

Textual Ecstasy

Exploring the possibility and potentiality
of an ecstatic encounter within a text.

Textual ecstasy as seduction, madness, fold and abject.

A good fucking read.

Jane Harris

"Vertiginously pleasurable because intensely experienced, in the encounter with the outside nothing is lost or exchanged. The outside as an encounter that does not know itself, and makes the self not present to the self but nonetheless teeming with unqualified intensity, is how I will define ecstasy." (Maccormack, 2010, p.111)

To raise the text out of the realm of frigidity, to banish the 'foam of language' (Barthes, 1973, p.5) that reduces the text to mere prattle. To cut, to fold, to dazzle, to *seduce*. To undress the text of its extra-textuality; not to render it naked, for where is the allure in nudity? Just as the lover extends a glimpse of exposed flesh to tantalize, so the ecstatic text presents spurts, contusions, lesions that entice. '..it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic; it is this flash itself which seduces,' (Barthes, p.10).

I cannot fuck a text and it cannot fuck me. I can be *seduced* by it. To say I *desire* it is contentious. For Lacan, pleasure (jouissance¹) presupposes desire, whether his early account whereby the two coexist or later when he posits that desire is founded on the absence of jouissance are acknowledged, in both, desire is an essential of jouissance (Evans, 1998, p.6). Yet Barthes presents desire as a class issue; pleasure is not a noble value, desire is. 'Desire has an epistemic dignity, Pleasure does not' (Barthes, p. 57). Pleasure is desire seen through the iconoclastic, frivolous eyes of the hedonist.

But I desire the *author* (Barthes, p.27). But desire and seduction require two to function, to perform. When I read textual ecstasy, there is interaction, reciprocation, the absence of which would render the text and my reaction to the text mere intellectual masturbation:

¹ the words pleasure, bliss, jouissance and ecstasy, are not interchangeable, but I see one as a continuation (or varying degree) of the other, starting with pleasure and culminating in ecstasy.

"The text is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*. The text chooses me, by a whole disposition of invisible screens, selective baffles: vocabulary, references, readability, etc.; and, lost in the midst of a text (not behind it, like a *deus et machina*) there is always the other, the author" (Barthes, p.27)

When I read the ecstatic text, do the the text and I become lovers, (albeit ones that can never fuck)? And if so, who is the lover and who the beloved? And if, as Bataille decrees, 'the lover strips the beloved of her identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim' (1957, p.90), then who is stripping who? Who is the giver and who the taker? Surely it is me, the reader, who is stripped. The ecstatic text may be undressing itself, provoking, offering the promise of glimpsed textual genitalia with my collusion, but it is me who is stripped bare. This is where the potential for ecstasy lies.

'Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self.' (Bataille, p.17)

Is ecstasy bathed in madness? Madness as approached by Foucault. As a language of reason beset by delirium, by passion. This passion does not cause madness, but 'rather it forms the basis for its very possibility' (1961, p.90). Madness and passion coexist. Within ecstasy, within jouissance and arguably within passion, there requires a loss of self. Ecstasy necessitates a type of death (Bataille, p.106) in order that sensual delight (and agony) may be fulfilled. In this moment of suspension, the personality is dead, 'Just as if some mad bitch has usurped the personality of the dignified hostess a little while back' (Bataille, p.106). Does the ecstatic text necessitate a type of death; of the author (though of course, he is already dead), of the language, of the reader? Death as a loss of self. Death as madness:

"One morning you wake up and take a speed ball, and feel bugs under your skin. 1890 cops with black mustaches block the doors and lean in through the windows snarling their lips back from blue and bold embossed badges. Junkies march through the room singing the Moslem Funeral Song, bear the body of Bill Gains, stigmata of his needle wounds glow with a soft blue flame. Purposeful schizophrenic detectives sniff at your chamber pot.....In Cuernacava or was it Taxco? Jane meets a pimp trombone player and disappears in a cloud of tea smoke." (Burroughs, 1959, p.30)

Burroughs, a heavy heroin user, claimed he had no memory of writing *Naked Lunch*, but qualified this statement by differentiating between different areas of memory; the addict may have a substantial and faithful factual memory, but his emotional memory is approaching 'effective zero' (1959, p15). Addiction, madness, as loss of self. Nobody wants to be stuck in a room with an addict, for when the initial anxiety subsides, it is essentially boring. Great swathes of *Naked lunch* are boring. I drift, fall asleep and when I wake I do not remember what I have read, just vague memories of textual laceration. But in the ecstatic text, boredom has value. Boredom is the clothing that shields my lover's skin. In boredom lies hope. 'Boredom is not far from bliss: it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure.' (Barthes, p.26)

What my pleasure, bliss, jouissance wants in an ecstatic text is the 'site of a loss' (Barthes p.7). The edge, seam, gap. For Barthes, this edge is created by cutting, by reappportioning language. But what if, rather than attributing the site of a loss to the cut, it was attributed instead to the *fold*. The fold as seen in the ultimate icon of feminine ecstasy, Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* (1652). Ensnared and embedded in the folds of her robe, Teresa's ecstasy mirrors the pleats and undulations both implicit and explicit therein. (Maccormack, 2008, p.66) The minor rupture of her jouissance is tangible in the waves and fluctuations in the fabric, 'The folds and pleats of Teresa's robe

materially resonate with and as the folds and pleats of her ecstasy' (2008, p.66).

Naked Lunch is a narrative, albeit non-linear, it has no plot as such, structure is everything yet meaningless, the chapters can be read in any order, I read, I drift, I jump, I sleep, I jerk in and out of the folds. This novel is not cut, it is endlessly folded, it endlessly breeds folds. The cut that Barthes talks of is the billow of the fold that plunges into the void. At the point that the text collapses, my ecstasy is assured.

"..but it is not violence which affects pleasure, nor is it destruction which interests it; what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss" (Barthes, p.7)

The fold may be infinite (Deleuze, 1991. p.227) but what if the oscillations are so relentless, so tenacious that the undulations are imperceptible. I am dragged from the realm of affect and pitched into literary atrophy. The text flatlines. Pierre Guyotat's *Eden Eden Eden* (fig.1) is a sentence lasting 6762 lines with no discernible fluctuations in tempo:

"Heart stimulants are recommended because the rhythmic pulse of words droning through Eden's lettered vein-structure perfectly synthesises, balances and regulates the monotony of the reader's metabolic rate...any MORE boring and the reader would fall into a coma or die." (Chapman, 1995)

Rape, child murder and bestiality, all present in *Eden Eden Eden* are transgressive subjects and there is value in transgression; unfettered by literary etiquette, 'knowledge', 'truth', (whatever they may be) have a better chance of being exposed if revealed through the edge of experience, but if these transgressions and the language used to describe them know no seams, edges, *folds* then 'transgression incessantly crosses and re-crosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration', (Foucault, 1963, p.34); the line being crossed only vindicates the presence of a line to be crossed, my thrall to conformity is

confirmed, I flatline but without the ecstasy that accompanies the minor death of jouissance.

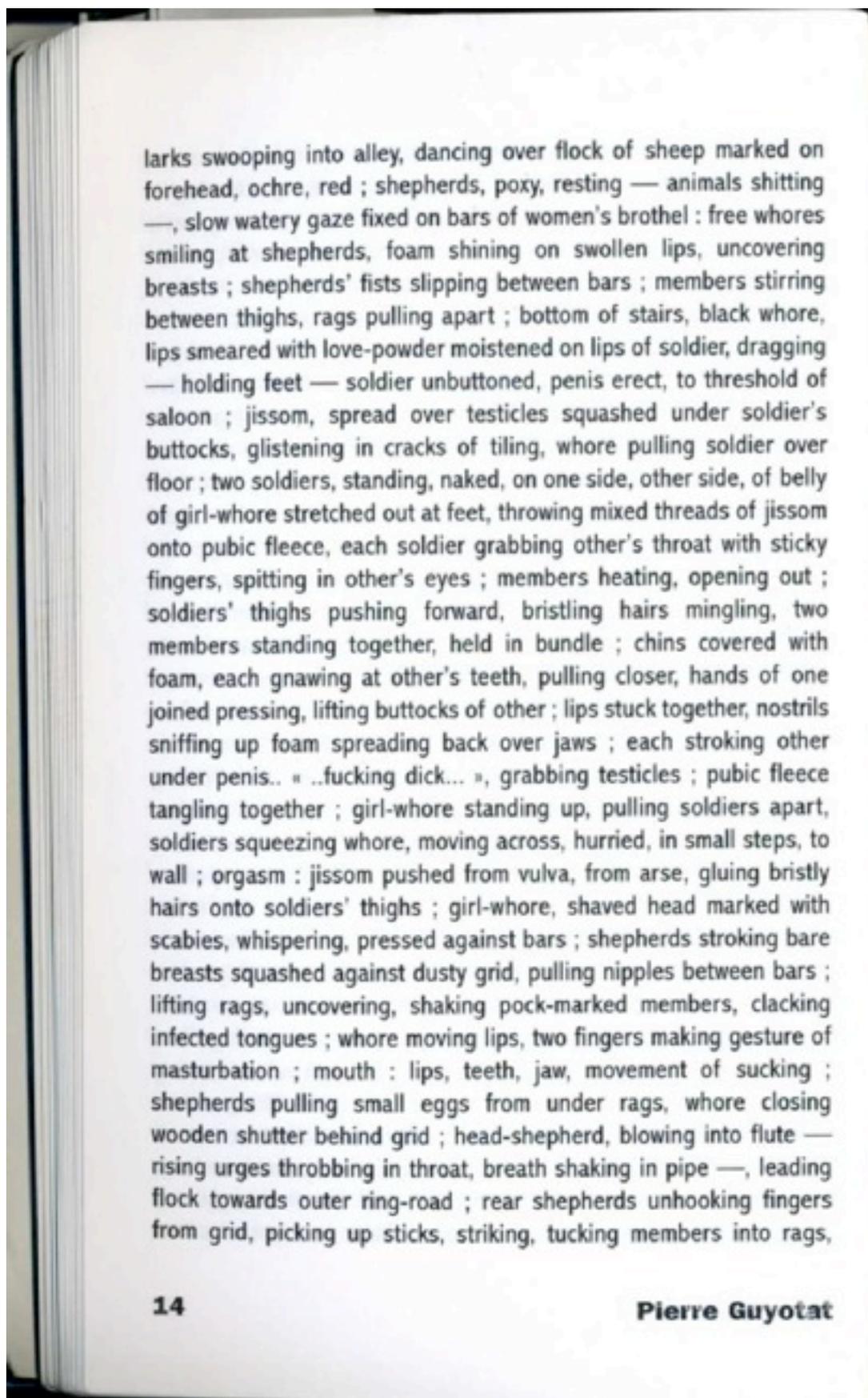


fig 1. Guyotat, P., 1970. *Eden Eden Eden*

If jouissance constitutes a type of death, a frozen moment where the subject is consumed or subsumed by the 'mad bitch', it empathizes with Kristeva's understanding of the abject as a human reaction, be it convulsion, spasm or nausea 'to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject or object or between self and other' (1980, p.1). And yet within this revulsion and in relation to jouissance / ecstasy, the abject remains seductive, alluring; I am drawn to the horror, I am its compulsive victim. Passion and madness, jouissance and desire, jouissance and the *abject*.

"It follows that jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully." (1980, p.9)

Only with jouissance, with ecstasy, can the text know the abject. Only with the fold, the seam, the seduction. And with laughter. Laughter sets the scene for the abject, laughter can both place and displace the abject. (1980, p.8) If I am willing to collude, I laugh with and at Bataille as he slips consciously in to self-parody. He writes to stave off the madness, yet leads me willing to that which I both crave and fear and where I confront the other:

"A dog devouring the stomach of a goose, a drunken vomiting woman, a sobbing accountant, a jar of mustard represent the confusion that serves as the vehicle of love." (Bataille, 1970, p.6)

Humour is erotic, humour seduces. Were Bataille's texts to be performed, his voice would confound the trap of the pheno-song whereby the lung 'swells but gets no erection', (Barthes, 1972, p. 183). There is no God, but I have faith in the erectile function of Bataille's organs.

Humour, parody, pathos, pastiche are all deployed in Brett Easton-Ellis's *American Psycho* to locate the abject. An unremitting rampage through the vacuity of the delusional psychotic protagonist's life, it uses uncompromising language and subject matter; torture, rape, mutilation, cannibalism, necrophilia yet

avoids textual anesthetization by leading me back to boredom, back to sporadic flashes of skin. Repetition, rhythm, pattern, the 'tiny private scene' (Barthes, 1973, p.53) of inconsequential detail. Which bottled water is the best? Should you wear tasselled loafers with a business suit? Did you know cavemen got more fibre than we do? Eggshell with Romalian type versus bone with Silian Rail business cards. While a rat eats cheese rammed up his victim's vagina.

In an attempt to identify textual ecstasy, I too have fallen into self-parody. I have surrendered anonymity in an attempt to stave off conceited impartialism and yet there is nothing neutral about the ecstatic text, it reeks of subjectivism, but, 'Do not think I am unsympathetic. These thickets of abstract identity are no doubt unpleasant to stumble through.' (Land, 1992, p.6) Unpleasant, but the lesser of two evils and only one of the many quandaries faced when using *language* to locate language.

"No 'thesis' on the pleasure of the text is possible; barely an inspection (an introspection) that falls short. *Eppure si gaude!* And yet, against and in spite of everything, the text gives me bliss." (Barthes, 1973, p.34)

I am exhausted, but I have not come.

Bibliography

- Barthes, R., 1972. *The Grain of the Voice*. In: S.Heath, ed. 1977.
Image, Music, Text. London: Fontana Press
- Barthes, R., 1973. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated from
French by Richard Miller., 2000. New York: Hill & Wang
- Bataille, G., 1957. *Eroticism*. Translated from French by Mary
Dalwood. 1962., London: Marion Boyars Publishers
- Bataille, G., 1957. *Literature and Evil*. Translated from French by
Alastair Hamilton., London: Marion Boyars Publishers
- Bataille, G., 1961. *Tears of Eros*. Translated from French by Peter
Connor. 1989., San Francisco: City Light Books
- Bataille, G., 1970. *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings*
1927-1939. Translated from French by Allan Stoekl., 1985.
Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Burroughs, W.S., 1959. *Naked Lunch*. 1992. London: Paladin
- Deleuze, G., 1988. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Translated
from French by Tom Conley., 1993. London: Continuum
- Easton Ellis, B., 1991. *American Psycho*. London: Pan Books Ltd
- Foucault, M., 1963. *A Preface to Transgression*. In: D.S. Bouchard,
ed. 1977. *Language, Counter Memory, Practice*. New York:
Cornell University Press
- Foucault, M., 1961. *Madness and civilization*. Translated from
French by Richard Howard., 1964 abridged ed. Abingdon:
Routledge

Guyotat, P., 1970. *Eden Eden Eden*. Translated from French by
Graham Fox. 2003., London: Creation Books

Kristeva, J., 1980. *Powers of horror, an Essay on Abjection*.
Translated from French by Leon S Roudiez. 1982., New York:
Columbia University Press

Lacan, J., Miller, J. A., ed. 1999. *On Feminine Sexuality, the
Limits of Love and Knowledge. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan,
Book XX, Encore*. Translated from French by Bruce Fink., New
York: W Norton & Company

Land, N., 1992. *The Thirst for Annihilation, Georges Bataille and
virulent nihilism (an essay in atheistic religion)* London:
Routledge

Maccormack, P. 2008. *Cinesexuality*. Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing
Group

Nobus, D., ed. 1998. *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*.
London: Rebus Press

Articles

Maccormack, P., 2010, Inhuman Ecstasy. *Angelaki*. 15(1), pp.109 -
121

Chapman, J., 1995. Eden Eden Eden. *frieze*. 24, Sept-Oct Issue

Fisher, M., 2011. Nick Land: Mind Games. *Dazed digital*. (online).

Available at: [http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/
article/10459/1/nick-land-mind-games](http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/10459/1/nick-land-mind-games) (Accessed 29 December 2011)