance from the windows of the Gothic cathedrals to the plain colours and black outlines of *l'imagerie d'Epinal*. In the words of one 1926 history, 'the imagery crossed several centuries with an immobile soul, close to the native soil,' from the medieval *imagiers* to their modern counterparts.⁴³ *L'imagerie populaire* signified a conservative *françité* that stretched back to the Middle Ages.





Figs. 2 and 3: *Images de piété*. France. 18th-19th century. Private collection.

Rather than pious contemplation, however, the *Crucifixion* forces the viewer to experience a disaster of meaning and the subject. If we're in the temple, as the etymology of *contemplation* suggests, then the veil is torn. Again, its affect is far from stable, veering between horror and hilarity, an improper mix for a conventional meditative image. I would note the Spanish layer in the picture's palimpsest, not least in its blaze or riot of colour, whose garish dazzle connotes Southern sun, while the predominant reds and yellows literally flag Spain up. Given the Paschal theme, the crowded polychromy of the Andalusian *Semana Santa* offers an anthropological overlap. The clearest motif in the painting refers to the bullfight, via the picador-Longinus at left, and an irruption of Spanish popular festive violence in a French frame of contemplation is congruent with the *victimisation* of the image (and indeed the image, *eikon*, is a victim).⁴⁴

Spain functioned as a topos of proximate, primitive otherness in French modernism – one Bataille visited in *L'Histoire de l'oeil*. In his *Documents* articles Bataille exploited his professional formation as a medievalist at the École des Chartes only once, in his 1929 piece about the pre-Thomist *Apocalypse de Saint-Sever* [fig. 4], and it is noteworthy that he chose an apocalyptic medieval treasure of the Bibliothèque Nationale that he could recode as a disordered product of Christendom's Spanish margin (he linked its millenarianism to panic at the Moorish threat).⁴⁵ In contradistinction to the 'architectural and majestic mystique' with which Northern illuminated manuscripts cloaked the 'theological speculations of contemplative monks,' the *Saint-Sever Apocalypse* presented disasters with a crudely vernacular 'provocative bonhomie.'⁴⁶



Scholarship has linked the *Apocalypse de Saint Sever* to Picasso's *Crucifixion* through the reproduction in Bataille's article of the Saint-Sever Flood, whose drowned victims Ruth Kaufmann compared with the twisted bodies of Picasso's thieves.⁴⁷ Kaufmann also referred the *Crucifixion's* colour scheme to that of the *Apocalypse*, despite the *Documents* images being monochrome.⁴⁸ It is true that Picasso could have seen a couple of plates from the Saint-Sever manuscript at the blockbuster 1926 *Exposition du Moyen Age* at the Bibliothèque Nationale, though neither of these were illustrated in *Documents*.⁴⁹ More pertinently one might correlate the *Crucifixion* with the co-presence Bataille saw in the Saint-Sever Flood, between 'a feeling of decisive horror [...] expressed with the aid of arbitrary deformations,' and the 'unexpected jovial feeling' conveyed by the goat at the bottom of the page and even the eye-gouging raven at top.⁵⁰

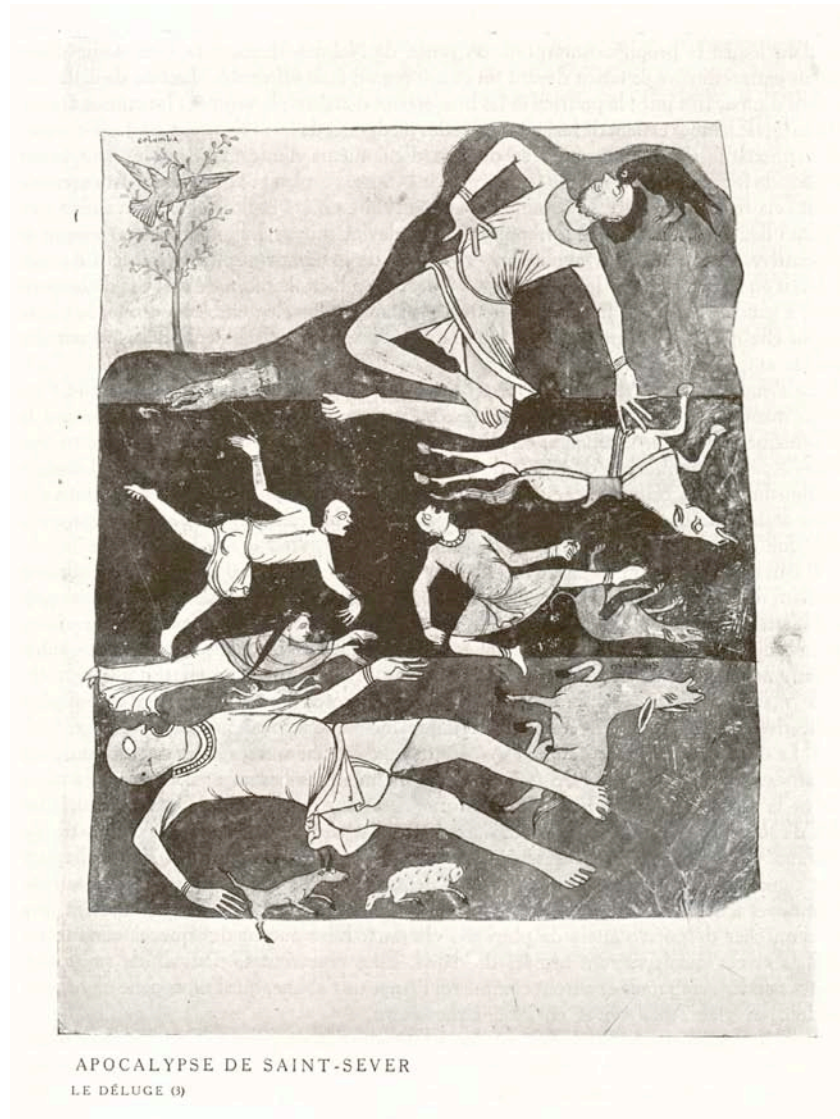


Fig. 4: Anon., France, 'Le Deluge', *Apocalypse de Saint-Sever*, 11th Century. From *Documents* 2, 1929.



According to Bataille:

Here this inconsistency is the sign of the extreme disorder of free human reactions. In effect this is not a matter of calculated contrast, but of immediate expression of unintelligible – thus all the more significant – metamorphoses which are the result of certain fatal inclinations.⁵¹

Freud's theory of instinctual dualism was urgent in 1929, after the 1927 French translation of the second topography,⁵² and it inflects Bataille's text here, in his interception of the significant unintelligibility of ambivalence. The idiotic serenity of Picasso's Christ, his face untroubled by the terrifying jaws at his breast, effects the same affect Bataille saw in the *Apocalypse*:

...there human grandeur is found at the point where childishness – ridiculous or charming – coincides with the obscure cruelty of adults.⁵³

The sadomasochistic disintegration of an infantilised masculine subject is the nucleus of the *Crucifixion's* catastrophe. Like the apocalyptic manuscript, Picasso's painting might be said to produce 'grandeur' through 'direct and crude procedures'; but it is above all in the ambivalence between horror and jollity, between the feminine screams and the grinning yellow skull at top right, that the two converge. This affective contradiction approaches the structural operation of the apocalyptic genre.

Bataille's article on the Saint-Sever *Apocalypse* implies the possibility of an *other* medievalism, disruptive of both liberal rationalism and reactionary idealisation of the pre-modern.⁵⁴ The neo-Thomist catholic revival was a *classical*, humanist medievalism. On the contrary, like much of Picasso's production at the time, the *Crucifixion* is rigorously anti-classical. Rather than obey the syllogistic Aristotelian economy of the image (*to eikon* – the icon), where the spectator garners pleasure through deducing intelligible content from sensible form, the painting's motifs violate intellection.⁵⁵ As against the pleasure principle of spectatorship, one might inscribe this as a mobilisation of the death drive in pictorial mimesis:

But why hesitate to write [wrote Georges Bataille at the end of 1929] that when Picasso paints, the dislocation of forms leads to that of thought, that is to say, that the immediate intellectual movement, which in other cases leads to the idea, aborts.⁵⁶

The literature on the *Crucifixion* has hesitated to write this dislocation, but I'm going to argue, with Bataille, for an anti-idealist Picasso. The *Crucifixion's* anti-idealism – the violence or excess it



installs in the painted signifier, against ideation, against ideality – can be subordinated neither to the traditional crucifixion iconography, nor to the idealist ‘project of iconography’ per se.⁵⁷

By ‘iconography’ I mean the mode of art-historical inquiry, codified by Erwin Panofsky, in which ‘specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources’ determine the ‘conventional meaning’ of images.⁵⁸ This methodology is rooted in theology and philosophical idealism, which are themselves close relations of course. Therefore iconography’s logocentrism derives at least in part from its affiliation to scholastic theology.⁵⁹ Art-historical iconography emerged in mid-nineteenth-century France with Adolphe Napoléon Didron’s monumental study of medieval art, *Iconographie Chrétienne* (subtitled *Histoire de Dieu*).⁶⁰ Didron was followed by Emile Mâle, who dominated French medieval studies in the first half of the twentieth century. In his 1898 tome, *L’Art religieux du XIII siècle en France*, which went through seven editions by 1931, Mâle described a medieval orthodoxy in which the visible world itself was iconographical, ‘a book of twofold meaning of which the Bible held the key.’⁶¹ For Mâle, European Gothic art was a systematic regime of the image as ‘first and foremost a sacred writing.’⁶² Ecclesiastical authority dictated this iconography, so that it manifested divine law; the image as *verbum dei*.⁶³

The traditional Crucifixion image, the central image of the Western cultural imaginary, is a *priori* iconographical, an illustration of scripture and exegesis. Enculturation has conflated the binary iconographical structure of the crucifixion sign – a picture signifying a text – into consubstantiality. In Picasso’s *Crucifixion*, this homology shears apart, by dint of its disruption by motifs heterogeneous to the Gospels. Thus Picasso emancipates the icon from the master text; but further, iconicity itself, the image’s internal mimetic condition of similitude to being, undergoes sacrifice. That is to say, the *Crucifixion* inverts the binary hierarchy of the iconographical sign, then confounds the pictorial term. The *restricted economy* of the iconographical image – where pictorial representation tallies with prior discourse (and is later exchangeable by experts into discourse of equivalent meaning) – opens onto *general economy*, at the site of the picture’s unassimilable ‘potlatch of signs.’⁶⁴ Whereas iconography as art-historical method presupposes a transparent motif, sublating sensible materiality in favour of intelligible meaning,⁶⁵ the *Crucifixion*’s crude facture desublimates the iconographical motif, foregrounding the painted signifier, marring intellection with sensible materiality. This is base materialism in figuration.⁶⁶ The gestalt fails, iconicity shudders between overplus and non-meaning, hybridity and anatomical confusion addle identities. In Panofsky’s terms, the *Crucifixion*’s ruinous ‘world of artistic motifs’ is a catastrophe of the ‘pre-iconographical.’ Paradoxically, the *Crucifixion* might be the kind of picture Panofsky barred from pre-iconographical description, where ‘the objects, events and expressions depicted [...] may be unrecognisable owing to the [...] malice aforethought of the artist.’⁶⁷

Yet it is possible to track the operations by which Picasso sacrifices intelligibility. For one, the very motif of crucifixion realises a bad gestalt (I’ll come back to this). Elsewhere, there are



several examples of the typical Picassian trick – reminiscent of the surrealist image, or even the ‘poetic technique’ of *L’Histoire de l’oeil* – of crossing indeterminate visual metaphors on the axis of contiguity.⁶⁸ For instance, at top left, next to the yellow head that connotes a moon, claw or helmet, is the green shape that scholars have identified iconographically as a sponge,⁶⁹ rock⁷⁰ or rotten sun,⁷¹ but which might just as well signify an avocado, pomegranate, visceral organ, brain or testicle. In juxtaposition with the head the green object might stand for a helmet-plume,⁷² but the possible permutations of the contingency of associations bankrupt discursive economy. Above all, they cannot be contained in theological exegesis.

Sometimes in the *Crucifixion* the paint pushes towards non-meaning, as in the yellow field and white strip beneath the blue cloak with the yellow upraised arms at right; and the vortex or striated screen jutting from the orange groin of the moon-headed figure at left, to reach up the ladder. Yet in contact with the mutilated and hybrid bodies to which they pertain, these sections are also overdetermined. Throughout, the picture does much violence to anthropomorphism and bodily integrity: for example in the central bad form; or the sutured schizogenesis of the dicer and skeletal mourner at right; or the arm of the left-hand dicer, which we can view as a gaping mouth; or the disorganised, confused bodies of the thieves, their faces inverted, the right-hand thief’s arm a leg – a confusion we also see in the torturer on the ladder.

These moves coincide in the most obscure section of the painting, just to the right of the cross. The bizarre red and yellow figure on the horizon has caused exegetes of the *Crucifixion* no little trouble. It is a figure, because it has feet. But how are we to read the rest of it? My first impression is of a big yellow grinning skull. We are supposedly in Golgotha, after all. The blind bulges I’m taking for eyes might also connote testicles or buttocks. Could this figure instead be bending over, showing us its arse? The tiny configuration in the middle of the ocular buttocks is inscrutable. Could it be a face, with inverted nose and slit eyes, or a genital formation, surfacing from behind the buttocks? Or might it represent two eyes, a nose and a moustache or mouth of a red face with grotesquely fat, puffed-up jowls, the whole figure hunched and holding its breath, the ‘skull’s smile’ its groin? Or might we read the ensemble as a carnival costume, with eyeholes or face in the centre? The otherness to discourse of this thing has led scholars vaguely to invoke the primitive and the non-European.⁷³ By contrast, a similarity – a *ressemblance informe*, to be sure – has been suggested with the risen Christ of the Eisenheim altarpiece, the glorious antithesis – apotheosis – of Grünewald’s suppurating Crucified.⁷⁴

The face of the figure immediately to the right of the cross shows the typical Picassian device of simultaneous profile and frontal representation. Two strands of long blue hair gender the figure as feminine, while the yellow right-angled triangle subjacent to the red outline of the face confers a family resemblance with the numerous heads Picasso painted between December 1929 and March 1930 in which triangles impinge on the facial features.⁷⁵ Below this female face is what might be a short yellow dress, in which case we might read the red shape emerging from



the hemline – another bit of paint that resists assimilation – as a shin and foot. But against this are the two yellow feet below and what appears to be a blue hand, proceeding from a yellow shoulder behind the blue skeletal jaws to touch the yellow elbow of the upraised arm at right. The groin of the figure would therefore seem to be disintegrating in contact with the blue jaws. Does a third, red foot inhabit this disintegration? If we must pick a body-part for the red shape on the white ground, articulated, rounded at its top and frayed at its bottom, how about a severed finger? Or a wound, vaguely phallic, vaguely vaginal, to correlate with the painting's pervasive iconography of castration?

Ruth Kaufmann produced an influential iconographical identification of this figure as 'a reference to Mithras, the youthful sun god who, in the Mithraic religion, sacrificed a bull and was depicted on reliefs wearing a peaked cap', reading the triangle in the girl's face as a Mithraic 'conical cap' or 'triangular hat' (note the slippage).⁷⁶ But Mithras wears a *Phrygian cap* [fig. 5]; if we must interpret the triangle as a hat, why not a dunce's cap or, seeing as it is on the face rather than the top of the head, the tall pointed mask of a Spanish *Semana Santa Nazarene*? Or why should we stop at a hat? What about the theological or Pythagorean discourse on the triangle? I'm carping at an outmoded analysis, but Kaufmann's interpretation keeps being reiterated, not least by the Musée Picasso.⁷⁷ The series of heads in which Picasso uses triangles to interrupt and figure the female face seem to be more about the problematic of pictorial representation than anything else.⁷⁸ As I mentioned above, Kaufmann adduced Bataille's text 'Soleil pourri' as 'the probable source of, or impetus to, Picasso's use of this Mithraic reference.'⁷⁹ Rather, I would say that 'Soleil pourri' describes the operation in the *Crucifixion* that makes iconographical analysis untenable.



Fig. 5: 'Typical Representation of Mithra (Famous Borghesi bas-relief in white marble, now in the Louvre, Paris, but originally taken from the mithraeum of the Capitol.)' From Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, Kegan Paul, London, 1910.



Now Bataille, in 'Soleil pourri,' compared looking at a Picasso to beholding the blinding sun, or undergoing sacrifice.⁸⁰ At this time Bataille thought sacrifice as a bursting of limited homogeneity – of meaning and the self – into the 'heterogeneous' (a movement he later termed the 'sovereign operation'). Perhaps more than any other painting by Picasso, the *Crucifixion* dazzles the spectator. We might think it in Bataillean wise, as a sacrificial image. Like Bataille's writing, the *Crucifixion* does not tolerate the distinction of form and content.⁸¹ It signifies sacrifice and sacrifices the signifier. Simultaneously the central crucifixion sacrifices Christ, Christ's form, Christ as form, and, in a phobic space between castration and abjection, Christ as phallic subject.

This 'Christ' – another name under erasure – is a bad *imitatio Christi*. At the apex of the ironically triangular (Trinitarian) composition (or decomposition), outlined in black on a white ground, we see a bald, chinless, beardless – *infantile* – head on a long neck, set against the transverse beam of a T-shaped cross. In another displacement of the authorising text (in a literal displacement of text), Picasso excludes the superscription declaring Christ to be the King of the Jews, on which all four Gospels agree, and which the iconography normatively represents as the initials I.N.R.I.⁸² The face on the cross has no hair, no nimbus, no crown of thorns, no beard, in short no True Likeness as it was perpetuated in the post-medieval tradition. Indeed the dots that denote eyes and mouth are so close as to become almost indistinguishable, insinuating, in combination with the extended neck and smooth, bulbous head, a low pun on the male urethral aperture. True Likeness as phallus. Is this the *jouissance* of the hanged man? Or a *signum victoriae*, in the manner of the ithyphallic sub-genre unearthed by Leo Steinberg in Renaissance Christological iconography?⁸³ The primary context is the contemporaneous subculture of psychoanalysis:

As well as showing to what extent the psychological life of man is linked to his sexuality, psychoanalysis gives the key to the idea of God, for example, by rendering it as the transposition of the father (or of the phallus) onto an ideal plane.⁸⁴

In these terms Picasso's Christ, a mock-phallus, acts out a parodic desublimation of the Father.

By dint of the lance-thrust of the picador-Longinus one may deduce the tiny rectangle on Christ's breast to be the wound. But if we take the *coup de lance* as not yet having pierced Christ's side, the dry 'wound' resembles a nipple. The nakedness of Christ's chest seems to be confirmed by the patch of black armpit hair to the wound-nipple's right, which belies the infantilism of the rest of the body. There is also, it has been suggested, something of the adult female pubis in this patch, with the wound as navel, conferring polymorphous gender on Christ's body.⁸⁵ The potential nakedness, though not the gender trouble, seems contradicted by the pleated hemline above the little feet on the customary footrest; yet the figure's neck and right shoulder are visible, and there is no sign of a collar. Doubt twitches the veil.



The covering of Christ's body in the traditional crucifixion iconography supplements the Gospel narrative, in which Christ is stripped of his raiment. We can see the soldiers dicing for the raiment at the bottom of Picasso's *Crucifixion*. Notwithstanding a few exceptions,⁸⁶ the veiling of Christ's genitals on the cross can be taken as a general rule of decorum. Medieval iconography accounted for this veiling with the Old Testament prefiguration of Shem and Japheth's filial piety in averting their eyes and covering Noah's nakedness;⁸⁷ a typology related to that in which Ham's mocking of Noah foreshadowed the Passion.⁸⁸ The uncovering of Noah has more recently been connected by Jacques Derrida with the dangerous unveiling of *apokalupsis*, the 'gesture of denuding or affording sight' that he also saw tabooed in the Levitical sexual prohibitions, and compared to the revelation of the glans in circumcision.⁸⁹ Might the *Crucifixion's* twitching veil border on *apokalupsis*?

Picasso's posing of Christ (Logos) as veiled phallus correlates with the Lacanian signifier, whose sublation of the real penis into the ideal master signifier of meaning Lacan theorised as a veiling:

[The phallus] can play its role only when veiled, that is to say, [...] when it is raised (*aufgehoben*) to the function of signifier. The phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself [...]. That is why the demon of *Aidōs* (*Scham*, shame) arises at the very moment when, in the ancient mysteries, the phallus is unveiled (cf. the famous painting in the Villa di Pompeii).⁹⁰



Fig. 6: *The Unveiling of the Phallus*. c. 70-50 B.C. Pompeii, Villa of the Mysteries, Room of the Mysteries, east wall.



In Picasso's Christ we see the divine Logos – theologically the primordial signifier ('In the beginning was the Word,') – as the phallus of which the avant-garde culture of psychoanalysis, from which Lacan emerged, understood God to be 'the transposition [...] onto an ideal plane.'⁹¹ This desublimated Christ nevertheless retains his veiled, symbolic status, his raising of the penis to the level of the signifier. Picasso visited Pompeii in 1917, and there is something in the seamless line around Christ's head, running down to the hem of His collar-less garment, that resembles the veiled bulb in the Villa of the Mysteries [fig. 6]. *What we are witnessing is the sacrifice of the signifier*. Now if theology obtained, one might receive this sacrifice as sublation – as an elevation of the Word made flesh, the contradiction between God and Man, through preordained Resurrection, into Majesty. But Picasso's *Crucifixion* is not *the* Crucifixion, not least since it undoes Christ's identity, his gestalt, his presence on the cross.

Rendered in the same black outline on a white ground as the infant and the cross, a scream, much larger than the face above it, occludes the Sacred Heart, its jaws and fangs familiar from Picasso's repertoire of feminine types. With verticalised (horizontalised) eyes the woman stares the viewer down, as the prong of her lower body drops flatly into knife-like continuity with her cloak. Similarly the white leg, at contorted odds with its blue counterpart, stands in for the foot of the cross. This process of indistinction, here of the woman's body with the cross and the cloak, is repeated between the veils (or *veil*) and bodies (or *body*) of Christ and the woman. For at the crux of the *Crucifixion* is a blindingly obvious aporia, in the gestalt switch flickering between the arms of the white woman and the arms of Christ.⁹²

On one level Picasso dramatises the *Crucifixion* as castration. As such the painting negotiates the genealogy concatenated by Frazer, and repeated by Freud, between the ancient Phrygian god Attis – the young lover of the mother goddess, Cybele, who died by castrating himself – and Christ.⁹³ Freud interpreted the narrative of Attis within the world-historical Oedipal economy of *Totem and Taboo*, the young god's self-castration an enactment of Oedipal guilt at transgressing the incest prohibition.⁹⁴ In the *Crucifixion* the sacrifice of the phallic Christ cooperates with abundant castration metaphors: the falling bird (as phallus) and fallen thieves, their heads mimicking Christ's; the mutilated and fragmented bodies to either side of the cross; the feminine jaws; the woman-cross's knife-like lower body. Yet there are also frantic defences against castration: the multiple phalluses (remember Freud's 'technical rule') that constitute the body of the crucifier on the ladder in the act of castrating;⁹⁵ the phallic prong of the white woman's midsection. Christ's own crucified phallicism might itself represent a kind of *virile* castration.

But in the loss of difference between self and other, the failed gestalt of Christ and the woman, appears abjection, as Julia Kristeva has theorised it: as the primary separation of the infantile subject from the maternal body, and the threat of its reversal.⁹⁶ A mother/son dyad proposes itself, with the infantilised Christ little in relation to the large white woman, perched on her 'hip,' her body making up the bottom part of the Cross. As if in parody of the traditional



emblem of Christ as the mother pelican feeding her brood with her own blood, Christ's wound-teat is offered to the woman's gape: may we not read this as a phobic fantasy of the devouring mother, of incorporation by the mother's body? Christ's head strains away from the white woman's, like a scissiparous cell, as if he were seeking separation from the body with which he is irremediably undifferentiated. This undifferentiation ruins the integrity of Christ's crucifixion: the psychoanalytic diachrony collapses, so that there is no progression, through symbolic castration (which theological Crucifixion, as the passage to Majesty, would play out), no progression to the paternal Law;⁹⁷ rather, the pre-Oedipal infant is mired in the body of the mother. The transcendental signifier is pulled down into abjection. This is the representation of abjection as a crisis in paternal law.

The general strategy of undifferentiation instanced by the bad gestalt of the central cross, the jumbling of Dysmas and Gestas, the hybridity of the dicer/insect at right, or the mimicry by which the bodies of the hammerer, the thieves, and the soldier at the drum simulate that of Christ, is consistent with the sacrificial in twentieth-century anthropological theory. In that theory undifferentiation became a master-trope through which to apprehend a universal structural operation of sacrifice. Since, as Bataille noted, sacrifice is etymologically nothing but the production of sacred things, in theory sacrifice accessed the sacred, whose aporetic ambivalence between holy and accursed, awe and horror, came to constitute a central theme of modern anthropological thinking.

At the turn of the twentieth century Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert conceived the 'sacrificial mechanism' as transgressing, through the victim, the fundamental Durkheimian opposition between the profane world and the sacred; thus the victim embodied the sacred, the co-presence of binary opposites.⁹⁸ Later Jacques Derrida, in his account of the *pharmakon* of writing, allied the scapegoat, the *pharmakos*, to the undecidability excluded by communicative reason.⁹⁹ René Girard – whose project, notwithstanding its ethnocentrism and monolithic claim to universality, is recognisably deconstructive – theorised sacrifice as the expulsion of mimetic violence (social undifferentiation) in the ambiguous figure of the victim.¹⁰⁰ In the *Crucifixion* the Girardian mimetic crisis is in process. Through mimetic contagion the two thieves, the dicer and the crucifier all acquire characteristics of Christ: indeed the crucifier's leg/hand and his hammer replicate the T-crosses themselves. The anthropological theory of sacred ambivalence inflected Kristeva's formulation of the abject's 'vortex of summons and repulsion,' too.¹⁰¹

Notwithstanding the *Crucifixion's* communication with what Giorgio Agamben has termed the 'scientific mythologeme' of sacred ambiguity,¹⁰² I want to suggest that one might rethink the *Crucifixion*, and with it Bataille's heterology, as *apocalyptic*. I'm indebted on this topic to Malcolm Bull's extraordinary book, *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality*, which analyses apocalyptic as the revelation, return or reincorporation of the undifferentiation – the contradiction or indeterminacy – excluded by ontic and epistemic



bivalence.¹⁰³ While Derrida and Girard feature in Bull's argument, as does Kristeva, Bataille barely gets a mention.¹⁰⁴ Yet in Bull's terms Bataille is the most apocalyptic of thinkers.

In the unpublished text from 1930, 'The Use-Value of D.A.F. de Sade,' Bataille sketched out his 'heterological theory of knowledge':

[T]he intellectual process automatically limits itself by producing of its own accord its own waste products, thus liberating in a disordered way the heterogeneous excremental element. Heterology is restricted to taking up again, consciously and resolutely, this terminal process which up until now has been seen as the abortion and the shame of human thought.

*In that way [heterology] leads to the complete reversal of the philosophical process, which ceases to be the instrument of appropriation, and now serves excretion [...].*¹⁰⁵

That is to say, heterology reverses the process by which, 'As soon as the effort at rational comprehension ends in contradiction, the practice of intellectual scatology requires the excretion of unassimilable elements.' It's a deconstructive operation, and an apocalyptic one according to Bull's definition; in fact for Bataille it goes hand in hand with catastrophic Revolution.¹⁰⁶ Likewise the *informe*, in the various descriptions Krauss gives of it, is an operation of binary undifferentiation.¹⁰⁷ Apocalyptic undoes the separations and differences that maintain cosmic order, so that religious apocalypse manifests the transgression of taboo and the undifferentiation of fundamental differences – hence the predominance of monsters in the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic texts. Picasso's picture is a shambles of undifferentiation: of figure/ground; self/other; infant/mother; human/non-human; right/left. The differential order is collapsing. Picasso visits apocalyptic on the *Crucifixion*.

¹ This article proceeds from the paper I gave at *Picasso in the late 1920s*, a conference at the University of California, Berkeley, 23-24 March 2007. I would like to thank Professors Tim Clark and Anne Wagner for the invitation to attend this very focused and productive event; many thanks also to my respondents, Amy Lyford and Sebastian Zeidler.

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, 493.

³ Georges Bataille, 'Sacrifices' [1933], in Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, [1986] 2001, 130-136; 134.

⁴ For Zeidler's work see his article in this number of the *Papers of Surrealism*. T.J. Clark turned to Leiris's article, 'Toiles récentes de Picasso' (*Documents* 2, 1930, 57-71), in his lecture, 'The Ordinary Optimism of Picasso,' at *Picasso in the late 1920s* (see note 1, above). One should also



mention the Bataille framework of Christopher Green, *Picasso: Architecture and Vertigo*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005; and Lisa Florman's discussion of Picasso and Carl Einstein, in this journal.

⁵ In *The Optical Unconscious* Krauss treats only late Picasso directly, and puts him at a disadvantage to her hypothesis, so that his 'flipbook' drawings register the optical unconscious inadvertently. *Formless: A User's Guide* excludes Picasso's painting, illustrating only a 1926 *Guitar* assemblage and the horn-and-duster *Object* of c.1933. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1993, 197-240; Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, Zone Books, New York, 1997, 82 and 84. Bois is scathing about the content of the *Hommage à Picasso* number of *Documents*, and indeed gives more space to Breton's 1933 essay, 'Picasso dans son élément.' See *Formless: A User's Guide*, 81-86.

⁶ Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 21.

⁷ See my 'Introduction: The Use-Value of *Documents*,' in this number of the *Papers of Surrealism*.

⁸ See Lisa Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis: Picasso's Classical Prints of the 1930s*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000, 140-180; Kathleen Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso*, Reaktion, London, 2004, 10-11; Green, *Picasso: Architecture and Vertigo*, 19-39; Anne Baldassari, 'Picasso – or the insurrection of painting,' in Baldassari, ed., *The Surrealist Picasso*, Flammarion/Fondation Beyeler, Paris and Basel, 2006, 163-176; 168. Florman and Green push away from theme towards structure or form.

⁹ Ruth Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. CXI, September 1969, 553-561.

¹⁰ Georges Bataille, 'Soleil pourri,' *Documents* 3, 1930, 173-174.

¹¹ Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 554.

¹² *Documents* doesn't give exact dates of publication, but *Documents* 2, 1930, 50, reports a conference at the Musée Guimet on 26 January, and contains advertisements for the forthcoming numbers of the journals *Europe* and *Variétés*, dated 15 February and 15 March respectively. *Documents* 3, 1930, the 'Hommage à Picasso,' contains advertisements for exhibitions, at the Galerie Vignon (1-15 April), the Galerie Georges Bernheim (31 March-12 April), the Galerie de France (3-19 April), and announces the next number, 4, as coming out on 1 May 1930. It is therefore most likely that the *Crucifixion* was painted while the 'Hommage à Picasso' was in preparation. Given its brevity, it is probable that Bataille wrote 'Soleil pourri' after Picasso painted the *Crucifixion*. It's fun to imagine Bataille seeing the picture, then writing the text, but I have no data to support such a claim. In any case, Bataille's anti-idealist construal of Picasso was in place well before February 1930 – see Bataille, 'Le "Jeu Lugubre",' *Documents* 7, 1929, 369-372; 369.

¹³ I am speaking generally and not claiming any special genetic privilege for the 1930 *Crucifixion*.

¹⁴ E.g. *Corps crucifiés*, ex. cat., Musée Picasso, Paris, 1992, fig. 1 (frontispiece); Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso*, frontispiece; Baldassari, ed., *The Surrealist Picasso*, fig. 101, 218-219.

¹⁵ Cowling describes the *Crucifixion* as Picasso's most 'transgressive' work, 'the most intense and potent religious image he ever made,' without elaborating on either statement. See Elizabeth Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning*, London, Phaidon, 2004, 481 and 513. See also William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art*, MoMA, New York, 1968, 291-292; Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930'; Roland Penrose, *Picasso: His Life and Work*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971, 265-268; Penrose, 'Beauty and the Monster', in Penrose and John Golding, eds, *Picasso 1881-1973*, Paul Elek, London, 1973, 157-195; 182-187; Lydia Gasman, *Mystery, Magic and Love in Picasso, 1925-1938: Picasso and the Surrealist Poets*, PhD diss., Columbia University, 1981, 1049-1068; Neil Cox, 'Marat/Sade/Picasso,' *Art History*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 1994, 383-417; Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso*, 10. To highlight a mistake in the most



sophisticated of these accounts, Cox refers back to Kaufmann's identification of the 'left-hand Mantis-headed figure as the Magdalen,' when the figure in question is on the right-hand side of the painting ('Marat/Sade/Picasso,' 397). This error is symptomatic of the trouble to which the picture puts both identity and binarism.

¹⁶ Alfred Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art*, MoMA, New York, [1946] 1980, 67.

¹⁷ John 19:32.

¹⁸ On the tradition of Dysmas and Gestas see Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, London, 1999, 23-27.

¹⁹ John 19:34.

²⁰ In the words of the Church Father St John Chrysostom, in the Roman Breviary (Feast of the Precious Blood [1 July], Second Nocturn): 'De latere sanguis et aqua. Nolo tam facile, auditor, transeas tanti secreta mysterii; restat enim mihi mystica atque secretalis oratio. Dixi baptismatis symbolum et mysteriorum, aquam illam et sanguinem demonstrare. Ex his enim sancta fundata est Ecclesia per lavacri regenerationem, et renovationem Spiritus Sancti. Per baptismam, inquam, et mysteria, quae ex latere videntur esse prolata. Ex latere igitur suo Christus aedificavit Ecclesiam, sicut de latere Adam ejus conjux Eva prolata est.'

²¹ On the theory of parody see Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

²² Philippe Sollers, 'Crucifixions,' in *Corps crucifiés*, 59-61; 60.

²³ See Christian Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, *Oeuvres de 1926 à 1932*, Éditions Cahiers d'art, Paris, 1955, figs. 298, 303, 305.

²⁴ E.g. Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, fig. 248.

²⁵ Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, figs. 300, 302, 306.

²⁶ E.g. Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, fig. 137.

²⁷ E.g. Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, fig. 41.

²⁸ Max Raphael, 'Picasso,' in Raphael, *Proudhon Marx Picasso: Three Studies in the Sociology of Art*, trans. Inge Marcuse, ed. John Tagg, New Jersey, Humanities Press; London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980, 115-146; 139.

²⁹ Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, 322.

³⁰ Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, 379.

³¹ There is a useful comparative list of works exhibited at the Galeries Georges Petit and the Zurich Kunsthaus in Christian Geelhaar, *Picasso: Wegbereiter und Förderer seines Aufstiegs 1899-1939*, Palladion/ABC Verlag, Zurich, 1993, 266-268.

³² Raphael, 'Picasso', 140

³³ For the texts of Aeterni Patris and ensuing Papal declarations see Appendix III in Jacques Maritain, *St Thomas Aquinas: Angel of the Schools*, trans. J.F. Scanlan, Sheed and Ward, London, 1931 [French ed., 1930], 189-240.

³⁴ Maritain, *St Thomas Aquinas*, 42.

³⁵ An entry in Leiris's journal from 1926 reads: 'Sur le thomisme. Métaphysique venue d'Aristote, opposée à la Dialectique de Hegel. C'est la forme la plus sèche, la plus abstraite, la plus dénuée de sens historique de la pensée catholique. Elle représente dans la pensée chrétienne, contre le courant mystique (qui s'accorde avec l'origine orientale du christianisme), le courant intellectualiste gréco-latin [...]. En un mot il représente le catholicisme sous sa forme le plus



absolument indéfendable. Si le catholicisme moderniste correspond au libéralisme bourgeois, voire au réformisme, le thomisme est l'instrument de la réaction, la doctrine officielle des nationalistes d'Action française et des fascistes. D'ailleurs cet ordre "aussi opposé à l'ordre empaillé qu'au désordre" préconisé par Cocteau et Maritain est d'essence purement fasciste.' See Michel Leiris, *Journal 1922-1989*, Flammarion, Paris, 1992, 126. The above quotation comes in the text written under 'September.'

³⁶ For a fairly uncritical account see Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz-Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto and London, 2005.

³⁷ Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1989.

³⁸ Maritain himself targeted surrealism as worshipping a false god in poetry, an error that 'will give a new development to the old heresies of the free spirit' – that is, the medieval pantheism that stated that since all was divine there was no sin and therefore everything was permitted. For Maritain the psychoanalytic literary subculture was both symptom and cause of a perverse, godless world: 'The air we breathe is saturated with spiritual filth and we have returned to the great night of the agony of paganism, when man has to cope not only with his own wretched body but with a body scourged by the angels of Satan, when all nature clothes itself with obscene symbols, a nightmare the obsession of which literary Freudism is busily multiplying.' See Jacques Maritain, *Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. J.F. Scanlon, Sheed and Ward, London, 1930, 103 and 116. On surrealism and Catholicism see Fiona Bradley, *An Oxymoronic Encounter of Surrealism and Catholicism: Ernst, Dalí and Gengenbach*, PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1995.

³⁹ Raphael, 'Picasso,' 140.

⁴⁰ François Lebrun, *Histoire des catholiques en France du XVe siècle à nos jours*, Privat, Toulouse, 1980, 422.

⁴¹ Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, 97-148

⁴² Luke 23:45; Matthew 27:51.

⁴³ 'L'héritier des imagiers médiévaux, tailleurs de pierre, fut l'artisan tailleur d'images sur bois, héritier de leur nom comme de leurs traditions, de leur mentalité. L'imagerie a traversé plusieurs siècles d'une âme immobile, proche du sol natal [...]. Dans les vieilles images, le gros trait noir taillé d'un rude couteau, sur lequel viennent chanter les franches couleurs étalées au pochoir évoque assez bien les vitraux avec leurs cernures de plomb. Ainsi les images, et jusqu'aux XIXe siècle, n'épousent pas les styles successifs, elles sont et restent d'esprit gothique.' Pierre Louis Duchartre and René Saulnier, *L'Imagerie populaire*, Paris, Librairie de France, 1926, 30.

⁴⁴ For a Girardian analysis of the centrality of victimisation to traditional Spanish rituals and folk dramas see Timothy Mitchell, *Violence and Piety in Spanish Folklore*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1988.

⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, 'L'Apocalypse de Saint-Sever,' *Documents* 2, 1929, 74-84; 75.

⁴⁶ Bataille, 'L'Apocalypse de Saint-Sever,' 78.

⁴⁷ Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 557.

⁴⁸ Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 558.

⁴⁹ The images shown from the Saint-Sever Beatus were the Annunciation to the Shepherds (fol. 12 verso 13) and a photograph of the *Mappa mundi* (fol. 45 bis). See Bibliothèque Nationale, *Catalogue des manuscrits-estampes, médailles et objets d'art imprimés exposés du 28 Janvier au 28 Février 1926*, Editions de la Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1926, 23-24 (nos. 26- 26 bis).

⁵⁰ Bataille, 'L'Apocalypse de Saint-Sever,' 79.



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- ⁵¹ Bataille, 'L'Apocalypse de Saint-Sever,' 79.
- ⁵² Sigmund Freud, *Essais de psychanalyse*, trans. S. Jankelevitch, Payot et Cie., Paris, 1927. This collection included 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,' 'The Ego and the Id,' 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,' and 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement.'
- ⁵³ Bataille, 'L'Apocalypse de Saint-Sever,' 78.
- ⁵⁴ On the importance of Bataille's medievalism for his theory see Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, 26-56.
- ⁵⁵ Aristotle describes this economy of understanding in *Poetics* 1448b: '[U]nderstanding gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but likewise to others too, though the latter have a smaller share in it. This is why people enjoy looking at images [*tas eikonas*], because through contemplating them it comes about that they understand and infer [*sullogizesthai*] what each element means.' Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2005, 39.
- ⁵⁶ Georges Bataille, 'Le "Jeu lugubre",' *Documents* 7, 1929, 369-372; 369.
- ⁵⁷ The phrase is Hubert Damisch's, from his 'Semiotics and Iconography,' in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1998, 234-241; 237.
- ⁵⁸ Erwin Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art,' in Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Peregrine, London, 1970, 51-81; 61 and 54.
- ⁵⁹ On this logocentrism see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1994, 28.
- ⁶⁰ Adolphe Napoléon Didron, *Iconographie chrétienne. Histoire de Dieu*, Imprimerie royale, Paris, 1843.
- ⁶¹ Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey, Collins, London, 1961, 33.
- ⁶² Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, 1.
- ⁶³ From the Council of Nicaea in AD 787 onwards. Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, 392.
- ⁶⁴ My understanding of general economy derives from Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,' in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge, London, [1978] 1997, 251-277. I have borrowed the phrase 'potlatch of signs' from Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy,' 274.
- ⁶⁵ Sebastian Zeidler nicely parsed this in his response to my lecture at 'Picasso in the late 1920s.' See note 1.
- ⁶⁶ On base materialism see my 'Introduction: The Use-Value of *Documents*,' in this journal.
- ⁶⁷ Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology,' 59.
- ⁶⁸ See Roland Barthes, 'The Metaphor of the Eye,' trans. J.A. Underwood, in Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, Penguin, London, 1989, 119-127; 124-125.
- ⁶⁹ Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art*, 67.
- ⁷⁰ Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 557-558.
- ⁷¹ Marie-Laure Besnard-Bernadac, *Le musée Picasso Paris*, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1987, 64.



⁷² Cox, 'Marat/Sade/Picasso,' 394.

⁷³ Kaufmann describes it vaguely as a 'ritual figure' ('Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 557). Chénieux-Gendron suggestively – though with misleading certitude – refers to Apollinaire's poem 'Zone' when she describes the motif as 'an enormous fetish figure "from Oceania and Guinea," the "Lower Christ of Dark Hopes" (a reminder of Apollinaire).' See Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, 'Setting a surrealist stage for Picasso: Framing "the genius",' in *The Surrealist Picasso*, 215-224; 221.

⁷⁴ I owe this insight to an audience-member at 'Picasso in the late 1920s.' See note 1.

⁷⁵ See Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, Vol. VII, figs. 292, 297, 311, 312.

⁷⁶ Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 554.

⁷⁷ When the Paris Musée Picasso devoted an entire exhibition to the theme of crucifixion, it reproduced in translation Kaufmann's 1969 *Burlington Magazine* article. See Ruth Kaufmann, 'La *Crucifixion* de Picasso, de 1930,' in *Corps crucifiés*, 74-83.; *Picasso: Sous le soleil de Mithra*, which took 'Soleil pourri' as its epigraph, also rehearsed the solecism (115).

⁷⁸ See n. 75

⁷⁹ Kaufmann, 'Picasso's *Crucifixion* of 1930,' 554.

⁸⁰ Bataille identifies the beholder of the 'rotten sun' with the sacrificial victim, correlative to the viewer of Picasso's painting: 'Mythologiquement, le soleil regardé s'identifie avec un homme qui égorge un taureau (Mithra) [...]; celui qui regarde avec le taureau égorgé [...]. Dans la peinture actuelle [...] la recherche d'une rupture de l'élévation portée à son comble, et d'un éclat à prétention aveuglante a une part dans l'élaboration, ou dans la décomposition des formes, mais cela n'est sensible, à la rigueur, que dans la peinture de Picasso.' (Bataille, 'Soleil pourri,' 174.) I should signal here two misleading Englishings of 'Soleil pourri.' Alan Stoekl (*Visions of Excess*, 57) renders 'celui qui regarde avec le taureau égorgé' as 'in other words, with the man who looks along with the slain bull,' rather than, 'he who beholds, with the slaughtered bull.' Stoekl creates ambiguity needlessly: Bataille clearly identifies the rotten sun with Mithras and its beholder with Mithras's sacrificial victim. In Bois and Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (81-83), 'mais cela n'est sensible, à la rigueur, que dans la peinture de Picasso,' is translated as, 'though this is, in ever so small a degree, only noticeable in the paintings of Picasso.' 'A la rigueur' is surely better rendered as 'rigorously speaking'; Stoekl has 'strictly speaking' (*Visions of Excess*, 58). The misrepresentation is exacerbated by Bois's succeeding comment: 'The "in ever so small a degree" is important' (*Formless: A User's Guide*, 83).

⁸¹ Cf. Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy,' 267.

⁸² Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19.

⁸³ See Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, 82-93. In the context of this essay it is interesting that Steinberg identifies representations of the deposed Christ touching his genitals with a theological reference to the original wound of the Circumcision. Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 104.

⁸⁴ Michel Leiris, 'A propos du "Musée des Sorciers",' *Documents* 2, May 1929, 109-116: 116.

⁸⁵ My thanks to Amy Lyford for this suggestion.

⁸⁶ For these see Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 132.

⁸⁷ James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, Kortrijk, Belgium, 1979, 323, n. 697.

⁸⁸ Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 16.



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- ⁸⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,' trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1984, 3-37; 5.
- ⁹⁰ Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus,' in Lacan, *Écrits*, 281-292; 288.
- ⁹¹ On Lacan and surrealism see David Macey, *Lacan in contexts*, London and New York, 1988, 44-74.
- ⁹² The only commentator to note this appears to have been Gasman, *Mystery, Magic and Love in Picasso*, 1051.
- ⁹³ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, London, 1988, 360.
- ⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vintage, London, 2001, Vol. XIII, 1-161; 153.
- ⁹⁵ Freud, 'Medusa's head,' *Standard Edition*, Vol. XVIII, 273-274.
- ⁹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.
- ⁹⁷ See Freud, 'The dissolution of the Oedipus complex,' *Standard Edition*, Vol. XIX, 171-179.
- ⁹⁸ 'The victim represents death as well as life, illness as well as health, sin as well as virtue, falsity as well as truth.' See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W.D. Halls, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1964, 60.
- ⁹⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy,' in Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Continuum, London, 2004, 67-185.
- ¹⁰⁰ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore and London, 1977.
- ¹⁰¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.
- ¹⁰² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1998, 80.
- ¹⁰³ Malcolm Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality*, Verso, London and New York, 1999.
- ¹⁰⁴ For Kristeva abjection is apocalyptic: 'The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.' *Powers of Horror*, 9.
- ¹⁰⁵ Georges Bataille, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade,' *Visions of Excess*, 91-102; 97.
- ¹⁰⁶ Bataille is careful to distinguish heterogeneous revolutionary destruction from the 'Christian apocalypse' – suggesting that his is an atheological apocalypse, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade,' 100.
- ¹⁰⁷ See my 'Introduction: The Use-Value of *Documents*,' in this journal.

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