Silent Transmission: The Influence of Buddhist Traditions in Georges Bataille's *La Pratique de la joie devant la mort*

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Abstract

Beyond vague references to his 'Eastern' or 'Oriental' influences, there exists almost no work on the impact made by Buddhist traditions on the work of Georges Bataille. This study takes a first step towards understanding this impact. It embarks upon a reading of *La Pratique de la joie devant la mort* as a record of Bataille's meditation practice infused with Tibetan and Japanese Zen Buddhist concepts and practices as he understood them, through the prisms of European interactions therewith. The study traces the evolution of what are here termed the 'imagined Buddhisms' emerging from such interactions, from early Euro-Buddhist encounters during the Christian missions, through the 19th-century birth of 'Buddhist Studies' and the related influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, to an interwar avant-garde preoccupied with the rejection of the European values held to have caused WWI. Foremost of the avant-garde factions considered here is the secret society Acéphale, founded by Bataille with the stated aims of creating a new religion and waging war on 'tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui'. In the course of this investigation, a pattern of Buddhist traditions weaponised in support of European projects is established; one in which they are imagined and re-imagined alternately as equivalent and antagonist to the work of Bataille, his peers and their antecedents.

La Pratique de la joie devant la mort emerges in the light of Bataille's 'imagined Buddhism' as a practical version of an inverted Nietzschean sovereignty, incorporating elements of the concepts and practices of Tibetan and Japanese Zen Buddhism as he understood them. In the former case, these include his method of *dramatisation* (the projection of real or imagined images to bring about a rupture in the psyche) and the idea of Tibetan meditation as what he terms a means of 'put[ting one] to sleep'. Such an 'put[ting] to sleep' is argued to be akin to the what Bataille elsewhere calls the 'narcotic' of the profane world and to which he offers his own practice as a solution. In the case of Japanese Zen, the process Bataille would come to call the *opération souveraine* is shown to be present in *La Pratique de la joie devant la mort* and to bear resemblance to the process of achieving the form of Zen enlightenment called *satori.* A momentary flash of insight, *satori* is also shown to be comparable to the breakthrough of sacred from profane.

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Abbreviations

Schopenhauer

WWR: The World as Will and Representation

Nietzsche

AC: The Antichrist

BGE: Beyond Good and Evil

GS: The Gay Science

WP: The Will to Power

Bataille

EI: L'Expérience intérieure

LC: Le Coupable

LPM : La Part maudite

MM : Méthode de méditation

PJDM: La Pratique de la joie devant la mort

SA : La Somme athéologique

SN: Sur Nietzsche

Introduction

In Zen Buddhist traditions, 'Dharma transmission' refers to the lineage of masters – traceable back to Bodhidharma, an Indian monk considered the founder of the tradition – through which a student receives the Dharma (the teaching of the historical Buddha). It is believed that Bodhidharma brought what became the Ch'an tradition to China sometime in the Fifth or Sixth Century, and from there it spread to become Seon in Korea and Zen in Japan. The multiplicity of branches inherent to such a lineage means that knowledge of a student's transmission affords insight into the particular approach by which he or she studied. The Buddhist traditions and concepts with which Bataille interacted were transmitted through a quite different lineage, one of European constructions not only of Buddhist traditions and concepts in themselves, but of the cultural and geographic entity called 'the Orient' in which they were imagined to exist. This study argues that Bataille's 'transmission' is silent in two senses: firstly, he lacks insight into the origins of these constructed 'Buddhisms' and 'Orients' and secondly, his Buddhist influences go largely unreferenced. It is the purpose of this study to draw Bataille's transmission out of this silence, tracing its roots from the earliest Euro-Buddhist encounters, with particular focus on the prisms of 19th-century scholarship, the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and Bataille's contemporaries in the avant-garde. It then analyses the eruption of his transmission in *La Pratique de la joie devant la mort.*

La Pratique de la joie devant la mort was the title of a lecture given by Bataille in 1939 to the Collège de Sociologie. The notes to that lecture are now lost, but the controversy it sparked among the group appears to have been the catalyst for its dispansion. The Collège took a theoretical, ethnographic approach to the idea of a 'sacred sociology' that would see the restoration of the sacred into a society it believed had lost sight thereof.[1] This focus on theory was the cause of simmering tension between Bataille and other members (notably Roger Caillois and Michel Leiris)[2] around his perceived mysticism and interest in practical explorations of the sacred and of sacrifice as a means to achieve it. These he undertook with secret society Acéphale, an organisation which is often understood as the esoteric dimension of the Collège[3] and whose activities remain largely unknown, in great part due

[1] Michel Leiris, 'The Sacred in Everyday Life', in *The College of Sociology: 1937 - 39*, ed. by Denis Hollier (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 24–31.
[2] Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar: The Mysticism of Georges Bataille* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2000), p. 59.
[3] Camille Morando, 'Le Corps sans Limites ou l'acéphalité : Le personnage d'Acéphale, secret et équivoque, dans les Œuvres des Artistes Autour du Collège de Sociologie', *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne*, 31 (2006), 81–89., p. 82.

to the vow of secrecy maintained by its members. Of what is known, it is of particular interest to this study that the group's interest in sacrifice and the sacred sat within its aim to found a new religion with a focus on silent, solo meditation.[4] Over the course of the study, it shall be shown how this new religion and the meditation practices Bataille developed within it, were influenced by his 'silent transmission'.

In the same month as the fateful lecture, the review *Acéphale*, organ of the secret society, published in its final issue a piece by Bataille also entitled *Pratique de la joie devant la mort*. This consisted of a three-page essay followed by six short texts, the first five simply numbered and number six given the additional title *Méditation héraclitéenne.* These texts have been referred to variously as a poem, a set of 'Nietzschean hymns'[5] and a series of 'themes'[6] on which Bataille meditated. Bataille himself is at pains to say that they are not – barring the first – 'exercises' to be practiced but 'descriptions' of the 'état contemplatif ou [une] contemplation extasiée' in which the practitioner that he calls the *mystique de la joie devant la mort* finds themselves. This he attributes to the fact that such a state is so elusive that it is only possible to give a 'représentation la plus vague' of it. However, in the only study devoted to his meditation practice, Bataille's friend Jean Bruno emphasises that he desperately wanted to create a practice suitable for his peers and to share it with them, and indeed in *LC* he states: 'j'ai voulu rendre accessible…les transports qui semblaient les plus loins d'eux'.[7] It is also of note that Bataille sent an early draft of *PJDM* to Isabelle Farner with instructions on how to sit to meditate, and how to recite the text as part of this meditation.[8] This study approaches the texts with this conflict in mind: much as Bataille states that the texts are 'descriptions' there persists a drive to share his methods and experiences: a desire for communication that is at the very heart of his conception of the sacred.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 81.
[5] Karla L. Schultz, 'Bataille's *L'Erotisme* in Light of Recent Love Poetry', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 22 (1987), 78–87, p. 78.
[6] Jean Bruno, 'Les techniques d'illumination chez Georges Bataille', *Critique*, 195–196 (1963), 706–21, p. 713.
[7] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 284.
[8] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 451 – 453.

Before any analysis of Bataille's Buddhist influences may be undertaken, it is crucial to situate his interactions with Buddhist concepts and traditions in their historical context. The last two decades have witnessed increasing scholarly interest in the history of European engagement with Buddhist traditions,[9] which has highlighted the European tendency to create what Droit has dubbed an *Orient imaginaire* in their dealings with Buddhist traditions and cultures. This term refers to the creation of an imagined 'other' serving as a cipher for Europeans to process events and phenomena in their own cultures. In the service of understanding Bataille's *Orient imaginaire*, this study analyses the 'Orients' of his influences, from 19th century German philosophy in Chapter One to his avant-garde contemporaries in Chapter Two. Key to understanding how these 'Orients' were created and perpetuated is Andrew Dawson's theory of the 'westernisation of the East'. Though he notes the difficulty of these terms, saying they '[toy] dangerously with [talking] of East and West as if they were undifferentiated cultural entities rather than the mosaic heterogeneities we know them to be', Dawson proposes, and this study concurs, that there does exist a 'Western habitus'.[10] In this context the interpretation of 'eastern' concepts through the European lens, rather than 'easternising the West' as Campbell has argued,[11] has had the opposite effect of 'westernising the East' in European interactions therewith. This study supports the work of Droit and Dawson by showing that the avant-garde and Bataille in particular, through selective galvanising of Buddhist concepts in service of their own projects, 'westernised' them, rather than Buddhism having an 'easternising' effect on their own work.

The 'Orients' discussed in this study share common ancestry in the long history of European interactions with South and East Asian cultures and traditions. This seems to have begun with that of the Ancient Greeks, whose relationships with early Buddhists in northern India left not insignificant marks on Buddhist literature and culture.[12] However,

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[9] See, amongst others, Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. by Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000); Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994).

[10] Dawson borrows this term from Pierre Bordieu, see: Andrew Dawson, 'East Is East, Except When It's West: The Easternization Thesis and the Western Habitus', *Journal of Religion and Society*, 8 (2006), 1–13, p. 2.

[11] Colin Campbell, 'The Easternisation of the West', in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. by Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 35–48.

[12] For an historical overview of ancient Greek interaction with Buddhist tradition, see Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994), p. 5 – 15. The early Buddhist text *Milinda Pañha*, dated between 100-200 BCE, includes a famous series of discourses on central Buddhist concepts including *anātman*, between the Greek king Menander (known as Milinda: a Buddhist convert who ruled part of north-west India), and the monk Nagasena. See Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (New York, NY: Cosimo, 2005), p. 128 – 133.

explicit accounts of interactions with Buddhism were not available to Europeans until the time of the Christian missions in the Middle Ages, making them inseparable from the Christian perspective and agenda: as shall be discussed throughout this study, this underpins European understanding of Buddhism from the Middle Ages to the present day. Missionaries, concerned with upholding the veracity of the Christian narrative, were chiefly interested in the assimilation of the history and traditions of the cultures with which they interacted, to Biblical chronology. As such, they showed a strong interest in the discovery of lost versions of Christianity, notably declaring Tibetan Buddhism with its monastic system and use of malas and incense a degenerate form of Roman Catholicism.[13] By the Enlightenment, the motive of assimilation remained, but with the focus reversed from a Euro- to an Indo-centric perspective in line with Europe's move away from considering itself Christian. This was typified by Voltaire's argument that there existed a *doctrina orientalis:* the source of all Greek, as well as Asian, philosophy and religion.[14] This *doctrina* was in fact a conflation of Brahmanism and Buddhism which in this era were understood to be two sects of the same religion rather than the latter being a breakaway sect of the former. Just as his missionary antecedents had undermined the authority of Tibetan Buddhism with the chronology and beliefs of Roman Catholicism, Voltaire used the *doctrina orientalis* to undermine the authority of the Church. The galvanising of Buddhist concepts and traditions in support of European projects, and their positioning as alternately equivalent and antagonist to an individual thinker's philosophy, is evident in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bataille and the wider avant-garde and shall be discussed throughout this study. The ideas of East-West synthesis and a 'pan-Asian' religion persisted into the 19th Century. The director of the
École Spéciale des Langues Orientales, founded in Paris in the late 1700s, admired Voltaire's ideas and extended them to argue that the Bible was an imitation of the Veda and it was not until the 1830s that it was realised that Buddhism and Brahmanism were separate entities.[15] At this point, the unifying term 'Buddhism' and the field of 'Buddhist Studies' as a discipline first appeared. Chapter One addresses the way in which Schopenhauer and Nietzsche interacted with the work of the tight-knit group of European scholars involved in this field. In so doing, it shows how, together, these scholars and philosophers brought about one of the most persistent misrepresentations of Buddhist

[13] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 22 – 29.
[14] Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 5.
[15] Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 6.

traditions: that which Droit has called the *culte du néant*. This *culte* is at the heart of the 'imagined Buddhisms' transmitted by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to Bataille, resting upon the erroneous equation of Buddhist *nirvāna* with self-annihilation, itself made possible by the equally erroneous conflation of Brahmanic and Buddhist understandings of the self. Before proceeding to an overview of the chapter, it is useful to define these terms. Put simply, *nirvāna* is the cessation of suffering attained by following the eight-fold path taught by the historical Buddha. Key to the attainment of *nirvāna* is the realization of selflessness, or *anātman*. This term shall be considered shortly, but it is crucial to note at this juncture that its interpretation as self-destruction has been central to European readings of *nirvāna* as the 'extinguishing of all trace of physical and mental existence'.[16] This is certainly the case in Schopenhauer: for that philosopher, Will is the driving force behind both the individual self and the world at large, and it is the active negation of Will that Schopenhauer finds to be the only answer to suffering. This he equates with *nirvāna*:

> *To die willingly, to die gladly, to die cheerfully, is the prerogative of the resigned, of him who gives up and denies the will-to-live…he willingly gives up the existence that we know; what comes to him instead of it is in our eyes nothing, because our existence in reference to that one is nothing. The Buddhist faith calls that existence Nirvana [sic.], that is to say, extinction*[17]

Schopenhauer, who was introduced to the Upanishads well before Buddhist traditions, was familiar with the Brahmanic understanding of self. In this tradition, the unity behind the world is known as *brahman*, into which the individual *ātman* (usually translated as 'soul' but more accurately 'self')[18] becomes absorbed upon *nirvāna.* There is therefore an individual Self and a universal Self, which is mirrored by Schopenhauer's Will-as-self and Will-as-world. In contrast, Buddhist traditions teach the doctrine of selflessness: *anātman*. This is famously articulated by the analogy of a chariot in the Milindapañha (a dialogue between the Buddhist sage Nagasena and the Indo-Greek king Menander, rendered 'Milinda'). The word 'ego' here is a translation of *ātman* which as mentioned above is more accurately called 'self'.

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[16] Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994), p. 20.
[17] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), II. p. 508.
[18] Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (New York, NY: Cosimo, 2005), p. 111.

> *The word 'chariot' is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, and name for pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body and banner-staff…in exactly the same way, your majesty, in respect of me, Nagasena is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, mere name for the hair of my head, hair of my body…brain of the head, form, sensation, perception, the predispositions, and consciousness. But in the absolute sense there is no Ego here to be found*[19]

Anātman is a key point of study across all Buddhist traditions, which also hold that realisation of the truth of *anātman* is at the heart of meditation practice and key to *nirvāna*.[20] To give a famous example, in the *Genjō Kōan* of the *Shōbōgenzō* the founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen, Dōgen, writes:

> *When we conceive our body and mind in a confused way and grasp all things with discriminating mind, we mistakenly think that the self-nature of our own mind is permanent. When we intimately practice and return right here, it is clear that all things have no [fixed] self*[21]

Schopenhauer's role in the creation of the *culte du néant* was established in the 'close agreement'[22] he declared Buddhism to have with his own philosophy, with its insistence on Will-negation as the answer to suffering. He did not come to this conclusion in a vacuum, however: as mentioned above, the small, inter-reliant group of scholars in the newly established field of Buddhist Studies read avidly by Schopenhauer were instrumental in developing and disseminating this perception of *nirvāna.* The *culte du néant* also gained traction by dint of the fact that Schopenhauer's self-declared 'close agreement' went largely unchallenged, not least by Nietzsche. Chapter One highlights the fact that, in spite of roundly criticising Schopenhauer in many other areas, Nietzsche's interactions with Buddhism are with a Schopenhauerian version thereof. The chapter also shows how both

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[20] See, amongst others, Sam Bootle, *Laforgue, Philosophy, and Ideas of Otherness* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2018), p. 109; Roger-Pol Droit, 'Le Bouddhisme et la philosophie du XIXème siècle (I)'', *Le Cahier (Collège International de Philosophie)*, 4 (1987), 182–85; Roger-Pol Droit, 'Le Bouddhisme et la philosophie du XIXème siècle (II: Le cas de Schopenhauer)', *Le Cahier (Collège International de philosophie)*, 5 (1988), 152–57; Roger-Pol Droit, *Le culte du néant: Les philosophes et le Bouddha* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004) ; Heinrich Dumoulin, 'Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42.3 (1981), 457–70, p. 464.
[21] Shohaku Okamura, 'Lecture 7: Dogen Zenji's Genjo-Koan' <http://www.thezensite.com/ZenTeachings/Dogen_Teachings/Genjokoan_Okumara.htm> [accessed 14 October 2019].
[22] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), II., p. 169.

philosophers galvanise Buddhism in support of their own projects, affording it the role of both equivalent and antagonist to their philosophies much as their missionary and philosophical antecedents had done. Admire their 'agreement' though he may, Schopenhauer is at pains to state that European philosophy – the 'calm and dispassionate' Kantian kind in particular – remains the superior vehicle for articulation of their shared ideas. In the case of Nietzsche, the galvanisation of Buddhist concepts is writ large in his use of Buddhism to discredit Christianity while also casting it as a 'passive nihilism' inferior to his own 'active' version thereof.[23] Such an 'active nihilism' involves the embrace of suffering in the service of self-overcoming leading to the Eternal Return: an ever-repeating cycle of events both positive and negative. This is shown to be reliant on a minimal self which is also comparable to *ātman*, ironically making of Nietzsche's Eternal Return a parallel with Buddhist *samsāra* (the cycle of rebirth from which cessation of suffering – i.e. *nirvāna* reliant on realisation of *anātman* – affords release). The acceptance of Schopenhauer's 'close agreement' extends to the French reception of 19th-century German philosophy, which held both he and Nietzsche to have equivalent views with a subversive and degenerate 'Orient'. Foucher de Careil, for example, remarks derogatorily: 'grattez un Allemand, vous verrez reparaître l'antique sectateur du Bouddha'[24] This 'sect' or 'cult' was understood to be a nihilistic one,[25] an interpretation which largely arose not from a reading of Buddhist traditions themselves but from Schopenhauer's equation of Buddhism with his own philosophy. The resultant opposition created between German and French philosophy included a narrative of the threat of infection by the German 'mystical' philosophers of the rational, Cartesian French mind, body, and body politic.[26] Chapters Two and Three investigate the reverse phenomenon: for Bataille and many of his contemporaries, both the 'orient' and German philosophy would become key weapons in an offensive – one which the Acéphale group explicitly referred to as a war –[27] against Christian morality and the modernist, capitalist values of their era.

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[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XIV, P. 21 <file:///C:/Users/other/Desktop/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XIV.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2019].

[24] Alexandre Foucher de Careil, *Hegel et Schopenhauer* (Paris: Hachette, 1862), p. 307.

[25] Sam Bootle, *Laforgue, Philosophy, and Ideas of Otherness* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2018), p. 125 – 129 and Anne Staszak, 'Sociologie de La Réception de Nietzsche En France', *L'année Sociologique (1940 - 1948-)*, 48.2 (1998), 365–84, p. 380.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] 'Ce que nous entreprenons est une guerre' : Georges Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée', *Acéphale*, 1 (1936), 1–4, p. 1.

Chapter Two widens the focus from the 'imagined Buddhisms' of the preceding chapter to the *Orients imaginaires* of an interwar avant-garde in the midst of a violent rejection of anything they considered 'Occidental'. In this context, an idealised, constructed 'orient' became a weapon against an equally constructed 'Occident': a repository of the 'European' values considered to have led to the horrors of the First World War and to be instrumental in the threat of the Second. By the time of Acéphale in 1936, the Second World War looming, this rejection was writ large. The group declared themselves to be starting both a religion and a war of their own, declaring: 'NOUS SOMMES FAROUCHEMENT RELIGIEUX…ce que nous entreprenons est une guerre'.[28] This new religion was to be weaponised in the war against 'tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui.'[29] For both the avant-garde at large and for the Acéphale group and Bataille in particular, Christianity was to remain a central enemy in this war. However, further targets included capitalism (which for Bataille was intertwined with Christianity), modernism and colonialism.

In their weaponizing of 'Orient' against 'Occident', three avant-garde groups in Bataille's circles are considered in Chapter Two, namely the Surrealists, the group who gathered around the publication *Le Grand jeu* including René Daumal, and the dissident surrealist Rue Blomet Group of which Bataille was a central member. All three are shown to display a concurrent, conscious anti-colonialism and unconscious colonialism. This is evident in the fact that, while the 'Orient' in general and Buddhist traditions in particular are revered, they remain so in the service of European projects. To consider conscious anti-colonialism in the first instance: increased availability of scholarship on Buddhist traditions, including translations of primary sources, was accompanied by what may be termed a kind of 'proto-Orientalism' (in Edward Saïd's sense of the term, that is the patronising attitudes of Europeans to an imagined 'East')[30] that acknowledged the problematics of the European gaze and was interested in its reversal. This was significantly nuanced, however, by the popularity of the Theosophical Society and its problematic presentation of Buddhism, particularly the Tibetan form, which included strong reinforcement of white superiority. This presentation of Tibetan Buddhism was legitimised by D.T. Suzuki, widely considered responsible for the spread of Japanese Zen to Europe and the English-speaking world, and to whom we shall return.

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[28] Georges Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée', *Acéphale*, 1 (1936), 1–4, p. 1.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

Chapter Three discusses Bataille's treatment of Tibetan Buddhism in the article which appeared in *Critique* of 1947 as *Le paradoxe du Tibet* and in modified form in *LPM* of 1949 as *La société désarmée*. It is well-known that Bataille often worked on several pieces at the same time, and in this case he is known to have been writing *LPM* at the same time as *PJDM*. The chapter argues in the first instance that Bataille's analysis of the Tibetan system perpetuates his 'westernised' understanding of the country and its mythology, before arguing that his remarks in *Critique* and *LPM* reveal the influence Tibetan practices had on Bataille's own as recorded in *PJDM*. Especial attention is paid to the fact that Bataille refers to Tibetan meditation practices as a means of 'put[ting one] to sleep',[31] chiming with what he called the 'narcotics' of work and project existing in the realm of the profane.[32] It is argued that Bataille responds to these criticisms in *PJDM* much like Nietzsche's 'active nihilism': his practice would supercede both the Tibetan sleeping draught and the profane 'narcotic' to allow for the eruption of the sacred.

As regards Zen, Suzuki's *Essais sur le bouddhisme zen* appears to have been the primary source of information on the tradition across the avant-garde. It is the only certain source for Bataille, who quotes from it in *Sur Nietzsche*, although there is a strong possibility that he also gleaned information on Zen from André Masson. The latter's significant interest in Zen, to which he was introduced first by the Japanese author Kuni Matsuo, was also furthered by Daumal. An accomplished Sanskritist and translator of Suzuki's *Essais*, Daumal is widely regarded as one of the most authoritative figures of his time on Buddhist traditions and may thus be considered a potentially important indirect transmission to Bataille. Suzuki's presentation of Zen has been criticised both in his own time and more recently for presenting an historically and culturally inaccurate portrait of Zen, and for having nationalistic motives. The problematics of Suzuki's historical, cultural and doctrinal presentation of Zen are fully explored in Chapter Two, while Chapter Three investigates the key concepts Bataille took from it.

The Japanese Zen schools have different terms for enlightenment which distinguish between the final state of enlightenment (*daigo tettei*) and momentary flashes of insight into the true nature of things. Two of these terms are *kenshō* and *satori*. Bruno states that Bataille was most interested in what he (Bruno) compares

[31] 'on peut attendre qu'elle endorme plutôt qu'elle n'éveille' : Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI, p. 100.
[32] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 10.

to *kenshō*[33] and that he experienced this state in 1939, in the forest in which the members of Acéphale met.[34] The term *kenshō* is often used interchangeably with that of *satori*, although *satori* sometimes denotes a 'higher' or more intense experience and it is this term that Bataille uses in *SN* after his reading of Suzuki.[35] In the Rinzai school of Zen (descended from the Ch'an Linji school) of which Suzuki writes, *satori* is aided by 'shock' or 'lightning' techniques which often involve physical pain,[36] some of which are described in Chapter Three. Suzuki also describes *satori* as 'the sudden flashing of a new truth hitherto altogether undreamed of…a sort of mental catastrophe taking place all at once after so much piling of matters intellectual and demonstrative'.[37] This sudden eruption of insight is compared in Chapter Three to Bataille's interest in the eruption of the sacred from the profane. The sovereign insight into the truth of death as fulfilment of life in *PJDM* is also linked to *satori* and to Bodhidharma's declaration that Zen means 'for a man to behold his fundamental nature'.[38] The image of the lightning strike is articulated over and again in Suzuki as well as in Bataille's work. Notably, mirroring the lightning metaphor, Bataille incorporates the image of being struck by lightning as a metaphor for sudden awakening in *PJDM*. He also records what appears to be the same moment in *SN* in the chapter *La «Tasse de thé» le «Zen» et L'Être aimé*[39] and uses a lightning-struck tree as the meeting-place for Acéphale. It is therefore argued in Chapter Three that the influence of *satori* and its lightning-strike is discernible in the 'descriptions' of meditative processes and states in *Pratique de la joie devant la mort*, suggesting that Bataille knew of Zen before his reading of Suzuki, probably through André Masson and indirectly through René Daumal.[40] In illustrating the development of Bataille's thought and practice during the writing of *PJDM*, the study makes use of earlier versions of

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[33] Jean Bruno, 'Les techniques d'illumination chez Georges Bataille', *Critique*, 195–196 (1963), 706–21, p. 719.
[34] Jean Bruno, 'Les techniques d'illumination chez Georges Bataille', *Critique*, 195–196 (1963), 706–21, p. 712.
[35]Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI, p. 159 – 160 ; p. 192 – 193.
[36] Thomas P. Kasulis, 'Ch'an Spirituality', in *Buddhist Spirituality. Later China, Korea, Japan and the Modern World*, ed. by Takeuchi Yoshinori (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003).
[37] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 245.
[38] Arthur Waley, *Zen Buddhism, and Its Relation to Art* (London: Luzac & Company, 1922) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43273/43273-h/43273-h.htm> [accessed 13 November 2019].
[39] 'Un peu avant la guerre, je rêvai que j'étais foudroyé. Je ressentis un arrachement, une grande terreur. Au même instant j'étais émerveillé, transfiguré : je mourais' Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI., p. 75.
[40] Alan Foljambe, 'An Intimate Destruction: Tantric Buddhism, Desire, and the Body in Surrealism and Georges Bataille' (unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 2008), p. 129 <http://universidadtantrica.org.ar/archivos/An_Intimate_Destruction_Tantric_Buddhism.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2019].

these meditations present in the internal papers of the secret society: these were only available in English translation at the time of writing, and as such quotations from them appear in that language.

Finally, Chapter Three addresses what Ebersholt designates as a key point of intersection between 'Japanese thought' and French philosophy: that of the limits of language, well-noted as one of Bataille's principal concerns. Bataille like Nietzsche before him tussles throughout his work with the conflicting desire to communicate and the impossibility of communicating in language, and this emerges in his fraught desire to share his meditations with his contemporaries in *PJDM*. As he put it : 'la communication profonde veut le silence'.[41] As shall be discussed, for Bataille the state of silence is a dual one from language emerges and into which language dissolves: 'silence' thus carries the meaning of both a tool and a state, and in this Bataille's meditation mirrors that of Buddhist traditions.

[41] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), v., p. 109.

Chapter One

Imagined Buddhisms: Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

공에 빠지지 말아라!

Don't fall into the void!

Seon (Korean Zen) saying

This chapter explores the construction of Schopenhauer's Buddhism and its transmission through Nietzsche to Bataille. What are here termed their 'imagined Buddhisms' were grounded in Schopenhauer's self-declared 'close agreement' with Buddhism and Nietzsche's unquestioning acceptance of both this and of Schopenhauer's reading of Buddhism in the development of his own views thereupon. Crucial to this was the understanding of the self in Brahmanic terms, that is as *ātman* (self) which is subsumed into the universal *brahman* upon *nirvāna*, and may thus be understood as the absorption of individual self into greater self. The break of Buddhism with Brahmanism was owed in part to the former's concept of *anātman* (selflessness). Such a selflessness necessitates that there exists no self, either universal or individual, to subsume or to be subsumed, and this realization is key to *nirvāna*. One of the principal problems with Schopenhauer's identification with Buddhism is the debt his owed by his self to the Brahmanic rather than the Buddhist tradition. While he does not address the self distinctly, it is, as Zöller notes, 'co-extensive with his portrayal of "the world as Will and representation"'.[42] Schopenhauer's Will underlies the self, and is responsible for its very existence. Like the two selves of *ātman* and *brahman*, it is the driving force both of the world at large and of the individual self specifically: that is, the human self and the selves of animals, plants and inanimate objects. The human self is thus inseparable from the 'self' of the world. A further parallel between Schopenhauer's conception of self and Brahmanic *ātman* is his notion of character. Fixed and immutable, for Schopenhauer a person's character is constant and inborn. As he puts it: 'great age, illness, injury to the brain, madness, can deprive a man entirely of his memory, but the identity of his person has not in this way been lost. That rests on the identical Will and on its unalterable character'.[43] For Schopenhauer as for the first and second Noble Truths of Buddhism,[44] life is suffering and

[42] Günter Zöller, 'Schopenhauer on the Self', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 20.
[43] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), II., p. 239.
[44] The Four Noble Truths are the basis of the Dharma, and are as follows: life is suffering; suffering is caused by attachment (both to material items and to fixed ideas, such as the perception of oneself as good or bad, or

suffering is caused by attachment: for Schopenhauer, this was specifically to do with attachment to individualism which is also a facet of attachment in Buddhist traditions. In a dramatic illustration of this, he writes:

> *In vain does the tortured person [call] on his gods for help; he remains abandoned to his fate without mercy. But this hopeless and irretrievable state is precisely the mirror of the invincible and indomitable nature of his will, the objectivity of which is his person*[45]

However, for Schopenhauer the self can be destroyed through the act of Will-negation, and this is the solution he proposes to suffering. Showing that we can actively choose Will-negation he states that:

> *at the end of life, if a man is sincere and in full possession of his faculties, he will never wish to have it to live over again, but rather than this, he will much prefer to choose complete non-existence*[46]

This understanding of the annihilation of a self in line with the Brahmanic *ātman* as the end of suffering, contributed greatly to the European consensus that Buddhism constituted what Droit deems a *culte du néant* involving 'une identité…entre bouddhisme, négation du vouloir-vivre et pessimisme'.[47] Schopenhauer writes:

> *we have recognized incurable suffering and endless misery as essential to the phenomenon of the Will, to the world [and we] see the world melt away with the abolished will, and retain before us only empty nothingness*[48]

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indeed the very fixed idea of self); suffering can be overcome; the overcoming of suffering is achieved by following the Eight-fold Path (a set of actions including what is usually translated as 'right thought' and 'right speech).

[45] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), I., p. 325

[46] *Ibid*., p. 324

[47] Roger-Pol Droit, 'Le Bouddhisme et la philosophie du XIXème siècle (II: Le cas de Schopenhauer)', *Le Cahier (Collège International de Philosophie)*, 5 (1988), 152–57, p. 152.

[48] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), I., p. 411.

However, this nothingness also entails a 'state of bliss in which "only cognition remains, the Will has disappeared"'.[49] On this account there necessarily remains a self which cognises, which Zöller calls a 'selfless self'.[50] Here, 'selfless' entails an active *-less*, in the sense that in the active destruction of Will-as-self, some vestige of self is left behind. As shall be discussed further in this chapter, the Nietzschean self, though the nature of it is hotly debated, may be seen as comparable in its minimal nature.

The imagined Buddhisms of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche existed as part of the wider imagined Orients discussed in the introduction to this study, that had developed in the European imagination and would re-emerge in Bataille's context. Central to this construction and to the transmission of the two philosophers' Buddhisms was the influence of a tight-knit group of European scholars who first created the field of Buddhist Studies. Eugène Burnouf was a principal founder of this discipline and has been considered the 'prototype of European understanding of Buddhism.[51] Burnouf played a crucial role in transmitting the notion of *nirvāna* as self-annihilation to European readers and scholars, his ideas tallying with Schopenhauer's conflation of the Brahmanic and Buddhist understandings of the self which contributed to this misconception. In addition to the influence of such scholarship, for both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as for Bataille, there exists an ambivalence as regards the constructed 'Orient' as a repository of all that is non-European. This is exemplified by Schopenhauer's view that European philosophy was superior to both Brahmanic and Buddhist traditions in its articulation of Idealism. For Nietzsche it is discernible in his subsumption of Buddhism as a 'passive nihilism' to his own 'active nihilism'. This ambivalence and the subsumption of Buddhism to both philosophers' projects supports Dawson's theory that European scholars have continually 'westernised the East' rather than vice-versa.

Schopenhauer was first exposed to Brahmanic traditions through the orientalist Friedrich Majer, whom he met at his mother's salon in 1814 and who introduced him to the *Oupnekhat:* the Upanishads in Latin, translated from Sanskrit via Persian. This he famously credited alongside Plato and Kant as one of the three principal influences for *WWR.* He had no knowledge of Buddhism until after the completion of that work, stating explicitly in Volume Two of the first edition that, in spite of the famous 'close agreement',

[49] Günter Zöller, 'Schopenhauer on the Self', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 38.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994), p. 256.

he had not been directly influenced by the tradition.[52] Nicholls suggests that Schopenhauer's progressively deeper understanding of what she calls 'Eastern thought' is evidenced by the references made in his *Manuscript Remains*[53] to works on Buddhism, among which Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* was key. These references grew significantly in number from 1818 – 1860[54] and in later editions of *WWR* it appears that Schopenhauer is moving further towards specific assimilation of his thought to Buddhism. By the 1844 edition of *WWR*, Cartwright notes Schopenhauer's statement that if his philosophy were to become recognised as true, then Buddhism would be the religion most adept at articulating such a truth.[55] By his 1858 notebook, Schopenhauer was asserting that he and the historical Buddha taught 'essentially the same thing', and he added the latter to Plato and Kant as one of the 'immortals of philosophy'.[56]

Nicholls provides a comprehensive list of Schopenhauer's sources on Buddhism which spans work in French, German and English.[57] From this list, it appears likely that Schopenhauer read work on a number of traditions, from Burmese Theravāda, to Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism and Chinese Mahāyāna[58] before discovering the Pāli canon[59] through the work of Christian missionary Robert Spence Hardy.[60] However, the fact that Schopenhauer attributed to Spence Hardy a 'deeper insight into the essence of the Buddhist dogma than any other work'[61] demonstrates his reliance on European academic sources for such insight, which are, in the case of Spence-Hardy, also influenced by Christian ideas

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[52] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), II., p. 169.
[53] Moira Nicholls, 'The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-In-Itself', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 171–212 <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-schopenhauer/E8D753063837720CC34284DDAC2780CB> [accessed 5 December 2019], p. 176.
[54] *Ibid.,* p. 177.
[55] David Cartwright, 'Foreword' in Barua, Arati (ed.), *Schopenhauer on Self, World and Morality: Vedantic and Non-Vedantic Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer, 2017), p.vi.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] Moira Nicholls, 'The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-In-Itself', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 171–212 <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-schopenhauer/E8D753063837720CC34284DDAC2780CB> [accessed 5 December 2019], p. 197 – 201.
[58] In basic terms, the Theravāda and Mahāyāna are the two most prevalent schools of Buddhism. Theravāda (mainly practiced in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) is the older form, with the Mahāyāna emerging sometime around the beginning of the Common Era. The designation 'Mahāyāna' includes the forms practiced in Tibet and Mongolia, and Zen – though sometimes referred to as a third distinct school – is also a part of the Mahāyāna tradition.
[59] The set of Buddhist texts central to the Theravāda school.
[60] Moira Nicholls, 'The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-In-Itself', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 171–212 <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-schopenhauer/E8D753063837720CC34284DDAC2780CB> [accessed 5 December 2019], p. 187.
[61] *Ibid.,* p. 188.

and agendas. It seems clear that Schopenhauer was also familiar with Isaak Jacob Schmidt's translation of the *Diamond Sutra* and although Batchelor holds that this would have been the only actual Buddhist text available to him,[62] given that Burnouf's translation of the *Lotus Sutra* – one of the most popular and influential Buddhist texts in the Mahāyāna tradition – was published six years before Schopenhauer's death it is possible that he may have read this also. In addition to Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien*, further work consulted by Schopenhauer includes that of civil servants of the British Empire and the journals of the Asiatic society of Bengal. While scholars the new field of study sought to deconstruct the catch-all term 'Buddhism' – arguably an admirable and long-overdue goal – their perspectives and methods were questionable. Writing from the perspective of Europeans (including Spence Hardy as a Christian missionary and in the case of the civil servants and the Asiatic Society, members of the colonising class), they applied the principles of scientific study used in their native scholarly tradition to a context unsuited thereto. Two prime examples of this are firstly the fact that the concepts of 'religion', 'God' and 'philosophy' are widely untranslatable into the languages of Buddhist traditions, and secondly that the text had none of the primacy afforded to European texts in general and to religious texts specifically. Rather, texts in the Buddhist canon are and were intended to be transmitted orally from master to student in addition to being read and true understanding was and is considered to be impossible without the additional accompaniment of individual meditation practice. Burnouf was a key proponent of the study of Buddhism by European methods with no need for knowledge of its varied, contextualised practices: a position echoed by Schopenhauer's privileging of European philosophical language to articulate the 'truths' shared by himself and the Buddhist tradition. Burnouf's interpretation of *nirvāna* as annihilation has also had far-reaching effects. He consistently emphasises this definition, citing both the Sanskrit etymology of the term and texts such as the dialogue between the historical and Mahamati from which he understands *nirvāna* as the 'absolute annihilation of subject and object'.[63] In addition to Burnouf, one of the most polemical texts on the nihilism of Buddhism emerged in Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire's reading of the same sources available to Schopenhauer, including Burnouf, to whose nihilistic interpretation of *nirvāna* he would have been exposed. As Droit notes, although original Buddhist texts had begun to appear, European *a*

[62] Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994), p. 256.
[63] Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, trans. by Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 476.

priori ideas influenced their readings making Burnouf 'le fils de son temps'[64] in his reading and representation of Buddhism and causing Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire to read into Buddhism a 'fanatisme du néant'.[65] *Le Bouddha et sa religion* of 1860 was widely circulated and very much prejudiced against Buddhism and Buddhists, as typified by his statement that:

> *On pourrait se demander si l'intelligence de ces peuples est faite comme la nôtre; et si, dans ces climats où la vie est en horreur et où on adore le néant à la place de Dieu, la nature humaine est bien encore celle que nous sentons en nous*[66]

In spite of the fact, then, that as Ryan puts it 'conjecture and supposition held the field'[67] in mid-19th-century European Buddhist scholarship, Schopenhauer remains considered 'well-read' on what is often problematically referred to as 'Indian philosophy', 'Eastern thought' or 'Asian religions'. If we consider Schopenhauer's Eurocentrism, inflected by the creation of his own 'Buddhism', this is certainly contestable. Though it was clearly no fault of Schopenhauer's that he did not have access to more reliable sources, much contemporary scholarship seems to equate 'reading what was available' with 'being well-read,' particularly as it studiously ignores his lack of access to primary texts beyond Schmidt's *Diamond Sutra* and possibly Burnouf's *Lotus Sutra*. Cartwright refers to Schopenhauer's 'life-long task of keeping up-to-date with the emerging literature on Eastern philosophy and religion'[68] which would be more accurate, specifying as it does that he was reading the scholarship of Europeans and not the texts themselves.

Schopenhauer's own projects, his ambivalence regarding 'Indian philosophy' and his insufficient access to sources on Buddhism thus meant that his philosophy, as Abelsen suggests, carries a similar 'atmosphere'[69] to Buddhism which is much more nuanced than the equivalence Schopenhauer and numerous scholars suggest. As shall be shown in Chapter Three, the same factors were at play during Bataille's era: he and his peers employed Buddhist and Brahmanic concepts in the service of their own projects and

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[64] Roger-Pol Droit, 'Le Bouddhisme et la philosophie du XIXème siècle (I)'', *Le Cahier (Collège International de Philosophie)*, 4 (1987), 182–85 p. 183.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 184.
[66] Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, *Le Bouddha et sa religion* (Paris: Didier, 1860), p. 180.
[67] Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), p. 6.
[68] Arati Barua (ed.), *Schopenhauer on Self, World and Morality: Vedantic and Non-Vedantic Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer, 2017), p. v.
[69] Peter Abelsen, 'Schopenhauer and Buddhism', *Philosophy East and West*, 43.2 (1993), 255–78, p. 255.

displayed ambivalence towards the value of 'Asian religions' and cultures compared to European thought. They were also largely exposed to Buddhism through European work which entailed both consciously anti-colonial and unconsciously colonial perspectives and agendas. Where Bataille and his contemporaries depart from 19th-century philosophy and scholarship is in their attraction to the meditative practices and related insufficiency of language that Schopenhauer – privileging the written word in the European philosophical tradition – did not value.[70]

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, the employment of 'Asian religions' in support of European projects – both pro- and anti-Christian – has been a path well-trodden in the history of European interactions with Buddhism.[71] This emerges in Schopenhauer's argument for the chronological precedence of Hinduism and Buddhism to Christianity,[72] in which he claims that the New Testament has Indian roots. His belief in the superiority of these religions to Christianity was also concurrent with a wider 19th-century interest in finding common roots between 'Asian' and European religions.[73] This sought to prove the existence of an 'Aryan race' connecting the heritage and traditions of Europe with those considered superior in India. The roots of European civilisation and religion, and indeed all that was of worth, may thus be seen to have been reimagined as lying in an 'Orient' of European construction. By the 1844 edition of *WWR* Schopenhauer had gone beyond borrowing from diverse Brahmanic and Buddhist traditions to a philosophy of religion asserting 'man's need for metaphysics': one which manifests as philosophies and religions worldwide asserting the same broad truths.[74] Schopenhauer argues that the 'religious traditions of India [were] repositories of religious stories and allegories' which would allow the essence – the core ethics and spirituality of the Christian religion, for example the ever-present nature of suffering and the need for salvation through selflessness and self-denial[75] – to persist even though its metaphysics was proven to be false. However, for Schopenhauer such traditions were an inferior vehicle for these truths precisely because it

[70] Benjamin A. Elman, 'Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44.4 (1983), 671–86 (p. 684).
[71] Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Roger-Pol Droit, *Le culte du néant: Les philosophes et le Bouddha* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004).
[72] Robert Bruce Cowan, 'Nietzsche's Attempted Escape from Schopenhauer's South Asian Sources in "The Birth of Tragedy"', *German Studies Review*, 30.3 (2007) 537–56, p. 541.
[73] Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Cultures* (Berkeley: Parallax Press); Roger-Pol Droit, *Le culte du néant: Les philosophes et le Bouddha* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004).
[74] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), II., p. 160.
[75] Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), p. 20.

presented them through myth and allegory rather than the 'calm and dispassionate presentation'[76] made by Kant, whose articulation of Idealism he holds to be superior both to those traditions and to his third core influence, Plato. For Ryan, this signifies – and this study agrees – that Schopenhauer 'relegat[es] Indian thought to the status of a precursor to European philosophy',[77] a relegation which sits within his wider project of situating Indian civilisation at the root of the European. Additionally, it is notable that Schopenhauer here privileges language in a way that Nietzsche questions and with which Bataille struggles vehemently, as shall be discussed in Chapter Three. Schopenhauer's need for metaphysics is echoed by Nietzsche's 'European Buddhism' which was – as he put it – 'indispensable'[78] only as a stepping stone between degenerate Christianity and his own 'active nihilism'. Like Droit, Ryan supports the argument that Europe's 19th-century interactions with their perceptions of 'Asian religions' correlated as in Nietzsche with widespread loss of Christian faith. This continued into the 20th century, extending to include all values considered 'Occidental', as shall be discussed in the following chapter. In the case of anti-Christianity, Nietzsche's 'active nihilism' as an alternative to Christianity with the 'stepping stone' of Buddhist traditions finds echoes in Bataille's meditation practice. This was situated in the larger context of Acéphale's desire to create a new religion, as part of which Bataille borrowed piecemeal from various religious traditions. Of these, his Tibetan and Japanese Zen sources are to be explored in Chapter Three.

The ambivalence discussed above, of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as regards Buddhist traditions, may be considered two-fold: in the first instance towards 'Indian' thought and in the second towards religion in general. In the former sense, undermining Janaway's comment that Schopenhauer is 'surprisingly un-Eurocentric,' [79] it arguably in fact reflects his Eurocentrism. Schopenhauer's ambivalence towards religion as a need but not one that is altogether admirable and certainly not in the form of Christianity re-emerges with significant differences in both Nietzsche and Bataille. Nietzsche, while vehemently attacking the Christian religion in *AC*, distinguishes its doctrine from the lived experience of Jesus to argue that Jesus was the only true Christian and his practice and lived

[76] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), P. 142.
[77] Christopher Ryan, 'Schopenhauer on Idealism, Indian and European', *Philosophy East and West*, 1 (2015), 18–35, p. 18.
[78] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XIV, P. 107 <file:///C:/Users/other/Desktop/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XIV.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2019].
[79] Christopher Janaway, 'Schopenhauer' (London School of Economics, 2019).

experience were the true 'Christianity'. On this account, the doctrine is a set of symbols pointing to an inarticulable truth, which has been taken literally and spun into a 'faith'.[80] Echoing Schopenhauer's metaphysical need, Nietzsche calls Jesus a 'mountain, lake and pastoral preacher who strikes us as a Buddha on a soil only very slightly Hindu'[81] and holds that he would have used Hindu or Daoist concepts in support of the inarticulable truth, had he been native to those cultures. As for Bataille, his quest to create a new religion might seem to exemplify the 'need for metaphysics'. However, his galvanising of Tibetan and Japanese Zen concepts and practices carry echoes of Nietzsche's privileging of the lived experience of Jesus as opposed to the doctrine that grew up after his (Jesus') death: he is fundamentally concerned not with metaphysics but with practice.

As discussed, the 'refractory nature of European understanding of Buddhism and Vedanta'[82] is typified by Schopenhauer's perception of both traditions as confirmation of his own philosophy. This is crucial to understanding Nietzsche's Buddhism in that contrary to his wide-ranging criticism of Schopenhauer, having first encountered Buddhist concepts in Schopenhauer's work he never questioned that philosopher's equation of Buddhism with his own. This goes some way to explaining Nietzsche's claim that Buddhism constitutes a 'passive nihilism',[83] that is calm acceptance of one's own suffering, a term to be returned to later in this chapter. This should, he proposed, be superseded by his 'active' form thereof by means of the active embrace of suffering as a means of growth (that is, self-overcoming) leading to the Eternal Return (a timeless cycle of recurring events, both positive and negative). As he writes in *BGE*:

> *The discipline of suffering, of great suffering - know ye not that it is only this discipline that has produced all the elevations of humanity hitherto?*[84]

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[80] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: T.N. Foulis, 1911), XVI, *§* 39 <https://holybooks-lichtenbergpress.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XVI.pdf> [accessed 5 December 2019].

[81] *Ibid*., *§* 31.

[82] Benjamin A. Elman, 'Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44.4 (1983), p. 676.

[83] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XIV, P. 21 <file:///C:/Users/other/Desktop/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XIV.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2019].

[84] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XII, P. 171 <file://campus.gla.ac.uk/SSD_Home_Data_D/2373392M/Desktop/All%20the%20Nietzsche/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XII.pdf>.

However, and as shall be discussed further, on a Buddhist account the Eternal Return bears an ironically close resemblance to *samsāra*: cyclic existence to which beings are bound by attachment and by dint of perpetual rebirth, continue to suffer.

In *WP*, Nietzsche deems the process of self-overcoming through suffering to constitute the Will to Power: this replaces Schopenhauer's annihilation of Will (also called the Will to Life) as the underlying force behind the world. For both, the conception of Will informs their definitions of sovereignty, a term to which we shall return. For Schopenhauer, Will-negation is the sovereign act while for Nietzsche it is the embrace of suffering. Where Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's ideas of Will converge however, is in the resemblance they both bear to *ātman.* While *WP* portrays the Nietzschean self as a non-essential collection of competing drives, scholarly debate rages between those who argue purely for this definition[85] and those who argue for a transcendental self based on the fact that one cannot overcome the self without a self to overcome and/or one to do the overcoming.[86] Anderson along with Nehamas and Janaway[87] occupies a middle ground, concluding that the Nietzschean self is 'minimal', existing as a 'numerically distinct psychological object, over and above its constituent drives and affects' but which nevertheless falls short of a definite and transcendental self. [88] As opposed to what Zöller dubs Schopenhauer's 'selfless self' (discussed above), in which a vestige of self remains after the Will's self-destruction, the minimal Nietzschean self exists to be cultivated in the service of the ideal of self-creation.[89] *WP* also sits in contrast to Nietzsche's assertion in BGE that, like *ātman*:

[85] R. Lanier Anderson, 'What Is a Nietzschean Self?', in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 202–32 (p. 205). For arguments pertaining to this conception of the Nietzschean self, see: Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002); Brian Leiter and Joshua Knobe, 'The case for Nietzschean moral psychology', in Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (eds), *Nietzsche and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 83–109; Matthias Risse, 'Nietzschean "animal psychology" versus Kantian ethics', in Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (eds), *Nietzsche and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 53–82

[86]R. Lanier Anderson, 'What Is a Nietzschean Self?', in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 205.

[87] For arguments pertaining to this conception of the Nietzschean self, see: Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Christopher Janaway, 'Autonomy, affect, and the Self in Nietzsche's project of Genealogy', in Ken Gemes and Simon May, (eds), *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[88] R. Lanier Anderson, 'What Is a Nietzschean Self?', in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 202–32, p. 202.

[89] *Ibid*., p. 229.

> *…at the bottom of our souls…there is certainly something unteachable, a granite of spiritual fate, of pre-determined decision and answer to predetermined, chosen questions. In each cardinal problem there speaks an unchangeable 'I am this'*[90]

Nietzsche's sources on Buddhism aside from Schopenhauer are ambiguous. Scholars have presented diverse views on the extent of his reading, from Dumoulin who holds that he owed his understanding of Buddhism entirely to his reading of Schopenhauer and never studied it with any rigour[91] to Welbon who suggests that Nietzsche may have been one of the most knowledgeable Europeans on the subject of Buddhism in his time, claiming he probably learned Sanskrit between 1865 to 1868.[92] Morrison cites three notable works read by Nietzsche, namely Max Müller's and Hermann Oldenberg's studies of the Pāli form of Buddhism and Karl Friedrich Koeppen's 1857 work *Die Religion des Buddha* on Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism. It is significant that, according to Morrison, Koeppen's was the first work on Buddhism that he read, in which the latter defines *nirvāna* and Buddhism in the following terms, further cementing its misreading as self-annihilation:

> *Nirvāna is first and foremost the total extinction of the soul, the extinction in nothingness, plain destruction…Nirvāna is the blessed Nothingness: Buddhism is the gospel of annihilation*[93]

The representation of Nietzsche as 'well-read' as in Welbon's account is questionable in similar terms to Schopenhauer's perceived expertise in Buddhism in that he remains influenced by European accounts both in his own reading and in that of Schopenhauer. As to his own reading, it could be argued that by means of the influence of Koeppen and potential other sources, and certainly by means of his taking Schopenhauer's Buddhism as representative, he absorbed into his own Buddhism a range of European readings thereof. This then gave rise to a confused and conflated 'Buddhism' of his own: a 'passive nihilism' with the notion of *nirvāna* as self-annihilation at its core. Nietzsche's

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[90] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XII, P. 181 <file://campus.gla.ac.uk/SSD_Home_Data_D/2373392M/Desktop/All%20the%20Nietzsche/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XII.pdf>.

[91] Heinrich Dumoulin, 'Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42.3 (1981), 457–70, p. 469 – 470.

[92] Guy Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvāna and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 185 – 189.

[93] Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 53, citing Mistry, Freny, *Nietzsche and Buddhism* (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1981), p. 179.

intertwining of Schopenhauer with Buddhism is particularly evident in the fact that, where he mentions the latter he usually mentions the former as well: an example of this may be found in *GS*, when Nietzsche states that Wagner is attempting to usher in a 'Buddhistic era', i.e. a 'passively nihilistic' one which is influenced by Schopenhauer. In *WP*, Nietzsche also conflates the Buddhist, Christian and Schopenhauerian view, saying they hold the view that 'it is better not to be than be'.[94] This simultaneous conflation of Buddhism and Christianity, and his use of the former to discredit the latter, echoes the timeline of European interpretations of Buddhism discussed in the introduction to this study. Like his predecessors and in advance of the figures to be discussed in Chapters Two and Three, including Antonin Artaud, André Breton and René Daumal as well as Bataille, Nietzsche's Buddhism functions in the service of his own projects. These include, as Davis and Elman have said, his weaponization of Buddhism against Christianity,[95] but they are also galvanised in support of his wider proposal of a world-embracing philosophy in the form of the Eternal Return. Elman sums up Nietzsche's attitude in *AC* as his 'bending over backwards to paint Buddhism in a bright light – as if to prove how much contempt he has for Christianity'.[96] Among the many references Nietzsche makes to Buddhism in this context, in *WP* he sets up the explicit opposition of 'Buddha versus Christ'[97] and refers to Christianity as a religion of *ressentiment.*[98] This term refers to what Nietzsche deems the 'slave morality' of resenting all that is different to itself, namely those in power, their happiness and possessions. This leads to a suffering and a mediocrity that, because it is at the heart of Christianity, is therefore at the heart of Western civilisation and represents the biggest threat thereto. For Nietzsche, Buddhism's 'first duty' is by contrast to fight such *ressentiment.*[99] He also admires the Buddha's commitment to achieving enlightenment in the here and now, rather than salvation in an idealised 'beyond'. This in turn supports his 'active nihilism'. Like Schopenhauer, however, Nietzsche's relationship with Buddhism is an ambivalent one. As mentioned, concurrent with his positive representation of the tradition, Nietzsche paints Buddhism as a 'passive nihilism': a response to meaningless

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[94] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (New York: McMillan, 1911), XV, P. 159 <https://holybooks-lichtenbergpress.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XVII.pdf> [accessed 5 December 2019].
[95] Bret W. Davis, 'Zen after Zarathustra: The Problem of the Will in the Confrontation between Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 28 (2004), p. 89 ; Benjamin A. Elman, 'Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44.4 (1983), 671–86, p. 681.
[96] Benjamin A. Elman, 'Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44.4 (1983), 671–86, p. 681.
[97] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XIV, P. 129 <file:///C:/Users/other/Desktop/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XIV.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2019].
[98] *Ibid*., p. 130.
[99] *Ibid*., p. 170.

that 'cheerfully' accepts it.[100] To elaborate: whereas Christianity desires mastery over its 'slaves' by the concepts of good and evil, on Nietzsche's account Buddhists do not go beyond these notions in a life-affirming way. This means that they do not embrace suffering as a means of growth, but in the spirit of accepting their own powerlessness. For Nietzsche's 'Buddhists', powerlessness is a fundamental part of existence; of the world *as it is*.[101] However, as Davis has noted, 'active nihilism' parallels 'the masters' great reaffirmation of life' at the core of Zen teachings. Davis thus poses the question of whether Nietzsche, had he known of Zen, would himself have drawn this parallel.[102] As it is, the Eternal Return, as discussed above, finds an ironic parallel in *samsāra*. It is perhaps significant therefore, that Bataille's inversion of Nietzschean sovereignty as the embrace of death as an essential part of the *as it is* (indeed, as the fulfilment of life) rather than embrace of life, occurs in a context where he becomes aware of Zen. However, the seeds of such an inversion can also be discerned as early as 1924 when Bataille and Michel Leiris along with Jacques Lavaud considered founding a movement called *Oui*: rather than Dada which provocatively said 'no' to world as it was and which Bataille denounced as 'not stupid enough',[103] *Oui* would acquiesce to everything.[104]

The 'silent transmission', from Schopenhauer through Nietzsche to Bataille, of *ātman*-like self and *nirvāna* as self-annihilation, is furthered by the French Idealist movement which bridges the gap from 19th-century German Idealism to the interwar avant-garde and Bataille specifically. Particular parallels have been drawn between the philosophies of Léon Brunschvicg and Henri Bergson. In the case of the former, his work is described by Aron in Schopenhauerian terms as holding that 'le monde est notre représentation'.[105] In *Les Ages d'Intelligences,* Brunschvicg also apparently aligns himself with the Buddha's teaching on the individual route to Enlightenment, grounded in internal transformation rather than external solution.[106] The fundamental concept of world as representation is also

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[100] Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 5 – 6.
[101] Bret W. Davis, 'Zen after Zarathustra: The Problem of the Will in the Confrontation between Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 28 (2004), 89–138, p. 92.
[102] *Ibid*., p. 128.
[103] '«*Dada? – pas assez idiot », c'est en ces termes que Georges Bataille conclut notre premier entretien* André Masson, 'Le soc de la charrue,' Le rebelle du Surréalisme: Écrits (Paris: Hermann, 1976), p. 75.
[104] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, La mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 93.
[105] Raymond Aron, 'La philosophie de Léon Brunschvicg', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 50 (1945), 127–40, p. 131.
[106] 'les hommes…ne pourront jamais sauvés du dehors, qu'ils n'ont donc pas à se relâcher de leur effort pour exister chacun par soi-même, en développant ce qu'ils possèdent d'effectivement universel et divin.' : Joseph Moreau, 'De quelques préjugés contre l'idéalisme', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale,* 4 (1950), 376 – 86, p. 377.

discernible in Bergson's work and he is aligned by Jacoby with Schopenhauer. Like that philosopher, he describes understanding as merely a 'lantern' which shines its light upon matter[107] and his *élan vital* has been equated with the Will to Life.[108] Bergson's philosophy was wholeheartedly embraced by the first Japanese students of philosophy and – crucially for this study – by Suzuki, a significant influence on Bataille and his peers, who drew explicit parallels between Bergson's philosophy and that of Zen Buddhism. Meanwhile, Bataille was well aware of Bergson, having met with him and read his work on laughter in 1920.[109] Bergson's work has been credited as an unreferenced influence on Bataille's *opération souveraine*,[110] as shall be examined in Chapter Three.

[107] Günther Jacoby, 'Henri Bergson, Pragmatism and Schopenhauer', *The Monist,* 22.4 (1912), 593 – 611, p. 599
[108] *Ibid.,* p. 602.
[109] Bénédicte Boisseron, 'Georges Bataille's Laughter: A Poetics of "Glissement"', *French Cultural Studies*, 26 (2010), 167–77, p. 172.
[110] Jean-François Fourny, 'Bataille et Bergson', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 91 (1991), 704–17, p. 709.

Chapter Two

In the Shadow of War: Avant-garde Weaponisation of the *Orient imaginaire*

The West perceives some lack within itself and fantasizes that the answer, through a process of projection, is to be found somewhere in the East

Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*[111]

Widening the focus from Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's constructed Buddhisms, this chapter considers the avant-garde construction of Droit's *Orient imaginaire*.[112] The anti-Christianity discussed in the previous chapter was certainly a motivating factor in Bataille's interactions with Buddhist traditions, as it was for those of the wider avant-garde. However, the context in which the avant-garde existed included the long shadow cast by the First World War which Baishanski describes as 'le point de depart de toute une réflexion sur ce que représente la civilisation occidentale, jusque là la seule digne de ce nom'.[113] In addition, Surya notes that the senselessness of the war and the disdain for authority brought home by its soldiers were the inspiration for several contemporary artistic and philosophical projects, most famously Dada and Surrealism.[114] This chapter considers the work of three key avant-garde groups with links to Bataille whose reflections on their context led to a rejection not only of the Christian religion but of all that was considered occidental. These are the *Grand Jeu* group which formed around the publication of that name and included René Daumal, the Surrealists, and the dissident surrealist Rue Blomet group to which Bataille and André Masson were central. Many of such interactions were superficial, relying on vague concepts of 'Orient' and 'Occident' and the galvanizing of decontextualised artwork and artefacts from South and East Asian cultures, which had arrived in Paris in the early 20th century. This reflects and refracts the influence of the 19th-century Oriental Renaissance, in which writers such as Laforgue, Flaubert and Hugo had interested themselves in the 'novel, transgressive and diversionary value' of East Asian motifs.[115] In the art world, Redon and Gaugin had incorporated East Asian

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[111] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 6.
[112] Roger-Pol Droit, *Le culte du néant: Les philosophes et le Bouddha* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004).
[113] Jacqueline Baishanski, 'Entre les deux guerres: "La Nouvelle Revue Française"', *The French Review*, 77.3 (2004), 515–23, p. 515.
[114] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 90.
[115] Ian Harris, 'A "Commodius Vicus of Recirculation": Buddhism, Art, and Modernity'', in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia*, ed. by Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 365–82, p. 360.

motifs into their work and Van Gogh had been among the foremost to embrace the craze of *japonisme*, incorporating Japanese themes and techniques into his work (notably the use of ukiyo-e wood blocks) with little to no understanding of the culture from which such methods had emerged. The idea of *nirvāna* as self-annihilation also persisted in the interwar years as a result of continued false conflation of *ātman* and *anatman.* However, there were those whose interactions with Buddhist traditions and cultures were significantly more informed, of whom it is generally agreed that Daumal was among the foremost. An accomplished Sanskritist and translator of Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Daumal was instrumental to Masson's understanding of Zen. A second key influence was Japanese author Kuni Matsuo who introduced Masson to Zen art (which became discernible in the 1950s when he drew 'almost exclusively in the mode of Zen and Ch'an Buddhist art')[116] and told him that his near-death experience on a WWI battlefield amounted to one of *satori*. Given the close friendship and working relationship of Bataille and Masson, who has been called 'Bataille in pictures',[117] this chapter suggests a silent transmission of Zen concepts from Daumal to Masson to Bataille.

By the 1930s, as the Second World War loomed, the avant-garde were weaponising Buddhism in a metaphorical war that pitched their *Orient imaginaire* against an Occident which may be considered equally imaginary: supporting 'the romantic notion that "people of whom we know little or nothing have all the virtues we lack"',[118] the features of such an Occident included, in addition to Christianity, those they most opposed: reason, modernity, and capitalism. Bataille's antipathy to the first is stated by his biographer, who declares him to be 'only interested in those questions to which reason declares itself powerless to respond'.[119] As to modernity and capitalism, Bataille had witnessed the reduction they engendered, of human experience to the world of things and utility. Such a world is one which, during the time of the Collège de Sociologie and Acéphale, he would come to call the profane and from which he would show an interest in the emergence of the sacred. Goux and Winnubst point to the centrality of intertwined Calvinism and capitalism to the profane world, showing Bataillean sacrifice, leading to the emergence of the sacred, to be

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[116] William Rubin and Carolyn Lanchner, *André Masson* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), p. 185.
[117] Alan Foljambe, 'An Intimate Destruction: Tantric Buddhism, Desire, and the Body in Surrealism and Georges Bataille' (unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 2008), p. 129 <http://universidadtantrica.org.ar/archivos/An_Intimate_Destruction_Tantric_Buddhism.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2019].
[118] Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 21
[119] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 80.

an escape from these systems and structures of industrial European society.[120] The emergence of the sacred through sacrificial rupture of the profane world, and the parallels this finds with Zen *satori,* are to be explored in the following chapter.

It is a central argument of this chapter that the metaphorical war against the Occident led to a conscious anti-colonialism and unconscious colonialism among the avant-garde: while the Orient is seemingly revered, it is so in the service of avant-garde projects and is accordingly cut to fit their parameters. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Buddhism weaponised by the avant-garde was certainly transmitted through 19th-century German philosophy and scholarship, and French Idealism. However, it was also inflected by an increase in availability of primary texts and a more established body of scholarship. This was a double-edged sword in that, while there was better understanding of Buddhist traditions, the overall perception of Buddhism as a *culte du néant* persisted: Schopenhauer's claim to equivalence with Buddhism and Burnouf's assertion that *nirvāna* equated with self-annihilation remained unchallenged, as did the conflation of Brahmanic *ātman* and Buddhist *anātman*. Additionally, Dawson's 'westernisation of the East' remained in evidence by dint of the fact that Buddhism had become cemented as an '-ism' to be scrutinised through the lens of European languages, systems and perceptions. Improved access to Buddhist texts was also nuanced by a nascent body of popular literature on the 'Orient' and Buddhism (most pertinently for Bataille the travel writing of Alexandra David-Néel) and by the Theosophical Society's propagation of a problematic interpretation of Buddhist traditions. The latter was further problematised by the support it received from Suzuki, a controversial figure both in himself and in regard to his presentation of Japanese Zen to a European audience. Widely considered to be responsible for the spread of Zen to the USA and Europe and the source of Bataille's notes on Zen in *SN*, Suzuki's complex role in the construction of European perceptions of Japan and Japanese Zen; Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism, are discussed in this chapter.

In contrast to the limited circle of scholars and dearth of primary sources available in the mid-1800s, by the interwar years the discipline of Orientalism had made its way to academia as demonstrated by the founding of the École d'Orientalisme at the Sorbonne. Meanwhile, the École de Langues Orientales was attended by both Daumal and Bataille,

[120] Jean-Joseph Goux, 'Georges Bataille and the Religion of Capitalism', in *Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 106 ; Shannon Winnubst, 'Sacrifice as Ethics: The Strange Religiosity of Neoliberalism', in *Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 128.

where the latter studied Tibetan and Classical Chinese in the early 1920s.[121] Exhibitions of Buddhist art at the beginning of the century were widespread, most importantly at the Musée Cernuschi and the Musée Guimet. Foljambe holds these exhibitions to have opened up 'a genuine aesthetic, and possibly philosophical, alternative to the disenchanted artists of the Parisian avant-garde'.[122] However, for the most part such an alternative did not do fully away with the superficial spirit of the Oriental Renaissance: both artists and thinkers can be seen to engage with the exhibitions on a level of flavouring their own projects with something new and 'other', or using vague ideas of a now-fashionable 'oriental wisdom' to support them. The Musée Cernuschi's *Quatrième Exposition des arts de l'Asie: art bouddhique* of 1913 and the Musée Guimet's holdings of Tibetan manuscripts and objects were instrumental in bringing Tibetan art and traditions to a French audience. The former included 695 items, 85 of which were of Tibetan origin, including masks, bronzes, paintings and artefacts. In literature, the spiritual and geographical 'other' of an *Orient imaginaire* against which Europe explored and defined itself was as present as it was in the preceding century: avant-garde publications large and small reflect the creation of a such 'Orients,' each reflective of their various groups' individual projects. A specific interest in Japanese art and culture and in the religious and cultural practices of Tibet are discernible: some of the most important literary publications of the interwar period, among them *La Nouvelle Revue Française, Hermès* and *Les Cahiers du Sud,* carried translations of Japanese poems and Tibetan texts as well as pieces on 'l'âme japonaise' and Tibetan yoga.[123]

For some, an idealised Orient was constructed in response to an Occident considered to be failing in the arena of spirituality. Crucially, and certainly in the case of Acéphale in general and Bataille's meditation practice specifically, there was an interest in exploring spirituality on the level of personal experience rather than from an academic, conceptual perspective. As Baishanski puts it:

> *Cet intérêt pour les traditions spirituelles et les philosophies d'Asie…ne débouche pas sur une connaissance d'exégète, gratuite et toute cérébrale, mais sur une*

[121] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 63 ; p. 220.
[122] Alan Foljambe, 'An Intimate Destruction: Tantric Buddhism, Desire, and the Body in Surrealism and Georges Bataille' (unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 2008), p. 90 <http://universidadtantrica.org.ar/archivos/An_Intimate_Destruction_Tantric_Buddhism.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2019].
[123]Jacqueline Baishanski, 'Entre les deux guerres: "La Nouvelle Revue Française"', *The French Review,* 77.3 (2004), 515 – 23, p. 517.

> *connaissance qui va servir dans la vie quotidienne, qui va transformer la façon de penser et de vivre de celui qui la détient*[124]

In addition to the rejection of European culture and values demonstrated above, a critique of what Saïd would come some decades later to call Orientalism[125] was beginning to emerge. One of the earliest examples of the reversal of the European gaze had arrived with Victor Segalen: a travel writer who, along with Alexandra David-Néel, had a profound effect in certain quarters of the avant-garde, not least on the Surrealists. In addition, criticism of European colonialism existed in tandem with a more unmitigated embrace of the 'Orient' as opposed to the ambivalence of the 19th-century philosophers discussed in the previous chapter, and the literature of the time demonstrates greater awareness of the difficulties of engaging with Buddhist concepts by means of scholarship alone. By 1933, Jacques Masui's *Note Sur le yoga et la mystique* was to address the problematics of European engagement with 'Asian' concepts, on the grounds that in his view, questioning the nature of being and what lies beyond it occupies too little space in Europeans' lives and thoughts to adequately engage with cultures which centre this.[126] Masui's article foreshadowed the 1941 special edition of *Les Cahiers du Sud* entitled *Message actuel de l'Inde* which contained critiques of Orientalism from writers such as Benjamin Fondane alongside contributions from Indian writers secured by Masui and Daumal and a piece on arriving in France from an Indian perspective.[127] Though these phenomena indicate greater awareness of the European gaze, and a clear interest in its inversion, an unconscious colonialism nevertheless runs through avant-garde interactions with Buddhism. There was a particular interest in the Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism, and avant-garde interactions with these forms make such a colonialism discernible.

In the case of Tibet, the interweaving of colonial ambition, scholarly work and popular accounts of the country with perceptions of Tibetan Buddhism created a powerful mythology around it and its religious traditions to which the avant-garde was particularly attracted on grounds of its perceived 'unknowability' and subversiveness. Meanwhile, early 20th-century Japanese engagement with German 19th-century philosophy and

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[124] *Ibid*., p. 518.
[125] In the sense of patronising European attitudes to and representations of the 'Orient', rather than the academic discipline cited above. See: Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
[126] Jacques Masui, 'Note sur le yoga et la mystique', *Hermès*, 1 (1933), 51–67, p. 63.
[127] Jacques Masui, Jean Herbert, Shankaracharya et.al., *Message actuel de l'Inde* (*Les Cahiers du Sud*, 1941).

French Idealism was tied to the pan-Asian movement promoted by Okakura Kakuzō. Pan-Asianism called for the adoption of European technology and socio-political structures in order for Japan to escape colonial rule by countries of greater might, and for all Asia to unite against European imperialism. Within this however, was a strong Japanese nationalism which called for a return to traditional culture. Suzuki and his presentation of Zen have been linked to both pan-Asianism and Japanese nationalism,[128] not least for his participation in the movement called *shin bukkyo* (literally 'new Buddhism') which offered a government persecuting older forms of a tradition it deemed of step with a modernizing nation, a version more in line with such aspirations. Furthermore, mirroring the gestures of concurrent universalism and Japanese essentialism inherent to the Pan-Asian ideology, Scharf theorises that at the heart of Suzuki's presentation of Zen as the essence of all religion and philosophy, was a firmly-held belief in the superiority and uniqueness of Japan. Suzuki can thus be seen to contribute to a doubly-attractive European vision of Japan as both 'exotic other' and 'friendly familiar:'[129] By presenting Zen as the essence of all philosophy and religion, he opens the door to its practice by people of all faiths and none while retaining the superiority of Japan as the seat of this universal essence, and now the driving force behind a new, modernized Buddhism. The 'friendly familiar' he presented has been roundly criticized, particularly for its articulation in what McMahan has termed the 'language of metaphysics derived from German Romantic Idealism, English romanticism and American transcendentalism'.[130] Suzuki also supported and legitimised European mystical groups including Theosophy which presented a highly suspect vision of Buddhism. This was particularly true of its Tibetan form, which the Theosophists entwined with the popular vision of the country's unknowability and subversiveness – prized by the avant-garde, as shall be discussed – and a white supremacist worldview. Given this combination of factors, it is significant that Suzuki's presentation of Zen, with all its problems, is one of the only references for Buddhist concepts cited openly by Bataille.

Surrealist writings on Buddhism and the 'Orient' at this time tend towards an idealisation which serves first and foremost as a weapon in the crusade against what they considered

[128] Dharmachāri Nāgapriya, 'Poisoned Pen Letters? D.T. Suzuki's Communication of Zen to the West', *Western Buddhist Review*, 5 (2010) <http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol5/suzuki-gentium.html> [accessed 18 October 2019]; Brian Victoria, 'D.T. Suzuki, Zen and the Nazis', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 11.43 (2013) <https://apjjf.org/2013/11/43/Brian-Victoria/4019/article.html> [accessed 18 October 2019].
[129] Robert H. Scharf, 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', *History of Religions*, 33.1 (1993), 1–43, p. 29.
[130] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 125.

'occidental' values. This is exemplified by Antonin Artaud's two open letters, one to the Dalai Lama and the other to the 'Écoles du Bouddha', published in *La Révolution surréaliste* of 1925. Both letters decry all that Artaud found degenerate in European culture, notably the Church and the modernist notion of progress. He calls on the Dalai Lama to:

> *Adresse-nous tes lumières, dans un langage que nos esprits contaminés d'Européens puissent comprendre. Nous sommes environnés de papes rugueux, de littérateurs, de critiques… notre Esprit est parmi les chiens*[131]

In the letter to the 'Écoles du Bouddha' Artaud's rhetoric remains full of disgust for European values and peoples, and adds violent metaphors wishing for their destruction. For example, he calls on the 'Écoles' to:

> *Jetez à l'eau tous ces blancs qui arrivent avec leurs têtes petites, et leurs esprits si bien conduits… comme vous, nous repoussons le progrès. Venez. Sauvez-nous de ces larves*[132]

Bataille's friend and collaborator Michel Leiris holds that Artaud and the other Surrealists replaced the 'cult of Reason' with a cult of the Dalai Lama, as part of a simple rejection of the Occident.[133] The idealised Orient within which this 'cult' sat, and the desire to be conquered thereby, indicates the conscious anti-colonialism that brought about early attempts at inverting the European lens. Ideas corresponding to those of Artaud are found in the writings of André Breton in the same year. In his response to the *Cahiers du mois* enquiry *Orient et Occident* he writes :

> *Pour ma part il me plaît que la civilisation occidentale soit en jeu. C'est de l'Orient que nous vient aujourd'hui la lumière…Je n'attends pas que l'Est nous enrichisse…mais bien qu'il nous conquière*[134]

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[131] Antonin Artaud, 'Lettre aux écoles du Bouddha', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 3 (1923), 22, p. 22.
[132] Antonin Artaud, 'Adresse au Dalaï Lama', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 3 (1923), 17, p. 17.
[133] Alan Foljambe, 'An Intimate Destruction: Tantric Buddhism, Desire, and the Body in Surrealism and Georges Bataille' (unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 2008), p. 82 <http://universidadtantrica.org.ar/archivos/An_Intimate_Destruction_Tantric_Buddhism.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2019], citing Sally Price and Jean Jamin, 'A Conversation with Michel Leiris,' Current Anthropology (29), 1988, 157 – 174, p. 158 – 159.
[134] André Breton, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 898.

As indicated above, such conscious anti-colonialism is, however, nuanced by an unconscious colonialism. It is notable that all bar three of the surrealists never travelled to South or East Asia – neither Artaud nor Breton were among their number – meaning that it remained for them an 'eternal other': a blank canvas onto which could be projected idealised societies, values and ideas in direct opposition the those of an Occident fashioned equally from their own imaginations. In this case, just as the Orient had become a repository of all that Europe lacked, the Occident became a repository of all that was negative in European culture. The Surrealists can thus be seen to look to an idealised Orient in general and a constructed Buddhism in particular, with scant understanding of either and a desire for support of their own projects in mind. The conscious anti-colonialism of the Surrealists' denunciation of Europe, coupled with the unconscious colonialism of their projections of an idealised other in support of their own projects, is clearly discernible in their anti-colonial exhibition *La Vérité sur les colonies* of 1931. This they undertook in partnership with the Communist Party and in riposte to the French Government's *Exposition Coloniale* of the same year. The government's exhibition is now infamous for having 'displayed' the people of the French colonies in a 'human zoo' alongside their appropriated artwork and artefacts. In spite of the conscious anti-colonialism of *La Verité sur les colonies* however, it arguably exemplifies the appropriation of the 'other' in support of European projects. The exhibition reflected the political, anti-Christian position of the Communist Party and the Surrealists: each room contained placards of Marxist slogans and the exhibits merged Christian iconography with 'tribal' objects and imagery. This associated anti-colonialism explicitly with Communism and employed the 'primitive other' in the service of the surrealist project to undermine the Church. Furthermore, as Westbrook argues, there is an incoherence between rejection of France's 'civilising mission' and embrace of the 'civilising mission' of Communism alongside the celebration of 'primitive' art.[135] Dhainaut also observes that Surrealism picked and chose its references to and 'borrowings' from Buddhism, from across the Zen, Tantric and Mahāyāna traditions without seeming to clearly understand the differences between them, thus creating a Buddhism that served the Surrealists' own purposes. It is also ironic in the context of the anti-colonial exhibition that Breton owned several Tibetan artefacts and artworks brought back from European expeditions to Tibet, long before their significance was understood in Europe.[136] In this

[135] John Westbrook, 'Reorienting Surrealism', *The French Review*, 81.4 (2008), 707–18, p. 715 – 716.
[136] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 13; p. 138 – 152.

sense, he arguably interacts with them more as 'objets trouvés' than as works in their own right, contextualised in Buddhist cultures and traditions. Once again, this comes closer to the attitudes of artists of the Oriental Renaissance than to engagement with such cultures and traditions in their own right, or in any new depth.

An emphasis on revolution and revolt against European values was shared by the group led by René Daumal which formed around the publication *Le Grand Jeu.* Early in the first issue, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte inferred that this emphasis was widespread in the contemporary avant-garde, saying 'il n'est pas nouveau de dire que toutes les institutions sociales de l'Occident…sont dignes de toutes les révolutions'.[137] The *Grand Jeu* group had an incendiary relationship with the Surrealists, disagreeing on several key issues, but they certainly agreed on this point. Though Daumal refused Breton's invitation to collaborate, extended in the *Deuxième manifeste de surréalisme*, he recognised in the third issue of the publication that the two groups shared the aim of 'action révolutionnaire'[138] and of accessing a unity beyond the limits of perceived reality through 'l'aveuglement amoureux,' or dreams, or poetry.[139] However, the membership of *Le Grand Jeu* maintained that the Surrealists simply applied a set of techniques – automatic writing and other 'petits jeux de sociétés' – to create work which had become commonplace and far from what could be called 'surreal'.[140] As Masson was to infer, in his role as a member of the dissident surrealist Rue Blomet group to whom this chapter shall return, the focus of surrealist literary and artistic production was on its ends and not its means; on the form of the writing and art they produced and not the process of their creation. Daumal opposed this focus with what were dubbed the 'talismans' of his own faction: pieces of art or writing that brought about an 'instant éternel' in those who were able to experience it.[141] The talismans of *Le Grand Jeu* function in much the same way as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche described Christian doctrine: an allegory pointing to an inarticulable truth. The group as a whole share Breton's and Artaud's joy in the idea of a Europe 'conquered' by an imagined Orient and idealise that Orient, the 'Oriental man' and the 'instinct antique'[142] as weapons in the fight against European values. In Roger Vailland's review of André Gide's *Colonisation* he states that he the others of *Le Grand*

[137] Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, 'La force des renoncements', *Le Grand Jeu*, 1 (1929), 13 – 17, p. 17.
[138] René Daumal, 'Lettre ouverte à André Breton', *Le Grand Jeu*, 3 (1930), 76 – 83, p. 78.
[139] Thierry Galibert, 'La quête du primitivisme perdu: le poète chez « *Le Grand Jeu* », *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 2 (2001) 281 – 291, p. 290.
[140] René Daumal, 'Lettre ouverte à André Breton', *Le Grand Jeu*, 3 (1930), 76 – 83, p. 77.
[141] Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, 'Avant-propos', *Le Grand Jeu*, 1 (1929), 1 – 3, p. 3.
[142] Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, 'La force des renoncements', *Le Grand Jeu*, 1 (1928), 13–17, p. 17.

Jeu stand with 'les noirs, les jaunes et les rouges contre les blancs,'[143] saying:

> *il est probable que les peuples des colonies massacreront un jour colons, soldats et* missionnaires *et viendront* à *leur tour 'opprimer' l'Europe. Et nous nous en réjouissons* [144]

In addition to translating, as mentioned, Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Daumal was a self-taught scholar of Sanskrit who produced a dictionary of that language and translated portions of Buddhist scripture therefrom. He also wrote an informed and highly critical review of the French translation of the Bardo Chödol (the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*)[145] in 1934, to which this study shall return. These credentials suggest that Daumal could be described as 'well-read' in a way it is impossible to attribute to Schopenhauer or Nietzsche and certainly, as shall be discussed in Chapter Three, to Bataille. In some ways, he seems most aware of his Eurocentric perspective, saying:

> *Faire table rase [des idées européennes]…n'est pas si facile qu'on croit: le faire intellectuellement, oui, c'est facile, mais tout cet appareillage idéologique vous tient aussi au corps, au cœur*[146]

Daumal's role in the transmission of Tibetan and Japanese Zen Buddhist concepts to André Masson suggests that he may well have played an indirect role in the communication of these traditions to Bataille. This is especially probable given the closeness of the Bataille-Masson friendship and working relationship during the *Acéphale* period and the apparent influence of both traditions on Bataille during this time, to be discussed in the following chapter. Such a line of transmission could be said to have been an authoritative one, coming as it did from a more reliable source. However, the same unconscious colonialism is discernible in the work of Daumal and *Le Grand jeu* as it is in that of the Surrealists. Much like the violently anti-European rhetoric of Artaud and Breton, the anti-colonial statements *of Le Grand jeu* are easy to make from a privileged, hypothetical position. They are also ironically Eurocentric and self-motivated, weaponising as they do a vast number of cultures and peoples under the banner of 'good' as a projected opposite to a European 'evil'.

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[143] *Ibid.*
[144] Roger Vailland, 'Review of André Gide's "Colonisation"', *Le Grand Jeu*, 1 (1929), 57–59, p. 58.
[145] René Daumal, 'Le livre des morts tibétain', *Les Cahiers Du Sud*, 162 (1934), 371–77.
[146] Pascal Sigoda, 'Jean Paulhan, René Daumal et le Grand Jeu', *Europe*, 72 (1994), 85–97, p. 92.

The most striking revolt of the loose collective known as the Rue Blomet group (named after the address of their meeting-place at André Masson's apartment) was that which they undertook against the surrealist movement, famously resulting in Breton 'excommunicating' them in 1929. A key site of the group's criticism of Surrealism was the orthodox boundaries they attributed to that movement's search for the *absolu*, which they attempted to achieve through freeing the psyche from the constraints of rationalism. However, in 1941, Masson – chiming with Daumal's critique of 'ends over means' discussed above – would refer to the Surrealists as making of their striving for the irrational 'quelque chose d'aussi borné que le rationalisme honni' which led to their mainstream acceptance. Meanwhile, Bataille's attraction for dissident Surrealists reposed upon the fact that as a '"mad", uncontrolled philosopher' who exceeded the boundaries of the surrealist project,[147] he produced work that amounted to a 'war cry [designed to] capture the moment in which we moderns come undone':[148] this amounted to exceeding the boundaries of the profane – the world of project inhabited by the Surrealists – in order to glimpse the sacred. This, the status of war as one of the explicit aims of *Acéphale* and the influence of Zen *satori* on Bataille's conception of the sacred is explored in the following chapter. Further criticism of the Surrealists came in the form of Masson's belief that they entered into a duality of liberating, or worse faking liberation of, the psyche in order to make such liberation their 'theme' – and a marketable one at that. This superficiality, Masson explicitly links with the fact that they are European:

> *L'identification superficielle avec le cosmos, le faux «primitivisme» ne sont que des aspects d'un panthéisme facile…il y a lieu ici de faire la différence avec l'esprit extrême-oriental, qui tout naturellement n'accorde à la personne que peu d'importance, pas du tout d'indépendance, de liberté; laissant toute l'indépendance à l'universel, à la substance absolue. Ce mouvement est difficilement compris par les Occidentaux, ou devient chez eux, le plus souvent, inauthentique*[149]

Masson's criticism, like Masui's before him, is reflective of the conscious anti-colonialism inherent to his acknowledgement of the difficulties of European engagement with South and East Asian traditions. It also points to a simultaneous, unconscious

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[147] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 148.
[148] Shannon Winnubst, 'Sacrifice as Ethics: The Strange Religiosity of Neoliberalism', in *Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 131.
[149] André Masson, 'Peindre est une gageure', *Les Cahiers Du Sud*, 223 (1941), 134–40, p. 139.

colonialism: aside from the reductive and othering idea of the 'esprit extrême-oriental', a slightly smaller-scale reduction than the 'noirs, jaunes et rouges' cited above, the application of the term 'inauthentique' here is telling. In using it, Masson can be seen to afford himself – Breton's fellow European – the authority to decide what is 'authentically "oriental"'.

The Buddhist influences most prevalent in the avant-garde were what Dawson would call a 'westernised' understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and Japanese Zen. Such a westernisation relied heavily upon European colonial history in both Tibet and Japan, however in the case of Japan this was not limited to the imperial ambitions of European countries alone. As touched upon above, the role of Japanese nationalism as a response to European imperialism, and that of Suzuki specifically, has proven key to European understandings of Japanese Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.

Turning first to Tibet: as a country, it was (and remains) a perfect vehicle for conscious anti-colonialism and unconscious colonialism, and European perceptions of Tibetan Buddhism have long been inextricably entwined with those of Tibet itself. As Lopez puts it: 'we might regard Tibet as a work of art, fashioned through exaggeration and selection into an ideal with little foundation in history'.[150] The 'artworks' to which Lopez refers proved particularly attractive to the anti-capitalist, anti-modernist projects of the avant-garde. It is telling to note, for example, that Foljambe attributes the 'overheated drama of Tibet' to surrealist interest in the form of Buddhism practiced there[151] (as well as the 'drama' of Tibetan religious rituals and imagery, and exoticized accounts of Tibet in the travel writing available in Paris at the time, 'overheated drama' likely refers to the struggles between Britain and Russia for control of the country during the Great Game and the first Chinese attempt at colonizing Tibet in the early 20th century). Bishop and Lopez concur that in literature and popular culture, from Sherlock Holmes to Walter Benjamin's 1929 essay on Surrealism,[152] to Artaud's letters, Tibet has stood for a mysterious 'other' that exists in the European imagination and to support European

[150] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 183.
[151] Alan Foljambe, 'An Intimate Destruction: Tantric Buddhism, Desire, and the Body in Surrealism and Georges Bataille' (unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 2008), p. 100 <http://universidadtantrica.org.ar/archivos/An_Intimate_Destruction_Tantric_Buddhism.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2019].
[152] Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', trans. by Edmond Jephcott, *New Left Review*, 108 (1979), 47–56, p. 49.

concerns and projects.[153] As Woodcock puts it: 'Tibet's isolation, its persistent non-adherence to the world culture of the capitalist enterprise and nation-states that developed during the nineteenth century, made it the ideal seedbed where personal fantasies might be nurtured and clothed deceptively with experience'.[154] Such isolation and 'non-adherence' are themselves European constructs: the struggle of the British and Russian forces during the Great Game was one for strategic control of a Tibet existing tantalizingly on the borders of a colonized India and a China 'opened' to trade by force. It was 'isolated' only from European control and the culture it did not adhere to was European in origin, spread to its colonies but certainly not of the world. Such cultural imperialism is the backdrop for a wealth of attempts by white Europeans to enter, explore and document Tibet during the 19th and 20th centuries and led, for Bishop, to a binary representation of Tibet as either worthy of 'unquestioning and naïve adulation' or of 'arrogant picking and choosing of the bits that could prove useful'.[155] This context situates Masson's remark that Daumal introduced him to the practices of 'secret Tibet'[156] in a canon of European attitudes to the country and its people that extend back to the Jesuit missionaries and continue in European popular culture and imagination today.

Bataille's own interwoven attraction to the country and religious traditions of Tibet are first apparent in his letters to his cousin Marie-Louise from Madrid, at a time when he was in the midst of losing his Catholic faith. They are contextualised by his desire at that time to travel widely, preferably to the 'Orient'. He writes: 'je suis seulement obligé de rappeler qu'en particulier le 23 août 1920 j'étais on ne peut plus, préoccupé d'aller en Orient'.[157] This sets his interest in Tibet within a wider perception of an imagined Orient within which his attraction to the country is based variously on the difficulty associated with the journey, the cold and altitude, the idea of a '«voyage» comme ascétique' and the tradition of polyandry.[158] Here the colonial narrative of exoticised other is perceptible: for Bataille, Tibet exists as a landscape to be conquered; an exotic 'other' offering the

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[153] Peter Bishop, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* (London: Athalone Press, 1993), p. 14; Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 87; p. 156.
[154] George Woodcock, 'Book Review: "The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape" by Peter Bishop', *Pacific Affairs*, 63.2, 273–74.
[155] Peter Bishop, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* (London: Athalone Press, 1993, p. 9.
[156] 'Daumal se passionnait pour les aspects mystérieux de l'Inde et du Tibet secret. C'est avec lui que j'ai parlé pour la première fois de *tantrisme*' : André Masson, cited in Jean-Paul Clébert, *Mythologie d'André Masson* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1971), p. 31.
[157] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 50.
[158] *Ibid*., p. 58.

possibility of a spiritual quest. His Tibetan studies at the École des Langues Orientales in the early 1920s[159] points to further interest, however these studies were short-lived and his later understanding of the country and its religious practices, as well as of Zen, may – as mentioned – be attributable to Masson and by extension Daumal. In addition to such indirect transmissions, in the journal *Documents* edited by Bataille, his close friend and collaborator Michel Leiris also showed an interest in Tibetan meditations on emptiness, using them to analyse the work of Joan Miró[160] and writing on Tibetan practices based on his reading of Alexandra David-Néel.[161] It may thus be argued that Bataille's interest in the interwoven country and practices of Tibet extends back to the mid-1920s and evolves through the study of its language, his interactions with Masson and potentially Daumal and Leiris.

As regards Japan and Japanese Zen, at the same time as the German Idealists and early European Buddhist scholars discussed in the previous chapter were beginning to look outside the European philosophical tradition, the mid-1800s saw the beginning of Japanese modernism. Sparked by the realisation, with US warships on their doorstep demanding to trade, that if Japan did not adopt the superior technology of the European world then they would become subjugated to it, the Meiji restoration of 1868 was a time of uncertainty as the feudal system came to an end and elements of 'Western civilisation' were adopted.[162] As mentioned above, Meiji policies were two-fold: 'westernisation' in the arenas of military might, science, technology and government along with the study of European philosophical traditions, and simultaneous reaffirmation of Japanese values in the arena of culture. It was this seemingly dichotomous phenomenon that lay behind Okakura Kakuzō's pan-Asianism, which with his famous opening line 'Asia is one', served as an ultimate rejection of European colonialism.[163]

The discovery of French Idealism was of crucial significance to Franco-Japanese relations and to French understanding of Zen, with Ebersolt arguing that the discovery of French philosophy is 'inséparable du processus [politique] d'occidentalisation' during the Meiji period.[164] A German social model had been adopted in Japan after the defeat of

[159] *Ibid*., p. 63; p. 220.
[160] Michel Leiris, 'Joan Miró', *Documents*, 5 (1929), 263–69.
[161] Michel Leiris, 'Le "Caput Mortuum" ou la femme de l'alchimiste', *Documents*, 8 (1930), 21–26.
[162] Joseph M. Kitagawa, 'Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki (1870-1966)', *History of Religions*, 6.3 (1967), 265–69, p. 265.
[163] Kakuzō Okakura, *Ideals of the East: The Spirit of Japanese Art* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005).
[164]Simon Ebersholt, 'Le Japon et la philosophie Française Du XIXe au milieu du XXe Siècle', *Revue Philosophique de La France et de l'Etranger*, 202.3 (2012), 371–83, p. 327.

France at the hands of Prussia in 1870, and for this reason German philosophy was studied in Japan from the 1880s while French literature was studied but its philosophy ignored. The break with this trend came with the introduction of Bergson in 1910 by Nishida Kitaro, and Bergsonism exploded in the following years. Ebersolt notes that the attraction of Bergson was owed in great part to the value he placed on spiritual experience over and above intelligence, as well as his notions of intuition, duration, creation and *élan vital*.[165] One of the many Japanese students to have studied philosophy in Paris during the 1920s, Kuki Shūzō drew a parallel between the thought of Bergson and the meditation practice of Zen, saying: 'Le Zen…consiste en un effort pour saisir l'absolu par l'intuition. Et dans la pensée japonaise c'est lui précisément qui a frayé la voie à la philosophie de M. Bergson'.[166] In the case of European understanding of Japanese Zen, then, the European colonisation discussed hitherto is inflected by the colonial ambitions of Japan: mirroring the adoption of Buddhist concepts for European projects, Japan strove to adopt elements of European structures in service of their own.

As well as affecting Japanese understanding of philosophy, it has also been argued that Bergson was also a silent influence on Bataille: crucially to this study, Fourny queries whether Bataille's *opération souveraine* approached 'un bergsonisme qui n'ose pas dire son nom' alongside the influence of Nietzsche.[167] Bergson's *acte libre* does indeed bear resemblance to Bataillean sovereignty, as shall be discussed in the following chapter, being as it is a momentary breakthrough of the 'moi profond' (that of inarticulable emotion) from the 'moi modeste' of the quotidian. The *acte libre* also requires an intensity of emotion along with destruction of the 'arrangements raisonnables' of social convention. In turn, both concepts mirror Zen *satori* and *kenshō*. Bataille refers to the former in *SN* while Bruno explicitly compares Bataille's methods of meditation with the latter. These influences are explored further in Chapter Three.

Zen is often understood to be a subversive rejection of scripture in favour of practice as a direct route to enlightenment. Many, including Suzuki, define it in the terms attributed to Bodhidharma (considered the 28th patriarch of Zen responsible for bringing what became the Ch'an tradition to China, evolving into Seon in Korea and Zen in Japan):

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[165] *Ibid.*, p.374.
[166] Kuki Shūzō, *Kuki Shûzô Zenshû (Œuvres complètes de Kuki Shûzô)*, ed. by Amano Teiyu (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1981), p. 91.
[167] Jean-François Fourny, 'Bataille et Bergson', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 91 (1991), 704–17, p. 709.

A special transmission outside the scriptures
No dependence upon words and letters
Direct pointing at the human heart
Seeing into one's nature and the realisation of Buddhahood[168]

For the Rinzai Zen school of which Suzuki writes, this practice was that of the *kōan*: the posing of unanswerable and paradoxical questions or riddles; for the alternative Sōtō school it was *zazen*: seated meditation. Rinzai and Sōtō are the principal forms of Zen practiced in Japan and both rely to an extent on what Masson called the 'non-mental', in the sense of freedom from thought and discourse. Masson compares Bataille's focus on the 'non-mental' in his denigration of Dada and Surrealism with Zen. Given this explicit equation on Masson's part, it would not be improbable to suggest they had discussed it. He writes:

«Dada? – pas assez idiot », c'est en ces termes que Georges Bataille conclut notre premier entretien …Ainsi jaillit cette réponse mémorable, digne d'un moine zen…Oui, Dada, pas assez idiot, et le surréalisme beaucoup trop « mental »…J'insiste: ce non-mental que Georges Bataille préconisait…Ce non-mental, qui est au centre de la doctrine zen[169]

It is important to note however, that the polarised representation, popularised by Suzuki, of Zen as a rejection of scripture in relation to older forms of Buddhism lacks nuance: Zen masters were and are well-versed in Buddhist doctrine, with Zen schools tending to place an emphasis on the *Lotus sutra*. While Avens for example holds that Suzuki 'succeeded in his great ambition to make the reality of Zen accessible to the Western way of thinking…without perverting it,'[170] this view is highly questionable. Not only does Suzuki equate key Zen concepts with Christian ones as mentioned earlier, but his popularisation of a Zen free of Buddhist doctrine encouraged practitioners to 'highlight a technique of meditation [for example Rinzai *kōans* or Soto *zazen*] that can be appropriated and interpreted by different traditions and used to their own ends'.[171] Both

[168] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 163.
[169] André Masson, 'Le soc de la charrue,' Le rebelle du Surréalisme: Écrits (Paris: Hermann, 1976), p. 75.
[170] Robert Avens, 'Silencing the Question of God: The Ways of Jung and Suzuki', *Journal of Religion and* Health, 15.2 (1976), 116 – 135, p. 127.
[171] Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Cultures* (Berkeley: Parallax Press), p. 213.

Masson's and Bataille's understandings of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism can be seen to serve their own ends in a similar way. In addition to the issues above, Suzuki also legitimised the 'Buddhism' of one of the most problematic European spiritual sects of the time, that of the Theosophical Society. The influence of this group cannot be overstated as a vehicle for the transmission of an outlandish and frankly damaging presentation of Buddhist concepts and traditions to Europe and the USA. As part of his theory of the 'westernisation of the East', Dawson interrogates Theosophy, asking how much is it is 'counter-cultural' versus how much it conforms to 'western' culture given its 'self-conscious and selective remodelling [of 'eastern' traditions]' in line with their own projects.[172] Founded in 1875 by the Russian occultist Helena Blavatsky and American military officer Col. Henry Steel Olcott, the Theosophical Society aimed like Acéphale to create a new religion, in their case in response to a decline in Christian belief.[173] Blavatsky's view of Buddhism was that it was 'incomparably higher, more noble, more philosophical and more scientific than the teaching of any other church or religion'[174] and she took the lay precepts to become the first European Theravadin. Meanwhile, Olcott became the first European-American to convert to Buddhism. In spite of this, what was taught by the Theosophists (largely through publications such as *Esoteric Buddhism* by AP Sinnet) was far from the doctrines and practices of South and East Asian Buddhism. This did not hinder its being widely accepted in Europe and the USA, however, that the two were equivalent. Among the Theosophists' more questionable beliefs was the existence of a congregation of 'Mahatmas', white sages who were the conservers of the 'wisdom of Atlantis', living in secret in Tibet and concealed even from Tibetans. Blavatsky claimed that she lived with the Mahatmas – also known as the 'Great White Brotherhood' – for seven years and that outside this time she and other Theosophists communicated with them through dreams, visions, letters that materialised in her cabinet, and automatic writing.[175] The fact that the Mahatmas were white points to the Theosophical movement as a prime example of Europeans borrowing from South and East Asian traditions and cultures to reinforce white supremacy: although it aimed to create a 'universal brotherhood regardless of race, creed, sex, class or colour'[176]

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[172] Andrew Dawson, 'East Is East, Except When It's West: The Easternization Thesis and the Western Habitus', *Journal of Religion and Society*, 8 (2006), 1–13, p. 9.
[173] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 238.
[174] Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Cultures* (Berkeley: Parallax Press), p. 269.
[175] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[176] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 49.

Blavatsky claimed to have studied a work called the *Book of Dyzan* in the secret language Senzar, which described a racial hierarchy of seven 'root races' and seven 'sub-races'. In this hierarchy, the Aryans (Greeks, Egyptians and Phoenicians) drove the 'yellow and red, brown and black' races into Africa and Asia'.[177] In *Esoteric Buddhism* a Mahatma is reported as saying that: 'the highest people now on earth (spiritually) ….is the last subrace of the fifth [root race]– yourselves, the white conquerors'.[178]

The 1927 translation of the *Bardo Chödol* was made by prominent Theosophist Walter Evans-Wentz and was the text from which the French translation was made by Marguerite La Fuente. Lopez notes that this book is one of the primary channels that has served diverse European agendas and that it is vital to be cognizant of Evans-Wentz's Theosophical beliefs when reading it. Despite claiming that he aimed only to be the 'mouthpiece of a Tibetan sage, of whom I am a recognised disciple', there is nothing to suggest Evans-Wentz was ever anything of the sort, or indeed even a follower of Tibetan Buddhism.[179] Daumal, in his review of the translation, is damning of Theosophy and of both Evans-Wentz and Sir John Woodroffe, praising the translator for putting the latter's introduction at the back as it is written 'dans le plus pur style de sacristie théosophique'.[180] It is ironic given Daumal's excoriation of the Theosophists that Suzuki, author of his translation of *Essais sur le bouddhisme Zen*, should have lent legitimacy to Theosophy and also brought it to a Japanese audience. Tweed's account of Western occult influences on Suzuki in the first two decades of the 20th century details the latter's earlier involvement with the followers of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was a key influence on Theosophy, claiming – like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche – that the 'true' Christian religion had been obscured by the doctrine that sprang up around it. His own writings were based on spiritual experiences rather than Christian theology, and it was not only Suzuki who noted parallels with Buddhist traditions in Swedenborg's discussions of the self, emptiness and interdependence.[181] Suzuki was introduced to Swedenborg by British-American 'Buddhist sympathiser' Albert J Edmunds[182] and

[177] *Ibid.*, p. 54.
[178] *Ibid.*
[179] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[180] René Daumal, 'Le livre des morts Tibétain', *Les Cahiers Du Sud*, 162 (1934), 371–77.
[181] David Loy, 'The Dharma of Emanuel Swedenborg: A Buddhist Perspective', *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 16 (1996), 11–35; Philangi Dasa, *Swedenborg the Buddhist; or, Higher Swedenborgianism, Its Secrets and Thibetan Origin* (Los Angeles, CA: Buddhistic Swedenborgian Brotherhood, 1887).
[182] Thomas A. Tweed, 'American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 32.2 (2005), 249–81, p. 249.

called him 'the Buddha of the North',[183] translating four of his works in the early 20th century and writing a book on his life and work in 1913. Like Theosophy, Swedenborgianism claimed Tibetan origins: Vetterling, a Theosophist who in 1887 wrote *Swedenborg the Buddhist; Or,The Higher Swedenborgianism: Its Secret and Thibetan origins*, initiated Japanese contact with Theosophical ideas by sending their writings to 'young reform-minded Japanese Buddhists'[184] (i.e. those of the *shin bukkyo* movement) who published Theosophical writing and supported the idea of founding a branch of Theosophy in Japan. Suzuki's wife Beatrice Erskine Lane Suzuki, a member of the Theosophical society, then opened a Theosophical Lodge in Kyoto in the 1920s alongside her husband[185] and Suzuki lectured at the San Francisco branch of the Theosophical Society from 1903, referring to the movement as 'the real Mahāyāna Buddhism'.[186]

Reminiscent of the pan-Asian movement itself, Suzuki's role in the promotion of a Europeanised understanding of Zen was on the one hand singularly Japanese: an exoticised other that undermined the superiority of the European worldview, thus appealing to the avant-garde. On the other, it was recognizably European: an accessible object of study connected to familiar philosophical and spiritual movements, thus affirming the legitimacy of the European worldview. His Zen thus sat within the pan-Asian project while his involvement with Theosophy is linked to his legitimisation of the latter's presentation of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. As is to be discussed in the following chapter, it was Suzuki's Zen, transmitted through Daumal and Masson, and the version of Tibetan Buddhism to which Suzuki contributed, that Bataille would galvanise in support of his own projects thus refracting them into the wider avant-garde and his own readership. Such galvanisation of Buddhist traditions also constituted a form of weaponisation within the Acéphale group, who were explicit in their declaration of war on 'tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui'.[187] It is to Acéphale's weaponisation of Buddhism that the following chapter shall turn.

[183] *Ibid.,* p. 265.
[184] *Ibid.,* p. 255.
[185] Thomas A. Tweed, 'American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 32.2 (2005), 249–81, p. 235.
[186] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 54.
[187] Georges Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée', *Acéphale,* 1 (1936), 1–4, p. 1.

Chapter Three

Bataille's Buddhism: Sovereignty, *Satori* and the Sacred

Je ne veux plus parler d'expérience intérieure
(ou mystique) mais de pal. *De même on dit le zen*

Georges Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche*[188]

How she hated words, always coming between her
and her life…ready-made words and phrases,
sucking all the life-sap out of living things

DH Lawrence, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*[189]

This chapter explores Bataille's interactions with the imagined Orients and Buddhisms discussed in the previous chapters. It will be shown that Bataille's 'Orient' carries the legacy, both direct and indirect, of early European understandings and accounts of Buddhist traditions, 19th-century scholarship and philosophy, his peers and the available popular literature (most pertinently Alexandra David-Néel, whose accounts of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhist practices are suggested here as a vital influence). Bataille's weaponisation of Buddhism, like that of his avant-garde peers, takes place in the service of his own projects, in this case Bataille's individual interest in anti-Christianity and inter-related anti-capitalism, and the Acéphale group's stated aim of waging a metaphorical war against 'tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui'.[190] As regards this war, the views of the philosopher Heraclitus and of Nietzsche were highly influential: both held war to be an essential part of the world in its totality, and the emergence of this influence in *PJDM* shall be discussed. In addition to the waging of war, Bataille was to confirm some twenty years after the activities of Acéphale, his interest in founding a new religion through the society:

> *J'avais passé les années précédentes avec une préoccupation insoutenable : j'étais résolu, sinon à fonder une religion, du moins à me diriger dans ce sens*[191]

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[188] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI., p. 78.
[189] DH Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (New York: Modern, 1983), p. 103 – 104.
[190] 'Notre existence est la condemnation de tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui…Ce que nous entreprenons est une guerre' : Georges Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée', *Acéphale*, 1 (1936), 1–4, p. 1.
[191] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 287.

The meditation practices documented in the papers of Acéphale and the 'descriptions' of *PJDM* were a central part of this new religion, which privileged silence and solo meditation.[192] Within them, Dawson's 'westernisation of the East'[193] is discernible in their piecemeal borrowing from Zen and Tibetan Buddhist concepts and practices, which this chapter argues was influenced by Bataille's 'transmission' through his European sources. Many of the concepts first developed in *PJDM* re-emerge and are consolidated in *SA*, *MM* and *LPM*, which will be used throughout this chapter to illustrate such through-lines.

The influence of Tibetan and Japanese Zen Buddhism, 'westernised' in Dawson's terms in service of Bataille's interests is evident by *EI*, in which he writes of having been able to attain the states of the 'mystics' for around two years before he began to think of putting together a 'method' but that this was 'indépendante…des présuppositions auxquelles les mystiques l'imaginent liée'.[194] This reads as a reference to Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Tantric 'presuppositions' of which he was aware at the time of *Acéphale*, and which he claims to have replaced with 'de longues réflexions sur l'érotisme et le rire'.[195] Eroticism and laughter are both forms of Bataillean sacrifice in that they represent a rupture with the profane world allowing for a momentary eruption of the sacred. This is the *expérience intérieure* of the book of the same title and may be considered to be at the heart of that work. In *LC*, Bataille describes such a rupture as a sovereign moment arising in him in a fit of madness in the depths of the forest. This he compares with the erotic moment, separating the spaces of the lovers' room and the forest in which he experiences madness, from the spaces outside which are those of the profane sphere:

> *Hors du bois comme hors de la chambre, l'action utile est poursuivie, à laquelle chaque homme appartient. Mais chaque homme, dans sa chambre, s'en retire…ma folie dans le bois règne en souveraine*[196]

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[192] Camille Morando, 'Le corps sans limites ou l'acéphalité : Le personnage d'Acéphale, secret et équivoque, dans les œuvres des artistes autour Du collège de sociologie', *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne*, 31 (2006), 81–89., p. 81.
[193] Andrew Dawson, 'East Is East, Except When It's West: The Easternization Thesis and the Western Habitus', *Journal of Religion and Society*, 8 (2006), 1–13.
[194] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), v., p. 110.
[195] *Ibid.*
[196] *Ibid.*, p. 365.

By *MM*, two years after his notes on *satori* in *SN*, Bataille would align the *expérience intérieure* with the *opération souveraine*, where the designation *opération* arguably highlights the fact that the achievement of sovereignty is a process, one which this chapter will argue was influenced by the process of attaining *satori*. The process demands 'sovereign' behaviours entailing *angoisse* such as ecstasy, laughter and eroticism, mirroring the 'fiery baptism of the spirit'[197] by which Suzuki described *satori*. Bataille writes 'Précédemment, je désignais l'opération souveraine sous les noms d'expérience intérieure ou d'extrême du possible. Je la désigne aussi maintenant sous le nom de : méditation.[198] Two years earlier in *SN*, he had equated the expérience intérieure with Zen, writing as in the epigraph to this chapter: 'je ne veux plus parler d'expérience intérieure (ou mystique) mais de *pal*. De même on dit le zen'.[199] This triangulation of Zen, *expérience intérieure* and meditation along with the violent metaphor of 'impalement' (a Rinzai 'shock' tactic if ever there were one) prompts this chapter to argue that Bataille was strongly influenced by Zen *satori*. The ways in which this influence is discernible in Bataille's interest in the sacred and the profane, and in sovereignty, shall be discussed. In so doing, the means by which *satori* is achieved as well as its effects (notably what it reveals as regards the 'fundamental nature'[200] – as Bodhidharma is said to have put it – of humanity) will be shown to have been under construction in PJDM and to have continued to interest Bataille in the *SA* and beyond.

Ebersholt designates an interest in the limits of language as a key point of intersection between 'Japanese thought', Bergson and French philosophy in general. The limits of language is also well-noted as one of Bataille's principal concerns, and this emerges with force in his struggle between the desire to, and the possibility of, sharing his meditations with his contemporaries. This desire was a fraught one, given that Bataille like Nietzsche before him tussles throughout his work with such a conflicting desire and indeed with the possibility of communicating in language at all. As he put it : 'la communication profonde veut

[197] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 231.
[198] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 219.
[199] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI., p. 78.
[200] Arthur Waley, *Zen Buddhism, and Its Relation to Art* (London: Luzac & Company, 1922) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43273/43273-h/43273-h.htm> [accessed 13 November 2019].

le silence'.[201] As shall be discussed, for Bataille the state of silence is a dual one from language emerges and into which language dissolves: 'silence' thus carries the meaning of both a tool and a state, and in this Bataille's meditation mirrors that of Buddhist traditions. Moreover, he differs from his 19th-century influences by the very fact that he is specifically concerned with developing a *practice* rather than with academic or philosophical engagement with Buddhist traditions. Indeed, a reading of *PJDM* as a practical version of Nietzsche's 'active nihilism', influenced by both the process of *satori* and by Tibetan Buddhism, shall be one of the principal concerns of this chapter.

In addition to Bataille's own texts, the limited work on his understanding of Buddhist traditions and meditation practices both reflects and refracts an *Orient imaginaire* in the service of his own projects, incorporating Droit's *culte du néant* and Dawson's 'westernisation of the East'. Paralleling descriptions of Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's understandings of Buddhism, for example, Hussey declares that Bataille was 'well-read in Classical Hinduism and Buddhism'.[202] This in spite of the fact that the examples he gives of Bataille's reading include no primary texts in either tradition and that his list of Bataille's sources pertaining to Buddhism gives only Alexandra David-Néel and Mircea Eliade's work on mystical Tibetan practices.[203] At the time of Acéphale, Bataille had access only to the travel writing of the former. It is undoubtable that David-Néel provided one of the first and most detailed accounts of the lives of ordinary Tibetans and of Tibetan Buddhist practices: the first white woman to enter Tibet, she learned several dialects of Tibetan, converted to Buddhism and became a Lama. She also adopted a Tibetan son and travelled incognito with him from China to Lhasa, disguised as a peasant and staying in locals' houses along the way. The work of David-Néel displays a conscious anti-colonialism and simultaneous unconscious colonialism comparable to those of the avant-garde groups discussed in the previous chapter (Indeed, she was a key source of information for many of them, Leiris included, on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism). For example, she holds her fluency in the language responsible for a fundamental shift in her formerly fixed, European ideas, saying that the knowledge she gained

[201] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), v., p. 109.
[202] Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar: The Mysticism of Georges Bataille* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2000), p.65.
[203] *Ibid.*

from being able to interact on a par with ordinary Tibetans is no less interesting than that she gained from the Lamas and recognising that she has 'apporté instinctivement mes notions européennes dans un pays où elles n'ont point de place'.[204] In spite of this however, she perpetuated markedly colonial tropes, not least in her description of Tibetans – including her adopted son – as little more than 'grands enfants'.[205] Her own unease at losing her white superiority through her disguise, which has been called her 'most arduous performance'[206] is also evident in her risking discovery on two occasions to demonstrate her knowledge of the Dharma in discussions with high Lamas.[207] As one of the most popular writers on Buddhism, of whom Bataille borrowed five works from the Bibliothèque Nationale between 1933 and 1937,[208] such tropes were disseminated to him as part of a wider context in which his ambivalence to Buddhism and the 'Orient' in general existed. Such ambivalence, in addition to the assumption of his place to comment on traditions of which he knew little, is evident when Bataille admits not only that he knew little of India but that what he did know left him with a mindset 'plus d'éloignement que d'acceuil'.[209] Furthermore, in spite of his recognition and intermittent praise of his Buddhist influences, like both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche Bataille's focus was consistently on how Buddhism could support his own projects, in this case the development of his meditation practice. His ambivalence is clear in *EI* where he writes that 'l'Église bouddhique [a une] fin negative: la suppression de la douleur'.[210] This mirrors Nietzsche's disdain for what he considered the 'passive nihilism' of a 'Buddhist' suppression of pain that precluded self-overcoming and suggests a transmission to Bataille not merely of this Nietzschean understanding but, once again, of the broader concept of Buddhism as a *culte du néant*. In this sense, as shall be discussed further, *PJDM* may be understood to interact with Nietzsche as a practical version of 'active nihilism' that simultaneously inverts Nietzschean sovereignty to encompass the embrace of death.

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[204] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1927), p. 59.
[205] *Ibid*., p. 90.
[206] Sara Steinert Borella, 'Travel, Gender, and the Exotic', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 86 (2009), 133–42, p. 136.
[207] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1927), p. 296 – 302.
[208] 'Emprunts de Georges Bataille à La Bibliothèque Nationale (1922-1950)', in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), XII., p. 584, 608, 618. 578.
[209] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 30.
[210] *Ibid*., p. 19.

Bataille's anti-Christianity, like others before him from Voltaire to Nietzsche, is a clear motive for his interest in an *Orient imaginaire*. In Bataille's case however, as discussed in the previous chapter, Christianity was tied to capitalism. Conner illustrates this in his remark that 'a world…of means and ends, of sacrifice for profit within a finite economy of calculation, is a world structured according to the values of Christian morality'.[211] It is this world that *PJDM*, with its focus on useless expenditure, rejects. In it, as in *LPM* (which he began writing in 1939, the same year *PJDM* was published), Bataille rejects the capitalist, Christian worldview through what this study argues is a recourse to an imagined 'Orient' and its religious traditions, among them Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. Like his antecedents from Voltaire to Nietzsche, Bataille's 'Buddhism' may be seen to function as a riposte to Christian – and now capitalist – doctrine. Unlike them, and as mentioned above, rather than an academic or philosophical argument his riposte takes the form of a practice: a lived, shared experience which he, along with the other members of the secret society, were developing at the time of Acéphale. As is clear from the very title of *PJDM*, Bataille is concerned with the *practice* of joy before death and with the attempt to share this state, not its academic discussion. This sits within the wider context of the community of Acéphale's centring of silence and of meditation.[212] As opposed to the theoretical approach of its 'exoteric' twin, the Collège de Sociologie, the 'sacred conspiracy' of Acéphale foregrounded the *experience* of the sacred, synonymous with both individual and communal ecstasy brought about by meditation. To elaborate on this meditation: Bataille referred to the concept of *joie devant la mort* as a 'formula for mystical meditation [that] relates to a joy felt when facing the certainty of death and to the foundation of a religious existence that is quite distinct from Christianity'.[213] Bataille's 'formula,' though it bears some resemblance to the Gnostic Christian methods of which he knew, does indeed depart radically from traditional Christian meditation and shows signs of influence by Buddhist traditions. Firstly, as Griswold states, 'the focus of meditation is on the law of God, involving the mind. The purpose of meditation is "that you may observe to do" everything that is written in the law'.[214] Meanwhile, though Buddhist meditation practices share what may be called the 'purpose' of the cessation of suffering (*nirvāna*), practitioners should not approach meditation as a means to an end. To do so would be to attach oneself to one's

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[211] Peter Conner, 'Mysticism and Morality in Georges Bataille', *Assemblage*, 20 (1993), 30–31, p. 30.
[212] Camille Morando, 'Le corps sans limites ou l'acéphalité : Le personnage d'Acéphale, secret et équivoque, dans les œuvres des artistes autour du collège de sociologie', *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne*, 31 (2006), 81–89., p. 81.
[213] Georges Bataille, 'To Saint-Paul', in *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology* (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 455.
[214] Scott Griswold, 'Comparison of Biblical and Buddhist Meditation with Reflections on Mission', *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 10.1 (2014), 12–134, p. 121. Citing Joshua 1:8.

own *idea* of *nirvāna,* thus excluding the possibility of accessing it as it truly is. From Griswold's definition, it may also be said that Christian meditation focuses upon bringing the practitioner into accordance with God's law: with the world *as it should be*. Meanwhile, Buddhist meditation practice brings about in *nirvāna* an apprehension of the world *as it is*. In the case of Zen, Bodhidharma is famously reported to have said (this is notably recorded in a work read by Masson) that 'Zen means 'for a man to behold his fundamental nature'".[215] For Bataille, a significant part of the world *as it is* and of our 'fundamental nature' is the fact of our death: the fact from which, as he writes in *EI*, we distract ourselves by means of the 'narcotics'[216] of work and project but that his *mystique de la joie devant la mort* embraces in what he would deem a sovereign act. When he writes in *LC* that 'le mystique devant Dieu avait l'attitude d'un *sujet* [mais] qui met l'être devant lui-même a l'attitude d'un *souverain*'[217] he is setting the sovereign ability of the *mystique de la joie devant la mort* to look being (including death) full in the face in opposition to the Christian who looks only at God and therefore remains a mere subject. In other words, he is setting his *as it is* against the Christian *as it should be.*

The 'narcotics' of work and project mentioned above were part of what Bataille would call the realm of the profane. His interest in the sacred and the emergence thereof from the profane was, as indicated above pursued in the theoretical sense through the 'public face' of the Collège de Sociologie, which adopted the Durkheimian distinction of sacred from profane[218] and took an ethnographic approach to this sacred and its inter-relations with sacrifice and community. Meanwhile, the rituals and meditation practices of Acéphale were concerned with bringing about the eruption sacred from profane through literal sacrifice (most famously a discussed, though not performed, human version). This was intended bring the community together in identification with each other and with that which (or whom) is sacrificed.[219] In the same source of Masson's cited above, a famous dialogue between the Emperor of China and Bodhidharma is reproduced:

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[215] Arthur Waley, *Zen Buddhism, and Its Relation to Art* (London: Luzac & Company, 1922) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43273/43273-h/43273-h.htm> [accessed 13 November 2019].
[216] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 10.
[217] *Ibid*., p. 278.
[218] Roger Caillois, 'Festival', in *The College of Sociology: 1937 - 39*, ed. by Denis Hollier (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 279 – 303, p. 282.
[219] See *Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion*, ed. by Jeremy Biles and Kent Brintnall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Shannon Winnubst, 'Sacrifice as Ethics: The Strange Religiosity of Neoliberalism', in *Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 133 ; Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

Emperor: You will be interested to hear that I have built many monasteries, distributed scriptures, given alms, and upheld the Faith. Have I not indeed acquired merit?

Bodhidharma: None at all.

Emperor: In what then does true merit consist?

Bodhidharma: In the obliteration of Matter through Absolute Knowledge, not by external acts

Emperor: Which is the Divine and Primal Aspect of Reality?

Bodhidharma: Reality has no aspect that is divine[220]

This exchange chimes with Bataille's interest in sacred and profane: building monasteries and distributing alms with the aim of building merit exist in the world of what Bataille might call the profane; the world of useful activity and of project, and which Bodhidharma here calls 'reality'. Further influence of the sacred and the profane emerges in Bataille's remarks on Tibetan Buddhism. It is known that Bataille often worked on several projects simultaneously and that the order of publication does not reflect the order in which his ideas were being developed, a pertinent case being his development of *LPM* at the same time as *PJDM*. By the time it was released in 1949, *LPM* included a section entitled *La Société désarmée,* a revised version of *Le paradoxe du Tibet* published in *Critique* in 1947.[221] Part book review of Charles Bell's biography of the 13th Dalai Lama, part theory of Tibetan monasticism as a mode of expenditure tailored to a 'closed' country, *La Société désarmée* clearly perpetuates Bataille's 'westernised' (in Dawson's terms) understanding of the country and its mythology. While demonstrating some knowledge of Tibetan history, the role of monks in Tibetan society, and the British influence in Tibet – including the fact that they could not bear having a place that was closed to trade and that this was the motivation behind their military action in the country – Bataille expresses the romanticized vision of Tibet as an 'enclave de civilisation paisible[222] that was morally permissive but remained 'fermé aux Blancs'[223] and tantalizingly inaccessible. The piece also reveals more of the influence Tibetan practices had on Bataille's own when he refers to Tibetan doctrinal debates and meditation practices as having had the effect of 'putting to

[220] Arthur Waley, *Zen Buddhism, and Its Relation to Art* (London: Luzac & Company, 1922) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43273/43273-h/43273-h.htm> [accessed 13 November 2019].
[221] Georges Bataille, 'Le paradoxe du Tibet', *Critique*, 12 (1947), 427–38.
[222] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI, p. 93.
[223] Ibid., p. 95.

sleep' the thirteenth Dalai Lama's awareness of political necessities.[224] While 'political necessities' may seem to belong firmly in the realm of the profane, chiming with the 'narcotics' of work and project discussed above, Bataille's 'putting to sleep' may also be read in a similar way to Nietzsche's 'passive nihilism'. For Bataille, the Dalai Lama's training had prepared him only to sit passively, shut off from the world, as it was invaded first by the British and then by the Chinese. Much like Nietzsche's 'active nihilism,' Bataille's practice would go beyond the Tibetan 'putting to sleep' as well as the 'narcotic' of the profane. Where Bataille differs from Nietzsche, as discussed above, is his inversion of Nietzschean sovereignty discernible in the embrace of death by the *mystique de la joie devant la mort*. However, though he dismisses the meditation techniques of Tibetan Buddhism, his technique of *dramatisation* (the use of images, real and imagined to, as Bruno articulates it, 'ouvrir dans la psyché une brèche')[225] has strong parallels with the Tantric Tibetan visualisations of which he read in the work of David-Néel. The following finds particular echoes in *MH*, as shall be shown:

> *Le célébrant souffle dans le kangling (la trompette faite d'un fémur humain) conviant les démons à la fête qui se prépare. Il imagine une déité féminine qui personnifie sa propre volonté. Celle-ci s'élance hors de sa tête, par le sommet du crâne, tenant un sabre à la main. D'un coup rapide, elle lui tranche la tête*[226]

The 'breaching' of the psyche referred to by Bruno demanded violent means akin to those cited in the visualisation above: in the case of *MH* these included the world in flames, the screaming woman with her hair on fire,[227] and in its early drafts two female deities: one war-like; the other cannibal and self-cannibalising. Such deities bear resemblance to the female deity mentioned in David-Néel's text but also to other wrathful female deities in the wider Tantric tradition including Kali on whom Bataille wrote in *Documents*[228] and Chinnamasta (appearing as Chinnamunda in Tibet). Given the resemblance that the self-decapitating latter goddess bears to the figure of the Acéphale, this is worthy of further

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[224] 'une telle éducation, on peut attendre qu'elle endorme plutôt qu'elle n'éveille un sentiment des nécessités politiques : *Ibid*., p. 100.
[225] Jean Bruno, 'Les techniques d'illumination Chez Georges Bataille', *Critique*, 195–196 (1963), 706–21., p. 710.
[226] David-Néel, Alexandra, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Editions Plon, 1929), p. 196
[227] Georges Bataille, 'Méditation *héraclitéenne*', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 22–23.
[228] Georges Bataille, 'Kâli', *Documents*, 6 (1930), 368 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k32952s/f453.image> [accessed 15 September 2019]

investigation though sadly outside the scope of the present study.[229] By *EI* Bataille would present *dramatisation* as a means of self-loss, supporting Hussey's claim that *joie devant la mort* functions as a 'concentration upon the dissolution of fixed identity' entered into through his '*mantra*'.[230]

> *Si nous ne savions dramatiser, nous ne pourrions sortir de nous-mêmes. Nous vivrions isolés et tassés. Mais une sorte de rupture – dans l'angoisse – nous laisse à la limite des larmes : alors nous nous perdons, nous oublions nous-mêmes et communiquons avec un au-delà insaisissable* [231]

Bruno's observation that Bataille's *dramatisation* cannot be attained without silence[232] sits alongside Hegarty's observation that silence is the result of excess rather than a meditational tool: 'Bataille is going to drink, fuck, and stumble, braying into a pit that the self cannot withstand'.[233] As well as the limits of language, the role of silence itself in Bataille's work is widely discussed, and in the case of his meditation practice it may be argued that much like the practices of Buddhist traditions, silence is both outward and inward. In this sense, outward silence becomes a condition for *dramatisation*, and *dramatisation* a tool by which inward silence, in the form of the 'pit that the self cannot withstand' is attained. For Bataille, such an 'inward silence' occurs in his sovereign moment. To clarify this term: the concept of 'sovereignty' occurs in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bataille, carrying different meanings in each case. What unites their definitions, however, is the destruction of what may be read as a Brahmanic *ātman* leaving a minimal self in its wake. Schopenhauer's sovereignty is the negation of the Will resulting in annihilation: a state of 'bliss' in which 'only cognition remains' that he explicitly compares to *nirvāna*.[234] However, as discussed in Chapter One, what also necessarily remains is what Zöller calls a 'selfless self': an 'active *-less*' that must exist to carry out the negation of self.[235] By contrast, Nietzsche's sovereignty occurs through self-overcoming, a

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[229] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 454.
[230] Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar: The Mysticism of Georges Bataille* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2000), p. 68.
[231] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 23.
[232] Jean Bruno, 'Les techniques d'illumination Chez Georges Bataille', *Critique*, 195–196 (1963), 706–21., p. 708.
[233] *Ibid*., p. 97.
[234] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), II., p. 508.
[235] Günter Zöller, 'Schopenhauer on the Self', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 38.

term – as also discussed in Chapter One – which in spite of his describing the self as a set of competing drives, necessarily denotes a self to be overcome and a self (however minimal) to do the overcoming. More explicitly indicating a self akin to *ātman* is his description in *BGE* of 'an unchangeable "I am this" which he calls a 'granite of spiritual fate'.[236] As shown above, Bataille's sovereignty differs from that of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in that it is communitarian rather than individual: it relies upon *communication.* Bataille's sovereignty appears to come closer to Buddhist *anātman* than either Schopenhauer's negation of Will or Nietzsche's self-overcoming. However, as shall be discussed in more depth shortly, it retains like both a 'minimal self'.

It can be understood that the 'absolute knowledge' of which Bodhidharma speaks in the discourse cited earlier is the means by which the profane 'reality' of matter is obliterated. Similarly, for Bataille the emergence of the sacred occurs, as discussed, through the community's identification with each other during sacrifice. This, Bataille calls *communication,*[237] writing in *LC* of the revelation of 'truth' by means of the loss of self which occurs therein:

> *La vérité n'est pas là où des hommes se considèrent isolément : elle commence avec les conversations, les rires partagés, l'amitié, l'érotisme et n'a lieu qu'en passant de l'un à l'autre…le monde ne ressemble à aucun être séparé et se fermant, mais à ce qui passe de l'un à l'autre quand nous rions, quand nous nous aimons : l'imaginant, l'immensité m'est ouverte et je me perds en elle. Peu importe alors moi-même et, réciproquement, peu m'importe une présence étrangère à moi*[238]

These glimpses of the sacred; these sovereign moments, bear comparison to the flash of insight that is *satori*, often referred to through the metaphor of the lightning strike to illustrate its 'unexpected onrush…into the ordinary field of consciousness'.[239] The nature of the lightning strike is explained in Suzuki's section on the history of Zen in *Essays in Zen Buddhism.* His account privileges Hui-neng, the sixth of the Chinese patriarchs whose teachings were the basis of Ch'an's growth into a distinct school as opposed to an obscure

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[236] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (London: McMillan, 1911), XII, P. 181 <file://campus.gla.ac.uk/SSD_Home_Data_D/2373392M/Desktop/All%20the%20Nietzsche/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XII.pdf>.

[237] As it holds this specific meaning in relation to Bataille, I have used italics to distinguish its meaning from the common definition.

[238] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 282.

[239] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 242.

sect. 'Unlettered' and concerned with 'dynamic' meditation that differed from calm sitting, Suzuki writes that Hui-neng's 'simple-mindedness not spoiled by learning and philosophising could grasp the truth at first hand'.[240] A central part of Hui-neng's teaching is the coming of enlightenment as an abrupt flash of insight, as opposed to the gradual realisation taught by his contemporary Sheng-hui, and Suzuki maintains that 'all true mystics are followers of the "abrupt" school'.[241] The image of the lightning strike is pertinent to the practices of Acéphale: central to their 'new religion' was the invention of rituals, which would galvanise the formation of new bonds in the community, and among these were the initiation rites of new members which took place at a lightning-struck tree in the forest of Marly.[242] Given that the metaphor of the lightning strike is one to which Bataille turns to articulate his sovereign moment in *PJDM* and *SA*, it is possible to read the lightning-struck tree as a visual representation of this moment. In a footnote to the final line of the third meditation in *PJDM* ('Je me représente l'instant glacé de ma propre mort'),[243] Bataille describes the moment 'X' felt himself struck by lightning during a dream. 'X' was dazzled and transfigured, and attained the 'inespéré' before waking.[244] This lightning imagery describes a similar state, brought about by violent rupture, to *satori*, which evolves in *SN* when Bataille writes:

> *Un peu avant la guerre, je rêvai que j'étais foudroyé. Je ressentis un arrachement, une grande terreur. Au même instant j'étais émerveillé, transfiguré: je mourais*[245]

It is reasonable to assume therefore that Bataille himself is the 'X' described in *PJDM*.

In addition to the creation of a new religion, Acéphale considered themselves to be waging war against, as has been mentioned, 'tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui'.[246] The Greek philosopher Heraclitus, and Nietzsche's interpretation of his work, had a seismic effect on Bataille and the entire *Acéphale* group, who shared the view of both philosophers that war was simply part of the *as it is* of the universe. Bataille's *MH* with its opening line 'JE SUIS MON-MÊME LA GUERRE was born of this Heraclitan influence, which fellow Acéphale

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[240] *Ibid*., p. 196.
[241] *Ibid*., p. 200.
[242] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 24.
[243] Georges Bataille, 'La pratique de la joie devant la mort', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 11–23., p. 17.
[244] *Ibid.*
[245] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI., p. 75.
[246] Georges Bataille, 'La Conjuration sacrée', *Acéphale*, 1 (1936), 1–4, p. 1.

member Pierre Andler declared equal to that of Nietzsche himself.[247] Bataille read Heraclitus in the Autumn of 1927, and Morando remarks that from the moment of their schism with Surrealism in 1928, Masson and Bataille set about creating a universe 'proche d'Héraclite'.[248] Bataille writes in his analysis of Nietzsche's writings on Heraclitus in the second issue of *Acéphale* that: 'Parce qu'Héraclite a vu la loi dans le combat des éléments multiples, dans le feu le jeu innocent de l'univers, il devait apparaître à Nietzsche comme son double, comme un être dont il a été lui-même une ombre'.[249] Bataille's conception of Heraclitus as a 'double' of Nietzsche takes on especial significance in light of Abel's remarks on Bataille's *SN* as coming from a place of attempted communication; of 'being-Nietzsche-with-Nietzsche'.[250]

In the first meditation of *PJDM*, Bataille positions peace at the other side of war, saying 'Je m'abandonne à la paix jusqu'à l'anéantissement'.[251] In this metaphor, peace refers not to that from which war erupts but to that which arises upon cessation of war. This mirrors the way at which silence is arrived in his meditations through clamouring of discourse or image. Just as life has no meaning except in death, language has no meaning except in its dissolution. Bataille would go on to articulate this in *LC* as '[les] mots n'ont de sens, du moins, que dans la mesure où ils précèdent immédiatement le silence (le silence qui met fin)'.[252] It is important to highlight at this juncture the crucial differences between Christian and Buddhist meditation practices in regard to their use of language, and the similarities shared between Bataille's practice and those of Buddhist traditions. Christian commentators put great focus on the importance of language, both spoken and written, in the practice of meditation. Strong notes that the Hebrew term means 'verbal activity, including muttering, speaking or praying'[253] while McAlpine calls meditation 'the devotional practice of pondering the words of...scripture with a receptive heart'.[254] As opposed to this use of language in Christian meditation as a means by which

[247] Stuart Kendall, 'I Myself Am War: Bataille's Heraclitean Meditation', 2017 <https://www.academia.edu/34744534/I_Myself_Am_War_Batailles_Heraclitean_Meditation> [accessed 11 July 2019].
[248] Camille Morando, 'Le corps sans limites ou l'acéphalité : Le personnage d'Acéphale, secret et équivoque, dans les œuvres des artistes autour du collège de sociologie', *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne*, 31 (2006), 81–89, p. 83.
[249] Georges Bataille, 'Frédéric Nietzsche: HERACLITE (Texte inédit en français)', *Acéphale*, 2 (1937), 14–16.
[250] Lionel Abel, 'Georges Bataille and the Repetition of Nietzsche', in *On Bataille: Critical Essays* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 51–61, p. 51.
[251] Georges Bataille, 'La pratique de la joie devant la mort', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 11–23, p. 14.
[252] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 242.
[253] James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), p. 115.
[254] Campbell McAlpine, *Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2004), p. 30.

one brings oneself into alignment with God's law, all forms of meditation in the Buddhist tradition revolve around silence: both the silence in which one sits to meditate and the inner silence achieved by stilling the mind. Though the muttering, speaking or praying may seem to bear relation to Buddhist chanting or use of *mantra*, where language is used in this latter instance it is to bring about the dissolution of language into the second form of silence mentioned above. Bataille's meditations also revolve around such a dual silence: his letter to Isabelle Farner with instructions on how to recite an early version *of PJDM* appears to serve the function of *mantra*, giving as it does instructions on exactly how to recite the lines, specific pauses and all, with the aim of achieving the meditative state. [255] Bataille's interest in silence sits in the wider context of a man who, as Surya notes, felt that from a young age his 'affaire en ce monde était d'écrire, en particulier d'élaborer une philosophie paradoxale'.[256] Central to this paradox is, as Biles has noted, the contradiction of a scholar, philosopher and librarian who detested and sought to destroy intellectual structures and the form of thought and writing itself.[257] Bataille's sovereign moment is intimately linked to this lifelong struggle with the insufficiency of language and philosophy, a struggle he shared with both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, though the latter ultimately privileges the 'calm and dispassionate'[258] Kantian presentation. All schools of Buddhism also emphasise the insufficiency of language to articulate meaning, for which reason meditation practice is essential. A famous metaphor for this is of language as a finger which points to the moon: it is essential not to focus too much on the finger and thereby fail to see the moon:

> *[imagine] a man pointing a finger at the moon to show it to others who should follow the direction of the finger to look at the moon. If they look at the finger and mistake it for the moon, they lose (sight of) both the moon and the finger*[259]

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[255] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 451 – 453.
[256] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 28.
[257] Jeremy Biles, *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 166.
[258] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), P. 142.
[259] *Surangama Sutra*, trans. by K'uan Yu Upasaka Lu (Sri Lanka: Brighthill Buddhist Centre), p. 60 <http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/surangama.pdf> [accessed 13 September 2019].

The same metaphor returns in Suzuki's essay on the history of Zen[260] and in his translation of the *Lankavatara sūtra*:

> *As the ignorant grasp the finger-tip and not the moon, so those who cling to the letter, know not my truth*[261]

Bataille's agreement with this account of language as a 'finger pointing at the moon' is discernible in his own attitudes to language throughout his work and life as well as in his descriptions of meditation as discussed above. It is also discernible in his recording in *SN* a passage in which Suzuki describes a disciple becoming enlightened upon hearing the sound of a stone strike bamboo, and feeling grateful that the master he had asked to teach him had refused: his *satori* would never have arrived had he attempted to learn how to attain it through means of language and discourse.

The process of attaining Bataille's definition of sovereignty represents a further parallel with *satori* as described by Suzuki. As mentioned above, the latter writes that the process should be akin to 'a fiery baptism of the spirit', varying in intensity depending on how hard the practitioner has worked towards *satori*.[262] Elsewhere, he describes the state of 'extreme mental tension' experienced by a monk over a period of days and nights before reading a verse that stimulated *satori*.[263] Suzuki also recounts several instances of monks attaining *satori* through physical violence and pain: in one instance a master slams a gate into his student's leg, breaking the leg but affording the student 'insight into the life-principle from which the whole universe takes rise.[264] In another, a master kills a kitten before his students in order to stimulate the flash of insight.[265] It could be argued that Bataille makes a nod to Suzuki's 'fiery baptism' when he notes in *SN* that 'le thème de la nuit d'angoisse se retrouve sur quelque forme dans les méditations de l'Asie'.[266] However, there are pointers to an earlier engagement with the violence of *satori*. A moment of enlightenment experienced as violence is discernible in *PJDM*, in which *la joie devant la mort* is experienced as a 'violence intérieure',[267] an experience to be distinguished from the

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[260] 'to point at the moon a finger is needed, but woe to those who take the finger for the moon': D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 6 - 7.
[261] *Lankavatara Sutra*, trans. by D.T. Suzuki (Boulder, CO: Prajna Press, 1978), p.193.
[262] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 231.
[263] *Ibid*. p. 237.
[264] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 11
[265] *Ibid*., p. 292.
[266] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI, p. 53.
[267] Georges Bataille, 'La pratique de la joie devant la mort', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 11–23., p. 12.

Christian 'béatitude satisfaisante' which serves to provide an 'avant-gout de l'éternité',[268] Thus, Bataille sets up his own moment of 'enlightenment' in the form of sovereign joy before death, as a moment arrived at by violent means and distinct from Christian salvation. Here, the use of Buddhist ideas to counter the Christian may be discerned, which is situated in the wider context of European-constructed *Orients imaginaires* and the theory discussed in the previous chapter of parallel *Occidents imaginaires.* Rather than, as for Nietzsche, the struggle of several facets of the self for domination leading to self-overcoming and contingent embrace of the Eternal Return, Bataille's sovereignty relies upon the rupture of individual identity – of the self – through a chance encounter such as a lightning strike, or a broken leg.

By the time of *SN*, Bataille would write that 'le néant en jeu dans les états mystiques est tantôt le néant du sujet'. This, along with Bruno's statement that, for Bataille, 'toute notion d'être – Dieu aussi bien que la personnalité humaine – s'annihilait',[269] supports the argument for a Brahmanic self in Bataille. Bruno's argument that *PJDM*'s treatment of the flame brings Bataille close to Buddhist selflessness (that is *anātman*)[270] betrays once again such a Brahmanic understanding of the self not only in Bataille but in his critics, thus displaying the persistence of this long-standing European conflation. In the foundational texts of the Pāli canon the flame is a key metaphor for selflessness, while Bataille's flame denotes annihilation. This suggests that, rather than Bruno's understanding, Bataille's flame demonstrates the fact that his sovereignty – like the negated Will and Nietzschean self-overcoming – retains a minimal self. Turning first to the treatment of the flame in Buddhist traditions, in the Milindapañha (a dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Menander (here called Milinda) and the monk Nāgasena) finds the latter answering Milinda's question of whether we are the same person when born as we are when we die with the observation that the flame lit at night is not the same flame that remains in the morning:

> *one element perishes, another arises…therefore neither as the same nor as a different person do you arrive at your latest aggregation of consciousness*[271]

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[268] *Ibid.*
[269] Jean Bruno, 'Les techniques d'illumination chez Georges Bataille', *Critique*, 195–196 (1963), 706–21, p. 717.
[270] *Ibid.*
[271] Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (New York, NY: Cosimo, 2005)., p. 149. Citing Milindapañya, no. 40.

The metaphor of the flame also arises in the historical Buddha's dialogue with Vaccha in the Majjhima-Nikaya. The Buddha posits that one would be aware of the fact a fire had started and was dependent upon its fuel, but that it is not possible to articulate where it goes when extinguished. The same is true of *nirvāna*: the forms and the consciousness by which we deem someone to exist have ceased and the person attaining *nirvāna* has been released from such attachments. We cannot say they have been annihilated, but we also cannot say that they have been reborn.[272] Turning to Bataille's use of the flame as a metaphor for self-annihilation: in an earlier draft of *MH*, Bataille introduces the image of fire as an insatiable hunger, saying that it 'devours in order to consume itself and to give of itself without measure'.[273] A key part of the meditation is to 'take on the woeful hunger for being and enduring'[274] that prevents the 'free gift of self' so that ultimately the self can be consumed and given of as freely as the flame *par excellence* and a recurring image in Bataille from his earliest writings on, the sun.[275] In the published version of *MH*, this extended meditation on the flame is gone, but the *représentation* of the earth, flung into space like a screaming woman with her hair on fire, remains as one of several images of sacrifice, (self)-consumption and war.[276] By *SN*, he would use the extinction of the flame as a metaphor for the self-destruction inherent to sovereignty:

> *…la flamme*
> *brillante et légère*
> *se consumant en elle-même*
> *s'annihilant*
> *et de cette façon révélant le vide* [277]

As suggested earlier in this chapter, Bataille's sovereignty in its embrace of death as part of life; as part of the *as it is*, may be seen to represent an inversion of Nietzsche's sovereign embrace of the Eternal Return. While the latter has been compared in Chapter One to *samsara*,[278] Bataillean sovereignty appears at first to

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[272] *Ibid*., p. 127. Citing the Majjhima-Nikaya, Sutta 72.
[273] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 454.
[274] *Ibid.*
[275] *Ibid.*
[276] Georges Bataille, 'Méditation Héraclitéenne', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 22–23, p. 22.
[277] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), VI, p. 80.
[278] Bret W. Davis, 'Zen after Zarathustra: The Problem of the Will in the Confrontation between Nietzsche and Buddhism', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 28 (2004), 89–138, p. 93.

come closer to the moment of *satori.* This is not a straightforward equivalence, however, as shall now be discussed. In his attitude to war, Bataille seems close to Nietzsche's self-overcoming, writing in *PJDM*: 'le combat est la même chose que la vie. La valeur d'un homme dépend de sa force agressive'.[279] Here, *accomplir* is best translated as 'fulfilment', and the fulfilment of human possibility which can only occur through combat may seem almost a direct nod to Nietzschean self-overcoming. However, Bataille's account most explicitly diverges from that of Nietzsche as regards the concept of *joie devant la mort*, of which he writes:

> *Un homme «vivant» se représente la mort comme ce qui accomplit la vie : il ne la regarde pas comme un malheur. Par contre, un homme qui n'a pas la force de donner à sa mort une valeur tonique est quelque chose de «mort»*[280]

The idea of one who hides from death being already dead, illustrates Bataille's inversion of Nietzschean sovereignty in the embrace of death: a vital person; a 'living' person, embraces not just life in the Eternal Return, but is *fulfilled* by death. In this sense, Bataille may be seen to avoid the *samsāra* of Nietzsche's Eternal Return. Bataille's fulfilment in the joyful embrace of death may also be seen to have echoes of Schopenhauer's end of suffering in Will-negation, but the element binding all three together is once again the existence of a self akin to *ātman*: in Nietzsche the self which overcomes and is overcome in order to access the Eternal Return; in Bataille and Schopenhauer the self which is destroyed at the moment of death. Further insight into the parallels between the Bataillean self and *ātman* may be found in an earlier version of *MH*, in which Bataille writes firstly of a self that is annihilated by *joie devant la mort* and secondly of his embodiment thereof: this bears comparison to the dissolving of *ātman* into *brahman* following the annihilation of the former. Bataille describes the universe as possessed of 'a cruel hunger that makes violent demands for my death: it demands it for the sake of its boundless appetite, and for its dazzling joy at existing; everywhere it demands that everything that has been should be annihilated incessantly'.[281] In this earlier version he begins the meditation as he does two of the 'descriptions' in

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[279] Georges Bataille, 'La menace de la guerre', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 9–10, p. 9.
[280] *Ibid.*
[281] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 455.

Acéphale by stating 'I AM JOY IN THE FACE OF DEATH'[282] alongside the statement in the final version of *MH*: 'JE SUIS MOI-MÊME LA GUERRE'.[283] As discussed above, Nietzsche was influenced by Heraclitus in his views on war, both holding that war is one of the realities of the world *as it is*:[284] Bataille, closely influenced by both, now *embodies* both war and death as part of the *as is*. He returns to this embodiment of war as part of a meditation practice in *LC*, writing: 'assis au bord d'un lit, en face de la fenêtre et de la nuit, je me suis exercé, acharné de devenir moi-même *un combat*'.[285] In this, he may be seen to indicate that in the final analysis the silence; the war; the sacrifice by which he is annihilated, he then becomes. In the sense that (as he writes in the earlier version of *MH*) 'the inexorable hunger…becomes ME',[286] and (in the published version) '[la] mort n'est que consommation *éclatante* de tout ce qui était, joie d'exister de tout ce qui vient au monde',[287] he has himself become the universe's joy at existing, an existence that inevitably includes death. It is arguable that here lies the essence of the *PJDM*: an explicit *practice* to embody the universe in its totality; that is to say the universe *as it is*, in the form of an inverted Nietzschean sovereignty that includes death as the fulfilment of *tout ce qui était.* The influence of Tibetan Buddhism as a practice which 'put[s one] to sleep' is discernible in this inverted sovereignty: like Nietzsche's 'active nihilism' Bataille situates his practice as the solution to this sleeping draught in order to allow for the sacred to break through the profane. The influence of *satori* is also discernible in regard to this breakthrough, in that Bodhidharma's 'reality', void of 'aspect that is divine' bears resemblance to the profane. Meanwhile, the 'divine' of 'beholding our fundamental nature' bears a parallel resemblance to the sacred. Finally, Bataille's *opération souveraine* may be seen to resemble the process of achieving *satori* through painful means akin to *angoisse*, such as the 'shock' techniques compared to a lightning strike, the killing of a kitten or the crush of a leg in the gate.

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[282] Georges Bataille, 'La pratique de la joie devant la mort', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 11–23., p. 15 ; p. 17.
[283] Georges Bataille, 'Méditation héraclitéenne', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 22–23, p. 22.
[284] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Oscar Levy (New York: McMillan, 1911), XVII, P. 72 - 73 <https://holybooks-lichtenbergpress.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/The-complete-works-of-Friedrich-Nietzsche-VOL-XVII.pdf> [accessed 5 December 2019].
[285] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), V., p. 250
[286] Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy: The Internal Papers of the Secret Society of Acéphale and Lectures to the College of Sociology*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2018), p. 454.
[287] Georges Bataille, 'Méditation héraclitéenne', *Acéphale*, 5 (1939), 22–23, p. 23.

Conclusion

This study has traced the transmission and evolution of imagined Buddhisms, situated within wider *Orients imaginaires,* from the earliest European interactions with the traditions, through Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to the French interwar avant-garde and to Bataille in particular. It has been argued that such imagined Buddhisms and Orients were born of what Dawson deems the 'westernisation of the East' rather than an understanding of Buddhist traditions having had an 'easternising' effect on the perspectives and output of the thinkers discussed herein. A central example with which the study has been concerned is that of the confusion of Brahmanic *ātman* and Buddhist *anātman* which was crucial to European misunderstanding of *nirvāna* as self-annihilation and of Buddhism itself as what Droit calls a *culte du néant.* The erroneous conflation of *ātman* and *anātman,* ironic given that the break between Brahmanism and Buddhism owes much to this central difference, has been shown to have existed since the early Christian missionaries conceived of a 'pan-Asian' religion fusing the two traditions. It persisted through Voltaire's *doctrina orientalis* to the early 1800s, up until the emergence of the academic field of 'Buddhist Studies'. Nevertheless, the close-knit group of European scholars involved in that field retained the conflation of *ātman* and *anātman* and were instrumental in refracting it, along with the perception of *nirvāna* as self-annihilation and by extension Buddhism as a *culte du néant*, into the work of Schopenhauer. The latter's assessment of Buddhism was then unquestioningly accepted by Nietzsche, whose Will to Power depends, as do Schopenhauer's Will to Life and notion of character, upon a self akin to *ātman.* The combined factors of an *ātman*-like self and *nirvāna* as self-annihilation emerge in multiple references to annihilation and self-annihilation in *PJDM,* and in Bataille's treatment of the flame in *SN.* The latter turns a popular Buddhist metaphor for selflessness on its head, making of the flame a metaphor for self-annihilation.

A further form of the 'westernisation of the East' discussed in this study has been the galvanising and weaponising of Buddhist traditions in support of European perspectives and projects. For Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bataille this process involved the employment of an imagined Buddhism as either equivalent or antagonist to their own ideas. This equivalent/antagonist relationship stretches back once again to some of the earliest European engagements with Buddhist traditions, notably Christian missionaries of the Middle Ages who, seeking to establish the veracity of Biblical chronology, held

Buddhist texts (though clearly heretical) to be forms of the Bible.[288] Both Catholics and Protestants, upon coming into contact with Tibetan Buddhism and discovering such features as the monastic system, use of incense and prayer beads, declared it to be a lost (if degenerate) form of Roman Catholicism. This the Catholics used to declare their superiority, and the Protestants to defame the Catholics.[289] In later years, as Europe began to question Christian dogma, thinkers such as Voltaire began to use Buddhist traditions in support of their own anti-Christianity. approach is shared by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bataille, all of whom employ the equivalent/antagonist framework to support their own philosophies. For Schopenhauer, in spite of the 'close agreement' between his own philosophy and Buddhism, it is in the final analysis merely an inferior means of fulfilling humanity's need for metaphysics than the 'calm and dispassionate'[290] language of Kantian philosophy. For Nietzsche, the 'passive nihilism' of Buddhism has more to be admired than the slave morality of Christianity, but its perceived willingness to accept powerlessness makes it inferior to his own 'active nihilism'. Bataille's vehement anti-Christianity does not make him averse to religion in and of itself, a fact made abundantly clear in Acéphale's self-declaration as FAROUCHEMENT RELIGIEUX and its aim to create a new religion.

In an important development since the scholarship and philosophy of Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's era, Bataille's equivalent/antagonist relationship to Buddhism arose in a context not just of anti-Christianity, but of a rejection of all that was considered 'Occidental'. Acéphale's war on 'tout ce qui est reconnu aujourd'hui' was part of a wider rejection of the values seen to have led to the First World War and from which a second World War threatened to emerge. This meant that capitalism, modernism and colonialism all came under fire as well as Christianity from groups across avant-garde, of whom the Surrealists, the dissident surrealist Rue Blomet group and the members of *Le Grand jeu* were discussed in Chapter Two. These groups were unequivocal in their call for the violent overthrow of an 'Occident' that – as a repository of everything considered undesirable – was arguably as constructed as the 'Orient' called upon to do the overthrowing. Such an atmosphere informed what this study has referred to as a conscious anti-colonialism and simultaneous, unconscious colonialism among the members of the groups discussed. It was

[288] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 22 – 29.
[289] *Ibid.*
[290] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), P. 142.

certainly the case that far more primary texts and more reliable Buddhist scholarship was available, with René Daumal, an accomplished Sanskritist, student of Buddhism and translator of Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, a key figure in this development. A number of exhibitions of Buddhist art had also come to Paris, bringing such art and artefacts to the attention of the avant garde, while contemporary periodicals reflect an interest in Japanese art and culture and in the geographical and spiritual landscape of Tibet.[291] Perhaps most significantly, there was also a growing awareness of the difficulty of engaging with primary sources from a 'Western' perspective, strikingly demonstrated in the work of Jacques Masui.[292] Such evidence of what this study has called a 'proto-Orientalism' (in Saïd's sense of the term), though undoubtedly progressive for its era, nevertheless entailed an unconscious colonialism. This is evidenced by a continued 'westernisation of the East' on the part of an avant-garde which galvanised Buddhist cultures and traditions in support of their own projects. In the case of Tibet, the 'mysteriousness' of the intertwined country and its Buddhist traditions, invoked by Artaud as a saviour for Europe, perpetuated long-standing use of the country as a catch-all 'other'. Tibet in the avant-garde became, as it remains today, an ideal canvas for the projection of anti-capitalism, anti-modernism and conscious anti-colonialism. The mystery and spiritual superiority of this mythologised Tibet is discernible in Bataille's reasoning for wanting to travel there on a '«voyage» comme ascétique' through harsh and inaccessible terrain.[293] It is also, however, infused with a reassertion of white superiority. This occurs in Alexandra David-Néel's perpetuation of a lasting colonial trope, that of her description of Tibetan people (including her own adopted son, a fellow Lama) as nothing more than 'grands enfants'[294] and is strikingly present in the Theosophists' 'Great White Brotherhood' and their claim to the superiority of the 'white conquerors'.[295] Japan and Japanese Zen have arguably been the subjects of European mythologization in much the same way as Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. This study has shown the ways in which the construction of this mythology intersected with that of Tibet and with Japanese colonial motivations. Suzuki's presentation of Zen was evidently crucial to the avant-garde and to Bataille specifically as one of their only reference points for the history, practice and concepts of that tradition. It is significant therefore, that in spite of the praise accorded to Suzuki for 'bringing Zen to

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[291] Jacqueline Baishanski, 'Entre les deux guerres: "La Nouvelle Revue Française"', *The French Review*, 77.3 (2004), 515 – 23, p. 517.
[292] See Jacques Masui, 'Note sur le Yoga et la mystique', *Hermès*, 1 (1933), 51–67 ; Jacques Masui, Jean Herbert, Shankaracharya et.al., *Message actuel de l'Inde* (*Les Cahiers du Sud*, 1941).
[293] Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 58.
[294] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1927), p. 59.
[295] Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 54.

the West', the 'Zen' he brought has been roundly criticised on all three counts, not least for its problematic equations of Christian and Zen concepts. Suzuki may be similarly criticised for his contribution to European understandings of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism: by his praise of Theosophy and establishment of a branch of that movement in Kyoto, Suzuki was instrumental in legitimising the Theosophists' presentation of Buddhism in general and the mythology they built around Tibet in particular. Furthermore, as highlighted in Chapter Two, Suzuki's description of Zen as the essence of all religions served concurrently as an affirmation of Japanese universality and as an assertion of Japanese uniqueness and superiority. Occurring at the time of the Meiji restoration's embrace of European military and governmental systems, and concurrent reaffirmation of traditional Japanese culture associated with rising nationalism, this situates Suzuki's presentation of Zen within a wider relationship of European to Japanese imperialism.

It was argued in Chapter Three that the lineage described above served to transmit the elements of Japanese Zen and Tibetan Buddhism employed by Bataille in *PJDM* and weaponised as part of Acéphale's 'war' on the capitalist, modernist and Christian worldview. The two traditions were argued to have had particular influence on Bataille's interactions with the sacred and the profane, and on what in *MM* he was to call the *opération souveraine.* In the case of his Tibetan influences, these were shown to be two-fold and to exist within the familiar framework of the equivalent/antagonist relationship serving ultimately to support Bataille's own projects. Firstly, the descriptions of Tibetan Tantric meditations he read in the work of Alexandra David-Néel have been suggested as potential unreferenced inspiration for the violent *dramatisations* of *MH*, and in particular the figure of a violent female deity which is erased from the final published version. Bataille was, however, to dismiss Tibetan meditation techniques as means of 'put[ting one] to sleep' in the face of pressing political necessity. Like Nietzsche's 'active nihilism' as the solution to 'passive nihilism', Bataille's *PJDM* may be seen to suggest a solution to the Tibetan approach, which allows the breakthrough of the sacred. The breakthrough of sacred from profane and the process by which this is achieved were also shown in Chapter Three to bear much relation to *satori*, of which this study has suggested Bataille knew long before his specific remarks thereupon in *SN* (probably through André Masson and, indirectly, René Daumal). Suzuki describes the process of achieving *satori* as one of 'extreme mental tension'[296] and a 'fiery baptism of the spirit',[297] a progression which this

[296] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 237.
[297] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Company, 1927), p. 231.

study has argued, parallels the *angoisse* arising from 'sovereign behaviours' necessary to the *opération souveraine*. Furthermore, the 'fiery baptism' itself is also described by Suzuki as a sudden flash of insight akin to lightning: a metaphor for the emergence of the sacred which also occurs in the texts of *PJDM* and *SN* as well as being embodied in the lightning-struck tree at which the members of Acéphale met. In a source known to have been read by Masson, *satori* is said to arise from what Bodhidharma calls a 'reality' that is necessarily separate from the 'divine' and affords insight into our 'fundamental nature'. For Bataille in *PJDM*, our 'fundamental nature' is one of beings that will die and in the view of this study, insight into this fact along with its joyful embrace – *la joie devant la mort* – constitutes the sovereign act in an inversion of Nietzsche's sovereign embrace of the Eternal Return. Ultimately, this study has argued that *PJDM* amounts to the *practice* of inverted Nietzschean sovereignty, influenced by what has been called the 'silent transmission' of Tibetan and Japanese Zen Buddhist concepts and practices.

As the first of its kind to focus on the influence of Buddhist traditions in Bataille's work, this study has raised at least as many questions as it set out to address, generating several potential avenues of further study. Foremost among these is the interest Bataille and his peers share in Tantra, which was not limited to the Tantric practices of Tibet such as the meditation referenced by David-Néel. Bataille was at one point planning a work on Tantra, and it would be valuable to unpick to what exactly this 'Tantra' amounted and how it influenced his meditation practice and his work more broadly. The figure of the Tantric wrathful deity is of particular interest, emerging in Bataille's short piece on Kali[298] and in an early draft of *MH*. The potential debt owed by the figure of the Acéphale to (self-) decapitating wrathful deities upon which this study briefly touched, is certainly worthy of particular attention.

There have also arisen in the course of this study two prisms in the transmission of Buddhist concepts and practices to Bataille that merit further investigation. Firstly, the role of French Idealism was argued in Chapters One and Two to have been instrumental in creating a bridge from 19th-century German philosophy to Japan. To this, the work of Bergson seems to have been crucial with Kuki Shūzō, one of the first wave of Japanese students to study in Paris during the 1920s, paralleling Bergson's philosophy with Zen

[298] Georges Bataille, 'Kâli', *Documents*, 6 (1930), 368 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k32952s/f453.image> [accessed 15 September 2019]

practice as an 'effort pour saisir l'absolu par l'intuition'.[299] It was also suggested in Chapter Two that Bergson was another of Bataille's 'silent' influences with Fourny going so far as to call the *opération souveraine* 'un bergsonisme qui n'ose pas dire son nom'.[300] In this sense, the work of Bergson appears to bring about a triangulation of *satori*, sovereignty and *acte libre* when the latter is, as it has been in this study, compared with Bataille's sovereignty in its breakthrough of the 'moi profond' from the 'moi modeste'. The second prism worthy of further study is the relationship between Suzuki's presentation of Zen and European and Japanese imperial motives. Those of Europe are employed in Okakura's Pan-Asianism as an antagonist for Asia as a continent to unite against, with Buddhism a key component of this unifying force. This functions much like the way in which the early Christian missions and elements of Schopenhauer's, Nietzsche's and Bataille's work employ Buddhism as an antagonist to their own proposals. Meanwhile, the *shin bukkyo* of which Suzuki's presentation of Zen was part, offered up to both a reformed Japanese government favouring modernity, and a European audience with a keen interest in 'Eastern' spirituality, a form of Buddhism aligned with what were considered Western ideals and which borrowed European and Christian concepts in its questionable communication of Zen. Scharf's observation that Suzuki's presentation of Zen as the kernel of all religions – universally applicable but distinctly Japanese[301] – also mirrors colonial European perceptions of their 'civilisation' and of the Christian religion as universally applicable yet distinctly European. The details of this Euro-Japanese interaction and its reverberation not only into the French interwar avant-garde but to present-day European understandings of Zen, would make for greater understanding of the role of Buddhism as a 'weapon' employed concurrently by European nationalists, European dissidents, and the forces of Japanese imperialism.

[299] Simon Ebersholt, 'Le Japon et La Philosophie Française Du XIXe Au Milieu Du XXe Siècles', *Revue Philosophique de La France et de l'Etranger*, 202.3 (2012), 371–83, p. 380.
[300] Jean-François Fourny, 'Bataille et Bergson', *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de La France*, 91 (1991), 704–17, p. 709.
[301] Robert H. Scharf, 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', *History of Religions*, 33.1 (1993), 1–43, p. 29.

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