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KITCHEN INTERIOR DESIGN

WRITINGS FROM GEORGES BATAILLE

Translated by Richard Howard

This brief text by Bataille (1897-1962), at the time of its writing one of the least known of French intellectual figures, is part of a vast lyrical discourse that is probably as influential today as that of any thinker between the two world wars. Poet, philosopher, novelist, sociologist, religious thinker, critic of art and literature, Bataille - more than Breton or Blanchot, more than Sartre, even more than Foucault - is the most numinous of modern European writers.

Architecture is the expression of the very being of societies, just as human physiognomy is the expression of the being of individuals. Yet it is chiefly to the physiognomies of official persons (prelates, magistrates, admirals) that such a comparison applies. Only society's ideal form is expressed, strictly speaking, in architectural compositions. Thus the great monuments loom like dikes, setting the logic of majesty and authority against all disturbing elements: it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State address (and silence) the multitude. There can be no doubt that such monuments inspire social obedience and often real fear. The storming of the Bastille is difficult to explain except in terms of the people's animosity toward those monuments that are their real masters.

Moreover, each time architectural composition is encountered elsewhere than in monuments - in physiognomy, in costume, in music, in painting - we may infer a predominant taste for authority, human or divine. The great compositions of certain painters express a will to compel the viewer's mind to an official ideal. The disappearance of academic construction in painting, on the other hand, opens the gates to the expression (and thereby to the exaltation) of those psychological processes most incompatible with social stability. This largely accounts for the intense reactions provoked for over half a century by the gradual transformation of painting, which was hitherto characterized by a sort of concealed architectural skeleton.

It is evident, moreover, that the mathematical organization imposed upon stone is none other than the final evolution of earthly forms, whose meaning is granted,

in the biological realm, by the transition from simian to human, the latter already presenting all the elements of architecture. Humanity apparently represents, in the morphological process, no more than an intermediary stage between ape and edifice. Forms have become increasingly static, increasingly dominant; hence the human order is *ab initio* united with the architectural order, which is merely its development. Wherever we attack architecture - whose monumental productions are at present our real masters, grouping the servile masses in their shadow, imposing admiration and amazement, order and constraint - we in some sense attack man himself. Today one human activity the world over - and no doubt the most brilliant there is in the intellectual realm - tends moreover in this direction, betraying the inadequacy of human predominance. Hence, strange as this may seem with regard to creatures as elegant as human beings, a way opens - indicated by the painters - toward bestial monstrosity; as if there were no other hope of escaping the architectural chain gang. [From the review *Documents*, May 1929.] ■