

The Neurological Impasse

- Timothy de Vries (Ontario College of Art and Design)

It appears that the pre-eminent symptom of the nineteenth-century bourgeois has been re-invigorated. Eric Santner and Michael Taussig, for instance, have ventured into the conceptual realm of neurology to not only to discover how the nerves both concede a material basis to pathology and offer a means of integrating disparate, unorganized subjects and extremities of research together, but to find that neurology accepts as matter-of-fact the mutual invocation and provocation of the nerves by impulses and stimuli.

In painting, nerves become visible as rhythm. Those who 'state the truth' and then expect coherence between those statements and others discover that there is an evident link between sensation and the nerves, but this link is frequently, and often ingeniously occluded in theoretical discourse. To what extent might nerves be legible in writing? Nerve stimulation finds expression in the mental image, the recording sensation, and its articulation. These are impulses generally transcribed according to the sanctioned models. What is pathological is the sensation: it is the basis – in the philosophy of Hegel, for instance – for certainty, but consequently becomes the thing that must be overcome – and cured. Sensation is spectral but also a thing. The specificity of this sensation is not the concern of this paper, but the means by which the sensation is materialized, is. Sensuous concepts 'materialize' neurology, and have significant implications for both a theory of art production and social being split from "the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto" (Marx 389). Neurology is concerned with disorders, and consequently localizes its discipline on the body as they are materialized. What properties are then in question? The properties of the body are also attributes of a synthetic object that does not yet exist: namely, the brain. A linguistic, and therefore general model must fulfill both specific immanent criteria and procedures for universal recognition – including the sensibility of perception – for these properties and attributes to be revealed. This tends to be called consciousness. Hence the difficulty of extracting thinking from onto-theology. As a residuum of this theory, however, the sensation and all of its neurological stimuli must be transcribed. It is as if the painter is caught between two absolute limits: the sensation, which is both specific and universal, and the neurological stimuli, which organize and disorganize the impulses. In light of how sensation operates in dialectical philosophy as a high-water mark which the exposition of the concept has a duty to convey, the 'rhythm' of the concept corresponds to the stimuli which provoke it and continue to provoke it. It is the concept that provides immanent criteria for what gets on the painter's nerves. Theoretically, the empirical content of a concept are indexical signs that point to the material basis of thought and which can identify prescriptive and diagnostic statements. The intention of this presentation, then, is to explore the implications of this neurological approach in neutralizing the regime of the remark and the role it plays in constructing therapeutic ontologies.

Nietzsche's Physiology of Resistance

- Jason Dockstader (PhD student, Theory and Criticism, UWO)

In this essay I intend to explicate Nietzsche's definition of resistance. I will note how the issue of resistance became especially important for Nietzsche as he began to formulate, in his later writings, his own theory of the definitive characteristics of organic life. Resistance becomes for him an essential aspect of the relations between strength and weakness found throughout nature. For Nietzsche, life expresses itself organically as a relationship between forces of action and reaction, of coercion and resistance. This is rooted in Nietzsche's conception of life as the will to power. The will to power is nature's self-creative urge to play with its own eternal creativity by establishing resistances to itself, that is, by limiting itself within certain physiological structures. These resistances are the drives and forces that instinctively compete with one another in and around the physiology of every organism. In my paper I will address how Nietzsche comes to define a being's strength or weakness, health or sickness, nobility or slavishness, in terms of how it endures, affirms, transforms, and resists the resistances it encounters throughout life and nature. Resistance is both an action and a reaction, an expression of an urge for self-overcoming and a passive acceptance of the forces one must resist. The evolutionary demands of the physiology of every organic being, for Nietzsche, allows for the development and utilization of a variety of tactics of resistance. These tactics are not only the physiological interpretations of an organic being's existential condition, but are also the modes through which moral and political evaluations become possible. I will conclude my essay by arguing, with Nietzsche, that all political discussions of resistance are in fact expressions of the already inherent physiological tactics of resistances that determine an organic being's vitality and constitution. The competitive aggression and resistance between the instincts, drives, and forces define organic life for Nietzsche.

Bataille's Mode of Contestation

- Matthew Austin (PhD student, Theory and Criticism, UWO)

My paper has three aims. First, I outline what is 'contestable' about the 'human situation.' Second, I outline Bataille's contestation of the human situation through 'dramatization at the extreme limit,' 'poetic perversion' and 'ecstasy.' Finally, I outline Bataille's 'modification of the thing' as his concession, or compromise, to the human situation. For Bataille, the human situation represents the 'basic problem' of philosophy. The human situation is one where reflection has been subordinated to the necessary activity of projects. Projection defines humanity. Humans, through their passage from 'animal to man,' posit tools (things). This positing introduces to the realm of animal continuity the essential difference that constitutes the 'order of things.' Under the dominance of the thing, utility and concern for futurity take precedence over intimate existence. Resisting the instrumentality of the thing Bataille offers the "principle of inner experience: to emerge through project from the realm of project." As humanity emerged

from animality with the positing of the thing, so will intimate existence emerge from humanity with the transgression of the thing. Transgression is bound to the limit it crosses. The limit, in this case, is the human realm of projection. Through the projection of 'poetic perversion,' Bataille contests the utility of concerned action by 'sully' with the nothingness that lurks at the extreme limit: i.e., death.

In the end, Bataille does not advocate either a romantic return to animal intimacy, or a full-fledged flight from things into ecstasy. Rather, he offers a compromised situation. In this compromise the possibility of an 'intimate order of things' is revealed. That is, rather than abandoning the order of things in the pursuit of nothingness, Bataille affirms both realms (animal and human; intimate and thing) and by a 'modifying reversal' "leans over his own nothingness."

A Scatological Examination of Excess and Resistance

- Dhruv Jain (Social and Political Thought, York University)

The sacred is not confined to religious sphere, rather it occupies a plethora of different spaces in everyday life including the democratic state form. Democracy is sacred in such a way that providing a radical critique or undoing of said State becomes not only undesirable but also impossible. This has been accompanied with an inextricable coupling between the democratic state and capitalism resulting in democracy becoming a placeholder for capitalism. Slavoj Zizek argues that due to the post-political nature of contemporary politics it has become easier to envision the end of the world, than to imagine to the end of capitalism. Indeed, it has been recommended by intellectuals including Alain Badiou and Zizek that today the enemy is no longer capitalism, but rather democracy. Thus, the fundamental question becomes: 'How can we rupture the sacredness of the democratic State form?' This paper attempts to grapple with Bataille's conceptualization of a politics of excess that is able critique the democratic State and capitalism. Indeed it is not coincidental that Bataille finds recourse in the 'gift' and the occult as a means of practicing such a critique, as the excessive act is indeed sacred in itself and is thus inherently volatile. For Bataille the volatility of the sacred allows for a rupturing of the current system. However, I will critique Bataille on two aspects of his argument: 1) that his politics of excess are actually not outside of capitalist logic but fundamentally within; 2) utilizing the work of Zizek and Badiou, critique Bataille's 'neo-paganism' as an ideological re-affirmation of capitalism. I will attempt to examine Bataille's conceptualization of scat, whilst juxtaposing it to Zizek's analysis of the ideological production of toilets. I will try to show that Bataille in his exuberance for a 'politics of excess' actually reproduces current ideological formations.

Ekology as the Last Viable Form of Sociopolitical Resistance?

- Kane X. Faucher (PhD student, Theory and Criticism, UWO)

Among the plethora of resistance strategies, the cynic is perhaps the least expected and least methodologically represented. When in the "higher" echelons of academia,

academics themselves are culturally ignored and generally politically moot in terms of their ability to engage in a more consultancy capacity among elected leaders to assist in shaping public policy, or when “on the ground”, activists and guerilla artists succumb to their own image commodification as well as to perform acts of resistance that seem only to justify higher policing budgets to quell dissent, what may be left for the cynic who would abjure both? It is with this in mind that one may invoke the Nietzschean understanding of *Ekel*, the poetic will to vomit. I will first trace the unique characteristic of vomit as a speech act that can only be spoken in the present tense, and whose form may differ alongside its constitutive content, while retaining its semantic stability. The Ekel-linguistic aspect presents us with a new host of potentially politically resistant practices that are violent without causing harm, polemical without being targeted articulations, and express dissatisfaction through the performative of the abject. When one vomits from the rage of dissent, one is a sovereign as well as an artist (in a way that extends beyond the spectacle bodyworks of Istvan Kantor). In addition, some treatment will be given the history of vomiting as a communicative means in mediating a variety of social situations.

Bataillean Sacrifice as Resistance: Guantánamo and the Empire of Tragedy

- Melissa Ptacek (Researcher at the Center for Population Economics, the University of Chicago)

The politics of George Bataille, when not dismissed outrightly, have often been characterized as “impossible.” In large part, such impossibility relates to Bataille’s contempt for the *constitution* of power and his corollary celebration of power’s collapse, an event which to Bataille opened the door to ecstatic liberation. My paper focuses on the question of whether Bataille’s politics are nonetheless especially suited for a moment such as ours, when resistance to, and not (re)constitution of, power is the more urgent problem.

Bataille named his resistance strategy—forged in the era of fascism’s rise and specifically opposed to the “empire of arms”—the “empire of tragedy.” The impossible possibility of such an empire of tragedy is obvious: much as with Bataille’s admiration of the Aztecs’ resistance against the Spanish, the empire of tragedy is incarnated in those who literally have no future, in those who resist in the face of, and *as a result of*, the futility of their efforts (read: certain death). My argument will be, however, that there is something in this strategy that offers a more so-to-speak *possible possibility* for today. The suicide attempts by prisoners at Guantánamo form my principal example.

These Guantánamo detainees, though not fully qualifying for membership in Bataille’s empire of tragedy can be said, I think, under the current structure of the mass media, to offer a “spectacle” (albeit one not directly witnessed by most) of Bataillean self-sacrificial tragedy, generating and spreading anguish from victims to “spectators,” which then can effect profound transformation in the latter. Is this strategy far-fetched as political resistance? One may tend to think so. Yet, consider the charge by U.S. military officials that the Guantánamo prisoners who attempt suicide engage in “asymmetrical warfare,” which must be necessarily suppressed. Perhaps these officials sense something of the force of Bataillean resistance?

