Title: The Death of Language: Listening to the Echoes (of Georges Bataille) in *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II—The Sith Lords*

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ABSTRACT

This article is, firstly, an analysis of Kreia, a character from the *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II—The Sith Lords* video game, a character whose role in the game is pivotal: the conversations the player has with Kreia serve as the main narrative basis for the entire game experience. Secondly, on the basis of a collection of quotations from these conversations, this article juxtaposes Kreia and Georges Bataille. An intriguing variant of the blind seer trope is revealed in Kreia through studying the game's poetics, in which a focus on the sense of hearing is discerned. Kreia and Bataille are compared in their understandings of the universe, and a similarity between their ulterior motives is discovered: both of them struggled against something which was considered to be an inextricable element of their respective universes.

Keywords: Georges Bataille, Kreia, language, *Star Wars*, *Knights of the Old Republic*.

"Can what is playing you make it to level 2?"
(Land 456)

The galaxy whose stars shine far away, and the events of which happened a long, long time ago, has an even more ancient past buried in its own cosmic deep time. The narrative of the classic *Star Wars* trilogy and both its prequels and sequels (the time of the Republic, of the Empire, and of the First Order) is, fabula-wise, predated by the history of the Old Republic, at the time of which the very conflict on which the *Star Wars* universe is founded, the battle between the Jedi and the Sith, had already been going on for thousands of years.

Before we move onwards—or, rather, backwards—into foreign space-times, we must establish the basic premises by which this article will be governed. It shall be devoted, firstly, to a particular instalment of the franchise in question, namely the video game produced by Obsidian Entertainment, released by LucasArts in 2005 (PC version), and entitled *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II—The Sith Lords*; secondly, it will be devoted to an even more particular character—Kreia, whose importance in the game experience is rivalled only by the (usually) necessary relevance of the player-controlled main character. From the beginning of the game, Kreia assumes the role of a mentor: she becomes the main character's teacher, guiding them through the complexities of the galaxy, attempting to instil in them an independence of conviction and belief from the strict scriptures (strictures of thought, as it were) of the Jedi and Sith Codes, and helping them gain both an understanding and a connection to the Force (explanations are inbound). The purpose of this text is twofold: it is to be a collection, a kind of exposition, of some of Kreia's in-game teachings, and it is to be a meeting place for Kreia and the thought of the French thinker Georges Bataille. In other words, the aim here is a simple juxtaposition of ways of thinking, a survey of the possible consonances vibrating between the philosophy bestowed upon Kreia by the game's makers and the meditations of Bataille.

The first, preliminary task is to draw an outline of the context. There is, of course, an economic factor at work in the intra-franchise, inter-media movement of elements and themes within the copyrighted bounds of the *Star Wars* universe, with all the corporate machinery engineered to capitalize on consumerist nostalgia. Fortunately, many more factors are also at play in, firstly, the process of a story changing its medium, and, secondly, a situation in which a fictional timeline has its details gradually filled in by successive additions: prior to a certain corporation's buyout of the franchise, the canonical timeline was composed of numerous creations made by a multitude of authors. *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*

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(produced by BioWare, released by LucasArts in 2003) was the first video game positioned on that timeline, and it was followed by *Knights of the Old Republic II—The Sith Lords* (KOTOR II in short), the game we will focus on here.

To reiterate: we will not be discussing an adaptation, but rather an insertion, and a multimedia one at that—a "video game" is a complex, hybrid entity, a "ludo-narrative" work (Aarseth, "A Narrative Theory of Games" 133). Of course, given that the game positions its narrative within a universe already predefined by a set of rules, some measure of adaptation had to take place; the shift from portraying a mystical energy in a movie to basing a mechanics of gameplay upon it would perhaps merit a separate study. Nonetheless, as far as the technicalities of KOTOR II are concerned, let us simply say that it is what Espen Aarseth calls[1] a "'creamy middle' quest game" (the "creamy middle" referring to being able to make choices pertaining to both "kernels" and "satellites" of narrative structure) (Aarseth, "A Narrative Theory of Games" 131), one in which the quests are nested, concurrent, and place- and objective-oriented, and the spatial structure of which can be characterized as a "semi-open," "star-shaped hub" (Aarseth, "Introduction to Quest Theory"); later on we will return to the significance of this shape and its influence on interpreting the game experience.

A ludo-narrative work is a (sometimes) clever contraption that allows the player to interact with the story being told. Even if the player's part is to merely survive and therefore allow the story to continue being told, the player experiences that story in a specifically active way. But a ludo-narrative piece may also convey a philosophical conundrum, thus permitting the player to experience such a puzzle in the specifically active way characteristic of ludo-narrative works (cf. Kampis on *The Talos Principle*): we are here in line with the "sensemaking" "perspective of participation," one which "enables us to analyze a videogame as a context that enhances a certain kind of experiences related to activities involving the interpretation of a role, fantasy, self-expression, etc." (Pereira and Roque 9–10). Our reading of KOTOR II is the result of undergoing/-taking such an exercise in understanding.

Let us now move on to the main course. It seems only reasonable to carry on with our explanations by the use of quotations from Kreia's in-game dialogue (which will later be compared with Bataille's writings). All of these excerpts will be transcribed verbatim here from the version of

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[1]   Though Aarseth writes about the first part of the series, the elements he analyzes have not undergone any changes that would undermine the adequacy of his analysis in reference to KOTOR II.

the game described in detail in the section listing cited works (quotations conjured from other sources will be marked as such). It goes without saying that there will be spoilers ahead.

In the world of *Star Wars*, the universe and everything that exists is intrinsically permeated with what is known as the Force, and what Kreia describes in the following way:

> It is like a cloud, a mist that drifts from living creature to creature, set in motion by currents and eddies. It is the eye of the storm, the passions of all living things turned into energy, into a chorus. It is the rising swell at the end of life, the promise of new territories and new blood, the call of new mysteries in the dark.

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The Force seems to be a life-force, a fabric of energy woven into the matter of which all things are made, a rhizome of pangalactic proportions, the pulsations of which can be heard by those attuned to it—Force sensitives. It is not merely a stylistic choice to say that those sensitives can *hear* the Force: the sense most commonly used throughout the game to express experiences of the Force is precisely the sense of hearing. One's lack of connection with the Force is presented through the metaphorical prism of deafness, of aural (both in the sense of aura and of pertaining to the ear) insulation: it is "like being unable to listen, being put into a deep sleep, unable to awaken to the galaxy around you."

The player begins the game as a person devoid of the Force, cut off from it, an ex-Jedi exiled from the Jedi Order (an organization of Force users whose alignment lay on the Light Side of the Force, and whose conduct was regulated by the Jedi Code: "There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is the Force") for going to war and defending the Republic against a foreign threat in spite of the fact that the Order—and its ruling body, the Jedi Council—vehemently opposed joining the armed conflict. Upon finding the player's character (from now on to be referred to as the Exile), who has spent years travelling across the peripheral regions of the Republic, Kreia, a Force user herself, takes the Exile under her tutoring wing. This results in the formation of a bond between Kreia and the Exile, a master-apprentice type of bond which allows the Exile to reach the Force again. In the words of Kreia herself: "You can hear the Force through me."

As a character, Kreia is a variant of the blind seer archetype. The likes of Tiresias ("Thou knowest, though thy blinded eyes see naught . . ." [Sophocles]) often lose their physical sight involuntarily (by what usually only seems to be an accident), or are bereft of their bio-vision (as opposed

to an inner vision, or a Shakespearean mind's eye) by an illumination that unveils too bright a fire (like staring at a god, at the sun, or into the maddening peristalsis of reality; incidentally, Bataille wrote of the pineal eye—the vestigial remnant of which sits firmly in our skulls in the form of the pineal gland—imagining it as a feature of a human being, the purpose of which would be to exult in the fiery gaze of the sun: "The eye . . . opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration . . ." [Bataille, "The Pineal Eye" 82]). Kreia, however, is a blind seer of a different kind: "her unused eyesight lies fallow as she relies on marathon meditations to penetrate the universe's mysteries" (Thompson et al. 158). Her eyes have deteriorated from disuse—they were wilfully abandoned: "I see all that I need, though the seeing of things flesh and blood has failed me some time ago. They were distractions only"; a few lines of dialogue later Kreia gives the Player the following instruction:

> If need be, I could heal them [her eyes], restore my sight, but sight can prove a distraction. When one relies on sight to perceive the world, it is like trying to stare at the galaxy through a crack in the door . . . You must learn to see crude matter for what it is before the veil is lifted.

Hence the emphasis placed on the sense of hearing within the poetics of the game's dialogues. In a different conversation, for example, it is the Player who has the option to describe the experience of the Force as "hearing the heartbeat of the galaxy for the first time." It is intriguing that, among the other options that the Player may choose from, two also refer to sensory experiences, but neither of them suggests that the Force may be *seen*. The two options are: "It is like a current that passes through you, and carries you with it to all the places it touches," and "The warmth of the sun without the glare—you can feel its light and its heat, but there is no harshness to it" (like looking at the sun for the nth time, eyes blinded long ago? Or after an Oedipal enucleation?). Thus, assuming a perspective of sound studies allows one to discern within the game's verbal poetics a critique of ocularcentrism.

Let us return to our analysis of Kreia: she cast her biological sight away willingly, finding it lacking when set against the in-sight provided by "marathon meditations." She is not like the god-cursed Tiresias (as Ovid recounts, "Saturnia [Juno] . . . amned the one who had made the judgement [Tiresias] to eternal night"), but rather like Odin the god, whose quest for understanding (for, etymologically speaking, standing in the midst of things [Skeat 583], for discovering "the eye of the storm," the

vantage point from which the thundery revolutions of the universe can be perceived as a shape, as a meaningful pattern) and hunger for epiphany led him to sacrifice one of his eyes in return for knowledge (Mortensen 44).

It is possible to make a connection between this committed attitude and Bataille's thought, but first let us introduce an intertext capable of enriching our experience of this connection. In the fifth instalment of *The Elder Scrolls* video game series (Bethesda Game Studios), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, the player ventures upon one of the eponymous Elder Scrolls, primordial and probably cosmogenic entities which manifest themselves to mortal beings in the shape of manuscripts (yet another variant of an ancient archetype). If the player attempts to read the Scroll, they will for a split second glimpse a mosaic of alien, incomprehensible signs and symbols, only to become temporarily blinded. Within the lore of the series, trying to read an Elder Scroll without adequate training results in loss of sight. In fact, even reading them while being familiarized with appropriate techniques takes away one's sight should the readings become a regular practice. This is evident in the fourth instalment of the series, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, in which the player has the possibility of visiting a secluded monastery of monks who have dedicated their lives to studying the mysteries of the Elder Scrolls—most of the anchorites are blind.

This particular incarnation of the blind seer trope—mystics losing their sight in the process of lifting the mystical veil—allows us to better comprehend the relentless resolve with which one *renounces seeing by seeing*: "I laugh when I think that my eyes persist in demanding objects that do not destroy them" (Bataille, "The Practice of Joy Before Death" 239). Her eyes already destroyed, Kreia listens, and thus hears and feels the fluctuations that agitate existence, her interiority itself exposed to the incessant fulguration of stimuli. Through meditative endeavours (which should not be confused here with the means intercepted in Western culture by the self-help industry), Bataille attained similarly altered states. By projecting oneself within one's interiority in the form of a dramatized "point"[2] (dramatized in the sense of inciting a tragic awareness of one's inescapable annihilation), one goes beyond, as it were, the projected oneself:

> It is only in such a concentration—beyond itself—that existence has the leisure of perceiving, in the form of an inner flash of light, "that which it is": the movement of painful communication which it is, which goes no

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2   It has to be stated that although the poetics of *Knight of the Old Republic II* can be interpreted as a subversion of the cultural domination of the sense of sight, Bataille straightforwardly says of his method of the dramatized "point" "that it has given the optical form to experience": "As soon as it admits the existence of the point, *the mind is an eye*" (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 118).

less from within to without, than from without to within. And no doubt it is a question of an arbitrary projection of oneself, but what appears in this way is the profound objectivity of existence, from the moment that the latter is no longer a little entity turned in on itself, but a wave of life losing itself. (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 118)

"A wave of life losing itself"—"Joy of the dying man, wave among waves" (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 51)—is there not a certain agreement between these images and the above-quoted "rising swell at the end of life, the promise of new territories and new blood, the call of new mysteries in the dark," the latter being the way in which Kreia described the experience of the Force? Perhaps the Force can be likened to the dramatized "point" (given the mental malleability of Bataille's method [*Inner Experience* 126]), since what it is fundamentally is a conceptualization of the connectedness of everything (shaped in accordance with the *Star Wars* universe, or shaped as it could possibly be shaped in the circumstances narrated in and through that universe), of not only the link between that which is surrounded and that which surrounds, but also of the ultimate oneness of the two: of the end of separateness, of the nameless continuity of death that encapsulates the discontinuous life ("Infinite foretime and / Infinite aftertime: above your head / They close like giant wings, and you are dead" [Nabokov, *Pale Fire* 30–31]; cf. Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*). Bearing in mind the constant tension between the domain of knowledge (of things, of operations, of distinctions) and the depth of non-knowledge (of anguish and ecstasy combined [Bataille, *Inner Experience* 58], and of feeling that there "is, in us and in the world, something that reveals that knowledge was not given to us, and that situates itself uniquely as being unable to be attained by knowledge" (Bataille, "Nonknowledge, Laughter, and Tears" 135), the Force can be understood as an intrusion: a usurping force—the higher order of things—appearing in place of what Bataille signals below by the use of three periods (ellipsis *points* pointing to an absence):

> He and I, having emerged without name from . . . without name, are for this . . . without name, just as two grains of sand are for the desert, or rather two waves losing themselves in two adjacent waves are for a sea. (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 50)

The Force is an intrusion in other ways as well—a skilled Force user can gain access to the thoughts of another. Kreia teaches the Exile how to make one's listening so deep and so penetrating that the mental articulations and inner movements of others cannot but open before the attention (the stretching [Skeat 30]) of its tendrils (organs that stretch [Harper, "tendril (n.)"]). She is, however, quick to point out to the Exile that one should be

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careful not to fall prey to an illusion of power: "is such listening enough to perceive the world around you? It is not. Because to listen to the thoughts of another is much like attempting to see the universe only with your eyes. It is equally limiting." Therefore, if one is to listen, then one has to listen in a way reminiscent of the listening described by Nabokov:

> I am like one of those inflated pale spiders you see in old gardens. Sitting in the middle of a luminous web and giving little jerks to this or that strand. My web is spread all over the house as I listen from my chair where I sit like a wily wizard. Is Lo in her room? Gently I tug on the silk. She is not. Just heard the toilet paper cylinder make its staccato sound as it is turned; and no footfalls has my outflung filament traced from the bathroom back to her room. Is she still brushing her teeth . . . ? No. The bathroom door has just slammed, so one has to feel elsewhere about the house for the beautiful warm-colored prey. Let us have a strand of silk descend the stairs. I satisfy myself by this means that she is not in the kitchen—not banging the refrigerator door or screeching at her detested mamma . . . Raylike, I glide in thought to the parlor and find the radio silent . . . So my nymphet is not in the house at all! (*Lolita* 47–48)

Though the listening depicted above served the purpose of locating a particular person, what interests us is the mechanism, the metaphor of the spider listening *with* its web, feeling the tiniest, the most minute throbs and trembles of the environment *through* the silken extensions of the mind (cf. Japyassú and Laland on the subject of spider cognition in the context of web-building). One has to palpate, as it were, one's surroundings with one's ears—with the attentive tendrils of a tactile listening.

The game provides us with an appropriate example. The Exile and Kreia (and their other companions) travel to a moon called Nar Shaddaa, a completely urbanized world of typically dystopian characteristics: sky-high architecture (as one of the Exile's companions declares, it would take hours to fall from one of the walkways to the actual ground), metallic materials, black markets, mobs, assassins, and of course walled-off ghettos in which war refugees (most of them human) are kept, harassed, and exploited by the alien races who are a dominant force on Nar Shaddaa. After a short time spent on the moon, Kreia remarks that the Exile's thoughts are perturbed, to which the Exile responds: "I feel this background noise, like a vibration." This triggers a conversation which we must reproduce here (with a small omission):

> Kreia: It is Nar Shaddaa, the true Nar Shaddaa, that you feel around you. It is this moon, with the metal and machines stripped away and the currents of the Force laid bare.

> The Exile: The sound . . . the vibration is strange, tense.
> Kreia: . . . What you feel is the echo of the minds of these creatures within the Force. Their anger . . . their greed . . . their desperation. It is life.
> The Exile: Is it possible for me to manipulate it? To control these people?
> Kreia: One might as well move the universe . . . but such manipulation is possible, yes. It requires that one be able to feel the critical point within the fractured mass . . . and know how to strike it in such a way that the echoes travel to your intended destination.
> The Exile: This feeling . . . how long can I feel these echoes around me?
> Kreia: For as long as it lasts. Like life, such waking moments within the Force are rare, waiting for the right moment when the critical point is struck, and the sound rises . . . But let us be silent . . . words and thoughts are distractions. Feel this moment, for as long as it will last. Feel life, as it is, with the crude matter stripped away.

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The conversation may take a different shape if the player chooses other dialogue options, but the ones used here are the ones Kreia approves of. Nevertheless, this is a moment in which the Exile truly listens, sits like the spider upon an undulating web of echoes, of waves, of inner movements. What we have here is a perfect exemplification of the all-encompassing listening: one in which it is no longer the audible manifestation, sound, that matters, but rather the basest level of vibration—thought, inner states themselves are here implicitly understood as, to use Kreia's words, "oscillations of energy" (cf. Goodman 81–98 in reference to vibrational ontology); one is tempted to think of one of the four fundamental forces, gravity: the mutual pull exerted by everything on everything, the infinitely complex network of connections both inter- and intra-, the bond between every single body in the universe: no matter how weak the gravitational pull between any two objects is, *it is there*. To truly hear the Force would perhaps be similar to feeling the gravity of all the galaxies and all the atoms.

There is more to be unravelled out of that conversation. An apparent incongruity, for instance, between Kreia and Bataille must be eliminated. What Kreia seems to be, philosophically speaking, is a sort of idealist, whereas Bataille associated himself with materialism. On the one hand, he wrote of what he called base materialism, a materialism which would avoid the trap of treating matter as an idea: "Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations" ("Base Materialism and Gnosticism" 51). On the other hand, however, the Force—as it is experienced by Kreia—is not an idea abstracted out of reality and elevated onto a pedestal beyond matter. It is, by all means, an integral part of matter, just like the intangible interactions of physics; it is immanent (literally, dwelling in [Harper, "immanent (adj.)"] matter),

not transcendent. The rhetorical line Kreia draws between "crude matter" and "life, as it is" is in truth rather resembling the way in which Bataille writes of his method of the dramatized "point" in "The Practice of Joy Before Death": "it is necessary to strip away all external representations from what is there, until it is nothing but a pure violence, an interiority, a pure inner fall into a limitless abyss" (238). This interiority is connected with the continuity of life (as a grandiose, seamless process of there being life, not the discontinuous, particular lives):

> I wish to emphasize a basic fact: The separation of beings is limited to the real order. It is only if I remain attached to the order of *things* that the separation is *real*. It *is* in fact *real*, but what is real is *external*. "Intimately, all men are one." (Bataille, *The Accursed Share* 192)

"All men are one"—"Every human is connected to other humans, is only the expression of others" (Bataille, "Notebook for 'Pure Happiness'" 236). This is the interiority where it would be conceivable to listen through the Force, if, instead of the ". . . without name," our universe had the Force.

So everything and everyone is connected, yet we should not be misled into thinking that the recognition of this blossoms by default into an attitude of care or altruism. The socioeconomic conditions on Nar Shaddaa being harsh, it does not take long for the Exile (who is obviously well-to-do) to be approached by beggars or people who are otherwise challenged by adversities. If the player makes the Exile help them, Kreia reprimands the Exile for robbing these people of their opportunity for growth, of their own tests of strength, the trials and tribulations of their destinies. For her, confrontation is the only soil fertile enough for people—and peoples—to bear fruit: "a culture's teachings, and most importantly, the nature of its people, achieve definition in conflict." Elsewhere, she says: "It is only through interactions, through decision and choice,[3] through confrontation, physical or mental, that the Force can grow within you."

"Physical or mental"—this appreciation of conflict is by no means a glorification of senseless brutality: "To best one in battle is one thing. To defeat them without striking a blow—that was my hope"; "It is a far greater victory to make another see through your eyes than to close them forever." Nevertheless, her outlook is indeed quite Heraclitean: "War . . . is justice, because everything comes into being through War" (Heraclitus qtd. in Fowles 203). This, in turn, is elucidated by Bataille in his "Heraclitean

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[3] ". . . desire and decision (the two things that create a live world) . . ." (Nabokov, *Lolita* 67)

Meditation," in which he gives a verbal, articulated form to the cry that comes from the river which is in no two instants the same:

> Before the terrestrial world whose summer and winter order the agony of all living things, before the universe composed of innumerable turning stars, limitlessly losing and consuming themselves, I can only perceive a succession of cruel splendors whose very movement requires that I die: this death is only the exploding consumption of all that was, the joy of existence of all that comes into the world; even my own life demands that everything that exists, everywhere, ceaselessly give itself and be annihilated. ("The Practice of Joy Before Death" 239)

In Hopkins's succinct, yet succulent, words: "Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on" (66). Change is the prime Heraclitean principle, and the "keraunos [the thunderbolt, chaos, hazard] steers all things" (Heraclitus qtd. in Fowles 203, the translation in brackets is part of the quotation).

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"In the fabric of chance, dark interlinks with light" (Bataille, *Guilty* 72)—"The true war is waged in the hearts of all living things, against our own natures, light or dark. That is what shapes and binds the galaxy, not . . . creations of men," says Kreia, who, in the end, turns out to have an ulterior motive in training the Exile.

Kreia was once a Jedi, but she was a Sith, too (the Sith are those who oppose the Jedi Order and its doctrines of serenity, and whose conduct may be summarized by their code: "Peace is a lie, there is only passion. Through passion, I gain strength. Through strength, I gain power. Through power, I gain victory. Through victory, my chains are broken. The Force shall free me."). By the time she travels with the Exile, however, she is no longer either of those, seeing the factions for what they are—sides of a coin, parts of a whole pretending to be the whole.

In other words, Kreia, too, is an exile. She and the Exile were both expelled from orders whose rules they failed to adhere to. How fitting, then, that the paths of these two characters—repelled by others and thus drawn to each other—meet in the so-called Outer Rim Territories, far from the centre of the known galaxy. And how suitable that—as we have already mentioned—the spatial structure of KOTOR II can be characterized as a "semi-open," "star-shaped hub," for this means—given that "quest and space are intrinsically linked" (Aarseth, "Introduction to Quest Theory")—that as the game is played, the Exile along with Kreia and their other companions, enact the pattern of attraction and repulsion (cf. Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion I," "Attraction and Repulsion II"), of appropriation and excretion (cf. Bataille "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade"): the player ventures into various wildernesses (arms of the star-

hub) from demarcated, more or less "civilized" spaces (centres of the star-hub) in which bargains can be struck and quests are received. The ordeals ordained by the quests are faced in the various wildernesses, while the rewards are reaped in the "civilized" spaces, which alternately appropriate and excrete the Exile, who always, however, ends up excreted by a space, an order, the galaxy.

The significance of the star-shaped hub is that it is homologous with anthropological models that divide societies into centres and peripheries: the basic apparatus of inclusion and separation finds itself reconstituted within the mechanics of ludo-narrative works (doubtless, a phenomenon connected with the tightly-wound interplay between culture and play, cf. Caillois 57–67, 81–97). Aarseth states: "What is common for all computer games with virtual environments is that they are based on a simulation, a dynamic model/rule set" ("Introduction to Quest Theory"). The same could be said about all games, and not just games, for is language not precisely "a simulation, a dynamic model/rule set"? Intersubjectivity—a simulation—takes shape through articulations: "Language is not life; it gives life orders" (Deleuze and Guattari 76).

Before we follow this train of thought, let us refocus on Kreia. Her real struggle, the one into which she tries to entangle the Exile throughout the game, is the fight against the Force itself. In a final conversation with the Exile, who is revealed to be a wound in the Force due to the carnage perpetrated at the summit of the war that resulted in his exile, Kreia speaks of her true conviction:

> It is said that the Force has a will, it has a destiny for us all. I wield it, but it uses us all, and that is abhorrent to me. Because I hate the Force. I hate that it seems to have a will, that it would control us to achieve some measure of balance, when countless lives are lost. But in you . . . I see the potential to see the Force die, to turn away from its will. And that is what pleases me. You are beautiful to me, Exile. A dead spot in the Force, an emptiness in which its will might be denied.

Kreia wished for the Force to die, because it is a principle of instrumentalization under which every living creature serves a higher purpose, is manipulated into harmony. It is as if instead of the Force, the usurper, Kreia would want the ". . . without name," the freedom to be disharmonious, *out of sync with the universe* (to be in our universe).

Language "seems to have a will," too: "Language speaks. Man speaks in that he responds to language" (Heidegger 207). Not only that, language, along with its entire semiotic setup of rules, boundaries, constraints, bears within itself the principle of servility: "I succumb to the use of words like *to*

be, *effect*, *succumb*, *use*. In being assembled together, these words, through the very process that links them, announce my servitude" (Bataille, "Surrealism and God" 183). "The elementary unit of language—the statement—is the order-word" (Deleuze and Guattari 76), the order-word being

> . . . the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement. Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a "social obligation." (Deleuze and Guattari 79)

Language is part of the machinery that turns human beings into slaves, subduing and subordinating them to (higher) orders, the grander schemes of things, *to things* (Bataille, "The Sovereign" 185–95). Kreia desired the death of the Force, and Bataille desired the death of language, silence: ". . . to find that which reintroduces—in a point—the sovereign silence that interrupts articulated language" ("Method of Meditation" 90).

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"With any tangible reality, for each being, you have to find the place of sacrifice, the wound. A being can only be touched where it yields" (Bataille, *Guilty* 26). Kreia has found the Exile, the wound through which the Force could have been touched and hurt. Her plan, though finally rendered unsuccessful by the Exile, was to multiply and concatenate echoes of this wound, thus lacerating the Force to the point of its nullification. But what of Bataille's silence?

> NON-KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATES ECSTASY. Non-knowledge is ANGUISH before all else. In anguish, there appears a nudity which puts one into ecstasy. But ecstasy itself (nudity, communication) is elusive if anguish is elusive. Thus ecstasy only remains possible in the anguish of ecstasy, in this sense, that it cannot be satisfaction, *grasped knowledge*. (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 52)

If "[t]he defeat of thought is ecstasy" (Bataille, "Nonknowledge" 203), if this anguished ecstasy heralds non-knowledge, renounces certainty, suspends one in a state of being unable to speak, then the effort put by Bataille into writing about his ecstatic methods and disseminating these writings is visible in new light: what we see in this light is a crusade for the death of language.

Let us conclude with the following remarks. A similarity between language and Aarseth's definition of a game has been suggested above. What was meant to be implied is not that our current affair with language is in fact and in its entirety a game, but rather that there is a possibility towards which certain strains of poetry (or wordplay) seem to point—a possibility

that language could be the ludo-narrative dwelling *par excellence* (consider as an example Borges's "The Lottery in Babylon" as read by Baudrillard [150–53]). Let us assume that this possibility is actualized in various degrees and on different levels throughout our relationship with language—that we are indeed playing some sort of game, and that we are thus necessarily played (Aarseth, "I Fought the Law" 130). If we consider in this context Bataille's description of "silence" as a "slipping word" (*Inner Experience* 16)—a word that twists language into contradiction, giving way to true silence—then it begins to resemble a cheat, a method of exploiting a bug in the system, of glitching your way out of the map. Given Bataille's engagement with transgression, it is only fitting to redirect Aarseth's notion of "transgressive play" (Aarseth, "I Fought the Law" 132–33) back onto the transgressor-extraordinaire: just as Kreia played the game of the Force in order to destroy it, Bataille played the game of language to subvert it, to access . . .

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