Of Excrementality: Économie, Signification, and Autoimmunity

Tony Richards
University of Lincoln

ABSTRACT The author concentrates on a re-machining of Bataille’s notion of a sovereign “accursed share” of general economy by adding a theoretical dimension he terms “économie,” which suspends the traditional moral-numerical restrictions of a hitherto dominant economic housing. The lodging here of this portmanteau is coined to uncannily combine the previously separate concepts of “economy” and “anomie” into something that suspends the classical modelling of each. The author then utilizes Heidegger’s “signification” (Bedeutung) to uncover embodiments that such économie acts formally indicate or entail. Signification, it is argued, is not some abstract upper layer or mere outer ontic shell of representation, but a materially networked substance that works-over all individual comportments. Finally, the author explores signification through the optic of Derrida’s “autoimmunity,” in the concrete re-signification of “the suicidal” within social networking économic technologies of the self.

KEYWORDS Économie; Anomie; Economy; Excess; Signification; Excrementality; Excessive world picture

RÉSUMÉ L’auteur réinvente la notion de Bataille à l’égard d’une souveraine « part maudite » de l’économie générale en y ajoutant une dimension théorique qu’il appelle « économie », mot qui écarte les restrictions morales et numériques traditionnelles imposées par la logique économique dominante. En effet, ce néologisme combine les concepts traditionnellement distincts d’économie et d’anomie afin de suspendre la signification classique de chacun. Par la suite, l’auteur utilise le concept de « signification » (« Bedeutung ») de Heidegger pour découvrir les incarnations que de tels actes « économiques » indiquent ou impliquent formellement. La signification, selon l’auteur, n’est pas une couche supérieure abstraite ou une coquille extérieure antike de la représentation, mais une substance imbriquée dans les réseaux qui agit sur tout comportement individuel. Enfin, l’auteur explore la signification à travers l’optique de « l’auto-immunité » de Derrida dans la réinterprétation concrète du « suicidaire » au sein de technologies du soi économiques agissant dans les réseaux sociaux.

MOTS CLÉS Économie; Anomie; Économie; Excès; Signification; Excrémentalité; Image du monde excessive

Tony Richards is Senior Lecturer in the School of Media at the University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln, UK, LN6 7TS. Email: arichards@lincoln.ac.uk.

©2013 Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation
Introduction: The preliminary outlines of ecänomicie

The industrial development of the entire world demands of Americans that they lucidly grasp the necessity, for an economy such as theirs, of having a margin of profitless operations. An immense industrial network cannot be managed in the same way that one changes a tire. ... It expresses a circuit of cosmic energy on which it depends, which it cannot limit, and whose laws it cannot ignore without consequences.


Here as elsewhere pathology is a precarious ancillary to physiology.

—Émile Durkheim (1997, p. 291)

This neologistic quasi-homophone of “ecänomicie” should be comprehended within its compound-chemical in-mixing for which one should adopt a suitably poetic ear. It is montage. To lay hold of a poetic ear for this neologism’s comprehension (of the emergent space it seeks to signify), one should not take it as an excessive or a barren exercise without its uses, as an unwarranted featureless wordplay of invention. For what is being broached within this seemingly brazen contradictory alloy or in-mixing is, as we will see, the very question of a new exchange value of the excessive toward which this very concept-word does its pointing. Indeed, one might even grant to ecänomicie, as we will later see, the ability to “integrate” a strangely autoimmune “self-abuse value,” to stretch Michel Serres’ “abuse value” as outlined within his immunologically titled Parasite (Serres, 2007). In taking this word-montage of ecänomicie (this strange fusion of mutually incompatible nuclei) forward as an argument for certain recent and still emerging changes to a more traditionally shaped housing or self-protective economy, we will soon, and necessarily, look toward some of its classical constituent elements to help us to unpack this seeming inexplicable blending. Before this, however, let us pay a preparatory visit to what de-houses or erases the canonical separation of these elements: ecänomicie.

For we will witness later that this ecänomicie, as a space of re-positioned, and thus now positively categorized excess, marks out a newly violated and volitional space: an opened or openly dehiscent body politic, which confirms that we are now residing on this side of the border of an age that marks a close to the long-held Aristotelian notion of an excess that could, would, or should be moderated or mediated by larger immunopolitical self-protections. To conceptualize this requires, as we will later see, a new theory of biopolitical immunity, one not based upon an anthropomorphic self/non-self model, but instead one that would benefit from much recent post-Burnetian thinking from within the restricted domain of immunological studies. For, as is known, there has been much metaleptic transportation between so-called bodily immunity and so-called political immunity, and so it is very interesting and germane for our purpose to note that the once dominant Burnetian self/non-self paradigm (Burnet, 1959) has come under increasing suspicion within immunology. The recognition of autoimmune behaviour within the biological organism has been one of these paths out from this idealized Burnetian immunitory opposition. Though I borrow more usefully from
Derridean (generalized) autoimmunity later, it is interesting and helpful however to briefly note here that within immunological research:

We are witnessing a significant challenge to immunology's basic tenet, the immune self. Such an ‘entity’ is increasingly regarded as polymorphous and ill defined as transplantation biology and autoimmunity have demonstrated phenomena that fail to allow faithful adherence to a strict dichotomy of self/non-self discrimination. Instead of searching for elusive criteria of ‘self’ and ‘other’, immune responses are increasingly studied as arising within complex contexts. 

... In such context-based models, ‘ecologic’ controls arise from the entire organism within which the immune system is fully integrated. In these systems, subject-object relationships become blurred. (Tauber, 2000, p. 241)

Such a disciplinary development is obviously no mere accident, but part of a larger paradigmatic shift that goes beyond immunology. So while, historically, the biologico-immunological model successfully coexisted alongside classical polis-protecting media apparatuses (and it is perhaps no accident that these models did historically and ecystemically coexist), it is clear that an errant periphery no longer occupies the same position as something threatening and thus extra-systemic. Our preliminary orienting algorithm here might state: Rather than being immunologically corrected, errancy is now becoming connected. The attendant significations of errancy have now then been radically restructured, and thus the very notion of an anomie outsider-regime or counter-dispositif must come under some radical analytic questioning. Classical models of self/non-self immunity, as metaphorically transferred or grafted onto media apparatuses, are clearly inadequate to such a task. Indeed, it is the recent opening, obliterating, or melting of spaces of sovereign self-enclosure, through continuously building social networking protocols, that has thrown or cast the tradition of a protective body politic into the dispersive winds of a more generally open ecnomic spatiality: All that formerly was so solidly self-enclosed now finds itself folding open. Connectedly, Anderson’s (2006) much-discussed notion of a new economic long tail, where previously unviable minor quantities can now be easily monetized, is just one very clear incarnation of this recent tendency of the periphery to lose its lack of value. Indeed, the very notion of such a seemingly hollow category as “uselessness” might now be seen to collapse within a highly malleable general hospitality toward the excess. Here then abuse and, more paradoxically, an autoimmune self-abuse gain in expansive exchange value, as we will later see.

As such, then, and in a sense extending out from neoliberalism, we have moved into a space beyond the prolonging care or classical housing of anything resembling some solid geometry and entered a space (if space is any longer the appropriate concept or orientation) resembling what Bauman (2000) has labelled “liquid modernity.” What of such classical careful housings that are now folding themselves open? And what of these two traditionally inimical elements of a “self-economy” vs. “non-self-anomie,” these once so independently existing nuclei that have come now to be so thoroughly con-fused? What exacting mediatory domain has such liquidity supplanted?

**The departed age of “economy” versus “anomie”**

Classically, economy and anomie were opposed to one another as the house is to an
As is known, “economy” derives from the Greek word οἶκος, meaning “household,” and as such is inherently concerned with its smooth and healthy upkeep. Oikos then is the technology of the household in the very performative act of naming it so (we will term such an act “performative”). As such, and as of some sovereign fortress, it always finds itself inherently and actively divided off from that which would threaten, diminish, impugn, or impinge upon its maintenance, longevity, and energetic growth. One must, within the oikos, keep watch over only what is common to the in-vestments of the family and the continued circulation of its blood(line). This notion of a proprietal keeping-watch-over only that which is common to the familiar will subsequently form the trunk of an etymologically and genealogically secure family tree of oikos/economy that has been so firmly rooted right up to the present emergent stage that this article is attempting to outline. Economy, then, is always what has performatively enacted “inclusion-exclusion” and as such it is always already also an active narrative politics of closure. Of this closure of economy, in terms of upkeep and an inhering indemnity against threat, the technocratic proto systems theoretical sociologist Durkheim (1997), writing in a period of the self-conscious formation of high industry (for here sociology itself had duties to perform), writes of:

[a] form of activity which in this way has acquired such a position in the overall life of society [that it] can clearly not remain unregulated without very profound disturbances ensuing. Specifically, this is a source of moral deterioration. Precisely because economic functions today employ the largest number of citizens, thousands of individuals spend their lives almost entirely in an industrial commercial environment. Hence it follows that, since this environment lacks anything save a slight moral tincture, most of their life is pursued without any moral framework. Yet for the sense of duty to strike deep roots within us, the conditions in which we live should constantly sustain that sense. … Thus the lack of economic discipline cannot fail to produce effects that spill over beyond the economic sphere, bringing with it a decline in public morality. (p. xxxiv, emphases mine)

Economy and a guarding morality invested under one safe and well-structured politico-economic accommodation. Such is what furnishes the reproductive energies of a classical broadcasting and common circumscribing center. And what falls or falls outside the englobing walls of these centripetal moral investments in this healthy economic sphere is, in a somewhat circular fashion, unhealthy to its upkeep. The oikos and its position in the larger universe within which it competes can only be secured by strictly managing the self. The relation between the self and the larger oikos, under which it is always ultimately subsumed, requires strict self-management or sophrosyne. It is for the continued good growth of the oikos that one must always contain and constrain one’s excesses, the better to then be fit and able to distrust or be awake to any errancies that might disrupt or erupt within or around one’s household:

To manage a household [oikos] with respect to a city (polis) means to treat your own people as if it could turn strange to you at any moment. Socrates
invents the art of sophrosyne, the art of containing and moderating yourself in order to be able to contain and moderate your wife, your children, your slaves and your domestic animals. Sophrosyne lies at the heart of an art called economics to skillfully manage a household by demanding sacrifice now and promising reward tomorrow. (Baecker, 2008, p. 3)

One must then sacrifice sacrifice or wasteful self-sacrifice as wanton expenditure (dépense) so that one does not end up ultimately sacrificing the interests of one’s larger self. Such is the circuitous tautology of self-forgetting, the better to secure returns to this larger self at some subsequent date. This classical economic homespace or insulating circuitry is best represented by the comforting confines of the bell curve, that statistical descriptor par excellence. We could, moreover, describe this confining bell curve as a fundamentally perfnormative figure, in that its function is far more than a merely constative or descriptive one; its task was always to suppress the errant undertakings of its long lashing tails and thus to immunize the highly placed centre from the possible encroachments of these evilly twinned edges. Such is the supreme safety of Aristotle’s (2009) sophrosynic mean placed healthily between deficiency and excess. We will return later to the economic family-work of the warming/warning/warring bell curve’s safe central territory.

But ensconced outside of this bell curve’s safe central territory is that other element that threatens or harries this territory and which a homely economy must always inoculate or protect itself against to help keep Hestia’s home fires burning. This is so because what so obviously falls outside of this centralizing statistical law, a law that continually attempts to standardize any errant deviations, is unwaveringly contradictory to its upkeep. What falls outside, or implicitly attacks, must be immunized and severed off from the property, propriety, and properness that is always presumed to reside uncontaminated within. A mediatory economy must inspect and eject what festered or defecates beside its household discipline; the dissonant voices of any excremental lacking values must be continuously cleansed or cleaned away.

For such contradictory economic dissonance, the proto systems theoretical industrializing sociologist Durkheim will coin the powerful counter-currency of “anomie” to hold this statistical failing and falling from the bell curve’s normative territory to account. As a distinctly unwelcome guest into such a territorial economic housing, then, anomie is thoroughly and antagonistically opposed to economy. The steep protective mediatory walls of economy are however continually at the prey of this possibility of rot or badness that anomie so sadly is; to continue being-at-home-with-itself, economy must come to convert such excremental energies or direct them far away. Such significatory works of conversion, sheltered here so well by Durkheim under the perfnormative rubric of anomie, become clearer through a cursory examination of its own etymology. Anomie arises from the Greek for that which is thoroughly lacking in law (“a” being the prefix for without and ‘nomos’ indicating the lawful). Literally outlawed.

Such is the thorough lack-of-law that this “bad friend” (Cox, 1998, p. 131) presents to the cloth, the interests, or the in-vestments of the oikos and all the household cavalrys subsumed under a classical economy. In an essay concerning modern counter-classical-Fordist-economic forms of distribution, Rehn (2001) nicely states this
tautological encircling of classical economy that is lately coming to be shaken by what
I demarcate as the emergent eca
nomie:

[T]o state that something is 'economic' is often synonymous with stating it
to be the correct way to go about something. Conceptually, economy is also
closely related to the modernist virtues of rationality and calculability, even
to the extent that economy could be identified [as] the domineering discipli-
nary structure of modernism and western society at large. (p. 85)

Rehn himself goes on to utilize the Maussian/Bataillean categories of gift economy
and potlatch to demarcate certain emergent counter-economic activities that trespass
upon such classical territories. Potlatch, together with a more radical auto-expenditory
autopotlatch, also forms an integral significatory element of the dominium-without-
control of eca
nomie, as we will later see. What, however, are the foundations for this
somewhat foundationless unheimlich (“uncanny”) space that we would usefully term
eca
nomie?

The classical just-in-time foreshadowing of eca
nomie
The formative foundation that lifts us onto the present eca
nomic stage came about
with the introduction of the just-in-time regimen. Within the mid-
to late-twentieth
century’s crisis of overproduction there came the famous answer, resort or turn toward
post-Fordist “flexibilist” specialisms of just-in-time manufacturing processes (see
Hutchins, 1999, and Peppers & Rogers, 1996). These just-in-time (JIT) processes sought
to augment, and in time supplant, the dominant capitalist milieu-of-production that
favoured the standardized or massified norm over the thorny anomic exception. Such
tectonic shifts of activity within the industrial arrangement also inherently carried
within themselves certain dormant downstream significatory (Bedeutung) affordances:
JIT is not simply about the manufacture of more narrowcast objects, but forms itself
into nodes where communication or signification also inevitably blend in. The organ-
ized heading of capital was thus coming under threat, if not quite yet so decapitalized.
Although the classical JIT milieu-of-production also tended to follow a moral-signifi-
catory closing-off of aneconomic anomic energies now, within a sort of superstructural
lag to this shifting milieu, these anomic energies are absorbed (as monetizable medi-
atations) to form their very own most cutting edge. Economy becomes culturally decap-
itated. Such is the decapitalist eca
nomic. To describe this we will see later how a new
(and quite corporeal) form of eca
nomic signification deals with the excess, that previ-
ously excremental accursed share (Bataille, 1991).

Within a still emergent (that is, pre-eca
nomic) milieu of JIT domination, errant
peripheries would hang outside of the machine, yet never simply within some safe
sovereign beyond of the machinery. In not being exactly beyond the machinery, errant
peripheries simply exhibited for it a certain symbolic elsewhere set within the eyeline
of protective mirror apparatuses. Such panopticized peripheries could certainly form
into sites of agonistic symbolico-constative consequence but could not, as yet, be work-
ably integrated into the smooth running of the socio-logical machine. Parenthetically,
that such peripheral energies can now be siphoned off or drawn upon, instead of
merely being symbolically contained, is clearly evidenced in the radical re-tooling or
tectonic shifting of mediation and of mediatory space itself. Media, as many have pointed out within an age of cultural economies, should in no way be conceptualized any longer as mere representational apparatuses, if there ever were such a purity of thing: instead of mediation, there now comes immediation. Such is that performative turn within a larger space of social networking: Nothing any longer merely represents or is represented. Returning, how did JIT’s mediations fend off threat?

Although, previously, errant peripheries slipped a little loosely from econometric grasp, the centre always media-politically held its higher ground, safely defining, confining, and immunizing peripheries through a lively set of moral watchwords knitted together with unspoken, that is non-discursive, transparently communicative comportments and practices. As powerfully knitted and yet unspoken, such practices did not require, or need to operate within, a reflective or explicit normative discourse. They just were as they continued to do. As unspoken then, such protective mediatory practices were always already transparently thrown-into-the-world (Geworfenheit) in tacit opposition to excessive outlaw practices that always, as existing outside this normed soft regime of dominant practices, found themselves contained within their own consciously adopted and estranged oppositions: the lived life experience of the anomic was produced within a quite paradoxically parasitic and thus somewhat clinging opposition. The immunized periphery de-familiarly opposed or estranged itself from the centre in believing itself loosened off from it. There was clearly here a phenomenal immunitary sensation of two quite distinctive topographies: comfortably economically thrown or consciously and counter-economically thrown-out (oikos or anomos). What was excessive then, within this previous classical economic world picture, only ever functioned to further reinforce the unassailable centrality of the centre. And so for this central reservation of the bell curve, as something in or for itself, such peripheries were mere excrement, waste, or excess on all but a symbolic reinforcing immunitory level.

A mutation has now (considerably) gotten underway in the deepening movements and machinations of what I am terming here the economic. Economie is an eclectic, nebulous, and thus wide-open force that recycles all that would previously have been classed as unwarranted or anomic. Such is what JIT manufacturing really only prepared the way for. Before focusing fully on this move to economie, let us look a little further at the functioning of JIT in the period of transition and toward the thorny classical immunitary functioning of autoimmune suicide.

Centrally peripheral/peripherally central: The classically unmachinable work of suicide

Where previously, within Fordism, the errant periphery was forced to adapt to, or fail to adapt to, the functional necessities of the central production processes and their tendency to pipe unresponsive produce (the famous “any colour as long as it’s black”), the post-Fordist JIT imperative, rather than normatively enforcing or centralizing, sought a certain loosened guidance from the errancy or choices of the periphery in the ongoing machining of responsive new parts. So, where formerly the periphery was a seemingly incorrigible or irredeemable excess, which could only be antagonistically incorporated into the restricted economy of a Fordist-industrial universe (i.e., through symbolic opposition),
the exceptional could now, at least, begin to be more properly observed or asked-after and its requirements fulfilled as systemic growth-potentials. Here then a *loosening* of the errant as (autoimmune) centrifugally destructive systemically entropic bound energies, which would be exceptions to the helpful running of the machine, begins to be experienced. The mutation that occurred? *The anomie is no longer being economically accounted-for but is instead being economically counted-upon.* The once unwarranted antagonistic exception to the rule would become the rule of the exception.

The classical *aneconomic* antagonistic Durkheimian concept of anomie, observing as it did from the orienting, and thus somewhat captivating, peak of the normative bell curve, previously needed to take upon itself the technocratic function of a protective media-immunitary projection of high moral tones against what might be most dangerous and different to the norms or nomos-of-the-house (*Oikonomiea*). Society, as Foucault historically pointed out (Foucault, 2003), must be defended. Such centrally administered immunitary defences are now no longer necessary; in fact, they would form a blockage, a paradoxical waste of waste. Wasted energies must classically be protected against.

And so right here, at some paradigmatic distance from the classical centre, we will find residing the *ne plus ultra* of unwarranted anomic guests: the suicide. As the transgressive exemplar or nadir of normlessness, autoimmune suicide always classically found itself energetically classified as the very platonic benchmark of a useless and excessive energy that escaped the nascent science of society’s grasp. It was the thorniest of thorns within sociology’s side and thus also, simultaneously, its most precious object of study (Durkheim, 2002). As the *par excellence* of thoroughly wasteful energy, the suicide could only ever be re-engineered symbolically as useless waste matter to be displayed, recorded, and played back for the sake of always working toward a more positive and useful conduction of life’s affirmative and economic imperatives (MacDonald, 1986, 1988). For suicide robs the machine of available energies and so “suicide” must now be portrayed to stave off any further entropic losses. Suicide provides only bound energy. *And the power of the representation of suicide and its classical significatory circulation?* The anguish of any locally injured families are, objectively, but the epiphenomena of suicide’s more systemically substantial destructive *aneconomic* excessive energy. Such, briefly, was the symbolic work that was asked of an outsider suicide in the age of Fordist industrial and JIT reproduction. If this excessive waste material (that we might term here “autopotlatch”) could only, however, be put to work for the larger economy, it would certainly offer some contributive signification, if never quite pushed. And if a re-circulating of such bound excessive energy were possible, and I believe I am demonstrating in this article that it is, it would no longer function as some well-defined systemically autoimmune counter-energy or blood-disorder to the economic circulatory system or complex, of which it would previously have been the most excessive and accursed share (*la part maudite*). The economy would hold stock in this *ecconomic* thing. But what of this coming of *economy* that suicide no longer inherently threatens or befuddles?

The change then to which I alluded at the opening of this article is the very concrete re-engineering of the previously negative moral conceptuality (or mediation) of
anomie and the attendant model of a previously centrifugal long-tailed edges-of-the-bell-curve that were once conceived of, categorically, as wasted or wasteful energies. What then, categorically, is waste energy?

**The black sheep of excess: Calling the Maxwellian demon**
(or, how to do things with turds)

Waste energy is that for which the machinery has no useful purpose. It cannot be commissioned or converted and, as such, it is entropy (see Georgescu-Roegen, 1999) by its most tautological definition. This tautology, however, is never circuitously or terminally closed, as the system always has a stock of hope set aside for the black sheep of excess that might eventually convert it from its bound entropic ways. As the excrement that is expended or ejected from a body that must carry on running, this excrement haunts the very machinery it escapes as something both harmful and yet desired to be re-integrated. The perfect Maxwellian demon would be an entity or networking protocol that would, in recognizing each excessive particle, and in importantly expending less energy than it frees, re-engineer the excess and feed it back into the useful circulation of the machine. As somewhat abject heuristic imagery, we can picture an exhaust tube that comes out from the expulsive bodily anus and which then folds back into the ingestive buccal cavity so that the energetic call upon the outside is reduced to something approaching an ideal of the null.

Following through our abject heuristic image, the demon or gatekeeper will deeply mine the fecal excess and, by feeding it back into the facial opening, also reduce the autoimmune entropy that the excess so thornily figures as, if left proximate to the bodily economy. Excesses deposited at the previously antagonistic edge-of-the-bell-curve, which previously activated the immuno-mediatory economic body, now come onstage to play their part as powerfully workable networking protocols arise to work upon these in their own non-destructive way. We will later look in some practical detail at the working of such long tail economic networking protocols, protocols that are successfully working on the once-feared criminal particles or elements of anomie and excess. The cardinal difference obviously now is that such criminal errancy is no longer a counterforce to be penalized for its edginess: *Instead of simply burning off* (Stoekl, 2007), *it becomes the very petrol that helps to operate the machine.*

What then would become of anomie-as-excess at the coming of such networking protocols? Anomie, as a moral category that is systemically opposed to the safe-house of economy, is simply now outmoded. Economics is the modern successful attempt at losing such excesses as mere waste produce. Excess is now accounted for in different ways. Anomie, conceived of as outsider counter-energy, is thus from quite a different order.

Here we can see exactly why economy + anomie forms into such a strangely sublime liminal alliance. Following back the etymology: the house (*oikos*) now houses that which is situated outside of it. *Economie, as such, is this science of the unheimlich or uncanny.* In re-conceptualizing anomie as but a numerical, that is post-moralistic, long tail edge-of-the-bell-curve, economie is able to re-house or re-situate excess and recover that which previously merely fell out to the tomb. Out of the way. Off the track. Anomie, as that edge-of-the-bell-curve, as something thus modelled as merely wasteful,
now becomes, as a label, a quaint Fordist conceptual relic to be eco-systemically sup-
planted by the necessarily more amoral économie that resides and resonates within
the re-shapeable housing of this fully post-Fordist age or, in what we are now ready to
term, an “excessive world picture.” What is a world picture in this respect? To answer
this question concerning the technology of this excessive world picturing, let us briefly
visit Heidegger’s (1977) definition of the classical world picture to help to map out this
economic change:

What kind of unconcealment is it, then, that is peculiar to that which results
from this setting-upon that challenges? Everywhere everything is ordered to
stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may
be on call for further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own
standing. We call it the standing-reserve [Bestand]. The word expresses here
something more, and something more essential than mere “stock.” The word
“standing-reserve” assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. ... Whatever stands
by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands against us as object. (p. 17)

Within the framing (Gestell) confines of the classical “age of the world picture,”
all the elements of world are transformed into standing-reserve, but always from a cen-
tralized arrangement that can never however be pointed toward, as of some singular
expugnable thing. “Standing reserve” and “world picture” are systemically substantial.
For Heidegger distance, for example, now becomes a mere flattened Cartesian sub-
stance ontological “x-y-z-t” unit of measurement (Heidegger, 1996) and, as a notion
comparable to Marx’s modern universal exchange value (see Goux, 1990b), everything
stands side by side as interchangeable elements, and not transcendent object; every-
thing is emplaced within an economic nexus of infinitely quantifiable and calculus-
driven substitutions; everything is transposable (see Vattimo, 1991). Such is the act of
a transparent, and thus seemingly innocent, signification. As part then of such “every-
thing,” “The Rhine” or “The Ister” (Heidegger, 1996) cease any longer to supply any
opaque excessive poetic grandeur or even any qualitative distance. The Rhine hence-
forth merely supplies a quantitatively valuable hydroelectric energy from its now finite
standing reserve. Within such a pictorial regime (of compositied pictorality), totality
swallows infinity. When Heidegger here then uses the somewhat apocalyptically final
“no longer stands against us as object” syntagm, he is pointing to the now non-tran-
scendent sense of globalized mere materials, which would immediately become
stitched or networked together into an expansive calculative whole or weave. The ques-
tion, connectedly, becomes: What is the functionality of excess in this transformed
world picture? Excess is certainly something more than a mere ontic “bare life”
(Agamben, 1998) that one might come to plug a power cord into (to become such
standing reserve). For such a coming-into-availability of excess now additionally
stretches out toward the long tail much flatter lining of the thanatosic death drive
(Todestrieb) also. Here, what we might label, “necropreneurial algorithms” now arise
to monetize such energies that are now continually coming online and thus becoming
economically pictoralizable. Analogous then to Agamben’s issue with “bare life,”
power (or “equipower”) now reaches out toward communicable enframings of “bare
death.” Let us question this additional excess that moves now toward pictoralization.
Such a questioning then concerning excess will take us a stage on from Heidegger’s (1977) immanent-pictorial stage toward what we might come to recognize as a newly accosted excessive world picture. How does excess come to find itself both calculated and enframed? We move across now then from the high political economic modernity of Heidegger’s reserves to Bataille’s sovereign momentary and particular excesses. Here we pay a visit to that paradoxical general economic space of the gift.

**The Maxwellian demonic gift of the écconomie of excess**

But we’re never gonna survive, unless we get a little crazy

> —Seal (1990)

> The overriding function of the gift is to prohibit isolation and to consolidate communication.

> —Michelle Richman (1982, p. 80)

Traditionally, creative or artistic expenditure (dépense) or excess is the gift of time (see Derrida, 1994) that escapes the machining extractive grasp or gaze only to return to the machine at some future point to do a job. Excess is always, as such, on some stretch of sabbatical. The sabbaticalee is given this gift of time for a return to be made back into the sensory system (and thus also the effector or motor outputs if we think this systems-cybernetically) at some future point. Such a logical gift economy is Maussian (Mauss, 2001) rather than Bataillean (Bataille, 1991, and Shershow, 2005, for comparison in modern “workplace” and Goux 1990a for Bataille’s place for post-modern economics), and yet reclaiming the Bataille’s genre of gift has always also been the horizon that is painted so invisibly onto the surface of the machine as its ultimate and organizing totemic telos. For even to Bataille the excess was never merely some perfectly aimless waste matter, but the harboured desire for transcendent sovereign auto-affective self-proximate ownership (see Derrida, 1978): some heroic paradoxically “self-present-yet-forgetting” walled-up waste that would, as such, escape from the housing of some restrictive economic public reserves. It was, to be sure, never about miserly self-saving but was, nevertheless, also not entirely about a waste unspent. According to Richman (1982), Bataille’s sovereignty, where the gift economy reigns, is:

> Composed of a variety of moments rather than a sustained revelation or state of being, these epiphanies [sovereign moments] cannot be organized or appropriated into a discursive system of understanding. (p. 76)

Although then such gifted sovereign moments seem not to be linked into a restrictively monetized economy, there is a sense in which they certainly return a circuit-of-energy whose exact locale is nevertheless necessarily hazy and hard to pin down. *There were not the networking protocols to free this bound energy.* Nonetheless, even accounting for the irreducible heterogeneity of such wishful walled-up sovereign moments, the more general Bataillean gift economy of such excesses was always already the future target or hoped-for haunt of an écconomie art whose time has come and whose uncanny shape we are attempting here to depict. Something then has come to keep watch over this remainder or excess, that seemingly (in)escapable second rule of thermodynamics that, under the rubric of expenditure, Bataille sought to celebrate
as some sovereign space of wallable or severable excess. But how can such severance claim its toll?

The demon, as a function of the will-to-reduce this second law of thermodynamics (entropy), always haunts the excessive-sabbatical, as it were, and expects a certain quota of returns. For though costs or expenditure escape the immediacy of the machine, there is a systemic autoimmunity always within acceptable bounds. For as every R&D unit of any corporation knows: there needs to be a certain quota of waste for there to be a future in any ultimately workable fashion. It is a deferred realism then that energies should be encouraged to go to waste in the hope and statistically projected expectation of a later more positive reclaiming. The hope for the networking Maxwellian demon then is to increase its observational skill and reduce that which would be termed “excess excess” and redefine as forgivable excess that which merely has a longer horizon or return cycle than that which seems more immediately transparent or calculable.

There are thus two concepts of excess or expenditure (dépense): expenditure as mere loss or non-reclaimable waste, and expenditure as a less excessive excess that will nevertheless have some future spectral benefits: excess as deferred gain. If these cannot ever entirely be separated in any empirical, ontic, or specific situations, ontologically macroscopic statistics would seem to secure this role (of excess loss versus gain) as a rule. We will see later that the currently evolving logistics-of-the-network assures that such black holes and dark energetic excesses now get pictorialized and reclaimed. Such a blackened économie is the very paradigm of this clean and open white space of the excessive world picture. And why then exactly open instead of closed?

As Bataille (1991) pointed out for us at the opening of this article, such excess cannot be treated in any analogous restricted economic sense of changing a tire. This rule is not factually a difference of kind but a flexible difference of degree, for Bataille stated as much when strategically situating his consumption-focused economic masterwork:

This is regrettable in that the notions of “productive expenditure” and “non-productive expenditure” have a basic value in all the developments of my book. But real life, composed of all sorts of expenditures, knows nothing of purely productive expenditure; in actuality, it knows nothing of purely non-productive expenditure either. (p. 12)

In any event, the concept of recoverable excess is moving ineluctably in the direction of usefully utilizing, through pictorializing, the merely wasteful. Excessive excess is thus disappearing as that dangerously abhorrent non-calculable register-of-uselessness. Uselessness now, quite paradoxically, has value. Excess is a future whose element has come in the shape of this automatistically-attentive protocol or demon of économie that keeps watch over the ever-lengthening long tail of the shapeless économie leviathan. Économie science reaches out for and toward the flat-lining edges of a now non-normative non-mediatory bell curve. The complexity of the Internet, as non-restrictive “immediatory” space, is its most sprawling homeless haunt. The schema of the enclosed space simply does not fit such an excessive world picture. Closure again bespeaks of the morally weighted centripetal oikos or housing.

This économie is a leviathan stripped of any centripetal moral weight. It governs without governing: equip-mentally it is excre-mentality over govern-mentality. As such
it is the age of the excessive and thus also quite abstract world picture. The normative
moral weight of anomie was previously necessary in an age of high industry, but in an
age where the appropriation of what is out toward the edges-of-the bell curve (where
very few consumptive desires now fall to the tomb or are en-crypted), such anomie is
re-machined or machinated and thus becomes écœnomie. Anomie, as such, was the
symbolic space of a previously closed crypt: a cryptic waste matter. Écœnomic dis-cryp-
tion is the contemporary and concerted re-machining of this thoroughly open currency
of excess. It is an excessive machination. As such a concerted re-machining, Bataille’s
once shocking regionality of the anus, and its rather shitty excremental lower ordering,
does not organizationally shock any longer: the gravitational average has lost its place
at the organizing centre of the balancing of accounts. Within the sudden rise of écœnomie, the normative head of the bell curve has been summarily dispatched as the
centre of gravity, forming now an inherently contradictory “écœnomic household”
(and could we baptize the science of such an “acéphaleécœnomics”?). What then resides
at the tail of the bell curve is brought out of its retirement and into the region of a
generalized écœnomic rationality of the excessive. How is this change rippling through
and revealing itself? We will return to Heidegger to provide some tools to excavate this
long-tail excess and return to the figure of suicide as our gold standard of écœnomic
measure.

The accursed share: Signification and autoimmunity
If an autoimmune or self-abusive suicide itself, as of yet, cannot be re-machined into
the available exchange value of an écœnomic housing or cannot circulate valuably (i.e.,
become a transparently exchangeable self-abuse value) within the generalized collective
network, the very imagery of what is beyond or immunized from the centre of this bell curve is strategically finding other echoes and new forms of significatory prac-
tice. Signification (Bedeutung) here is the part something plays within a contemporary
landscape where nothing is materially unaccompanied or merely locally, idiosyncrat-
ically, and fragmentarily placed.

Signification (Bedeutung) for Heidegger, unlike for his mentor Husserl, is neither
an abstract nor merely linguistic “representational” layer but a solid corporeal being-
within-the-world that we are thoroughly and equiprimordially wrapped up in coping
within. A famous illustrative example: a fallen tree over a river can certainly be utilized
to cross that river, but it is not for all that a bridge to the other side. Only a bridge, as
opposed to this accidental and singular fallen “tree-thing,” is an item of equipment
(Zeug) for such a work of regimented navigation. For “[t]aken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment” (Heidegger, 1978, p. 97). Algorithmically: there is never anything singular (idios) that can stand out or apart within signification. Signification is always already referentially emplaced; “standing out” is stric
to sensu always significatory. Signification then is an interrelated holistic totality, a corporeal regionality that, existing on any scale, also reaches deep into the body.

As a singular anomic or “accidental thing” then, a fallen tree for Heidegger can bear no “bridge” signification. To be a bridge it must, most importantly, already be
networked into a motor system of roads and a sensory system of signals (to assert its
powerful and quite assured pressure of navigation). A bridge, as signification or equip-
ment, is always but one component within a sensori-motor equipmental totality. To function as such, then, it must be already immanently baptized into an interlocking collective network of “towards-whiches.” Once so baptized into this interlocking network, we are always already absorbed-into this towards-which of crossing in the mode of its layout and long before we ever concretely hit it (by foot, by car, etc.). Consequently, and connectedly, the very idea of an over there, toward which we might cross, then becomes a radically reduced quality and not an exotic or xenotic expedition. Such concrete roads or bridges must go onwardly from there to form part of a larger historiographical map (what Heidegger [1978] called a “for-the-sake-of-which” [Worum-wollen]), terrain or “totality-of-equipment” encapsulated or embodied within a systemic belief and, most importantly, held as common stock by a collective group at a certain point in delimited or reproductive social history (later, as for all, to become an archaeological relic, a trace remained element of some posited larger social structuration). We can term such equip-mental regi-mentality, equipment’s very “equipower” (whether on the smaller flowing scale of the “towards-which” or the grander terminal scale of the “for-the-sake-of-which”).

Here then Heideggerian signification, as with its much more abstract Saussurean linguistic cousin, cannot ever solely be owned by any fragmented individuality: it is always ecologically lined up within some larger ‘en-ringing’ Umwelt (see Uexküll, 2010, and Heidegger, 2001). A laptop falling into a jungle is similarly not, in that particular place, an item of equipment, but it can certainly be used toward defence from an animal within the confines of a brutal jam or pickle. Thus for any piece of equipment to signify, in Heidegger’s very defined terms, it must always be part of a larger network or equipmental totality (and we must appreciate the post-Cartesian, somewhat hidden portmanteau elegance of this term “equipmentality”). Économie within the Internet’s significatory framework represents such an equipmental or significatory shift. A new significatory économie has arisen, just as real as any road, and yet a road now set within a far wider reach. Here is where, I believe, Heidegger’s non-significatory, and thus quite romantically positioned, model tree ceases any longer to live quite so sovereignly outside of signification (just as with Bataille’s own acéphalically worshipped sovereign hidden tree), planted here as it is so firmly within the now dominant age of the excessive world picture. Connectedly, there is, as we all know, a whole history of lonely trees, archivally abandoned within their heterogeneously confusing and somewhat labyrinthine forests! Such is the positioning of the philosophically model tree.

Here, however, what previously fell outside to an encrypted extra-spatiality, like the accidental (idios) tree over the river, now finds itself already smoothly networked up, no longer as mere aberrant or accidental or (un-sequestered) sovereign excess. Here exactly is where the radical shift in the économie signification lies: Even accidental fallen trees now find themselves already swept into the larger économie stream. Such is the “Big Data” or the “Internet of Things” that the networked space of économie is able to chaotically encompass or enframe. Trees no longer fall outside the empirical confines of economy, but find themselves already accommodated within earshot of économie nets. Within such a pictorial regime, would the outsider exemplar of suicide
any longer be signified as the very idios-of-the-idios that works so thoroughly outside the household’s plot? Has the work of suicide changed? Is there a re-worked signification of suicide? Does it move outside the regime of the family plot or oikos, and into the more forgiving open spatiality of social networks? A social networking économie?

**Économie at work: The autoimmunal (social) networking of suicide**

Signification itself then is mutating in an age of hyperexpansive economic standing reserve that can now signify (Bedeutung), in the extended corporeal sense outlined above, previously fallen or anomic accidentals. The changing reserve of suicide, in an age of socio-corporeal networking, is itself paradigmatic or evidential of something that should not be seen to occupy the same moral position held previously in the centralized machinery of high-Fordist or post-Fordist JIT paradigms. This, I believe, I have somewhat assertively disclosed, if not as yet fully demonstrated. The remainder of this article aims at doing so, not so much as an empirical demonstration of suicide’s own rearranged place, but demonstrative relatedly of many connected energies that also no longer seem so inherently antagonistic.

It is clear that such newly acquired economic tolerance is not to be seen as some humane, therapeutic, or progressive movement, whose lines are traced out within the form of an enlightened mediatory “acceptance” of an excessive wasteful suicide, so much as an echoed further confirmation of general tectonic realignments and the increasing circulatory movements or encroachments of economie. This softening signification (Bedeutung) of suicide’s previously misspent energies, as such, then, merely forms an archaeological or metonymic evidentiary, a component part of a larger “shifting” where many other forms of “excessive reclamation” occur within that somewhat voracious space that we have termed économie. Retreating to our mere component exemplar, the previously dominant immunitary reaction of the machine to the suicidally autoimmune, that previously accused splinter within the solid social flesh that is “self-slaughter” (as the ne plus ultra of that which is wholly unworkable), is being re-worked into a realigned significatory feedback loop: a new mode of ontic being-in-the-world. What of this figure of “autoimmunity” and its new economic mode of being-in-the-world? Drawing upon the suicidal metaphor, autoimmunity according to Derrida is

> [t]he same logic that elsewhere I proposed we extended without limit in the form of an implacable law: the one that regulates every autoimmunitary process. As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in a quasi-suicidal fashion, “itself” works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its “own” immunity. (Derrida in Borradori, 2004, p. 94)

Derrida’s utilization of suspicious quotation marks around “itself” and “own” are of cardinal interest here as he is questioning the very idea(l) of a system as opposed to an environment: the closed ipse as opposed to what might externally impinge or assail a supposed ipse’s inherent protective mechanism. As such there is no exclusionary opposition of mere terms so much as a complex. This is what has proved so reso-
nant lately, not least within studies of “terrorism” and “homeland security” (for example, Addis, 2007; Mansfield, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Murray, 2006; Naas, 2006), for this use of the term that Derrida has deployed against the ideal of some indemnifiable system that could be identical to itself or its own interests. Such systems, according to Mansfield (2006), are seen by Derrida “less as collapsing dichotomies or deconstructed binaries, than as singular complexes turned upon themselves. The trope he used for this double relationship with self was ‘autoimmunity’” (2006, p. 101). In relation to such a Derridean presentation of autoimmunity, W.J.T. Mitchell (2006) has pointed out that

the stretching of the metaphor seems to be exactly the point. The limits, borders, boundaries of the body (politic), its relations of inside/outside, friend/enemy, native/alien are exactly what is in question in the metaphor of the immune system. (p. 946)

The questionable economy of autoimmunity then raises the question of the economy of a body that is or could be proper to itself in something larger than the biopolitical sense. Glancing back up at this quotation, we could very easily substitute “economy/anomie” respectively for each of these terms that Mitchell lists, especially when the latter term of each pair finds itself inherently appointed and thus possessed of a paradoxical form of duty to the former, toward which it is supposed to be opposed. Autoimmunity, as with the more historically situated economie, upsets the balance of such oppositions by pointing to a certain outside-of-the-inside, enemy-in-the-friend, alien-in-the-native, et cetera. Autoimmunity, as Derrida, Mansfield and Mitchell outline it, certainly follows the logical-topographical lines of our own economie. What makes the figure of autoimmunity so infectiously transferable or germane here is that as a term, or indeed germ, it crosses or ceaselessly emigrates between the biological body and the body politic, as that which is hosted as alien or exempted from obligation (political) and that which withholds an endangering spread of the outside from itself (biological), which forms into a composite biopolitical concept that Derrida here, as Mitchell points out, works to generalize out to all forms of mechanism. No longer then is immunity or autoimmunity a space of sovereign indemnification, but itself the recognition of a mutation in the economy of the modern nation-state that is co-symptomatic of our own terminological economie.

In any event suicide, as the autoimmune reduction or removal of the body out from the space of social reproduction (autopotlatch), finds itself repositioned in economie as a less thorny thorn, if not as yet a smoothly workable form of re-machinable energy. The classically immunal defending-by-attacking tendency of the system is no longer, at this present juncture, called upon in-order-to (Um-Zu) performatively tag this as some antigenic cardinal errancy, but now works or hones it into its enlarged, or hypertrophic, significatory (that is, corporeal) framework. The machine now accepts escape, to all apparent purposes. As such it is but the Platonic form of an irrecoverable excess, but one that provides energy for extraction, creating now a self-abuse value. Suicide then no longer quite so sovereignly withdraws or is allowed to squander its energies. For the suicidal body classically sees itself as proper only to itself; anomalically and aporetically, it seeks to reclaim itself within some sovereign moment of loss and
thus remove itself from the useful network of workable integrable energies. It saves itself from the machine by turning itself against itself. It saves only by paradoxically auto-expending.

**Concluding facticals of economie**

While under the old systemic mappings or previously dominant signification this economically infertile infernality was the *ne plus ultra* of implosive-logic, it now holds a certain spark in this recent recalculation of the excess as the now workable space that we here are calling economie. Foucault (2001), writing in a time of an encroaching JIT (and previous to Google’s AdSense), saw suicide as something irredeemably stubborn and transhistorically transgressive of the socius, and as such he staunchly defended:

[T]he recognized right of each individual to kill himself. … If I won a few billion in the lottery, I would create an institute where people who would like to die would come and spend a weekend, a week, or a month in pleasure, under drugs perhaps, in order to disappear afterward, as if erased. (p. 380)

The suicide’s thanatopic calls are no longer quite so unheeded. These days one will easily find targeted advertisements on YouTube pages where people network about their suicidal thoughts and on other websites, where most famously, products are made available to assist the self-harming to move toward or achieve their desired ends. Of course, also, one’s auto-thanato-pathic tendencies can easily also be tracked, answered to, and monetized by a sort of long-tail leviathan that embeds itself not in singular “sites” but in a totality of user movements across a certain, what we might call, big data real patterning of sites. Outside of this more distributed ethic, there are sites such as suicidegirls.com, which successfully monetizes a branded significatory complex that offers a significant return on investment (with over 5 million unique visitors a month, CBSNews, 2007). In a video podcast on the site CBSNews titled “Suicide Girls: How to Build a Lifestyle Brand,” the founder of this multiplatform concept, Missy Suicide, stated that the site caters to “girls who choose to commit social suicide. Girls who don’t fit or choose not to fit into the norm” (CBSNews, 2007).

Much of the interview concerns the monetizing possibilities of that which is beyond the classical normative peak of the bell curve. When asked the paradigmatic ontological question “What is ...?" Missy Suicide points out that it is hard to quantify what makes a suicide girl, but it is clear that this difficulty concerning quantification does not equate to any excess beyond a certain confident inward reaching of economie. Such are the incursive overtones of the significatory nexus of “suicide” that lean upon the gold standard of the once sovereign losses of *the-thing-(no-longer)-in-itself*. Interestingly, and in a somewhat Andersonian fashion, another website linking to this interview titles its own coverage “Suicide Girls Shows How Online Communities Can Monetize by Thinking Small” (Social Media Soapbox, 2009). Such monetizing of what once so cryptically fell to the tomb is clearly far from peaking as economie networks take hold and redistribute these once squandered small energies. Suicides, in themselves, are now frequently captured on smartphones and “gift economically” distributed immediately outside of the subject’s own immediate moment of sovereign loss. Any idea of banning or deploping more full-scale or head-on suicidal economies would...
obviously be meaningless in a “space” where everything is in a dual sense highly distributed (as in not locatable in any one place but also distributable as produce). It is not merely a case of porous national borders, but of a rapid deceleration of the broadcasting centripetal centre that withers in proportion to networked monetization. Here the very “philosophy of money” (Simmel, 2004), exchange, and the gift transforms significantly. There would obviously be much mileage in tracing such transformations that ripple far inside communication itself.

As occupying the very limits of a so-called sovereign waste, suicide still somewhat amounts to an immovable teleology or unreachable pot of economie. Perhaps suicide remains a necessary (platonic) accountancy image for something beyond the systemics of systematicity (but again such an excess is evidential of the infinite stretch of the communicable-commodifiable), something that is strangely and somewhat paradoxically celebrated in an age where the market-machine works through all formerly excessively excess energies. As of now (2013), economie cannot quite find a total synergy with suicide. If not quite openly celebrated then, the responsive significations of mourning now find themselves ripped and reconfigured. This is clearly no longer the classical representation of “the suicide” (MacDonald, 1986, 1988) as mere dead weight. Though such a new reconfiguration of suicide may still then form a (albeit thinner) barrier or threshold beyond which economie cannot wholly or confidently step over the edge of, the economic marketplace holds such bare death as its strangest natural resource. As such, this is the age where the news of the death of God is now finally percolating through into the earshot of Nietzsche’s (1991) famous marketplace (and it is no accident that this news was indeed intoned within the uncanny twilight of an early morning marketplace that had itself distributedly contributed toward a killing that it itself knew nothing about and so was not as yet a marketplace available for mourning). In a strange autoimmune logic then, which now looks not so abjectly irresponsible to the eye and the equipower of economy reconfigured as economie, suicide still stands out as a certain gold standard of the excess of excess. Where the centrally organizing image of an immanent God previously outlawed such works of suicide, a strange new logic finds suicide itself occupying the position of sovereign exceptional excess, but one now reduced from Foucault’s somewhat idealistically and naively exceptional suicide that would defy an en-comprising economic lordship. Such an image that Foucault celebrated as the transgressive “sovereign exception” of an economic suicide (for his celebrative/romanticized discourse on suicide, as exceptionally transgressive, is really quite bizarre) now finds itself integrated as a quite useable economic fuel. No longer then is suicide a sovereign exception to the economy, the oikos, or the marketplace/agora, but analogous to that famous plight of Jesus in the inane age of the world picture, it is now a more mutable dashboard form of autoimmunity. To recoin the famous Smith (2009) dictum and brazenly splicing it with Nietzsche (1991): Economie is the invisible hand of Godlessness.

References


