



‘Bataille Ecology: An Introduction to the Theory of Sustainable Excess’

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Bataillean Ecology: An Introduction to the Theory of Sustainable Excess

Ray Huling

A new ecology and a new environmentalism have arisen from the study of the thought of Georges Bataille. This paper both introduces this scholarship and advocates for environmentalist action based on it. Through both intellectual biography and theoretical inquiry, this paper distills a principle for guiding environmentalism from small-scale communities to the limits of the biosphere, a principle of sustainable excess, a kind of perpetual decadence.

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An Invitation to Excess

Here follows the apex of a dinner party hosted in early December 1937 by Georges Bataille and Colette Peignot, two anti-fascist, anti-communist, anti-capitalist, anti-Christian authors, each the love of the other's life, the latter known best today under the name Laure: 'Odoïevtsova, naked, started to vomit'.¹ A new kind of ecological theory, a Bataillean ecology, finds its image in this crucial moment, a portrait as well of an environmentalism that finds its rule in excess, rather than austerity. Indeed, juxtaposed against both mainstream environmental activism and the business-as-usual of environmental exploitation, practices grounded in Bataillean ecology would seem decadent. This paper both explains this freshly sprung ethic and advocates for it.

Over the past decade and a half, ecologists and Bataille scholars have developed an approach to environmentalism based on Bataille's writings, particularly those texts he devoted to 'general economy', a perspective that holds the fundamental question of economics to be how best to destroy wealth, rather than how best to allocate scarce resources. Bataille worked out his theory and acted in accord with its principles with clear goals in mind: he wanted to stop war and overcome fascism, communism, and Christianity, all of which he saw as servile outcomes of capital growth. At the very core, what environmentally-minded scholars find fruitful in Bataille's thought is his rendering of the problem of over-accumulation as a matter of energy: all life under the sun suffers from an excess of energy, and the manner in which we deal with this suffering must be made sustainable.

¹ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes. V. La Somme athéologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 525.

Bataille indicted the sun for causing life on earth to produce too much food. Each organism and every community of organisms acquire more energy than they need to live, grow, and reproduce. Humans stand as grand acquirer in this regard, and both capitalism and its would-be usurper communism intensify the human production of abundance, to such a degree that they press humanity—and other species—against natural limits of growth, at which point society must have either war or collapse. Bataille arrived at these conclusions through his secondary researches in science and ethnography, his participation in cultural and political movements, and his heterological, agiological, or “other-directed” erotic explorations. He found a way out of the dilemma of growth through the same motley of experiences: he recommended practices of a kind with those rejected by modernity as wasteful, irrational, and decadent; he urged a sacralizing movement against the profanity of capital growth.

Today, scholars who apply this thinking to environmentalism argue that humanity must spend wastefully to stunt the material growth that now threatens to crash us against planetary boundaries. This scholarship is new; it has no settled nomenclature, and it offers little in the way of praxis or down-to-earth examples of its ethic. This paper examines not only Bataille's thought, but also his experiences, in order to ground advocacy for environmentalist action, especially that concerning food, in terms of both global-scale policies and ethics at the level of small-scale communities. This approach requires attending to both big traditional feasts and odd little dinner parties, all placed in the context of re-working the unsustainable agricultural system that makes them possible for the moment. The discussion here will begin in the years before the Second World War with Bataille's founding, with a few friends and lovers, of a secret society, called *Acéphale*; it continues with a brief account of current ecological scholarship that draws from Bataille; it concludes with a distillation of a principle both fundamental to Bataillean ecology and easily enacted in daily practice. In short, this paper seeks to introduce “General”, “Solar”, “Sacred”, or “Bataillean” ecology by binding it to a phenomenology of unproductive expenditure.² More precisely, it looks to the experience of communal creative expression—for example, the sort found in a shared meal.

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² For an overview of these terms, see Erich Hörl, with James Burton (eds.), *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), as well as the texts on Bataillean ecology discussed later in this essay.

'Pouring One Out' for Sade

The repast under consideration, the one Odoïevtsova vomited up, capped a festive day. This gathering was likely a celebratory feast in commemoration of the death of the Marquis de Sade. Shortly after the anniversary of Sade's death (2nd December), Bataille and Laure, led by the Sade scholar, Maurice Heine, visited 'the place Sade had chosen to be buried'³, in a grove of oaks, near a pond on Sade's former estate of Malmaison. Heine said the visit took place on 5th December; he did not attend the dinner.⁴ Marina Galletti, in her 'Chronology' of Acéphale, characterizes the event after the excursion as follows: 'On their return, having bid farewell to Heine, Bataille and Laure have arranged a supper and orgy with two guests who are as yet unidentified: "Ivanov et Odoïevtsova"'.⁵ These latter two must be Georgy Ivanov and Irina Odoyevtseva, Russian poets, husband and wife, and long expatriates in France. Galletti's use of the word 'orgy' is suggestive of an evening themed by the day's hike, which harmonized with the themes both couples had long established for themselves in their erotic habits. What would such a thematic suggestion suggest about what that they ate that evening?

A clear Sadean answer comes to mind; indeed, it is a minor question of Bataille scholarship whether he indulged in coprophagy. Bataille himself was sure that Laure had. After her death, Bataille and Michel Leiris, a close friend of his and Laure's, published some of her writings, Bataille writing a truncated biography for Laure in one of these collections. In this 'Life of Laure', he describes her Berlin period in the late 1920s, when she cloistered herself with Édouard Trautner, a German medical doctor and writer. At the end of a litany of Trautner's degradations of Laure, Bataille writes that 'Once, he gave her a sandwich, buttered inside with his shit'.⁶

Bataille has not made it easy to settle the matter. In his *Eroticism*, he offers in a single line a précis of his thinking on Sade: 'I repeat that I prefer to discuss him only with people who are revolted by him, and from their point of view'.⁷ This declaration is found in a section bearing the rubric '*To admire Sade is to diminish the force of his ideas*'.⁸

Yet the lure of the most disgusting things is a major theme in all of Bataille's work, a tension that he explores especially in his two 'Attraction and Repulsion' lectures, delivered

³ Bataille, *La Somme athéologique*, p. 525.

⁴ Maurice Heine, *Le Marquis de Sade*, ed. by Gilbert Lely. (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 353.

⁵ Marina Galletti, 'Chronology' in Georges Bataille. *The Sacred Conspiracy*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2017), pp. 219-220 (p. 220).

⁶ Laure, *The Collected Writings*, trans. Jeanine Herman (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1995), p. 281.

⁷ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (New York: Marion Boyars, 2006), p. 180.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

in January and February of 1938 to the College of Sociology, which he formed and led with Leiris and Roger Caillois. Bataille speaks of two fundamental experiences here: the call of the disgusting to individuals and the subsequent collective gathering around it. The former lies at the heart of human sexuality: ‘Between the people whose movements are comprised of exuberant life, the theme of reciprocal repulsion focused on sexual parts is present as mediator [...]’.⁹ The latter forms the core of human community: ‘Everything leads us to believe that early human beings were brought together by disgust and by common terror, by an insurmountable horror focused precisely on what originally was the central attraction of their union’.¹⁰ Bataille elucidated these experiences in order to derive from them principles for guiding communal action.

The solution to the mystery of the meal lies here. We know what Odoyetseva's nakedness means, but what does her vomiting signify?

There was a wild wind on the Beauce. Once back, having left Maurice Heine, Laure and I together laid out a supper: we were expecting Ivanov and Odoïevtsova. As planned, the supper was no less wild than the wind. Odoïevtsova, naked, started to vomit.¹¹

Suggestive indeed. Bataille goes on to recount how, a few months later, in March of 1938, he and Laure repeated the trip and the dinner, this time without Heine or the Ivanovs, their guide and their guests all replaced by Leiris and his wife Zette, both during the visit to Malmaison and, all had hoped, into the evening. The plan was the same, and the menu as well, but in providing more detail about the latter, Bataille casts doubt on the Sadean nature of their feast: ‘The supper we bought was deliberately what we had bought before, Laure and I, from the place where we had ordered supper for the Ivanovs’. It seems unlikely that any food service operation would cater to the full Sadean taste.

Another incident, years later, might shed some light. In the late 1930s, Michel Fardoulis-Lagrange and Bataille became friends, at Bataille's instigation after he read Fardoulis-Lagrange's novel *Sebastien* (1939). During the war, both participated in the Socratic College discussion group founded by Bataille. Their friendship lasted several years and Fardoulis-Lagrange wrote a brief memoir of Bataille, *G. B. ou an ami présomptueux*. The middle chapter of this book is titled, ‘The Meal’; it tells of an occasion when the two dined

⁹ Denis Hollier (ed.), *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*, trans. Betsy Wing. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹¹ Bataille, *La Somme athéologique*, p. 525.

together on wild boar, '*sanglier faisandé*' (literally 'pheasanted boar'), meaning boar meat hung until rancid or 'high'. Fardoulis-Lagrange reflects on Bataille's holding forth on the subject of food:

[...] my friend, a true blasphemer, espouses sentiments that whet the appetite for rotten food. God is reconstituted in rottenness in order to be vomited up afterwards, while I have recourse to fasting and purification.¹²

This experience of eating a disgusting lunch with Bataille lies at the heart of the memoir, both physically and thematically: "That's why I would consider my friend presumptuous; because, lacking something better, he digested dubious food while ascribing to it the virtues of communion".¹³

Fardoulis-Lagrange published this account in 1969. In 1987, in an interview published in *Le Magazine littéraire*, he clarified the moment in a way that complicates the image of Bataille's thought:

One day, his butcher had offered him some wild boar (one killed some time previous and already quite rancid. Well, he ate it, going all the way to make his point, saying he was from peasant stock and it was absolutely necessary to eat what he'd paid for. Anyhow, it was eating this rancid boar that gave me a case of jaundice. They had to come get me in an ambulance'.¹⁴

Fardoulis-Lagrange probably suffered a bout of Hepatitis E by partaking in either the pleasures or the frugalities of Bataille's table. It is salient and not contradictory that a case for Bataille's extravagance and a case for his thrift both enjoy a firm grounding in Fardoulis-Lagrange's respective texts: alternating from one to the other, from austerity to extravagance as an act of conscious habit and as an ethic of the gift, especially a poison gift, which is a practice that Bataille both theorized and undertook with important implications for ecology and environmentalism.

Thus, it becomes possible that Bataille and Laure served just this sort of dish as an appetizer to their orgies with the Ivanovs and the Leiris. And just as it matters that such an offering signifies both grand hospitality and good home economics, so it is important that Laure never ate the second meal. In *La Sainte de l'abîme*, her biography of Laure, Élisabeth Barillé places the scene of Laure's second and last trip to Sade's grove on 14 March 1938. After their excursion, they went to see an American film, *One Way Passage* (1932; a doomed romance between a murderer and a dying woman), then headed home for dinner and an

¹² Michel Fardoulis-Lagrange, *G. B. ou un ami présomptueux* (Paris: José Corti, 1996), p. 58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁴ Fardoulis-Lagrange, Michel, 'Interview' *Le Magazine littéraire* (1987), pp. 49-50, p. 49.

orgy: ‘Hardly had they returned to the rue de Rennes—with a detour to the caterer from whom they’d ordered dinner for the Ivanovs—when she fell ill’.¹⁵ She would never recover. Her death would become death itself for Bataille, colouring all of his thought, especially that on limits, which is to say the thought that would prove most valuable to Bataillean ecology. As he put it in *Eroticism*:

What we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain. De Sade's aberration exceeds that limit. Some few people find it tempting and occasionally some even go the whole way.¹⁶

There is a great sorrow in that last line, because of both the absurdity of any observance of natural limits in the face of the flow of time in nature—the death that will come to all of us, the inevitable extinction of the human animal, the coming swallowing of the earth by the sun—and his personal experience of loving a person who took continuity to unsustainable lengths.

That cold springtime hike to the spot where Sade had willed his body to be laid, there to be “[e]aten by the roots of the oaks, annihilated in a thicket's earth [...]”, as Bataille put it,¹⁷ sparked the recurrence of tuberculosis that would slowly consume Laure over the summer, leaving her dead by late autumn. After recounting their night with the Ivanovs, Barillé asks, ‘What did they hope to find in this organized debauchery?’¹⁸ The answer is right in the title of the book (Bataille’s *Guilty*) that Barillé references, as well as its notes about Odoyetseva and her vomit: the dinner affair was ethical. All of Bataille's affairs were. They were Bataille's attempt to seduce his friends and lovers into his anti-fascist crusade. He had hoped to infect them with the spirit of the monstrous anti-god that gave his small cult the name ‘Acéphale’. And, after several political failures, he saw the project of spreading irreligious sacredness as the only hope to stave off the coming wars. Let Bataille argue for his side, a month before he and Laure would take a step too far into the abyss, in lines he would come to hold culpable without recanting them: “[...] I believe that nothing is more important for us than that we recognize that we are bound and sworn to that which horrifies us most, that which provokes our most intense disgust.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁶ Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Bataille, *La Somme athéologique*, p. 524.

¹⁸ Barillé, p. 343.

¹⁹ Hollier, p. 114.

These stories about Bataille and his own reflections upon them make up the folklore, the communal creative expression, that underlies the formal articulations from which Bataillean ecology should unfold. The *acéphaliens* carried out human sacrifices, rumors said, in the years after Acéphale disbanded, when Bataille was writing the texts that Bataillean ecologists now seize upon. If Bataille has one lesson for us, it might be that one ought not discount myth, especially if it is demonstrably false. Indeed, understanding the value of Bataille's thought for ecology means acceding to Bataille's demand for practical consequences: his work is nothing but an ethics, one that directs action in the absence of a moral center, such as God or humanity. It works in the shadow of the void of traditional sacredness. Without this impossible ethic, a Bataillean ecology cannot work. Let us cleave, then, to Bataille's table and table-talk, while considering this perspective and the environmental activism it endorses.

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The Second Bataillean Crusade

The surge in ecological scholarship influenced by Bataille begins with its fullest treatment in Allan Stoekl's *Bataille's Peak*. The most recent major development is Giorgio Kallis's *Degrowth*. Stoekl draws heavily from Bataille's work on literary and religious themes to clarify the wisdom that general economy has to offer in the context of environmentalist action. Through his reframing of environmental crisis, Stoekl lends new meaning to practices that seem like environmentalist asceticism, such as cycling and recycling. '[M]uscles in agony and ecstasy', and reduction of waste both lose their austere sensibility and become extravagant as they respond to the scientific rationale of living within natural limits, a movement that happens only with heightened consciousness of the moment of total loss.²⁰ This and all of Stoekl's work on Bataillean ecology speak with richness of how we would live in accord with such precepts.

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

²⁰ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 202.

transformation of the economy [are] inevitable—the question is how it will happen²¹, 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 bedeviled 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

²¹ Giorgos Kallis, *Degrowth* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Agenda Publishing, 2018), p. 112.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

(‘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.

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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

²³ Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy*, ed. by Marina Galletti and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2017), p. 437.

²⁴ Graham Turner, ‘On the cusp of global collapse? Updated comparison of The Limits to Growth with historical data’ *GALA-Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society* 21.2 (2012), pp. 116-124, p. 121.

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

²⁵ M. H. Siebker, 'From Economania to Response-Ability: A Plea for an Ecological Society' *Environmental Policy and Law* 4 (1978), pp. 87-90, p. 88.

²⁶ Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. Peter Connor. (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 149.

²⁷ Siebker, p. 88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

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.

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The Biospherical Anus

The way forward lies in the failure of the figure of Acéphale, the Headless One, not only in the overall impotence of its community, but in the particular disaster of Bataille's try at initiating Laure. The great joke of the trip that ended up killing her is that Sade was never buried in that grove. While Heine guided them expertly, with assiduous attention to the details Sade had dictated in his Will, Sade's executors had ignored his last testament and simply buried him beneath a cross in the graveyard at Charenton, the asylum where he died. Even better, some years later, the asylum exhumed Sade's corpse as part of a cemetery relocation, and a young physician in residence at Charenton, J.-L. Ramon, withheld Sade's skull from reinterment so that he might make a phrenological study of it. He then loaned what must have been a dynamite specimen to Johann Spurzheim, a German doctor and popularizer of phrenology, who made off with it. The brainpan of the Marquis de Sade vanished into the depths of a different underground. But Spurzheim made casts of the skull, one of which survived, to be discovered by Thibault de Sade, the current Marquis, in the Musée de l'Homme. It seems that Thibault now hawks bronze replicas of it, in much the same way that his brother Hughes sells Sade-themed wines under the label Maison de Sade, (including organic ones, named for *Justine*). The Maison de Sade cares about the environment!’, exclaims the brand website.

All in the spirits of the times. Laure died as a result of her tramping across a ground that had never tasted Sade's flesh. There, we have illustrated the first principle of Bataillean ecology: there is only void above the myth that breathes life into excess. Bataille never managed to shape a movement that would conform to everyone's palate, one that would show how to savour disgust for waste, regardless of the particulars of the prohibitions and transgressions that would make it appetizing, while whetting a consciousness of the falseness of it all. These are the suasional tasks of the Bataillean ecologist, the work of cultivating practices of sustainable excess, practices that would work because their center has no truth. Humanity must convert from an unsustainable, capital-intensive agriculture to a sustainable one, but humanity must also waste the gains of this conversion: we must

sacrifice in the name of a lie, in order to prevent a truth from luring us into re-investing our energy into growth.

This holds true in the intimacy of our bodies and all the way up the scale to faceless global policy. It is the lesson of the boar: Bataille was no peasant, and so his eating of the rancid meat and, even more, his generosity with it, amounted to an extravagance—a feast of famine food. A host who is generous with rotten boar keeps the old ways, which have neither place nor use anymore. They are folkloric expressions that, in their disgustingly obvious falsity, bind a community. As Bataille himself sums up his generosity, consummation, and gratuity: “If the world insists on blowing up, we may be the only ones to grant it the right to do so, while giving ourselves the right to have spoken in vain.”²⁹

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²⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volumes II & III*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989a), p. 191.

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