

# On Natural Technicity: Oikos, Articulation, and the Gift

Donovan Stewart & Georgios Tsagdis

**Abstract:**

Deconstruction is from the start a matter of ecology, that is, an approach to the interminable articulation of *oikos* that resituates the traditional determinations of nature, technique, and place. Accordingly, “natural technicity” emerges as a metonym for deconstruction; a thinking of technics not on the basis of artefacts, but as originary *articulation*, the process of animating and weaving together the *oikos* and *logos* of ecology. We begin at the *oikos*, emphasising its elemental and decisive character for explicating the “eco” that speaks in both economy and ecology. We then turn to the technical articulation of *oikos*. We suggest that it is precisely through the question of articulation that we arrive at another thinking of technique, the always distinct historical modes in which an *oikos* takes place, which remain irreducible to an exclusive mode of nature or culture. This leads to a thinking of generalised technicity, understood as the highly differentiated series of responses and relations to what is given, in what we see as a history of articulation in response to the gift—for ecology, the originary gift of the sun’s thermodynamic plenitude.

**Keywords:**

Ecology, Technics, Deconstruction, Thermodynamics, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Georges Bataille

### Opening: On the Writing of Matter

In the following, we seek to demonstrate that deconstruction is from the start a matter of ecology, by which we understand the labour of the interminable articulation of *oikos* which resituates the traditional determinations of nature, technique, and place. In this analysis, “natural technicity” will emerge as a metonym for deconstruction: originary technicity thought not from the basis of artefacts but *articulation*, the process of animating and weaving together the *oikos* and *logos* of ecology. But first, in order to clarify the stakes of the following reflections, we must take a step back, to where deconstruction has in many ways been abandoned, with Derrida’s early emphasis on “textuality.”<sup>1</sup>

Derrida’s thinking of “general writing”<sup>2</sup> has often been caricatured by materialist discourses which attempt to monopolise “reality” through an arguably strategic obfuscation of deconstruction’s potential for thinking the most imminent ecological threats, such as mass extinction and ecosystem collapse. In this charge, deconstruction is presumed to *lack* a language for these issues, precisely due to its excessive insistence on language; it is thus relegated to a state of “infancy,” a literal speechlessness.

Karen Barad offers one of the most poignant formulations of this critique in their thematization of nuclear violence. For Barad, Derrida’s thinking through the primacy of the “written trace” prevents him from doing justice to a violence that reaches beyond the potential eradication of the textual trace and the worlds it constitutes, and thus blinds him to the bodily suffering and material devastation of those existences that slip through the interstices of “textuality”:

Does Derrida trip over the threshold he sets between linguistic and physical forms of violence in his examination of nuclearity? What are we to make of his near exclusive focus on textuality that winds up eliding both the destructive force of physical violence and the possibilities of its interruption in their materiality?<sup>3</sup>

Barad accuses Derrida of having “lost track” in his writings on nuclear apocalypse, of the “continuous nuclear war” perpetrated by the ongoing colonialism of nuclear “tests” responsible for immeasurable

---

1 For example: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); “Freud and the Scene of Writing” and “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2005): 246–292; 351–371; *Dissemination* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

2 As developed in Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” in *Writing and Difference*: 251–277.

3 Karen Barad, “After the End of the World: Entangled Nuclear Colonialisms, Matters of Force, and the Material Force of Justice,” *Theory & Event* 22, no. 3, (2019): 524–550; 534.

health complications and land destruction in the Global South. This they attribute to Derrida's "losing track" of the very principles of "general textuality," walling himself in an "academic form" and "reinforcing an enclosure of representationalism where his concern is with the absolute destruction of literature, the archive, the name, and not the planet itself."<sup>4</sup> The charge is that Derrida's epistemology and ethics run up against their absolute limit where discourse ends, "there" in the real world and "the planet itself." Consequently, Derrida's texts on nuclearity—if not all of his writings—in their overwhelming attachment to literary textuality, an effect of their *forgetting* of the literal principle of general textuality that these texts have established and elaborated, are better passed over in silence.

Indicatively, it is precisely in the performative relation of language to silence that Barad locates deconstruction's *captivity*. In "Force of Law," Derrida too invokes a "mystical" silence that is captured in the performance of the linguistic act, but which serves also as language's aporetic foundation—the same silence that Barad desires to liberate from its linguistic prison.<sup>5</sup> And yet this silence is for Barad not nothing—or rather it *is* nothing, nothing understood *as* matter, a matter "inseparable" from the "speaking silence of the void."<sup>6</sup> This silence amounts to a fundamental resistance to the work of presentation, a radical, unrepresentable elementality that sets this play of textuality moving.<sup>7</sup> In seeking to liberate that which remains the silent other of language, Barad seeks to present a language of silence, and thereby effects nothing less than the double genitive of deconstruction.

Claire Colebrook levels the exact opposite critique against deconstruction. Noting Derrida's "inadequate attention to *literal extinction*,"<sup>8</sup> she suggests that the problem is not at all that deconstruction walls itself up in a textual prison, but rather that its hyperbolic gestures, such as its demand for justice, "like the text, [are] never *closed*."<sup>9</sup> What is in fact needed in the face of "literal extinction" is a thinking of the possible halt of the trace's promise of iterability. Against its monstrous untamability and relentless opening potential, something like a "thinking of a material sublime: a stony, inert, lifeless, inhuman matter that is other than all the figures through which it is phenomenized," must be postulated.<sup>10</sup>

---

4 Barad, "After the End of the World," 536–537.

5 Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 13–14.

6 Barad, "After the End of the World," 542–543.

7 On a similar, deconstructive account of the "elemental," cf. Susanna Lindberg, "Elemental Nature as the Ultimate Common Ground of the World Community," in *Politics of the One: Concepts of the One and the Many in Contemporary Thought*, ed. Artemy Magun (New York and London: Continuum, 2021).

8 Claire Colebrook, "Extinguishing Ability: How We Became Postextinction Persons," in *Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy*, eds. Matthias Fritsch, Philippe Lynes and David Wood (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 261.

9 Colebrook, "Extinguishing Ability," 263.

10 Colebrook, "Extinguishing Ability," 266.

Although these two responses to deconstruction are diametrically opposed, both voice a clear demand for a step beyond deconstruction.<sup>11</sup> While we could continue to adduce explicit and tacit critiques of this alleged textual limitation of deconstruction, from texts that believe themselves to have escaped the orbit of *logos*,<sup>12</sup> it is perhaps more economic to recall Gilles Deleuze's own insistence on the linguistic structure of both the world and structure itself. Deleuze would not hesitate to write, in celebration of structuralism:

And if structuralism then migrates to other domains, this occurs without it being a question of analogy, nor merely in order to establish methods 'equivalent' to those that first succeeded for the analysis of language. In fact, language is the only thing that can properly be said to have structure, be it an esoteric or even non-verbal language. There is a structure of the unconscious only to the extent that the unconscious speaks and is language. There is a structure of bodies only to the extent that bodies are supposed to speak with a language which is one of the symptoms. Even things possess a structure only in so far as they maintain a silent discourse, which is the language of signs.<sup>13</sup>

Here, the silent discourse of things becomes language and *logos*, which is not mere analogy, but rather an elemental signifying structure. Whether Derrida's "textualism" is more metaphysical than Deleuze's "materialism" or not, one does not understand anything about either *post*-structuralist project, if one does not observe that *they both trail after the writing of matter, that they follow an originary technicity at the heart of existence.*

Derrida himself tried repeatedly to clarify the "misunderstandings" that his use of the figures of textuality and archi-writing continued to generate. For example, in "A Letter to a Japanese Friend," while admitting that the explicitly linguistic delimitations of his interventions helped develop the

---

11 Both Barad and Colebrook have made significant contributions to eco-deconstruction and the task of pursuing their contributions further remains at hand; here, only the point on textuality is pressed, to wrest *logos* as a specific mode of technicity and as an articulation of natural technicity.

12 Notwithstanding their eclecticism, such examples showcase the force of the materialist tide that bears down on eco-deconstruction. Often these critiques seem recalcitrant not merely to *logos*, in a restricted sense, but to all technical mediation. Certainly, some of these critiques aim at barely more than a straw man. Calling, for instance, for a "renewal" of materialism, Levi Bryant denigrates the substitution of the reality of things and phenomena with discourses, a substitution "convenient for humanities scholars who wanted to believe that the things they work with—texts—make up the most fundamental fabric of worlds." Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 1.

13 Gilles Deleuze, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*, ed. David Lapoujade (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 170–1.

lineaments of deconstruction, he underlined that such were only partial registers or “models” for what deconstruction was to be:

It goes without saying that if all the meanings enumerated by *Littré* interested me because of their affinity with what I “meant” [*voulais-dire*], they are concerned, metaphorically, so to say, only with models or regions of meaning and not with the totality of what deconstruction aspires to in its most radical ambitions. This is not limited to a linguistico-grammatical model, nor even a semantic model, let alone a mechanical model. These models themselves have to be submitted to a deconstructive questioning.<sup>14</sup>

The force to which all such models must be submitted, and perhaps most urgently among them the linguistic model, is that of articulation, of the event of taking-place—“if [indeed] deconstruction takes place everywhere it [*ça*] takes place, where *there* is something [...]”<sup>15</sup> This is a thinking of an unmistakably *material* taking-place, an “insistence,” that sets us on the way towards an ecologically inflected deconstruction. Such an inflection is not a fortuitous or expedient modification, but an emphasis on what is always already there, the ecological at the heart of the discursive; for deconstruction is not principally a kind of discourse, but a metonym for what happens. The discourse of deconstruction—to the extent that deconstruction becomes discursive—is in this way a testimony, a bearing witness, and a response, to this taking-place, the event of articulation. An “ecologically inflected” deconstruction as a programmatic, would be tasked with translating this quasi-transcendental event into explicitly “ecological” registers, and further with pursuing the history of human and non-human techniques of response to this articulation.

Such responsiveness and responsibility are as important for the futures of technology as they are for ecology. At a moment when (neo-)cybernetics closes in upon contemporary technological thought from all directions, deconstruction offers one of the few means of querying its presuppositions by inflecting the *logos* with a thinking of archi-technicity or “writing.” Already in *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida sought to limit this cybernetic “model,” as well as the linguistic “model,” claiming that “cybernetics is itself intelligible only in terms of a history of the possibilities of the trace as the unity of a double movement of protention and retention.”<sup>16</sup> The trace, that is, writing thought “before the letter,” enables an internal rupture of the notion of the *pro-gram*, the “fore-writing,” in the sense of “fore-controlling” of the biological articulation of the informational code of cellular life, as well as military, societal and

---

14 Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” in *Pysche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2–3.

15 Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” 5.

16 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 84.

financial processes.<sup>17</sup> The reinsertion of thought at the heart of the ubiquitous, non-exclusively-human technicity of writing that deconstruction effectuates is necessary in order to turn biosemiosis to sense. This turn takes place where deconstruction articulates itself, *there*, at the *oikos*.

### **On the Locus of Life: *Oikos***

Having wrested the *logos* of ecology from the silence imposed by the materialist ban or abandonment of deconstruction, we turn briefly to the topology and character of the “*oikos*,” the hearth of ecology, before proceeding to explore its technical articulation.

*Oikos* is home and house, a unit of life serving as a fundamental element of production, politics and sociality. This elemental character of the *oikos* is pivotal in order to explicate the “eco” that speaks in both economy and ecology. As an element, an *oikos* is part of a wider environment, a surrounding world, and yet an *oikos* also represents an environment unto itself, with a distinct structure (*logos*) and articulation (*nomos*), fashioning a singular internal life of its own.

It might be considered, provisionally, that the notions of economy and ecology rest on a first generalisation of “*oikos*,” a certain synecdoche of the part standing for the whole. In effect, the whole of nature, on the one hand, and the whole of the international community, on the other, are understood as having, respectively, a *structure* and *articulation* analogous to a household. Although this discursive construct can be understood as a “domestication” of the planetary, a reduction of the incommensurable articulation of existence to the form of the home, this configuration of the *oikos* can also be understood as a vital localisation of the universal. Thus, Geoffrey Bennington’s critique of Georges Bataille’s endeavour to thematise a general economy is valid, insofar as it underlines the restricted character of every economy, or rather, its character as restriction.<sup>18</sup> It is well possible, however, to invert this critique. An economy is only possible through a non-dialectical double restriction of *oikos*, that is, a restriction of its spatio-temporal restrictions, that constitutes the originary escape of an economy from the confines of its locality. For it is clear that the *nomos* of the *oikos* must be iterable and open to another *oikos*. As such, every economy is general.

It is in view of this double movement of exteriorisation-interiorisation of the *oikos*, that Olivier Human and Paul Cilliers propose to understand complex systems as “open” and “folded,” rather than merely

---

17 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 9.

18 Geoffrey Bennington, “Introduction to Economics I: Because the World is Round,” in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 2005), 48-49.

“general.”<sup>19</sup> Ordinarily, a “restricted” economy concerns the production and consumption of resources through its constituent parts and is in this regard internal to the system—bound up with its inherent constraints.<sup>20</sup> Such an economy is “conservative” in that it expends its forces by utilising maximally the constraints that it cannot overstep. This translates into the effort to preserve its structure, through a certain set of priorities or inviolable principles.<sup>21</sup> Human and Cilliers find in Edgar Morin’s theorisation of complex systems a model that can accommodate heterogeneous disruptive forces—what Bataille calls “transgression” and Derrida “play.” Play constitutes an internal transgression articulated through “multiple non-linear interactions and feedback paths within complex systems,” which are constitutively permeable.<sup>22</sup> The play at the heart of the system, which is supported by the system’s relationship to its environment, is what makes it non-totalisable—as such play “breaks” the system; by the same token, however, play *makes* the system.

Importantly, play is possible because of an internal, domestic lack. Derrida writes:

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.<sup>23</sup>

The missing centre is the “there” of the *oikos*, the *chōra* where *there is* the excess of the gift, to which the final part of this essay returns. In this missing centre, the hearth of *oikos*, a conflagration takes place as the solar excess sets in motion a system forever open to its constitutive lack. The *Hestia* or hearth is the sun-inside, the folding of excess into absence: *oikos* is topologically non-orientable.

Inviting or rather *discovering* the excess inside, play manifests “the precarity of the system, the fact that any system is always open to (self-)destruction.”<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, if a general economy or ecology has,

---

19 Olivier Human and Paul Cilliers, “Towards an Economy of Complexity: Derrida, Morin and Bataille, Theory,” *Culture & Society*, 30(5), 38.

20 Human and Cilliers, “Towards an Economy of Complexity,” 27.

21 Human and Cilliers, “Towards an Economy of Complexity,” 28.

22 Human and Cilliers, “Towards an Economy of Complexity,” 36.

23 Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2005), 365.

24 Human and Cilliers, “Towards an Economy of Complexity,” 37.

or more precisely according to Jean-Luc Nancy, *is, sense*, a well from which meaning can emerge, it is precisely because their systemic character, abiding *and* precarious, lends itself to both prediction *and* the incalculable.<sup>25</sup>

What remains to be understood is that play is always a technique—that the *oikos* of both economy and ecology is always technically articulated. In this regard, Émile Benveniste’s effort to establish the distinctive socius of the *oikos* is particularly illuminating. His etymological analysis of the semiotic affinity and distinction of the notions of “home” and “house” show that the technicity of the latter subtends the mores of the former. Benveniste writes: “Far from constituting two distinct social units, Gr. *dómos* and (w)*oikos* signify practically the same thing, ‘house.’ Date, dialect and style govern the choice of one or the other.”<sup>26</sup> Yet, gradually *domos* will assume in Greek the meaning of “house” and *oikos* that of “home,” splitting the unitary artefact into two. In Latin *domus*, cognate of the Greek *domos*, will retain the primary sense of “home.” Next to other adduced evidence, Benveniste argues:

[...] *Domi, domum, domo*, signify only ‘the home,’ with or without movement, as the point of arrival or departure. These adverbs oppose the ‘home’ to that which is outside it (*foras, foris*), or to foreign parts (*peregre*); or they contrast everyday occupations, the works of peace, *domi*, to war, *militiae*. Such ideas could hardly be reconcilable with the word for “house” if we had to take it in a constructional sense. It is clear that these adverbial uses imply a moral rather than a material connotation for *domus*.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, the “constructional sense” is never altogether abandoned. A home must be also a house, built through the jointure (*harmos*) of parts into a domestic harmony, which is not a naturalised effect of stabilising violence, but the arrest of a fragile metastability. Accordingly, this building activity is not exclusively, or principally, architectonic, but proceeds for the most part, through the finite natural technicity of life itself—its metabolics.<sup>28</sup>

---

25 Human and Cilliers, “Towards an Economy of Complexity,” 35.

26 Émile Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2016), 241.

27 Benveniste, *Dictionary*, 243–244.

28 See Georgios Tsagdis, “Architectures of Thought: Negentropy, Metabolics and the General Ephemeral,” *Footprint* 30, 31–44.



### What is Called Articulation? From Deconstruction to Natural Technicity

“It is from the primary possibility of this articulation that one must begin. Difference is articulation.”<sup>29</sup>

Deconstruction takes place there, at and as, the *oikos*; making up its jointure and architecture, composing an *oikos*. This is where it will always have taken its place—in *place*—and for this, there must have been at the start, perhaps not a being, a text, or meaning, but some ashes, some irreducible base materiality, miniscule and ungraspable as it may be. And yet this base material precondition paradoxically testifies to deconstruction, that is, articulation, as having arrived earlier. There will have been already the results of an unpresentable “possibility of movement, of the machine, of *techne*, of orientation in general.”<sup>30</sup> The *oikos* names the remains of this articulation: giving a name to the remaining earth, worlds, and lives, perhaps most simply, *artefacts*, in their singularity.

And yet perhaps the term “deconstruction” remains unwieldy for thinking this taking place of an *oikos*, given its persistent connotations as an interpretative method, a presupposition which limits its effects to an anthropocentric linguistic field. It might thus be appropriate to turn to one of the many other figures that Derrida would utilise to think this event, for example, “spacing,” which lends itself readily to explicitly ecological themes, given its far more material meaning. Now, spacing does not refer here to a process of introducing space into a pre-given whole, but instead to a basic operation of separation, of opening and tensing, that defers unity by inscribing differences. Spacing in this sense is not a negative operation, but most fundamentally a way to think *articulation*.

This material inflection of deconstruction that is offered by the thinking of “spacing” is emphasised by a passage from *Of Grammatology* in which Derrida comments on a certain physical path, the *picada*, which Claude Levi-Strauss presents as a “crude trail whose ‘track’ is ‘not easily distinguished from the bush.’”<sup>31</sup> For Derrida, the *picada* is a fine example of a spacing that takes place “in the world,” beyond the limits of the text in its restricted linguistic sense. This physical path reflects the self-fracturing of a “natural” *oikos*: “the opening, the divergence from, and the violent spacing, of, nature, of the natural, savage, salvage, forest. The *silva* is savage, the *via rupta* is written, discerned, and inscribed violently as difference, as form imposed on the *hyle*, in the forest, in wood as matter [...]”<sup>32</sup> What the *picada* highlights is that spacing is not a mere supplement to, or feature of, human language, but instead, the very opening

---

29 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 66.

30 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 84–85.

31 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 107.

32 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 107–108.

and articulation of existence. What *remains*, attests to this natural articulation, this “movement of protention and retention [that] goes far beyond the possibilities of the ‘intentional consciousness.’”<sup>33</sup> And it is here that one finds an invitation for another thinking of technique, a thinking that emphasises the always distinct and historical *how* of each articulation—the modes in which an *oikos* takes place which remain irreducible to a determined field of nature or culture.

Derrida himself will draw such a line from spacing to a kind of natural technicity in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Nancy’s thinking of a finite, material spacing at the heart of any presumed co-presence, sharing or relation, functions as a catalyst for Derrida to frame the taking-place of existence as a matter of technique.

What seems to prescribe [Nancy’s] necessary taking into account of plasticity and technicity ‘at the heart’ of the ‘body proper’ is an irreducible *spacing*, that is, what spaces out touching itself, namely con-tact. [...] Such an experience is always affected by the singularity of that which—by reason of this spacing—*takes place*, which is to say, by the event of a coming. *Taking place* and *taking the place of*, I would add, in order to inscribe the possibility of metonymy and substitution, that is, of technical prosthetics, right onto the very singularity of the event. [...] And this, I think, also opens onto organic articulation, *technē*, substitution, prosthetics, the *place of taking the place*, *what is held to taking the place of something*—from before man, before humans, well before and thus well beyond the humanism of the-hand-of-man.<sup>34</sup>

At the heart of the body proper, there is a fundamental spacing, but one that must be always taken in its singularity as a specific way of relating, a movement bound with the specificity of a given *oikos*. Indeed, spacing is a matter that takes place in and beyond a body, *there* from *this* base materiality. As we read in *Of Grammatology*: “articulation, wherever one finds it, is indeed articulation: that of the members and the organs, *differance* (in the) (self-same) [*propre*] body.”<sup>35</sup> The challenge here presented by Derrida and Nancy is to think this spacing in its finite materiality, that is, as “organic articulation,” and thus, in a rigorous sense, as *technē* “before and well beyond the humanism of the-hand-of-man.” Such a *technē* would need to be thought as anterior to the anthropological epochs of technics, and as being constitutive of them.

Nancy’s thought is indeed rife with such a thinking of the technical articulation of existence—its necessarily historical *being-put-into-play*. For example, in *A Finite Thinking* (1990), he writes that,

---

33 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 84.

34 Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 221.

35 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 248.

“nature designates an exteriority of places, moments, and forces: technology is the putting into play of this exteriority as existence.”<sup>36</sup> In *The Sense of the World* (1993): “it is necessary to come to appreciate ‘technology’ as the infinite of art that supplements a nature that never took place and will never take place. An ecology properly understood can be nothing other than a technology.”<sup>37</sup> What is, *qua* nature (*physis*), can here be thought only in its finite articulation, that is, through the discrete techniques and materiality in which it takes place.

Such a thought opens onto a generalised thinking of articulation and a fresh moment in the deconstruction of onto-theology through its persistent devaluation of technics. Where onto-theology has understood technics as undesirable prostheses to be neglected or repressed, then as unfortunate but constitutive elements of human existence, and finally as the impure essence of human life itself, Derrida and in his wake, Nancy, undertake to think technique not on the basis of artifactuality, but as an operation that gives artifice, that is, finite *articulation*.

We refer to this operation as *natural technicity*: the events of articulation as the ways or manners in which the tracing of existence takes place—the technical blossoming of *physis* as an *oikos*. Natural technicity can be thus understood as a metonym of deconstruction, a way to express the operation of taking-place in its finitude. This inflection of technique should perhaps be approached through its most determined sense in English, where technique refers to *a way, the how*, of not necessarily a being or thing, but of an event—the way an event transpires, *how* a relation takes place.

This auto-deconstruction makes tremble not only the hegemonic senses of technique, but also that which comes to be the other side of the same predicament, the thought of a presumed natural, a-historical earth, a pure *oikos*. This trembling reveals a diverse history of techniques, a general technicity of life’s different articulations, excessive and constitutive of anthropotechnics. Accordingly, “humanualism” would comprise only a partial, if irreplaceable, scale or series of scales in a wider field of techniques of articulation, the histories of which, we are now to suggest, must be understood as responses, as relations to what is given. This *reception* will animate the writing of life as a history of articulations, comported to the gift.

---

36 Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 25.

37 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 41.

### Dis-closure: On the Solar Gift

Techniques are responses to an *arrivant*, a gift. On more limited scales, we can see that, aside of human beings, there are discrete others towards and with which beings comport themselves. On a more general scale, there too is a necessary constitutive play with alterity through which any partially closed system, any *oikos*, composes and articulates itself. However, beyond the limits of any given *oikos*, all planetary articulation is made possible by the exceptional experience of the solar gift—there is no economy, no ecology, without this pure gift of the sun’s excessive abundance, without the “exuberance and effervescence” of a sun that “gives without ever receiving.”<sup>38</sup>

The sun’s import is already evident in Bataille’s earliest work; for instance, in “Solar Anus” (1927/31) the sun appears as the point towards which vegetation “uniformly” directs itself, from which humanity averts its gaze and which compels the earth into a frenzied masturbation, leading to general collapse;<sup>39</sup> however, these vertiginous theoretical probes never coalesce into a rigorous thermodynamic understanding of solar excess. In the writings of the period, such as “The Notion of Expenditure” (1933), excess refers principally to the gift received rather than the gift given; it concerns the wasteful or ostentatious expenditure which both conditions and undoes a system from within—a patrimony in the absence of the father. Only later, in “The Accursed Share” (1949–54), is the sun thematised as a necessary—yet not internal—element of the “general economy” of planetary life. Excess means here that “as a rule an organism has at its disposal greater resources than are necessary for the operations that sustain life.”<sup>40</sup>

Resources are afforded by the pure gift of the sun that the living, as living, receives, responds, and corresponds to. The “purity” of this gift is here understood in the limited sense of the radical non-reciprocity that conditions the archi-response of all that receives it. It does not presuppose that the gift is given for someone or something that already exists in advance of the reception of the gift. Nor does it require that upon the locus of its reception, the being that is constituted as the recipient of the gift perceives or receives what is given to it as a “gift,” that is, as something implicated in a pre-established moral order, which implicates the recipient in the same order.<sup>41</sup>

---

38 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I: Consumption* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 28.

39 Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

40 Bataille, *The Accursed Share I*, 27.

41 Cf. Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 60–62.

In the *chōra* opened by the archi-response provoked by the solar gift, specific responses proliferate. They articulate themselves as techniques, techniques to expend or dispense [*dépense*] the gift productively or transgressively. “Productive” designates here the building up and developing of the already situated structures of an *oikos*, whereas transgression consists not simply in the squandering of the solar gift, but in the gesture of an expenditure that makes the systemic architecture of the *oikos* tremble.

The principal question that troubles the generalisation of the planetary ecologic economy is whether the insertion of the sun as origin of all economic excess constitutes anything more than a violent internalisation of the sun into an economy that is always, by default, “restricted.” This is the relevance of Bennington’s aforementioned critique of Bataille. For Bennington, the sun can be considered a pure gift if and only if it “stands *outside* this finite terrestrial system”; however, it can be conceived and received as one only *within* the system—it is this irresolvable antinomy that appears to support Bataille’s tellurocentrism and anthropocentrism, to which we return below.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, for Bennington there is a second gesture of “economisation,” an internalisation of the gift, because Bataille:

consistently shows that *there is no gift*, and to that extent no loss, no excess, no transgression or dilapidation that does not generate surplus value within the system it attempts to exceed: and indeed that this surplus value *just is* what is called by names such as loss, excess, dilapidation and so on.<sup>43</sup>

For the introduction of the sun to constitute something more than a mere expansion of a restricted economy, the topologically non-orientable folding of *oikos* that we traced out must be thematised: the sun is inside *because* it is outside. Without ever engaging in such a thematisation, Bataille recognised and tried to align the double movement of thermodynamic expenditure, coalescing into and dissolving what is. On the one hand: “a squandering of energy is always the opposite of a thing, but it enters into consideration only once it has entered into the order of things, once it has been changed into a *thing*.”<sup>44</sup> Where the squandering of energy becomes a thing and takes (its) place is *oikos*. *Oikos* is the location where entropy is arrested; its corresponding duration is the negentropic time that remains. Such is the place of response, of techniques of response, the ways in which this gift is interiorised, metabolised, metastabilised, articulated.

---

42 Bennington, “Introduction to Economics I,” 50. Emphasis added.

43 Bennington, “Introduction to Economics I,” 54.

44 Bataille, *The Accursed Share I*, 193.

On the other hand, things are never perfectly stabilised in their interiority—their metabolism requires that they constantly dissolve into other things, into a bacchanalian fusion of energies. The doors of the *oikos* break, all is welcome into a radical hospitality, and all proceeds to the outside:

And if I thus consume immoderately, I reveal to my fellow beings that which I am *intimately*: Consumption is the way in which *separate* beings communicate. Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite between those who consume intensely. But nothing counts then; violence is released and it breaks forth without limits, as the heat increases.<sup>45</sup>

The archi-uneconomic gift of entropy takes place in a “there” that is never mere interiority—indeed it spreads, stretches and expands in all possible directions. The sun is this forever elsewhere that one must always recover *in* the *oikos* and indeed *as* the *oikos*. For *oikos* must be thought as the lot where the sun allots its law, its *nomos*, precisely in the sense of legal apportionment recognised by Benveniste.<sup>46</sup>

This double-becoming of *oikos*, the internalisation of its exterior and externalisation of its interior that constitutes its metabolics, is also always already a technical process that leads to further technicisation. What deconstruction proposes is the generalisation of the anthropic principle and an opening up of the limits of the human *oikos*—“nature” partakes in the anthropotechnical entropic feast and its glorious arrest.

Thus, we hold that deconstruction carries Bataille’s project of general economy further by opening up the two modes of human pre-eminence in the history of life, modes that Bataille’s lifelong friend, Jean Piel, identified as humanity’s capacity to amplify the potential of natural technicity, glimpsed in “the branch of the tree” or “the wing of the bird;” and its capacity to consume the excess of this potential in the most intense and luxurious manner.<sup>47</sup> Promethean “humanity,” at once anthropological object and capitalist subject, has certainly acquired unprecedented ways of generating entropy, from the discovery of fire, to thermonuclear weaponry, a tendency that led Claude Lévi-Strauss to call for a discipline of “entropology” in place of anthropology.<sup>48</sup> And yet, this entropic excess is possible only because, already

---

45 Bataille, *The Accursed Share I*, 58–59.

46 Bataille, *The Accursed Share I*, 58–59. It merits note that for Benveniste the field of gift and exchange is characterised by great lexical stability for long periods. It is only when the Greek *dapanan* transforms into the Latin *damnare*, that the sense of ostentatious or lavish expenditure assumes the sense of a curtailment or loss of resources and thus an affliction (Benveniste, *Dictionary*, 44, 52–53). Entropy is the law that celebrates and condemns at once.

47 Jean Piel, “Bataille and the World From ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ to *The Accursed Share*,” in *On Bataille: Critical Essays* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 102.

48 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Criterion Books, 1961), 397.

with “the branch of the tree”, there are *technically* entropic *and* negentropic tendencies, because human and tree share the same *oikos*. The task at hand then, the first task of philosophical anthropology, is to situate this singularity of the human adventure as but one scale within a far wider, general, articulation of life, scales of the unrelenting, irrepressably diverse responses to the solar gift.

### **Bibliography**

- Barad, Karen. "After the End of the World: Entangled Nuclear Colonialisms, Matters of Force, and the Material Force of Justice." *Theory & Event* 22, no. 3, (2019): 524–550.
- Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I: Consumption*. New York: Zone Books, 1988.
- Bataille, Georges. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, edited by Allan Stoekl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Bennington, Geoffrey. "Introduction to Economics I: Because the World is Round." In *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, edited by Carolyn Bailey Gill, 47–58. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Benveniste, Émile. *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*. Chicago: Hau Books, 2016.
- Bryant, R. Levi. *Onto-Catography: An Ontology of Machines and Media*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- Colebrook, Claire. "Extinguishing Ability: How We Became Postextinction Persons." In *Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Matthias Fritsch, Philippe Lynes and David Wood, 261–275. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" In *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, edited by David Lapoujade, 170–192. New York: Semiotext(e), 2004.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law." In *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, 3–67. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Letter to a Japanese Friend." In *Pysche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, 1–6. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.



Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Human, Olivier and Cilliers, Paul. "Towards an Economy of Complexity: Derrida, Morin and Bataille, Theory." *Culture & Society* 30, no. 5, (2013): 24–44.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. New York: Criterion Books, 1961.

Lindberg, Susanna. "Elemental Nature as the Ultimate Common Ground of the World Community." In *Politics of the One: Concepts of the One and the Many in Contemporary Thought*, edited by Artemy Magun, 157–173. New York and London: Continuum, 2021.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *A Finite Thinking*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Sense of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Piel, Jean. "Bataille and the World From 'The Notion of Expenditure' to *The Accursed Share*." In *On Bataille: Critical Essays*, edited by Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, 95–106. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Tsagdis, Georgios. "Architectures of Thought: Negentropy, Metabolics and the General Ephemeral." *Footprint* 30, (2022): 31–44.