#### What we are undertaking is a war…

Georges Bataille 36, brilliant economist writing for Acephale, 1st year, June 24, 1936; Translated: for marxists.org by Mitch Abidor 2005. “The Sacred Conspiracy”, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/bataille/sacred-conspiracy.htm> brett

What we are undertaking is a war.

It is time to abandon the world of the civilized and its light. It is to late to want to be reasonable and learned, which has led to a life without attractions. Secretly or not, it is necessary to become other, or else cease to be.

The world to which we have belonged proposes nothing to love outside of each individual insufficiency: its existence is limited to its convenience. A world that can’t be loved to death – in the same way a man loves a woman – represents nothing but personal interest and the obligation to work. If it is compared with worlds that have disappeared it is hideous and seems the most failed of all of them.

In those disappeared worlds it was possible to lose oneself in ecstasy, which is impossible in the world of educated vulgarity. Civilization’s advantages are compensated for by the way men profit by it: men of today profit by it to become the most degraded of all beings who have ever existed.

Life always occurs in a tumult with no apparent cohesion, but it only finds its grandeur and reality in ecstasy and ecstatic love. He who wants to ignore or neglect ecstasy is a being whose thought has been reduced to analysis. Existence is not only an agitated void: it is a dance that forces us to dance fanatically. The idea that doesn’t have as object a dead fragment exists internally in the same way as does a flame.

One must become firm and unshakeable enough that the existence of the world of civilization finally appears uncertain. It is useless to respond to those who are able to believe in this world and find their authorization in it. If they speak it is possible to look at them without hearing them, and even if we look at them, to only “see” that which exists far behind them. We must refuse boredom and live only on that which fascinates.

On this road it would be vain to move about and to seek to attract those who have vague impulses, like those of passing the time, laughing, or becoming individually bizarre. One must advance without looking back and without taking into account those who don’t have the strength to forget immediate reality.

Human life is defeated because it serves as the head and reason of the universe. Insofar as it becomes that head and reason it accepts slavery. If it isn’t free, existence becomes empty or neuter, and if it is free, it is a game. The earth, as long as it only engendered cataclysms, trees, and birds was a free universe; the fascination with liberty became dulled when the earth produced a being who demanded necessity as a law over the universe. Man nevertheless remained free to no longer respond to any necessity. He is free to resemble all that is not he in the universe. He can cast aside the idea that it is he or God who prevents everything else from being absurd.

#### The restricted economy, to which we have belonged, is entrenched in an impulse to cleanse the world of deviance, chaos, and disorder that displaces violence onto racialized Others.

Winters 17. Joseph, asst. prof. of Religious Studies, member of dept. of African and African American Studies at Duke, “Baldwin, Bataille, and the Anguish of the (Racialized) Human,” Journal of Religious Ethics vol. 45, Issue2, June 2017, pp. 380-405)

The tendency to guard and preserve, to protect what we have accumulated, what we have come to be, and what we imagine ourselves as, is ultimately an issue about being committed to order or the ordering of things. This commitment, Baldwin suggests, is an indelible mark of social existence, the result of our existence as dependent, interactive beings. In his essay “The Creative Process,” he writes, The entire purpose of society is to create a bulwark against the inner and outer chaos, in order to make life bearable and to keep the human race alive.... We become social creatures because we cannot live any other way. But in order to become social, there are a great many other things that we must not become, and we are frightened, all of us, of these forces within us that perpetually menace our precarious security. (Baldwin 1985, 316–17) Baldwin, in a manner that resembles Freud’s discussion of the function of civilization, acknowledges a constitutive limitation of the human subject. While life and self-preservation rely on sociality, social existence—or the binding of individuals to social norms and expectations—necessarily prevents and forecloses certain kinds of “menacing” possibilities, desires, attachments, and modes of being. As the psychoanalytic tradition insists, the process of becoming an intelligible subject within the social order requires a separation from those “great many things that we must not become,” a rejection of various drives, forces, and beings that signify chaos, social death, ambivalence, and the precarity of the self and social world.8 We are disciplined into social logics that associate certain qualities, and beings, with life and fullness and other qualities with death, contradiction, and lack/excess. In Baldwin’s view, art occasionally enables us to experience the relationship between social order and excess, or intelligibility and opacity—and to experience this relationship not as a simple binary. For Baldwin, the artist’s responsibility is to “illuminate the darkness,” to reveal the “mystery of the human being,” to show “what we all know but would rather not know” (Baldwin 1985, 315–16). While the artist is shaped by and within the social order, her onus is to express what social beings must disavow, minimize, or explain away in order to preserve the semblance of order and coherence. In addition to what Baldwin calls extreme, inescapable states (birth, suffering, love, and death), art must be faithful to the general instability and flux that always exists below and behind the precarious durability provided by communities, traditions, and identities. This looming instability, while the source of much pain and anxiety, is also an indication that things can and do change; the present order of things is contingent and the world could be different. 2. Baldwin, Bataille, and the Ambivalent Sacred For Baldwin, anti-black racism, while containing its own particular logics and dynamics, remains emblematic of a collective will to innocence, which in turn reveals something fundamental about the self/other relationship. Our attachment to being coherent, durable selves places severe constraints on our capacity to give, receive, and be open to qualities and circumstances that threaten to unravel (or dirty) the self and the imagined order that it clings to. These ethical themes in Baldwin resonate with the arguments advanced by literary critic and philosopher, George Bataille. According to Bataille, the very qualities that make us human—our investment in duration, in meaning, and in being distinguishable from other beings—necessarily requires us to subordinate others to our desires and projects (Bataille 2006, 29). To live in the “order of things,” according to Bataille, is to inhabit a world in which beings are primarily the occasion to accumulate value, power, and meaning; beings are subordinated to the logic of instrumentality and accumulation. Consequently, the continuation of any individual or collective life requires mechanisms that discipline, contain, or exclude that which might impede the preservation of that life. As Bataille writes: The objective and in a sense transcendent (relative to the subject) positing of the world of things has duration as its foundation: no thing in fact has a separate existence, has a meaning, unless a subsequent time is posited, in view of which it is constituted as an object. The object is defined as an operative power only if its duration is implicitly understood... . Future time constitutes this real world to such a degree that death no longer has a place in it. But it is for this very reason that death means everything to it. (Bataille 2006, 46) To some extent, death and its intimations—loss, suffering, shame, ecstasy, vulnerability—cannot have a place in a world defined by duration and preservation. In other words, even though death is a permanent feature of human life, the order of things must cultivate and imagine ways to diminish, mitigate, and deflect its effects and implications. We feel this pressure in moments when instances of suffering and loss are expected to produce or express some reassuring meaning (everything happens for a reason; that person got what he deserved). This mitigating process typically happens when individuals and communities locate death, suffering, and excessive violence elsewhere, in another place and community—a strategy that often justifies and makes acceptable violent projects to fix or restore that other community. Therefore, when Bataille says that “death means everything” to the world of accumulation and duration, he is thinking about how the anxiety and horror around death is related to our commitment to preserving ourselves in the future, a commitment that involves various forms of displacement and deferral. In other words, the will to futurity intensifies the anxiety and anguish that accompany thoughts and images of death, mortality, and vulnerability. Of course, humans are also fascinated with images, and practices, of violence and death, but only if they can experience and view these images from a comfortable distance or participate in these practices in a manner that reduces the risks to the self’s coherence and duration.9 On the duplicity of the self’s relationship to violence, Bataille writes, “Violence, and death signifying violence, have a double meaning. On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly” (Bataille 1986, 45). What is crucial here is that the order of things, the order of life preservation, is defined over and against death and loss—death means everything to this order. Yet I also take Bataille to be suggesting that everyday projects and strategies of self-preservation are implicated in the mundane, often undetected, exploitation and suffering of others; again, death means everything to the real world. Therefore, the human self is a site of a paradox: the world of projects, goals, and accumulation “imparts an unreal character to death even though man’s membership in this world is tied to the positing of the body as a thing insofar as it is mortal” (Bataille 2006, 46). According to Bataille, our general commitment to duration, to reproducing life, will always mean that some being, force, or desire will be marked as a threat or danger to that reproduction. And those threats will have to be managed, assimilated, disciplined, or subordinated in some manner. One’s ability to endure in this world, to accumulate recognition, prestige, and various kinds of capital means that one must separate oneself, to some extent, from those qualities and characteristics that endanger self or communal projects and aspirations. To put it differently, life needs to be cordoned off from death and those beings associated with death (even as we know that life and death are always intertwined and that certain kinds of subjects and communities are made more vulnerable to death and its intimations). Here Bataille’s line of thought converges with Baldwin’s point about social life providing a kind of barrier to “menacing” forces, to beings and desires that signify chaos and disorder. If Baldwin and Bataille are right, then racism, which is always about marking, disciplining, and managing “dangerous” bodies and communities, must be confronted alongside fundamental social and human limitations.

#### Endless accumulation within the restricted economy ensures excess is conserved, to be re-invested into further production. However, excess can’t be contained. Surplus must always be released, in some way or another. To attempt to contain excess ensures expenditure in catastrophic, rather than glorious means, producing an unsustainable global system.

#### Only embracing the sacrifice of excess provides a sustainable means for society to continue. Rigorous empirics verify our theory.

Huling 19, Ray Huling is a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. Source: Moveable Type, Vol.11, ‘Decadence’ (2019) ‘Bataillean Ecology: An Introduction to the Theory of Sustainable Excess’ [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10079968/1/II%20Ray%20Huling%20Bataillean%20Ecology%20[Final].pdf](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10079968/1/II%20Ray%20Huling%20Bataillean%20Ecology%20%5bFinal%5d.pdf) / brackets for gramma/ brett

Kallis applies these tenets to public policy. His degrowth stance grew out of what one might call the entropic tradition of ecology, founded by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1971). Degrowth removes itself by one step from the steady-state solutions promulgated by scholars such as Herman Daly (1994) in response to Georgescu-Roegen's recognition that economic development, green or not, can never violate physical laws, as its proponents invariably would have it do. Kallis avers ‘that in the long term, a contraction and transformation of the economy [are] inevitable—the question is how it will happen’ 21 , and he devotes much of his book to arguing for the necessity of managing this inevitability through a myriad of processes that are neither capitalist nor socialist.

Kallis scrutinizes the strategic problem that bedevilled Bataille across so many failures: the problem of contagion, of renewing sacred experience as a practice, and of drawing people into the movement. In adducing the opportunity-cost equation that lies at the heart of Bataille's argument, Kallis alludes to Bataille's erotic preoccupations with a flippancy that is both thematically and performatively à propos:

Life and death are two sides of the same coin of the universe: the life of one being is the expenditure or death of another. […] from [Bataille] we can see that no matter how little we produce after oil is over, we will always produce more than will be necessary for the mere survival of those who will have survived. And the problem of what to do with this excess will remain. Make love not war, seems a sound principle. 22

A sound principle indeed (and a fine bumper sticker). The complication that sloganeering would elide is not lost on Kallis: Bataille sees sex as no less evil than war, laughter, tears, and sacrifice. They all count as eroticism in Bataille's special sense, each being no less evil than any of the others, and all are infused with death. It comes down to choosing the evil that will keep humanity on the living side of the Sadean line. The central Bataillean ecological question is: Which excess is sustainable? The paradox is that choosing among evils to arrive at sustainable excess amounts to a rational calculation grounded on a scientifically rigorous model of the world.

Bataillean ecology, then, would force a choice conscious of the constraints of opportunity cost: when capital growth touches natural limits, capital burns up, catastrophically. Thus, a society must choose either to endure this burning or set fire to its wealth beforehand. That is, destroying wealth costs a society the opportunity for capital growth. Even though a Bataillean ecology would accept the growth of capital as good and the waste of capital as evil, it would choose evil. There is no transvaluation of values here.

Bataille extended his advocacy of practices of unproductive expenditure from his early writings into his later ones, from prose-poems to rigorous, if not systematic treatises, first as a means of fighting fascism, then as a means of staving off nuclear holocaust. Scholars of Bataillean ecology extend his ideas further still to the task of stunting material growth. This work depends on embracing Bataille's phenomenology of the scientific world (‘I picture the Earth projected into space, like a woman screaming with her head on fire’ 23), and his characterization of eroticism as a volcanic sacrifice of excess wealth. One must keep these images in mind when addressing the science of sustainability and the practical programs that such research enjoins, if one wishes to hew to the course of environmental prudence. It is of some benefit that in the very origins of contemporary sustainability research, there already appears a slight reflection of these visions.

The Wolf in the Systems Model

The pivotal work in contemporary sustainability is the 1972 MIT study funded by the Club of Rome, Limits to Growth (LtG), which enraged both ends of the political spectrum, from capitalists to communists, for unsurprising reasons. The study consists of the running-through of several computer models of different structures of social relations, and its results predict a slow collapse of population and capital, if the world stays the course of the Standard or ‘do nothing’ model.

From its publication and over the ensuing decades, orthodox capitalists and orthodox Marxists, both of whom reject the notion of natural limits, have rejected the findings of the LtG team. However, since the late-1990s, new assessments of this research have found that the world economy has indeed progressed in accord with its Standard model. One set of these reassessments by Graham Turner, observes that, continuing apace threatens the following outcomes: ‘Diminishing per capita supply of services and food cause a rise in the death rate from about 2020 (and somewhat lower rise in the birth rate, due to reduced birth control options). The global population therefore falls, at about half a billion per decade, starting at about 2030’. 24 The worst famine in history is Mao's: 35 million people starved to death in China from 1959 to 1961. Turner suggests that these catastrophic figures will be exceeded if we continue to do nothing, predicting that a yearly average of 50 million people will die, mainly of hunger, for decades.

From almost the beginning of the crystallization of environmental crisis in LtG-style models, there lay a splinter of Bataillean ecology. Aurelio Peccei founded the Club of Rome in 1968; in 1973, he co-authored a defense of the LtG report. His co-author was Manfred Siebker, a physicist and member of the Club. From this point, Siebker would write a series of environmentalist screeds that would culminate with the CADMOS report, The State of the Union of Europe, edited by Denis de Rougement, a colleague of Bataille's who lectured at the College of Sociology. All of these writings express a Bataillean sensibility, but it is only in 1978's ‘Economania’ that Siebker cites Bataille explicitly, frames the ultimate problem in Bataille's terms, and proffers Bataille's brand of solution:

[…] I repeat the words of Georges Bataille—the fundamental problem of human societies is that of surplus, of excess, human wants can transcend immediacy, and human activities (production, services, rituals, etc.) are not programmed to self-limitation beyond immediacy. […]

Many different solutions have been applied to the problem of how to get rid of surplus. […] The most disastrous of all, for the long-term viability of the system, is the modern one which essentially substitutes a relatively mild disequilibrium problem by a snowballing mechanism: re-investment, leading to an exponential acceleration of the economic Machine […] 25

In The Tears of Eros, Bataille pleads for a rational ordering of society that would avert catastrophe: ‘[…] unless we consider the various possibilities for consumption which are opposed to war, and for which erotic pleasure—the instant consumption of energy—is the model, we will never discover an outlet founded on reason’, 26 a sentiment that Siebker iterates when he claims that the ‘real quest is for a sane society’. 27

The particular difficulty of these sighs from the ecological deep is that they call for a conscious violation of capitalist and economic virtues at every scale. Only by the living of a new reality, and by the suffering that it entails, can a new value system emerge out of the nihilistic debris left by economania. Citizens' initiatives as well as non-conformist action groups are part of the new living realities by ‘real people’ (as opposed to the ‘non-living’ of those immersed in technology as reality) if they communicate and if they open their focus beyond their immediate concerns. 28

Siebker wrote with global environmental policy in mind (as well as dinner parties), and with a sensitivity for the anguish inherent in the acts of communally wrenching away from the anxieties of growth as if no limits existed and communally plunging toward the intensity of experience necessitated by the embrace of community within the circle of natural limits, which are always volcanic. His recognition of these calderian emotions takes us to the rim on which Bataille would have had us tip over into a new temple. The fundamental principle of Bataillean ecology itself becomes clear and distinct in this will to imbalance.

#### The state proliferates violence while creating taboos on the unthinkable violence that opposes it, ensuring that opposition is held to a standard of reasonability. True liberation requires strikes which are impossible, “…if nothing could be found beyond political activity, [we] would meet nothing but the void.”[[1]](#footnote-1) State-based recognition cannot be a basis for revolutionary politics.

Oxana Timofeeva 20, Professor, Leading researcher @ European University at St Petersburg, Tyumen State University. EUSP, 2020. ISSN 2310-3817. Vol. 9. No. 1. p. 144–165. “From the Quarantine to the General Strike: On Bataille’s Political Economy” <http://stasisjournal.net/index.php/journal/article/download/165/251/> brett

However, if we look back at twentieth-century theory, we discern a minor, yet interesting tendency of an apology for violence that exists within the leftist tradition. There are grounds for believing that Bataille belongs to this tendency—together with thinkers like Georges Sorel, Walter Benjamin, and Frantz Fanon. I put these four names together, because, in spite of serious differences, there is a structural homology between their conceptions of violence that can be described through the dialectical movement of the double negation. Namely, in these conceptions, there are always two types of violence—the one that we reject, and the one that we appreciate, validate, provide, or fantasize about. Thus, Sorel (2004) opposes a supreme proletarian violence of the general strike to the brutal violence of the capitalist state system; Benjamin (1996: 236–52) introduces the divine, or revolutionary violence contesting the violence of the law; Fanon (1963: 35–106) formulates the idea of the resistance of colonized people that becomes even more violent and brutal than the colonial regime against which it raises. In all these cases, the second, true violence—upright, just, rebellious, emancipatory or redemptive—destroys a preceding, stupid violence of a certain established system of the relationship of power.

Bataille, too, differentiates between two kinds of violence. As emphasized by Benjamin Noys: “Bataille explores the violence of difference in a reading of violence as a general economy. This requires careful and critical reading because it becomes easy to assimilate Bataille to a culture of violence, and all too often ‘celebrations’ of Bataille do just that. However, in breaking the (violently imposed) taboos on violence Bataille is not aiming to increase violence but to examine how these strict taboos generate their own violence” (2000: 134). I fully agree with this claim, and suggest tracing the connection between violence and general economy from Bataille’s late essay “Pure Happiness” (2001), where violence as a sovereign unlimitedness is opposed to the limits violently imposed by reason. What reason does is a constant operation of limitation: thought creates a sphere of things that are thinkable, that is, reducible to certain categories of reason. In this operation, something is necessarily excluded, and it is precisely this something that creates the domain of violence, or, as Bataille otherwise calls it, the sacred.

Yes, for Bataille, violence and the sacred are often synonymous. The sacred is that which has been excluded by reason, first of all, as animality, as an unthinkable nature. It is, in Kathryn Yusoff’s words, “…excluded from the ledger and returns as a destructive force because it has not been properly accounted for” (2015: 393). Such an exclusion can be compared to the process of repression, in a Freudian sense (Freud 1965: 141–58), followed by the return of the repressed, or to the suppression of aggression that, without finding a way out, transforms into mental illness, as in case of the oppressed people in colonies (Fanon 1963: 249–310). According to Bataille, the excluded is produced by reason that, positing the limits, functions as a kind of policeman: what it excludes from its domain becomes the object of its fundamental interrogation, for which violence “offers itself as the only answer” (Bataille 2001: 228). Bataille further suggests that such an answer “can only come from the outside, from that which thought had to exclude in order to exist,” and identifies it with God himself: “Is not God an expression of violence offered as a solution?” (Ibid).

Bataille’s equation of God with violence resonates highly with the concept of divine violence, which, according to Benjamin’s materialist political theology, breaks the vicious circle of the mythic, that is, law-making and law-preserving violence (Khatib 2011: 5). Benjamin invites us to think of violence not in terms of needs and ends, but in terms of a pure manifestation. Mythic violence manifests the power of the strongest, the law, the Father, whereas divine violence manifests justice. Imagine a situation, as simple as it is paradigmatic, of people being brutally beaten by the police. The law is on the side of the police officer, whereas nothing seems to be on the side of the people that are beaten. One says “Only God could help them!” meaning that nothing could really help these people: the law itself becomes an instance of an ultimate injustice. There is, however, still another kind of violence at people’s disposal, one that is outside the law. This violence is divine not because it comes from God, but because it is in place of God. It is “sovereign” (Benjamin 1996: 252) in a sense that “there is no big Other guaranteeing its divine nature” (Žižek 2008: 200), no police officer, and no God other than this violence itself, but also in a sense that, in contrast to the “administrative” mythic violence, it serves no goal; it just strikes. Divine violence is “the sign and seal but never the means of sacred dispatch” (Benjamin 1996: 252).

Likewise, “full violence,” according to Bataille, “can be the means to no end. It would be subordinate to no goal” (2001: 229). As he explains in the notes to “Pure Happiness”: “Violence reduced to a means is an end in the service of a means—it is a god become a servant” (Ibid: 291–92). However, there is a significant difference between these conceptions. While in Benjamin divinity appears as a manifestation, or a “sign and seal” of justice, Bataille’s god of violence is alien to any moral categories of this kind. It cannot be just or unjust, but is absolutely indifferent and stands beyond good and evil. It is not a God of theology, but rather “the animal god” whose “incomparable purity” and “violence above laws” Bataille invites us to discover (Ibid: 228). Further he introduces the following distinction:

I imagine two kinds of Violence. The victim of the first kind is led astray. It is the Violence of a rapid train at the moment of the death of the despairing person who willfully threw himself on the tracks. The second kind is that of the serpent or the spider, that of an element which is irreconcilable to the order wherein the possibility of being is given, which turns you to stone. It does not confound but slips; it dispossesses, it paralyzes, it fascinates before you might oppose anything to it. This kind of Violence, the second kind, is in itself imaginary. It is nevertheless the faithful image of a violence, this measureless violence without form, without method—that at any moment I can equate with God. (Bataille 2001: 232)

In the image of the train that will run us down, a reader can recognize the idea of the limited and limiting violence of the police of reason, structurally similar to Benjaminian mythic violence, or the state violence to which Sorel opposed a general strike, or the violence of the white colonizers described by Fanon. However, the second kind of violence according to Bataille introduces something completely new. The god of violence is not only animal; it is nonhuman in a broader sense. Violence as an answer to the limitations of reason breaks the borders of the human; it is non-anthropomorphic and non-anthropocentric. I cannot identify with a serpent, a spider, or with a hurricane in the way I could identify with the struggles of people in colonies or with workers on strike. It belongs to the world of immediacy and immanence, where, according to Bataille, animals eat one another, but those who eat do not really differentiate themselves from those whom they eat, do not conceive them as separate objects. Nonhuman violence is without a subject. No one really commits it, no one is to blame. I cannot blame a wolf for eating a calf. Predation and other forms of violence inherent in the animal world are compared to the movement of the sea waves swallowing each other: “every animal is in the world like water in water,” Bataille writes in the Theory of Religion (1989: 19).

#### To the state, which is the taboo on “illegitimate” means of violence, the right to strike is always “conditional” -- only a strike that exists outside the limits of the law can be truly unconditional. Refuse a view of rights as something that can ever function external to the logics of the state and reason.

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In other words, nothing would endanger the law more than the possibility of its authority being contested by a violence over which it has no control. The function of the law would therefore be, first and foremost, to contain violence within its own boundaries. It is in this context that, to demonstrate this surprising hypothesis, Benjamin invokes two examples: the right to strike guaranteed by the state and the law of war.

Let us return to the place that the right to strike occupies within class struggle. To begin with, the very idea of such a struggle implies certain forms of violence. The strike could then be understood as one of the recognizable forms that this violence can take. However, this analytical framework is undermined as soon as this form of violence becomes regulated by a “right to strike,” such as the one recognized by law in France in 1864. What this recognition engages is, in fact, the will of the state to control the possible “violence” of the strike. Thus, the “right” of the right to strike appears as the best, if not the only, way for the state to circumscribe within (and via) the law the relative violence of class struggles. We might consider this to be the perfect illustration of the aforementioned hypothesis. Yet, there are two lines of questioning that destabilize this hypothesis that we would do well to consider

First, is it legitimate to present the strike as a form of violence? Who has a vested interest in such a representation? In other words, how can we trace a clear and unequivocal demarcation between violence and nonviolence? Are we not always bound to find residues of violence, even in those actions that we would be tempted to consider nonviolent? The second line of questioning is just as important and is rooted in the distinction established by Georges Sorel, in his Reflections on Violence, between the “political strike” and the “proletarian general strike,” to which Benjamin dedicates a set of complementary analyses in §13 of his essay. Here, again, we are faced with a question of limits. What is at stake is the possibility for a certain type of strike (the proletarian general strike) to exceed the limits of the right to strike— turning, in other words, the right to strike against the law itself. The phenomenon is that of an autoimmune process, in which the right to strike that is meant to protect the law against the possible violence of class struggles is transformed into a means for the destruction of the law. The difference between the two types of strikes is nevertheless introduced with a condition: “The validity of this statement, however, is not unrestricted because it is not unconditional,” notes Benjamin in §7. We would be mistaken in believing that the right to strike is granted and guaranteed unconditionally. Rather, it is structurally subjected to a conflict of interpretations, those of the workers, on the one hand, and of the state on the other. From the point of view of the state, the partial strike cannot under any circumstance be understood as a right to exercise violence, but rather as the right to extract oneself from a preexisting (and verifiable) violence: that of the employer. In this sense, the partial strike should be considered a nonviolent action, what Benjamin named a “pure means.”

The interpretations diverge on two main points. The first clearly depends on the alleged “violence of the employer,” a predicate that begs the question: Who might have the authority to recognize such violence? Evidently it is not the employer. The danger is that the state would similarly lack the incentive to make such a judgment call. It is nearly impossible, in fact, to find a single instance of a strike in which this recognition of violence was not subject to considerable controversy. The political game is thus the following: the state legislated the right to strike in order to contain class struggles, with the condition that workers must have “good reason” to strike. However, it is unlikely that a state systematically allied with (and accomplice to) employers will ever recognize reasons as good, and, as a consequence, it will deem any invocation of the right to strike as illegitimate. Workers will therefore be seen as abusing a right granted by the state, and in so doing transforming it into a violent means. On this point, Benjamin’s analyses remain extremely pertinent and profoundly contemporary. They unveil the enduring strategy of governments confronted with a strike (in education, transportation, or healthcare, for example) who, after claiming to understand the reasons for the protest and the grievances of the workers, deny that the arguments constitute sufficient reason for a strike that will likely paralyze this or that sector of the economy. They deny, in other words, that the conditions denounced by the workers display an intrinsic violence that justifies the strike. Let us note here a point that Benjamin does not mention, but that is part of Sorel’s reflections: this denial inevitably contaminates the (socialist) left once it gains power. What might previously have seemed a good reason to strike when it was the opposition is deemed an insufficient one once it is the ruling party. In the face of popular protest, it always invokes a lack of sufficient rationale, allowing it to avoid recognizing the intrinsic violence of a given social or economic situation, or of a new policy. And it is because it refuses to see this violence and to take responsibility for it that the left regularly loses workers’ support.

The second conflict of interpretation concerns what is at stake in the strike. For the state, the strike implies a withdrawal or act of defiance vis-à-vis the employer, while for the workers it is a means of pressuring, if not of blackmail or even of “hostage taking.” The diference is thus between an act of suspension (which can be considered nonviolent) and one of extortion (which includes violence). Does this mean that “pure means” are not free of ambiguity, and that there can be no nonviolent action that does not include a residue of violence? It is not clear that Benjamin’s text allows us to go this far. Nevertheless, the problem of pure means, approached through the notion of the right to strike, raises the following question: Could it be that the text “Zur Kritik der Gewalt,” which we are accustomed to reading as a text on violence, deals in fact with the possibility and ambiguity of nonviolence?

The opposition between the aforementioned conflicts of interpretation manifests itself in Benjamin’s excursus on the revolutionary strike, and specifically in the opposition between the political strike and the proletarian general strike, and in the meaning we should attribute to the latter. As previously discussed, the state will never admit that the right to strike is a right to violence. Its interpretative strategy consists in denying, as much as possible, the effective exercise of the right that it theoretically grants. Under these conditions, the function of the revolutionary strike is to return the strike to its true meaning; in other words, to return it to its own violence. In this context, the imperative is to move beyond idle words: a call to strike is a call to violence. This is the reason why such a call is regularly met with a violent reaction from the state, because trade unions force the state to recognize what it is trying to ignore, what it pretends to have solved by recognizing the right to strike: the irreducible violence of class struggles. This means that the previously discussed alternative between “suspension” and “extortion” is valid only for the political strike—in other words, for a strike whose primary vocation is not, contrary to that of the proletarian general strike, to revolt against the law itself. Essentially, the idea of a proletarian general strike, its myth (to borrow Sorel’s words), is to escape from this dichotomous alternative that inevitably reproduces and perpetuates the violence of domination.

#### An infamous economist once said; “What drives the crowds to the street is the emotion directly aroused by striking events in the atmosphere of a storm, it is the contagious emotion that, from house to house, from suburb to suburb, suddenly turns a hesitating ~~man~~ [person] into a frenzied being”[[2]](#footnote-2). What normative visions of politics get wrong is an attachment to bureaucracy, which dooms the ability to strike out against the present state of things in an organic manner.

#### Thus, the plan: I affirm the revolutionary general strike as a method to recognize the unconditional right of workers to strike.

#### We offer a plan for action and resistance -- the revolutionary general strike is a festive event that brings out the power of the masses. Voting aff is a wager to move beyond logics of accumulation and restricted economy, bringing about the only true unconditional guarantee to strike.

Gordienko ‘12 /Andrey, Ph.D., PhD Film & TV @ UCLA “The Politics of Eros: The Philosophy of Georges Bataille and Japanese New Wave Cinema” UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/48f92067> brett

Perhaps, then, Suleiman's effort to periodize Bataille's intellectual itinerary does not contradict Besnier's thesis concerning the centrality of sovereignty to Bataille's thought? This question hinges on whether Suleiman understands the concept of “the political” as well as that of “power” in the same way as Besnier does. I would contend that when Bataille speaks of the seizure of power, he has in mind the "powerless power" of the masses as opposed to the State power. In "Popular Front in the Street," he writes: "What interests us above all ... are the emotions that give the human masses the surges of power that tear them away from the domination of those who only know how to lead them on to poverty and to the slaughterhouse.”65 Power of the masses, of which Bataille speaks, is anarchic power that differs in kind from that form of power which founds the State. The distinction between the two forms of power in turn presupposes two radically different conceptions of revolution. Thus, when Bataille appeals to the power of the masses to revolt, he calls for the destruction of the very form of the State as opposed to mere substitution of some new version of the State for its existing variant. While this distinction inevitably invokes Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the difference (originally posited by Georges Sorel) between a general proletarian strike and a general political strike (with the former entailing the complete negation of the State and the latter merely demanding that the State reform itself), it is in Maurice Blanchot's work that one finds the most precise characterization of Bataille's politics of the impossible that bases itself on the revolutionary potential of the powerless power of the people: “Contrary to 'traditional revolutions,' it was not a question of simply taking power to replace it with some other power, nor of taking the Bastille or the Winter Palace, or the Elysée or the National Assembly, all objectives of no importance. It was not even a question of overthrowing an old world; what mattered was to let a possibility manifest itself, the possibility - beyond any utilitarian gain - of a being-together that gave back to all the right to equality in fraternity through a freedom of speech that elated everyone.”66 Although Blanchot has in mind not the activities of Popular Front in the 1930s, but rather the event of May '68, his work shows a marked affinity with Besnier's decision to discuss Bataille's political logic in terms of ‘possibility’ and ‘impossibility.’ In other words, “the possibility of a being-together” that Blanchot finds disclosed in the image of the agitated masses taking over the streets is the possibility of the impossible – of the community forming spontaneously, without programme, without demands for political representation, held together only by pure effervescence. The power of the people is limitless, he insists, precisely because it incorporates absolute powerlessness - that is to say, powerlessness with respect to the possibilities of founding another State, securing the right to representation, passing new legislation, etc. Indeed, the idea of "freedom of speech" invoked by Blanchot has nothing to do with the ideal of freedom advocated by the proponents of parliamentary democracy inasmuch as the former presupposes that the people need no politicians to represent them and thus rejects the very principle of mediation. As Bataille himself puts it, “for us having the debate means having it in the street, it means having it where emotion can seize men and push them to the limit, without meeting the eternal obstacles that result from the defense of old political positions.”67 Thus, when Suleiman invokes Bataille's calls to seize power in order to question Besnier's thesis concerning the politics of the impossible, she appears to retain the traditional conception of power that presupposes the existence of the State. Besnier, on the other hand, puts forward an entirely different notion of power at odds with the form of the State: “the 'powerless power' which, resistant to all power and in that sense 'impossible,' characterizes the people.”68

#### The aff is a rupture with historic time that builds social energy among the subaltern masses and fights back against cruelly optimistic attachments to reform.

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One would be hard pressed to find a writer who was more conscious of the power struggle at play in the act of naming violence than Georges Sorel. Let us briefly turn away from Benjamin and toward Sorel's Reflections on Violence (1907), which was a source of major inspiration for Benjamin's “Zur Kritik der Gewalt.” For Sorel, socialism is meaningless unless it sets as its promise the emancipation of the working class from all situations of domination—in other words, unless its goal is one of creating a society freed from all relations between masters and slaves. Thus, the following question emerges: What needs must we satisfy such that socialist emancipation is not revealed to be a mere illusion? For Sorel, critiquing the masters of the day is not sufficient precaution. We must protect ourselves from the masters of the future. This is why, as we will see, the political strike—the strike understood as an extortion, whose aim is to compromise with the masters of the time—is situated in opposition to such a radical promise of liberation, and constitutes, as a consequence, a betrayal. Herein lies the difficulty of socialism: every time we think (or hope) to have gotten rid of the figure of the master, one way or another he or she finds his or her way back.

Accordingly, we come to understand the problem as the following: How can we safeguard the promise, inscribed within a project of radical elimination of masters that would ipso facto compromise it? For Sorel, this need could not be secured as long as the socialists aimed to conquer power through legal means (in other words, democratically and nonviolently). Their compromises with capitalism, their arrangements, and their weaknesses were nothing more than a way of making themselves acceptable to the masters of their time as possible masters of the future. Is it not in these terms that we should understand their fascination with state power and governmental institutions? With this analysis, Sorel approaches Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of the links between socialism and parliamentarism, formulated some twenty years earlier. They both condemn, for disparate reasons but with remarkably similar terminology, the illusory emancipatory character of such links. Far from trusting a project of emancipation through legal means, Sorel argues for the need to distinguish two radically different forms of political action. The first, parliamentary, one optimistically believes that a continuous path toward social progress can be traced through legal reforms. The second, on the other hand, might be understood as a “pessimistic path” leading toward a necessarily disastrous “deliverance.” The former asserts that there is no means of emancipating the people other than the legal conquest of power through democratic elections, while the latter places all hope in the promises of a general revolutionary strike. Building on this basic distinction, Sorel's project consists of showing that the second way is not only credible, but also moral—sufficiently moral for him to define this pessimistic “march towards deliverance” as a “metaphysics of morals.”2

This decisive distinction between optimism and pessimism, and between reform and revolution, demands two further considerations. First, the distinction rests on two different attitudes with regard to the state. The first (socialist) one might be called the “superstition of the state,” although Benjamin would undoubtedly speak of the “superstition of the law.” In this approach, having gained power through legal means, laws and state institutions are reinforced in order to justify and render acceptable reforms that contradict the initial promises of those who assumed power. It strives to reassure the masters (the dominant class) by showing them that they have nothing to fear for their interests, while asking the subaltern masses to wait. Consequently, the expounders of this superstition refuse all forms of violence that are not legitimized and organized by the state. The preservation of the state is thus favored over the emancipation of the working class, while the promise of a society liberated from master–slave relations is substituted by a desire for their mutual peace. Inversely, revolutionary syndicalism, far from wanting to seize the state and its means, wishes only to radically overthrow it.

The second consideration is that Sorel's critique of the ideology of the preservation and conservation of the state confers a new meaning to the notion of class struggle. It constitutes precisely that which reformist socialism tries to avoid or move beyond. Under the pretext of social peace, this form of socialism seeks nothing more than a compromise, a pact with the bourgeoisie that will not change in the least the balance of power in society. Thus, social peace is suspect and untrustworthy, because for the sake of such a peace, bound by duty, discipline, and silence, the masters will always remain the same. In this sense, social peace is linked to an impounding of speech, a confiscation of the voice that corresponds to the confiscation of all hope for a future deliverance. Hence Sorel's central question: Which voice, one shared rather than dominant, could carry such a hope? We must, in other words, find a word—or, more exactly, the true image of an action—capable of carrying the deliverance. If such an image were to exist, it would need to be resistant to appropriation by the dominant class, and it should have no other aim than to overthrow domination. Sorel calls it a “myth” to distinguish it from a utopia, a myth that can be criticized for offering the false and illusory image of an “enchanted” society to come.

Thus, we arrive at the core of the argument: for Sorel the revolutionary general strike is a myth, one that should be understood as the image of the action necessary to emancipate the working class. It is the image of a rupture with historic time, and it is this that marks its fundamental difference from a utopia. The latter, with its program of ridding society of all its ills, in fact enters into a contract with its own heritage in order to accommodate the pressures of its historical epoch. Conversely, the myth wants nothing to do with the past; marked by a radical discontinuity, it does not express any interest in economic, sociological, or historical data. The myth fully identifies with the rupture that it imposes by fulfilling three main needs: (1) to find a word for the future, one whose eschatological dimension is not threatened by scientific discussions; (2) to invent a word whose consideration is not subjected to the condition of its feasibility, nor of its probable or possible effects; and (3) to present an image of a radical class struggle that would abolish all confusion between fields—in other words, an image that would erase all risk of a paradoxical reinforcement of domination and would, rather, precipitate its undoing.

This is, then, the function of the proletarian general strike: it is a myth whose strength lies in its dual character. On the one hand, the myth is meant to unite the working class, without requiring any submission in return. It imposes itself without taking the shape of a command uttered by an organization or a party. On the other hand, it immediately exposes the insufficiency of the reforms proposed by the system, unveiling the abyss that separates revolutionary hope from all forms of compromise. Such a myth cannot accommodate any preservation or conservation of the law. The result is the justification of violence that constitutes one of the most distinctive traits of Sorel's thought. Nothing can happen without violence, as a politics that tries to contain violence will be unable to respond to the mythical imperative of undoing all domination. This is, ultimately, the terrible (and terrifying) law of the myth: there can be no salvation without a violent overthrow of the current state of affairs.

#### The role of the judge is to endorse the best revolutionary praxis.

#### Any other role of the judge instills nihilism and sterile argumentation. In this debate, you have only to choose between liberation from the principle of rational control OR the globalized misery of conventional life.

Schnurer 04, Maxwell Schnurer (Ph.D., Pittsburgh), Assistant Professor @ Marist College, Poughkeepsie, New York. “GAMING AS CONTROL: WILL TO POWER, THE PRISON OF DEBATE AND GAME CALLED POTLATCH,” CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATE.” <https://debate.uvm.edu/CADForumGaming2003.pdf> brett

Worse than being satisfied with shouting at walls, approaching debate from the perspective of games encourages a god-complex that teaches debaters that saying something poignant in a debate round translates into something larger in the world. Christopher Douglas, a professor of English at Furman University, explores how games teach us to adore the replay: “This is the experience structured into the gaming process—the multiple tries at the same space-time moment. Like Superman after Lois Lane dies, we can in a sense turn back the clock and replay the challenge, to a better end” (2002, p. 7). What kind of academic activity encourages students to fantasize about making change without considering for the slightest bit how to bring that change about?

Douglas positions this impulse alongside the Sisyphean burden of trying to make the world into a structured, controlled, sterile environment. Sisyphus and the reset button on a videogame console share a common ancestor with the debate model that has thirty debate teams advocating different policies in separate rooms at exactly the same time. All of these examples showcase humans desperately attempting to construct meaning out of a confusing world, where the human will to power forces the world to fit a structure. Douglas reminds us that games help to structure an oft-confusing world, imbuing the person imagining with god-like powers (McGuire, 1980; Nietzsche 1966):

Games therefore do not threaten film’s status so much as they threaten religion, because they perform the same existentially soothing task as religion. They proffer a world of meaning, in which we not only have a task to perform, but a world that is made with us in mind. And indeed, the game world is made with us, or at least our avatar in mind. (Douglas, 2002, p. 9)

Gaming draws forth a natural impulse of humans – to make the world in our image. But debate and videogames contain the same fantastic lure that encourages people to pore their energies into debate. Fiat and utopian flights of fancy are both seductions of our will to power, encouraging us to commit to becoming better debaters.

This process of self-important distraction has its model in the theories of the hyper-real posited by Jean Baudrillard. He argues that modern economies are geared to sell humans mass produced products, but whose advertising attempts to convince people that they have an authentic experience with the product.

Economic structures make products that are more-than real – hyperreal in order to sell their products. The hyperreal creates games and fantasylands that are far richer and pleasurable than real life. One example of the hyperreal is Epcott center at Disneyland, which reduces foreign cultures to their most base natures – ensuring that everything is uniform, bland, and suitably “ethnic.”

While one never need worry about eating food that is “too strange” in the Epcott lands, other negatives emerge in the world of the hyperreal. Humans who desire order and structure to our worlds often come to prefer the hyperreal to the real. The hyperreal has a world with all of the attractions of our own, but with none of the depressing realities of our own world. The hyperreal doesn’t have credit card bills or racism. The hyperreal is filled with beautiful people (who all want to have sex with you). The hyperreal is a hot seduction pulling our vision and hearing away form our own lives.

Describing Snider’s gaming as a dangerous distraction that pulls us away from our communities and our lives is a bit simplistic. Rather, gaming greases the wheels for powers of control to remain in control. Douglas articulates some of the specific ways games solidify structures of power.

In board games or computer games, however, players actually do start out in relative equality (although there are some chance elements as well, depending on the game), whereas in real life, so many characteristic of one’s life are already determined before birth, including social and economic standing, political freedom, skin color, gender, etc. What games accomplish is the instilling of the ideology of equality, which postulates that we are born equal and that differences emerge later on; the primary different to be explained away in this way is that of economic disparity, and games help explain that difference as the result of, in America, hard work and effort vs. laziness. Thus gaming helps inculcate the ideology that covers over the fact that, with the exception of the information technology bubble, most of those who are wealthy in the United States were born that way. Beyond this narrow ideological function, the game helps create subjects that accept the inevitability of rules as things that are given and must be “played” within—or else there is no game. This process is not total or ever complete, as the current gaming discourse complaining about the rules shows; here, player critique a games rules in view of a conventionalized notion of how “reality” works, or, less often, how a game’s playability is compromised by rules that are too “realistic (Douglas, 2002, p. 24).

Viewing debate as a game may have the opposite effect that Snider desires. Gaming teaches participants to play by the rules and even when challenging the game, to do that within the games structures. Debaters who are moved by poetry are encouraged to bring that poetry back to the debate realm – not to become poets.2

There are certainly debate-activists who bring their debate skills to bear on the political community. These debaters seamlessly slide between academic hyperbole in the First Affirmative Constructive and talking to homeless folks at a Food Not Bombs meal. But these folks are few and far between. Most who hear the call to conscience turn their backs on the call and justify their (in) actions by valorizing debate.3

Let me be clear that the desire of individuals to make the world is not the enemy. It is a positive drive that encourages debaters to fiat worlds into existence or hypothesizes that the world would be good if George Bush were before the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity. This drive to create a better world is the will to power. The big question is, what we do with that will to power? Recognizing that there are many complex problems in the world that require smart articulate people to solve them, we can appreciate the potential value of will to power (McGuire). In the debate context, will to power becomes reified in a hyper-real role-playing exercise.

Debate can be an amazing experience where students learn about complex ideas and then take those ideas into their own lives and communities. Debate can be a method for learning that people have their own voices in a world drowning with mediated/televised slime-balls. Debate can encourage intellectual growth and cause epiphanies. Debate encourages solidarity and teaches people to struggle together. Debate is primed to be a blast furnace for the will to power and take it to the furthest level of revolutionary potential. The only limitation is our own. If we frame debate to limit the revolutionary potential of the participants, then we do a disservice not only to our students, but also to the world.

Nietzschean will to power is a drive for self-overcoming, transforming fuel for personal and collective change.4 Will to power exists in all of us as a lunging to escape our current world and create another beyond the moral structure and hierarchy of this world. This desire to create a better world is admirable and is at the root of social change. My criticism of gaming is that this energy is sublimated into a fantasy world rather than being brought to the larger world. But perhaps there is a kind of game that might elicit something of what I desire . . . from within debate.

The Real Game: Potlatch

As pointed out in the last section, the stakes for the game of debate are high. The method of debate contains the possibility for revolutionary insight and revolutionary praxis. The question is how to understand an activity without systematizing and controlling the potential of debate. What we really must do is let free the will to power within debaters. In this sense, we can use gaming as the topoi to launch our conversation to a debate game that might encourage revolution.

But what does will to power look like? How do we encourage it? Lets get a feeling from George Bataille, who orients the Nietzschean impulse of will to power alongside a quote from Nietzsche himself:

Through the shutters into my window comes an infinite wind, carrying with it unleashed struggles, raging disasters of the ages. And don’t I too carry within me a blood rage, a blindness satisfied by the hunger to mete out blows? How I would enjoy being a pure snarl of hatred, demanding death: the upshot being no prettier than two dogs going at it tooth and nail! Though I am tired and feverish...“Now the air all around is alive with the heat, earth breathing a fiery breath. Now everyone walks naked, the good and bad, side by side. And for those in love with knowledge, it’s a celebration.” (The Will to Power) (4)

Will to power can be the outgrowth of debate that challenges existing structures. Bataille and Nietzsche desire a wild emancipation from traditional structures, far beyond conventional morality. Coupling Nietzsche’s theorizing with the practice of debate something new can emerge, but only if we free ourselves from the shackles of conventional debate, including gaming. How to break these chains? How do we get beyond that which has brought us so far? To help, I want to turn to Guy Debord and the Situationists.

Guy Debord was a French revolutionary whose political theorizing and activism culminated in the creation first of the Letterist International and later in the establishment of the Situationist International. The Letterists/Situationists were revolutionary philosophers who believed that the situations of the modern world were increasingly controlled by mediated/corporate experience. They viewed traditional politics in all of its reformist formats as a waste of time. Through a variety of situations (manipulated by the situationists) it was possible to create revolutionary meaning. They used a variety of tactics in order to elicit revolutionary change. Some of their methods, like detournement, have become common post-modern critical theory concepts.5

I focus our attention on the Situationists because they succeeded in creating a revolution. Situationist propaganda and theorizing were at the heart of the Parisian rebellion of May of 1968. This was the most powerful expression of malaise against the increasingly wealthy industrial western world. The riots in Paris, which upended cars and collectives emerged in downtown, became a model for revolutions in the industrialized north. Debord was seen as an intellectual architect of the uprising of students and workers. Situationists/Letterists were increasingly capable of articulate criticisms of the nature of the spectacle. These were often told through journals, graffiti, and posters (Dark Star Collective, 2001; Debord, 1995; Jappe, 1992; Hussey, 2001).

One of the most important Situationist tactics was articulated in the potlatch. The potlatch was a practice modeled on American indigenous communities of increasingly committed giving. In the potlatch, indigenous would give everything they had to each other, ever increasing the stakes of the gifts until the gifts were so outlandish the offers exposed the foolish nature of ownership. Potlatch became so important to these revolutionaries that they named their first journal potlatch because the writings held within the journal would hopefully be given on and on in an ever increasing spiral. Potlatch became an extended metaphor for the Situationists/Letterists, indicating all the possible spaces where revolution could emerge without capitalist economies. Every non-capitalist moment eked out of the day was articulated as a potlatch. Every relationship that emerged along side revolutionary dialogue became a potlatch. In a recent biography of Debord and the situationists, the author Hussey describes the Potlatch.

Potlatch . . . is the highest form of game. It is also the living moment of poetry, a moment which breaks down or reverses conventional chronological patterns. Most significantly, the object or gift which the Letterist International gave functioned symbolically between the giver, the International Letterists, and the receiver. The relationship between the two constitutes a third term – the gift is also a catalyst of the future in the form of a crystallization of desire. ‘Don’t collect Potlatch!’ ran a line at the end of the journals second year. “Time is working against you!” (Hussey, 2001, p. 89)

For the Situationists, the potlatch was the ultimate resistance to traditional economies. Originally a concept theorized by George Battaille, the potlatch was seen as a method to criticize the acquisition/showcase methods of modern capitalist economies. Because the potlatch could never be returned, it highlighted the foolishness of the modern economy and state. Through sacrifice and destruction, the act of giving overwhelms the possible response. Eventually, the social requirements of the potlatch necessitate that every society member give away everything they could ever have.

Yet we should not move too far from the fundamental truth of the potlatch: it is in fact a game. Indigenous nations would choose to exchange gifts in the potlatch as a form of entertainment. But let us not understate the importance of games. This game was made illegal because it was so dangerous to colonial economies. The Potlatch was recognized as threatening the burgeoning trading economy that was central to westward expansion. The potlatch was the most dangerous idea that indigenous nations could forward against the white/capitalist drive.6

The act of giving too much was the threat. This move disturbed the intense drive for acquisition. Why fight to trade beaver pelt, when at the next potlatch your neighbor might give you all her possessions? Potlatch was threatening because it made competition meaningless.

Non-competitive social structure was only one threat from the Potlatch. Situationist biographer Jappe discovers an obscure quotation by Debord on the Potlatch (Debord himself was remarkably close-lipped about the meaning of Potlatch): “Debord refers explicitly to the Indian custom of Potlatch and announces that ‘the non-saleable goods that a free bulletin such as this is able to distribute are novel desires and problems; and only the further elaboration of these by others can constitute the corresponding return gift’” (148). What was exchanged in Debord’s vision was not necessarily goods but rather ideas.7

Debate is the ultimate potlatch, demanding that we offer up something inside of ourselves without asking for something in return. Debate provides a few minutes carved out of lives that are otherwise consumed by pop-up ads, or email. When I think about the moments that I treasure in my life, few of them are moments of consumption. I don’t remember when I bought my television, but I remember with painful longing the last bicycle ride I took with friends.

Alongside the memories of moments with friends and in nature, I treasure a collection of moments in debate. Moments when I first learned about ideas, late nights in the squad room, the friendships that emerged, and watching my debaters grow and develop. The parts of the potlatch where humans draw out moments of freedom with each other are increasingly the only thing that keeps me interested in debate. Debord and the Situationists wanted people to take their initial offerings of the Potlatch and move them along into their own lives. We can do the same thing with debate. Almost all of us have debate memories that are deeply infused with the Potlatch-ethic. All it takes is for us to seek out and celebrate those moments, and our community will change. But these moments of time have to be grappled away from the industrial-capitalist state with great gusto. We must be brave to crack open debate.8

In our own lives, we should strive to bring about the kinds of realizations that elicit revolutionary transformation. Snider’s gaming does not bring us forward in direct revolutionary thinking. Rather, it encourages revolutionary thought and then focuses its power into the system of debate. The solution for Snider is not to continue looking for a way to explain and systematize debate but, rather, to embrace the confluence of potential meaning in debate and lunge forward. Debate should be about taking risks and creating new meaning out of our desires.

We should never sublimate our feral interests and instead should seek the highest level of meaning. Let us push gaming further. Let us find games that fulfill our revolutionary potential, take whatever moments we can for ourselves and try to push for as much change as we possibly can. In this case, perhaps it is not the game, but the players who have not yet made their move.

#### Reducing thought to purely economic conceptions is the basis of modern servitude and slavery. Only the aff enables true liberation.

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Bataille is sympathetic to Kant’s conception of moral autonomy as freedom. Yet, he acknowledges the de facto severance of the sacred and reason in the post-industrial era – being has transformed our sense of being. Since he is unwilling, with respect to the sacred, as with orthodox interpretations of Marx et al. to succumb to the systematic logic of either an economic or logical subsumption of the sacred, he asserts that it is sovereignty which exceeds profane religion. Bataille has sympathies for the free autonomous agent, but understands that such an assertion is radically vulnerable to criticism in light of the 19th century – and into the 20th. Sovereignty, not tied to and thus constrained by ‘system’, opens up as a space of de-sublimated resistance and deviance (liberation of imagination from the sublimation of its own self-suppression in the event of the sublime, the birth of reason).

In this way, while he acknowledges the historical, temporal character of existence, Bataille does not see history or temporality as merely reducible to a system as does Hegel and the orthodox Marx – there remains the un-thought, the remainder that is indigestible to ‘system’. Following Nietzsche, but not abandoning certain political and aesthetic aspects of Hegel and Marx, he sees history as a discontinuous field of events of which one can trace patterns and contours of existence – always to remain upon the surface with Alain Robbe-Grillet. History is not the embodiment of reason – the real is not the rational and vice versa. Bataille articulates a description of the history of the emergence and transmutation – genealogy – of these terms, understanding that theory is not existence, nor the thoughts of god before the creation.

With this deconstruction of a monolithic conception – reduction – of history, Bataille becomes open to the differing senses of the sacred and of freedom, especially that of the pre-capitalist pagan economy of the Gift (Mauss). The industrial revolution forced reason into a violent reduction, disconnecting it from the sacred. Can we escape from this reduction? Can we repair this severance, as some have yearned? Or – must we move beyond this predicament with no desire to enact a repetition of that which has been? Bataille examines, in works such as Theory of Religion, The Accursed Share, and other smaller pieces, the sense of the sacred of the ancients in order to trace the genealogy of our modern predicament and to suggest the means and examples by which we can move beyond that which is.

In the ancient world, the logic of the everyday was displaced, from time to time, by a differing logic, that of the sacred. The sacred disclosed its own logic via the necessity of sacrifice, but more importantly, in the saturnalia of all laws and mores. The saturnalia was a sacrifice of the useful, of the everyday object, so as to awaken the uselessness and unusual event of the sacred. In this scenario, there are at least two senses of the terms reason and logic. As there are different realms, there are different reasons. Kant knew this.

Bataille, however, wishes to go a step further – the sacred is not merely the noumena, and the profane, the phenomena. Instead, the self and its world – the sacred and profane exist in a ceaseless interpenetration of events – before the articulation of theories of temporal systems and objects or precepts of a practical or dogmatic reason. Bataille is not speaking of the pleasure and pain postulates of Epicurean or of Aristotelian happiness, both of which are criticised by Kant in his second Critique. Yet, he is speaking of a theory of religion outside the limits of reason alone, outside a merely logical or economic conception of reason – and inside a sense of non-knowledge which is a radical philosophy of existence, thinking, and acting – one that is manifest to him amid historicity, but, as with each of us, as an event, in a moment of vision (Augenblick). Bataille traces the genealogy from ancient sacrifice and the economy of the gift to the era of the rationalisation of the political economic life of the planet. Yet, he is unwilling to surrender the sovereignty over himself which exists amidst a negotiation between his wild ipseity and this ambiguous longing for total communion.

#### Our only real pleasure is to squander our resources to no purpose, just as if a wound were bleeding away inside us; we always want to be sure of the uselessness or the ruinousness of our extravagance

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Mastery has us by the throat. Unable to bring things up, prevented from taking things down—if we swallow, we do so without conviction. Mastery catches and keeps us mid-gasp.

In pursuit of mastery, education fell before its promised transcendence. Mastery claimed to elevate the educated philosopher above the quotidian, even make the philosopher immune to the world below and its persecutions. Yet mastery was yoked to its opposite: the enslavement of the philosopher to a philosophical doctrine. Mastery required discipline and self-control. It subordinated the self to a philosophical doctrine, wagering the self to an ordinance that promised future sovereignty but demanded present obedience.

Seeking spiritual direction, early philosophers enslaved themselves to their chosen philosophical school. Consultations were offered to non-philosophers too, for a fee. Whether a school was joined or merely visited, the spiritual direction on offer was intended, in its final effects, to allow each candidate to “take control and become master of [her]himself.”i With Christianity and its selective adoption of ancient philosophy, self-mastery became “an instrument of subordination” of more complete effect.ii Its voluntary dimension was reduced as spiritual training came to occupy the whole life of the Christian subject. The purpose of Christian guidance was to develop a form of introspection that would “fix more firmly the relationship of subordination”; it would attach its recipients to a regime of power that would take care of their entire life in all its detail and for the rest of its duration.iii At the same time, the promise of transcendence became ever more spectral, dependent ultimately on God’s will, against which the strength of will exhibited by the self- denying Christian was of secondary importance. For at the gates of heaven, God decides. On earth, the early Christian monk is warned against practising any self- denying ordinance to excess. We find Cassian recalling tales of monks casting themselves down wells, fasting excessively, or crossing deserts without food in an effort to demonstrate just how catastrophically they had achieved self-mastery, purging themselves of natural inclinations and desires.iv These were not acts of extreme piety; they were symptomatic of pride. And pride is of the devil.

With extreme asceticism the old but sinuous link connecting the promise of mastery to the necessity of enslavement calcified, and then broke. Early Christian ascetic practitioners, those Cassian warned against, so perfected their self-denials that they became increasingly indifferent to pain and discomfort, removing themselves beyond the grasp of power. Through enslavement they reached its opposite denying themselves so completely that little remained for power to attack. In this advanced form asceticism posed a challenge to Christianity, delivering its practitioners beyond the influence of its institutions and teachings. The most potent ascetics effectively reversed the self-denials of monastic obedience, transforming these denials into a form of “egoistic self-mastery” that denied access to external power.v

To secure their foothold monastic and ecclesiastical institutions had to bring self-mastery back within their control. They would purge themselves of all vagrant, self-sufficient, ascetic heresies, and bring all miracles, marvels, punishments and self-flagellations back into the orbit of their influence. Eventually self-mastery would slip its “doctrinal moorings” and migrate to a secular context.vi Education remains in awe of mastery. It preaches denial, yokes its members to the pursuit of mastery, but will not allow that mastery to become realised as such. Mastery haunts education as its most enduring spectral promise.

Just what exactly education promises mastery of, changes: from ancient self in pursuit of wisdom, to medieval body desiring knowledge of God, to modern subject of autonomous reason, and finally, to the promise that we might one day master our own performativities. By definition such mastery is rarely, if ever achieved. Our nihilism is the product of this framework, this belief that education requires higher objectives, a belief so well entrenched that as each objective comes under attack another is substituted in its place. When substitutes are left wanting, we are launched into overproduction. For we scarcely know how to operate let alone educate without the promise of mastery. Once described as the “destiny of two millennia of Western history,” nihilism is our unavoidable affliction.vii Those educators claiming to exist beyond its reach are in denial. There is no quick and easy escape. We are trapped in the digestive tract of Western history. Attached to a promise that is never delivered, we are its disappointments, you and I. We are debased and we debase ourselves, desiring mastery through our enslavement.

#### Liberal subject formation is the basis of modern nihilism.

Evans & Reid 14 (Brad Evans is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Bristol, Julian Reid is Professor of International Relations at the University of Lapland, Finland, 2014, Resilient Life, pp. 116-119) brett

Nihilism Unbound Writing in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche argued that nothing was more deeply characteristic of the modern world than the power of nihilism.43 Nietzsche’s intervention here allowed us to move beyond the well-rehearsed attack upon Platonic reason or Christian faith, to focus instead upon ‘the radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability’.44 Nihilism, thus understood, referred to the triumph of reactive thinking. It was all about the negation of life as it appeared to be incapable of affirming that which is properly and creatively different to human existence. Hence, for Nietzsche, nihilism was not simply reducible to some historical event in time, i.e. an exceptional moment in history which could be shamefully written into annals of human suffering. Nihilism was the recurring motor of history as the operation of power leads to a will to nothingness that strips life of any purposeful meaning. Crucially, as Nietzsche understood, this repudiation of the affirmative realm of experience is something we create for ourselves. 45 Nihilism, in other words, is to be understood through a sophisticated manipulation of desires such that the individual subject depreciates itself to such an extent that it actively participates in a custom of political self-annihilation. Central to Nietzsche’s thinking on the perpetuation of nihilism is the notion of ressentiment. In his On the Genealogy of Morality, Nietzsche explains this in terms of the slave mentality. This produces a feeling of impotence which not only translates into vengefulness, but more problematic still, teaches the slave that the only way it can become free is to give over to the prevailing reason mastery has set in place. Sloterdijk equates this ressentiment with rage, the basis of all great theisms.46 Such a condition, as Nietzsche understood, was ‘paralysing’ insomuch as it annuls the possibility of thinking and acting otherwise, and it was ‘exhausting’ insomuch as life was forced to compromise with the very lethality that put its condition originally into question. Through a ‘spirit of revenge’ what is lacking is therefore produced in a double movement, for lack is not some original gesture, it derives out of the ressentiment to deny us the opportunity to bring something different into the world. This raises a number of pressing questions: Could it be that not only have we become slaves to our biological existence, but in claiming false mastery of the earth we have given to ourselves an illusionary sovereignty? For how can we have mastery if that which we claim to be able to dominate as the principle force makes us increasingly vulnerable with each passing moment? Have we not, then, become slaves to ourselves and slaves to the earth, and resentful of them as a result? Nihilism has never been alien to liberal biopolitics. It is arguably its most potent expression. Its early development can be traced to Kant’s Copernican revolution of the mind. Placing life at the centre of its universe, Kant forced us to look for meaning beyond the realms of theological destiny. Whilst this moved us beyond the suffering and lament of the Christian subject which so irked Nietzsche, Kant’s universal substitute proved to be no substitute at all. The universal was actually denied to us due to the limits of our reason and our imperfections as finite beings – imperfections that significantly proved incapable of moving us beyond the reductionism of metaphysical idealism and its crude representations, towards a more affirmative form of metaphysics that worked in practice. As Drucilla Cornell writes, ‘Martin Heidegger famously wrote that Kant takes us to the limit of the very notion of critique and ultimately raises, but does not fully address, the question of ‘who’ is this finite being that must think through the transcendental imagination’.47 In a remarkably potent yet tragic stroke, Kant wrote the death of the omnipotent God and the types of docile subjects it produced who were rendered immobile due to its vengeance and fury, while putting in its place a fallen subject that was fated to be forever incomplete because of the burdens of its own actions. While Kant’s thinking paved the way for new eschatological forms of power to emerge that took leave of traditional sovereign moorings, the fallen subject was compelled to become resentful of its biological existence. Bios were to remain forever imperfect by design and fated to be judged accordingly. With life fated to live a biologically endowed existence, it is stripped of its capacity to have a meaningful existence beyond the limits of its bodily formations, while political strategies operate by governing through the problem of finitude, even though the finite inevitably became a philosophical problem too difficult to comprehend. As a result, forced to endure a growing resentment of its unfolding drama, liberalism slowly became morally equipped to continually intervene upon the souls of the living simply by offering to prolong the subject’s existence better than any other political rationality. Such was the realization of our finite entrapment in the bodily form that the ability to philosophically transgress the injunction between life and death became increasingly impossible. Indeed, as and we shall point out later, while liberal societies have a particular relationship to the question of dying as our existence is continually put into question, such that with each passing second we learn to survive until we become truly meaningless in the end, the idea of death remains incommensurable to the liberal subject. No longer does the resilient subject solely project its resentfulness onto the souls of ‘Others’. It resents the living world, for it too is radically endangering. It is here that catastrophic imaginaries begin to truly thrive. The resilient subject is shaped and anxiously mobilized by the prospect of the coming catastrophe. It fears the transformation of the subject, just as it fears the transformation of the ecosystem that gives sustenance to life. Our rage as such, to borrow from Sloterdijk, has become truly limitless. As everything becomes the source of our endangerment, we internalize the ressentiment and proliferate our impotence with unrivalled intensity and absolute necessity. Hence this produces a form of nihilism which is ‘unbounded’. For no longer do we simply resent the teleological unfolding of history as we phase shift from masters to slaves to masters; there is no mastery to speak of and as a result all our lament filters into a politics of ressentiment as we are left to simply govern through our continually unfolding state of unending emergency.

1. Georges Bataille, “The Sacred Conspiracy”, Acephale, 1st year, June 24, 1936;

   Translated: for marxists.org by Mitch Abidor 2005; https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/bataille/sacred-conspiracy.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Georges Bataille, "Popular Front in the Street," in Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939, trans. and ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 163. Brackets for gendered language [↑](#footnote-ref-2)