

Children's Experience of 'Beyond the Self' and 'The Rustle of Language' in G. Bataille

YASUKO MIYAZAKI

Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University

In this paper, first, the usage of the concept of 'authenticity (authentic language)' in P. Standish's book 'Beyond the Self', with comparing the idea of it in R. Barthes reading G. Bataille. Secondly, I discuss the structure of discourse of play theory in G. Bataille. As Standish distinguishes the following two ideas about language: limitations and limits. According to him, the idea of limits of language contains rich possibilities discussing education authentic. Further, he relies on the concept of 'authenticity' in relation to modern education based on Heidegger, Wittgenstein,; and Barthes, and Barthes seems to play the main role. However, Barthes' perspective on authentic language comes from an analysis in Bataille that is extremely radical. This tendency becomes clear when it comes to children's 'experience'. Finally Bataille's idea and re-interpretation on 'authenticity' in the educational context will be focused.

I. RESPONSE TO 'BEYOND THE SELF'

What is 'Authentic Language'?

In this paper, I explore the concepts of 'beyond', 'language' and 'otherness' in the book *Beyond the Self* from the perspective of the play theory of Georges Bataille (1897-1962), whom M. Foucault names as one of the greatest thinker in twenty century. Before going into discussion, I raise some questions. First, this title is very attractive but makes us wonder how we can be beyond ourselves or how we can talk of the experience of being beyond the self in language, as language is one of the most fundamental essences of our rationality. Secondly, Standish discusses those concepts by linking them in a concept of 'authentic language'. But what is it?

Standish describes 'authentic language' in chapters 3 and 6, with connection to the notion of 'authenticity' in the contexts of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Barthes and others. Since I still have no answer to the question, I try to raise the question of the notion of 'authentic', and in relation with it, 'limit(s)', and show an example of being beyond the 'language' from Bataille's writings. I shall do this, first, through reading Barthes, who interprets Bataille, and second, by looking at children's practice—the experience of being beyond the self—when they play through the theory of play in Bataille. As his play theory is very similar to the one of J. Huizinga's play theory 'Homo Ludens (1938)', which is the first organized theory about play. He points out that play

generates culture, not culture creates play, and culture means play. Bataille is far more radical. He developed Huizinga's idea and talks of a dismissal of the subject of play in ancient rites. According to Bataille, ancient rites show as the most pure experience of being beyond the self. Before relating that opinion, a review of 'authentic language' according to Standish is in order.

- i. It needs to be asked now what is to be understood by authentic (non-mythical) language. This will expose particular problems for education. (Standish, 1992, p. 106)
- ii. In Barthes' account, authentic language is language in action. (ibid.)
- iii. Within a culture where mythological language is dominant, it must be asked what happens to authentic language. Barthes' answer would be perhaps that it is treated as the exotic. (p. 118)

We see that Standish treats 'authentic language' referring to Barthes. It is apparent that Barthes distinguishes two functions of language: mythological and authentic (non-mythical). According to Barthes, mythological language would be understood as a universal fiction and, simultaneously, as an expression that is ruled by particular ideology. He examines mythological usage of language. Standish also examines it and treats 'authentic language' as a solvent for the 'mastery' of language over our world.

The Idea of 'Limits of Language'

'Authentic language' seems to pose a distinction between 'limit(s)' and 'limitation(s)' in Standish. He states the following:

- iv. The analysis of language shows its limits. There is richness to the term 'limit' which is deeply interwoven with the significance of limits in language. Thus, a limit may be a barrier beyond which one can see but which one cannot transgress, or, worse, something that blinkers one's vision. As such, it is a negative restriction of the sort that we might reasonably try, or at least desire, to transcend. On the other hand, 'limit' may carry some sense of the outward reaches of a situation. This seems to have a more positive significance showing the limits towards which one can reach. The negative sense of restriction or of shortcomings in the former will be conveyed by the more obviously negative 'limitation' while 'limit' will be used for the richer concept. (pp. 38-39)

Standish uses limit(s) and limitation(s) as mutually differing concepts. Furthermore, he argues that authentic language is a critical notion to the idea of 'limitations of language'.

- v. The understanding of the world generated by these [mythological language's] vocabularies is a sham. They constitute limitations on our ability to see the world as it is, encouraging us to subside into a complacent confidence that we have things in order. The account of authentic language was an attempt to show how the health of language in its variety of ways of speaking might be preserved. (p. 225)

It is understood that Standish relies on Barthes's notion of 'authenticity' to discuss a connection between 'authentic language' and 'limits of language'. Both are treated positively here. In contrast, 'limitations of language' rules over the modern world and appears especially in educational discourse.

- vi. [...] the interrelation of four mistaken views which constitute potential threats to education. [...] positivism, scientism, the prevailing idea of human subject, and the preoccupation with the ideal of autonomy. (p. 222)
- vii. The four limitations have been shown to constitute distortions of the conception of what it is to be human. They constitute special threats in education where there is a tendency for them to be enshrined in theory. Indeed educational theory is a peculiarly fertile ground for their development. Equally important is the fact that their widespread acceptance contributes to their institutionalization in educational policy and practice. (ibid.)
- viii. Rational-assertive language claims mastery over the objects which it designates. The idea of mastery becomes a refuge against uncertainty. It is a return to the self in its reinforcement of the sense of control. (p. 226)

II. READING BARTHES READING BATAILLE

The excess of images

According to Standish, in Barthes' essay 'The Plates of the *Encyclopedia*', the implications of this are nicely caught. The *Encyclopedia* is a world catalogue book. It shows the fact that we humans give names to objects, and because of that power of denomination, we gain mastery of the world. However, reading an encyclopedia today lends a different point of view, which is the excess of images.

- ix. '[T]he language of rational-assertion contained in the *Encyclopedia* breaks its own bound. Towards the end of this essay Barthes points out that a present day reading of the *Encyclopedia* will not stop at the level summarized above. We cannot look at eighteenth century images of ordinary objects without further connotations: their part in legend, the romance of a bygone age, and so on. There is thus a 'vibration of meaning' in the image which exceeds the intentions of the authors. In part, this poetic quality to the image centres in its otherness. This, Barthes suggests, is the sign of all mysteries'. (pp. 227-228)

These observations of Standish are based on the idea of Roland Barthes (1915-1980).

We come to confront 'otherness' in the excess of images, the excess of language that no longer has limitations. Therefore, we can realize that language is not the master or precursor of us; we are the one who creates it, so that we can limit the meaning and function of it and beyond it. We are not subject to limitations of language. Nevertheless, in our daily lives, we are caught in those limitations of language. We understand objects through language. Its dictionary meaning might be sufficient for us to believe that we understand the world. However, is it so? Mysteries emerge in uncertainty; mysteries make us realize our own otherness and mystery is the very point of limits of

language.

This discussion next progresses to the idea of how to advance (renew) our language.

Barthes's Reading Bataille in Rustle of Language

In *The Rustle of Language* (*Le Bruissement de la langue*, 1984), Barthes raises a question: 'Can language rustle?' He states the followings.

- x. [I]n any case, there always remains *too much meaning* for language to fulfil a delectation appropriate to its substance. But what is impossible is not inconceivable: the rustle of language forms a utopia. Which utopia? [...] utopia is often what guides the investigations of the avant-garde. So there exists here and there, at moments, what we might call certain experiments in rustling. (Barthes, 1989, pp. 77-78. Italics by Barthes)

Rustle is a sound of leaves scattered in the wind, in Standish's expression, 'vibration of meaning'. Furthermore, Barthes mentioned the language and its code in Bataille as a model to illustrate to the reader how we react to knowledge (*savoir*) in the essay about Bataille's writings called 'Outcomes of the Texts' edited in the book.

Barthes says that there is an 'outcomes of texts' in Bataille. I sum them up as follows:

- a. Deflation of value
- b. 'Poetic' code that includes thematic, amphibological, metaphorical and also codes of knowledge (anatomical, zoological, ethnological, historical)

According to Barthes, by deflating value, Bataille's texts exceed knowledge and gain 'heterology'. 'Heterology' is something being beyond our logical understanding.

Barthes refers to the possibility of rustling language and finding a way out of the four limitations that Standish described above. In other words, Bataille's texts transgress the limitation of language, especially its logical form. Language is deprived of what we blindly believe in Bataille's texts. He gives '*formlessness*' to it. Again, language never imparts limitations upon us; instead, we find its limits in rustling, as vibrations of language. Foregoing further discussion of details related to rustling, I would cite instead what Bataille says about it. We can verify what Bataille relates in his essay called 'Formless'.

- xi. A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock-coat, to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit. (Bataille, 1985, p. 31. Italics by Bataille)

These attitudes on language in Bataille explain a hidden interrelationship between

limitations of language and educational discourse to limits of language experience in education.

III. THE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF 'BEYOND THE SELF'

The language problems described above and the experiences in education share a similar structure. As language has a binary structure, it represents a mixture of the limits and the possibilities beyond it. Describing children's play is the good example of the experience.

The play theory in Bataille defines two dimensions of play: major play and minor play. For the following reasons, it is important to connect the major play (alternatively, 'authentic play') and the language to express its very experience.

Major Play and its Sovereignty

Bataille argues that play (*jeu*), especially major play is within utility. Play is done *for* something. In contrast, authentic play is done for nothing. It is useless: a pure act. Bataille states the following.

- xii. [T]here are two sorts of game, minor and major. The minor is alone recognized in the world where it is the useful, not *play*, that is sovereign. For this reason, nothing is less familiar to our thought than the *major* play, which cannot serve, and where the profound truth is manifested: *only play has a sovereign quality and play which is no longer sovereign is only the mockery of play*. (Bataille, 1998, p. 93. Italics by Bataille)

Sovereignty is what transgresses utility because its purpose is nothing but itself. Furthermore, it means freedom from any human project. Regarding C. M. Gernerchak, sovereignty in Bataille is explained in relation to Hegel's dialectic.

- xiii. [T]he purity (uselessness), and consequently the 'recklessness' of the master's expenditure (risk), or precisely those elements essential to Bataille's notion of 'sovereignty,' are compromised as soon as the risk is granted prestige—that is, once it is recognized and put to use. The sovereign excessiveness of the risk, the disregard for life for no external reason, is forfeited once it is given an end, once it enters the dialectic of recognition. Recognition indeed is one of the more ambiguous notions in Bataille's work. On the one hand he calls for the recognition of the heart of existence, yet this core must not be spatially objectified, must not assert itself or command anything—'the sovereignty [of thought]... hides itself. It is foreign to the desire for recognition'. Sovereignty—as well as lacking a sense—is in essence total powerlessness, good for nothing, *indifferent* to life. It is these two features—*powerlessness* and *purposelessness* (indifference to ends)—that essentially differentiate the notion of sovereignty from mastery (Gernerchak, 2003, p. 46. Italics by Gernerchak).

How to Talk of Children's Experience of 'Beyond the Self' at Play

Regarding Bataille, play is first and foremost an act in and of itself, which exhibits creativity, freedom, and the force of life. However, it has been adopted as an effective educational tool. In doing so, the original purity of play is lost. The fact that play can sometimes transcend the limits of education because it allows us sometimes beyond ourselves, though, creates a paradox in the education-play relation.

We live in a world that is a mixture of utility and sovereignty, not one only of utility. Nevertheless, our language always faces the world with the assumption that it must be explained in terms of utility. However, major play never allows itself to become the object of something else. This way of being beyond ourselves, of transgressing our own rationality, sounds extremely strange, but we can readily acknowledge that such movements often occur in our daily lives. We are in ecstasy when we are at play. We experience and live on the moment of becoming, in other words, on the edge of every limit. What language can we use then?

This is a further example of limitation of our language when we try to speak of the experience of beyond the self in education. Our logical language is typically constructed to express something, so that it is trapped within utility. However, being beyond logic, we live our loves, joys, tears, fears, and anger. We can only slightly express such extreme movements of emotion in language. The concept of 'experience' in Bataille is not the same as that is found in normal usage. It is not related to a 'dialectical piling up'. Bataille opens experience itself into moments, which are, so to speak, of 'open-dialectic'. Perhaps this argument extends beyond what Standish considers. If all human experience is in open-dialectic, we would lose every language and authentic language might mean the language of animals: a roar, yell and cry. However, it is worth noting that there are moments during which we are, not intentionally, beyond language. We humans create language and enforce our own servitude to it. In this sense, language is, from the beginning, the limit of humanity. Transgressing that limit and soaring beyond it, as when we really play, we confront 'otherness' in ourselves over which we can never have mastery. Therefore, we must realize the importance in arguing the limits of language.

The next step of research into this area is an examination of Bataille's open-dialectic language and educational discourse. What is the authentic language? How can we understand it as language?

REFERENCES

- BARTHES, R. (1989) *The Rustle of Language*, tr. Haward, R. (University of California Press).
 BATAILLE, G. (1985) *Formless, Visions of Excess*, tr. Stockl, A. (University of Minnesota Press).
 BATAILLE, G. (1998) *Essential Writings*, ed. Richardson, M. (Sage Publications).
 GEMERCHAK, M. C. (2003) *The Sunday of the Negative: Reading Bataille Reading Hegel* (State University of New York Press).
 STANDISH, P. (1992) *Beyond the Self: Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Limits of Language* (Ashgate Pub. Co.).