

*A Deleuzian reading of active and reactive forces in Bataille's Nietzschean  
Will-to-Power (under the name 'expenditure'):*

From Bataille:

The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy of the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.

As a rule the surface of the globe is invested by life to the extent possible. By and large the myriad forms of life adapt it to the available resources, so that space is its basic limit.

[L]ife suffocates within limits that are too close; it aspires manifold ways to an impossible growth.

[T]his atmosphere of malediction presupposes anguish, and anguish for its part signifies the absence (or weakness) of the pressure exerted by the exuberance of life. . . There can be anguish only from a personal, *particular* point of view that is radically opposed to the *general* point of view based on the exuberance of living matter as a whole. Anguish is meaningless for someone who overflows with life, and for life as a whole, which is an overflowing by its very nature.

A reactive force is a force which is dominated. An active force is a force which dominates. One may not exist without the other. Consciousness, for example, which is always a product of resentment, is a reactive force. Will-to-Power is "the principle of the synthesis of forces" (D); or, perhaps, the principle which allows for a difference/antagonism of forces.

To place this in Bataille's picture we should consider Will-to-Power the general bio-energetic principle of life; the generalized completeness of the extension of the biosphere in every possible direction, and the consequent necessity of an overall non-productive expenditure of energy. In this picture, no use of solar energy is possible in a generalized way; and insofar as such a use is possible in a particular instance it is only by displacement of necessary

expenditure to a different place within the biosphere. The displacer, that individual, species or other unit, which succeeds in temporarily displacing the necessity of expenditure elsewhere constitutes an active force. The location of displacement, which must increase, perhaps to the point of its complete extermination, its non-productive expenditure, becomes a reactive force. An active force must, however, become a reactive force when it is no longer able to maintain its new degree of accumulated energy.

Concretely, take as an example two chlorophyllic species of single celled organisms completely covering the surface of a pond. One species (or call it an individual if you like -- since every unit is genetically identical) can expand only at the expense of the territory covered by the other. Each species continues to absorb radiation from the sun, which brings it chemically to a state where some of its cells must either reproduce or die. If the latter, they dissipate the energy which they have absorbed in their mitochondria in a manner useless to the organism/species; if the former then they must cause just such a dissipation in cells of the other species. Most likely, each species becomes at the same time reactive and active -- some cells die at the same time as other cells succeed in displacing those of the other species to reproduce -- though, of course, there may well be a preponderance of domination in one direction. Even if the entire pond becomes monogenetic in the struggle for dominance, Will-to-Power does not thereby disappear. It merely operates instead exclusively at the level of individual cells.

Forces within the biosphere do not necessarily interact only through death, though this may be the most common result. We can also imagine two plants, for example, such as two grasses, which are in a struggle for territory where the reduction, and hence expenditure, of one does not result in its

death, but merely its diminution. Death is simply the most absolute form of an entirely general principle of the interaction of forces.

Again, we may consider yet another biological interaction of forces. A lion eats a lamb. A lion becomes active, allowing it to act out its potential of storing a still greater quantity of energy, of biomass; while in the same event a lamb becomes reactive, releasing non-productively its accumulated biomass-energy. This allows us to consider several additional things. First, in becoming-active a lion simultaneously increases its potential for becoming-reactive and exhausts one potential for becoming-active; the very active force contains within itself the movement towards a reactive force. That is, a lion expands its biomass by eating a lamb, creating a still greater degree of stored energy to be non-productively released -- as it will be eventually. An affirmation of life is an affirmation of the movement towards death. Every moment in which Will-to-Power functions is a return to the conditions under which Will-to-Power must function. Even if our lion becomes active before it becomes reactive, it must become active in a different manner than it became active before -- in relation to a different becoming-reactive force. Will-to-Power always returns, but never in the same particular forces as it has already been expressed. In this sense there is no active being, but only becoming-active; and likewise no reactive being, but only becoming-reactive. The much spoken of 'Eternal Return' is a return to becoming in each moment.

To talk about active forces and reactive forces is always to talk about a milieu or stratum. Within a milieu all the forces may be reactive forces; but they may only be so in relation to active forces on a stratum which grounds the stratum on which forces are exclusively reactive. For example, a monogenetic growth within a limited biological space is exclusively reactive on the species milieu. It does nothing but dissipate the excess of solar energy it

receives. However, even this purely reactive species force becomes reactive only out of the substratic struggle of both active and reactive individuals. This is only example, notice, it is not intended to suggest that individuals are universally a lower or more basic level than species. It may happen at other times that exactly the reverse grounding occurs -- that a purely reactive individual emerges out of the antagonism between active and reactive species. The biosphere, having generally exhausted the space available to it, is as a whole entirely reactive -- it may do nothing but dissipate its excess of energy. Reactive forces are "everywhere triumphant" (D) -- or at least, looking everywhere at once we see nothing but reactive forces.

Reactive forces become conscious in human beings are known as *ressentiment*. The resentful will is the will to non-productive expenditure, to allow dissipation rather than displace it. This will "seperates active force from what it can do" (D). A human being is capable of domination, but rather than become active in this domination she turns becoming-active force against itself to make it reactive. That is, rather than displace expenditure, the resentful being suffers it. The resentful consciousness in turning against itself creates metaphysical denials of the possibility of becoming-active -- either, as in science by denying becoming, or, as in religion by denying the necessity of expenditure (either in this world, as in Lamaism, or by projection to an imagined world without the necessity of expenditure). The scientific principles which carry forth this denial in consciousness are those which equalize all things by quantifying them, and by positing the "laws" of conservation.