



INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE EN GESTION

Sous la co-tutelle de :  
UNIVERSITÉ PARIS-EST CRÉTEIL  
UNIVERSITÉ GUSTAVE EIFFEL

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Eiffel  
ÉCOLE DE MANAGEMENT

**SPSG**  
Société de Philosophie  
des Sciences de Gestion

## Call for papers for the study day - "Georges Bataille (1897-1962): towards a critique of management and management sciences"

The SPSG (Société de Philosophie des Sciences de Gestion), the IRG (Institut de Recherche en Gestion) of the University of Paris-Est and the IAE Gustave Eiffel are organising a study day on 9 March 2022 on the theme "Georges Bataille (1897-1962): towards a critique of management and management sciences". We invite you to send us proposals for papers by 15 October 2021.

Bataille, who will have died 60 years ago in 2022, was an inspiration for several of the authors grouped together by some "Anglo-Saxon" commentators under the unifying (and inevitably misleading) term of "French theory": Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Baudrillard. These thinkers are key references for 'critical management studies', whereas Bataille – an important influence on all of them - has too often been ignored.

Several key notions of his anthropological thought, in systemic interaction with each other (we can in his terms speak of a general anthropology), could also be used to think about management from a critical perspective.

"*Expenditure*", for example, unproductive or useless expenditure, is the result of energy that is always in excess both on earth and in the cosmos. The desire to reduce it, as governments, economists and managers do (to avoid "drinking from the firehose"), regularly leads to disasters (crises, unemployment, psychosocial problems, suicides at work, etc.).

"*Sovereignty*", a notion derived from Hegelian "mastery", is defined as that which is 'beyond utility' (Bataille, 1956, p. 198). It designates all operations that take place in the moment, and hence opposed to the sort of planned projects so dear to management, and which do not concern themselves with time to come - operations subordinated to nothing other than their immediate pleasure:

"Laughter, tears, poetry, tragedy and comedy (...) play, anger, intoxication, ecstasy, dance, music, combat, the funereal horror, the magic of childhood,

the sacred - of which sacrifice is the most intense aspect - the divine and the diabolical, eroticism..." (Ibid., p. 230).

So what about sovereignty when each individual has become a 'dead man working' (Cederström and Fleming, 2012)?

“*Communication*” represents a relationship of total transparency between people, a shift from the discontinuity of separate beings to the continuity of eroticism. Communication requires that beings seek to go beyond themselves, as torn beings who communicate intensely through their wounds, beings 'on the edge of death, of nothingness' (Bataille, 1945, p. 44). This notion is obviously the opposite of all the instrumental communications we are only too familiar with in management (marketing, public relations, employee relations, etc.) and even goes beyond the social linkages mentioned by sociologists. It has a 'religious' type of content outside of dogmas and rituals, which connects beings through their intimacy and leads to the constitution of heartfelt 'communities' - such as in Bataille's case the *Société Acéphale* or the *Collège de sociologie* in the interwar period (Goodall, 1996 identifies a similar feature in a small college town in South Carolina). A 'full' being absorbed in work or in their ordinary daily life cannot be in 'communication'.

The three notions of 'expenditure', 'sovereignty' and 'communication' put together represent three anthropological characteristics of resistance to deleterious management when it consists over exercising power over people to make them do what they do not wish to do, or literally cannot do without damaging themselves or risking worse.

However the other side of this is *eroticism* - 'assenting to life up to the point of death' (Bataille, 1957, p 11) - which takes three forms, the eroticism of bodies (sensual passion), the eroticism of hearts (amorous passion) and sacred eroticism (sacrifices). How is this being transformed or even destroyed in the age of digital capitalism and, more generally, of consumerist 'neo-liberalism' that commodifies all human relationships? What is happening to the eroticism of bodies with escorting sites, and the eroticism of hearts with internet dating sites? Furthermore, can eroticism as 'transgression of the law' (Bataille, 1957, p. 219) help us to think about sexuality in organisations (Brewis and Linstead 2000)?

Bataille maintained a critical relationship with several philosophers. His most constant reference point is Nietzsche, whom he wanted to detach at all costs from any link with anti-Semitism and Nazism. There was also Hegel, whom he knew mainly through Alexandre Kojève's legendary Paris seminar on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and with whom he maintained a correspondence and in-depth intellectual exchanges. He read, commented on and criticised Marx, whose economic analysis he retained, but which he thought should be supplemented by Marcel Mauss's sociology of gift and sacrifice, the potlatch seeming to him a typical form of unproductive expenditure, and by psychoanalysis, even if he criticised it elsewhere. He strongly influenced Jacques Lacan, with whom he had intellectual and family ties.

He shares with certain authors in management sciences the desire for interdisciplinarity - not only between the human and social sciences but even with the natural sciences, a tendency we can see in Deleuze. He wrote at the beginning of *The Accursed Share*:

"This first essay addresses, from outside the separate disciplines, a problem that has not been framed as it should be, one that may hold the key to all the problems posed by every discipline concerned with the movement of energy on the earth, - from geophysics to political economy, by way of sociology,

history and biology. Moreover, neither psychology nor, in general, philosophy can be considered free of this primary question of economy. Even what may be said of art, of literature, of poetry has an essential connection with the movement I study: that of excess energy, translated into the effervescence of life. " (Bataille, 1949, p. 10).

This multidisciplinary concern can be found in his reasons for the creation of the journal *Critique*, which has an exceptional longevity, as it still exists 75 years after its birth in 1946:

"Human consciousness should cease to be compartmentalised. Critique seeks the relationships that can exist between political economy and literature, between philosophy and politics." (excerpt from an interview in *Figaro Littéraire* quoted by Surya, 1992, p. 450).

Bataille was also a man of reviews. Apart from *Critique*, which he created, there were those in which he participated, sometimes by subverting them from within (*Documents*), sometimes by developing ideas far removed from those of his editorial committee (Boris Souvarine's anti-Stalinist Marxist *Social Critique*), sometimes by creating a sacrificial community (*Acéphale*)... In all of them, there was an unquestionable freedom of thought, a concern to develop ideas which were often original, exchanges which were sometimes polemical, and obviously a total detachment from career concerns (Bataille was a numismatist by profession) and the search for profitability. Comparison with our currently "listed" and "unlisted" academic journals could be fruitful.

Finally, Bataille regularly criticised scientific and discursive language in various ways, believing that they masked reality, especially everything that was excessive and irrational, which he called heterogeneous elements. In this sense, managerial language should be challenged in its scientific claim to homogenise the phenomena of oppression and power and to rationalise what cannot be rationalised – the non-rational - in organisations. Bataille's writing seeks to escape this rationalisation by using an often poetic and often paradoxical language in a performative manner – as ultimately did Heidegger.

Of course, these themes are not intended as limitations. For example, the notions of sustainable development, social and environmental responsibility, which have become the obligatory leitmotif of company charters, or those of zero growth or edgrowth, can also be questioned with Bataille's thought. Do not hesitate to consult us if you are wondering about the relevance of a theme, or if you are looking for a reference in Bataille's work before sending your draft paper.

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### **"Useful" videos to introduce those who do not know or only know a little into the Bataille Universe (in French):**

La conférence de Monika Marczuc et Emmanuel Tibloux à l'Ecole des Chartes le 4 mars 2021 :

<http://www.chartes.psl.eu/fr/actualite/univers-bataille>

To hear Bataille :

Le film d'André Labarthe « Bataille à perte de vue » :

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x27x1rf>

To see Bataille :

Un entretien de 1958 dans l'émission *Lectures pour tous* à propos de son livre *La littérature et le mal* :

<https://m.ina.fr/video/I00016133/georges-bataille-a-propos-de-son-livre-la-litterature-et-le-mal-video.html>

### **Timeline :**

- Intentions de communication (2-3 pages) : 15 octobre 2021 (Proposed contributions)
- Sélection et retour fin novembre 2021 (Selection and return with comments)
- Communications complètes : fin janvier 2022 (Final paper)
- Journée d'étude : 9 mars 2022 (Study day)

### **Standard format :**

- 20 pages de texte au maximum
- Times New Roman 12, Interligne 1,5
- Texte justifié
- Marges 2,5 (haut, bas, droite, gauche)

The best contributions could be published in a collective work or an academic journal

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