



## After We Drank Up the Sea: Nihilism, Crying, and Laughing

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### ABSTRACT

In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche's madman proclaims that God is dead and we are the murderers. Then he asks a series of questions about how such an event was possible, including the question, "How were we able to drink up the sea?" That question reflects Nietzsche's insight that the loss of the true world (God) is also the loss of the apparent world (nature). This loss marks a transition to the Anthropocene—a geological epoch in which human impacts extend throughout Earth systems, including Earth's entire hydrologic system. Petrochemicals are found in the deepest parts of Earth's oceans while gyres of debris form floating islands on the surface. Drawing primarily on Nietzsche and Bataille, this article 1) diagnoses nihilistic tendencies at work in the worldwide destruction of marine ecosystems (e.g., pollution, ocean acidification, drying seas, and mass extinction), and 2) poses a *solution* in two practices of oceanic becoming: crying and laughing. Saline tears and oceanic waves of laughter open up possibilities for affirming coexistence in and as the uncertain seas of the Anthropocene.

### KEYWORDS

Anthropocene,  
Georges Bataille,  
extinction,  
Friedrich  
Nietzsche, ocean  
acidification,  
incontinence

Learn gradually to *discard the supposed individual!* Discover the fallacies of the ego! Recognize *egoism as fallacy!* The opposite is not to be understood as altruism! This would be love of *other supposed individuals!* No! Get beyond “*myself*” and “*yourself*”! Experience cosmically!  
—Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

This is my philosophy slogan: thinking should know how to laugh, and cry.  
—Timothy Morton<sup>2</sup>

To provide some context for what follows, I am inclined to inform the reader that I identify not as a philosopher, but as a comedian who is not very funny. This article is not part of a larger philosophical project. What I say here is part of a much *smaller* project, one where I say nothing, absolutely nothing, dissolutely nothing. If an experience might be on the verge of communication in what I say, it resonates with the words of Pablo Neruda’s poem “It is Born,” from his collection of poems of the sea:

Here I came to the very edge  
where nothing at all needs saying,  
everything is absorbed through weather and the sea.<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere, in “The Sea”—a poem from that same collection—Neruda says:

I need the sea because it teaches me.  
I don’t know if I learn music or awareness,  
if it’s a single wave or its vast existence,  
or only its harsh voice or its shining  
suggestion of fishes and ships.  
The fact is that until I fall asleep,  
in some magnetic way I move in  
the university of the waves.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, I consider this question, a question that has no viable response. Can the university of the waves teach me—or anybody, perhaps even us—how to inhabit extinction, specifically the mass extinction event currently underway?

Thinking with Nietzsche and Bataille, and to a lesser extent Deleuze, I diagnose a contagious nihilism driving extinction and offer a solution—an aqueous solution, in which a maladaptive humanity might so convulse with sobbing and laughing as to become waves,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, unpublished notes from 1881, quoted in André van der Braak, *Nietzsche and Zen: Self Overcoming Without a Self* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Björk Guðmundsdóttir and Timothy Morton, *This Huge Sunlit Abyss from the Future Right There Next to You...: Emails between Björk Guðmundsdóttir and Timothy Morton*, volume 4 of *Björk: Archives*, edited by James Merry (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Pablo Neruda, *On the Blue Shore of Silence: Poems of the Sea*. Translated by Alastair Reid (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

dissolving in the saline solvent of the sea. It's a dissolute solution: learning to drown in the Anthropocene, learning to die laughing and crying. A suitable beginning for this inquiry is Nietzsche's well-known declaration of the death of God, which Nietzsche announces through the cry of a madman. "Whither is God?" he cried; 'I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea?"<sup>5</sup>

Metaphors of drinking up the sea, wiping away the horizon, and unchaining Earth from the sun convey the vastness and the materiality of God's demise. The death of God is also the death of nature, the loss of the sensible world. Nietzsche makes this clear in *Twilight of the Idols*, where he gives a history of the true world in six stages, beginning with Plato and the initial positing of an intelligible world of truth over against a sensible world of appearance.<sup>6</sup> Initially, the true world, the highest good, appears for those who put forth the required effort to get out of the cave. The second stage that Nietzsche marks off begins when the idea of truth becomes Christian. In this case, the true world is "unattainable for now, but promised... 'to the sinner who does penance.'" The true world is attainable, but only later, after death or after Christ returns. At the third stage, the true world can neither be attained nor promised, but its connection to human rationality obliges us to act in its accord. Alluding to Kant, Nietzsche calls this stage "Königsbergian." In this stage, the structure of human rationality permits access to the terrain of phenomena, but not to the noumenal world—the infinite ocean of things in themselves. At this stage, the goal of life is no longer the attainable presence or promised presence of the true world, but merely the presence of a "good will" that acts according to universal principles of rationality.

The fourth stage on this historical path is positivism, whereby meaningful statements are restricted to those that correspond to experimentally verifiable facts. Metaphysical claims about the true world do not point to an ideal world or even to moral obligations, but to superstition and to ignorance of scientific truth. "The true world—unattainable? In any case, unattained. And if it is unattained, it is also unknown. And hence it is not consoling, redeeming, or obligating either."<sup>7</sup> In the fifth stage, the true world, after losing its obligating power, has "become useless, superfluous, hence a refuted idea: let's do away with it!"<sup>8</sup> In its declaration of the meaninglessness of metaphysical claims, the positivistic stage was the last to deal with the true world. Now that it has been refuted, the true world is gone. God is dead.

With the loss of the true world, the sixth and final stage of Nietzsche's history realizes the significance of this loss for the apparent world. "*Along with the true world, we have also done away with the apparent!*"<sup>9</sup> After orienting ourselves toward the apparent world according to the meanings and values we have inherited or supposed, the loss of truth is simultaneously a loss of the world of sense. The loss of the divine world of truth is simultaneously a loss of the natural world of sense. With the death of God comes the death of nature. More specifically, when we killed God, we drank up the sea.<sup>10</sup> (We can talk another time about the post-Copernican planetary predicament involved with unchaining Earth from the sun).

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<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Richard Polt (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>10</sup> "We" refers here to we humans, not all humans equally or without asymmetries and exclusions, but humans nonetheless—not apples, burritos, oxygen atoms, toaster ovens, airplanes, or Alpha Centauri.

## Nihilism, or How We Drank Up the Sea

Of course, we couldn't and didn't literally drink up the sea. It might look like Nietzsche got the situation backwards. After all, the sea levels are rising worldwide. What would the marine environment have to say to Nietzsche?<sup>11</sup> Wouldn't it be more appropriate to imagine that the death of God/nature means we have left behind the stability of land and are now lost at sea? That is not contrary to Nietzsche's imagery. In fact, it is conveyed in the aphorism immediately preceding the madman's declaration of God's death. "We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out!"<sup>12</sup>

In some sense, there is only the sea now. Yet, from another perspective, Nietzsche was completely right. The sea levels are rising, but that is a different sea, a sea digested by human civilization, a sea overused and abused by human constructs of industrial domination.

The habitats and inhabitants of the sea are being destroyed: acidification, pollution, and overfishing are on the rise, and biodiversity is plummeting. Ocean acidification, often called the "equally evil twin" of global warming, is due largely to increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which interact with water to form carbonic acid.<sup>13</sup> The oceans today have 30 percent more acid than pre-industrial levels, and biodiversity is declining at a rate that the oceans haven't seen since the extinction that ended the Cretaceous period around 65 million years ago. Human impacts extend throughout the most abyssal depths of the oceans. This is evident not only in biodiversity loss and in rising levels of acid (lowering pH), but also in rising levels of nonbiodegradable materials. Plastic has been found floating even in the Mariana Trench, the deepest place on Earth.<sup>14</sup> We might also consider the fact that the majority of oxygen on Earth is generated by the sea's inhabitants, phytoplankton in particular. When we breathe, we drink, like Zarathustra, "Drinking in this finest air,/ My nostrils distended like goblets."<sup>15</sup> When we breathe, we drink the sea. When our breath is dependent on fossil fuels that change the chemical composition of the atmosphere, ocean acidification draws down plankton populations, and we drink up the sea.

There is no part of the sea that has not been assimilated into human territory. This is part of what is implied by the idea that the geological epoch of the last 12,000 years has ended, with the Holocene giving way to an epoch in which anthropogenic impacts are significantly shaping Earth's systems of life, air, water, and land (i.e., the biosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, respectively). Shifting seasonal and weather patterns indicate that humans have altered the whole hydrologic cycle. The sea is still there, of course, but it is a sea ravaged by human consumption. It is a sea that has been drunk up. Moreover, along with the obvious dehydration that comes with the human consumption of the salty water of the sea, other symptoms include nausea and bloating. Given the virulent angst and obesity that spread through affluent, industrial societies, the metaphor of drinking up the sea seems apt, indeed.

Who drank the sea? *We drank it*—you and I. All of us are its drinkers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? The answer is simple: nihilism. The loss of the true world is

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<sup>11</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 180.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014), 120.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Gibbens, "Plastic Proliferates at the Bottom of World's Deepest Ocean Trench," *National Geographic*, May 13, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/05/plastic-bag-mariana-trench-pollution-science-spd>

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*. Translated by Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 269.

the advent of nihilism, a devaluation of values, and a loss of any ‘why?’<sup>16</sup> The double murder of God and nature is an effect of humans attempting “to render the world estimable” by positing themselves “as the meaning and measure of the value of things.”<sup>17</sup> Humans have divided and conquered the world so as to “maintain and increase human constructs of domination.”<sup>18</sup> Those nihilistic constructs require sea walls. After all, it is much easier to dominate land than sea. Humans do not make a house (*domus*) for themselves in the sea. If one wants to live in the sea, that probably entails inhabiting a house at sea, but such a house is a floating piece of land. One would thereby be living on an island, not living in a body of water.

If nihilism is about increasing human constructs of domination, a construct equally important to the rift between the true and the apparent worlds is the rift between the sea and the land. To consider how those two rifts intersect, let’s return to the fourth stage in the loss of the true world, the Kantian stage, when the true world becomes inaccessible, obliging as a regulatory ideal yet inaccessible in the apparent world. Kant himself uses a marine metaphor for metaphysics. “Metaphysics is a dark and shoreless ocean, marked by no beacons.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, Kant uses a land-sea distinction to describe the relationship between the phenomenal world accessible to human understanding and an uninhabited true world surrounded by the ocean.

We have now not only traveled through the land of pure understanding, and carefully inspected each part of it, but we have also surveyed it, and determined the place for each thing in it. This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end.<sup>20</sup>

Nick Land responds to this passage in his book on Bataille, *The Thirst for Annihilation*.

Is not transcendental philosophy a fear of the sea? Something like a dike or a sea-wall?

A longing for the open ocean gnaws at us, as the land is gnawed by the sea. A dark fluidity at the roots of our nature rebels against the security of terra firma, provoking a wave of anxiety in which we are submerged, until we feel ourselves drowning, with representation draining away. [...]

Reason in its legitimate function is a defence against the sea, which is also an inhibition of the terrestrial; retarding our tendency to waste painstakingly accumulated resources in futile expeditions, a ‘barrier opposed to the expenditure

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<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, “The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God,” in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*. Translated by and ed. David Walford with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 111.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A235-236.

of forces' [II 332] as Bataille describes it. It is a fortified boundary, sealing out everything uncertain, irresolvable, dissolvant, a sea-wall against the unknown, against death.<sup>21</sup>

This resonates with a point that Deleuze makes when discussing the imagination of deserted islands: “that an island is deserted must appear philosophically normal to us. Humans cannot live, nor live in security, unless they assume that the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained,” and thus any sites where that struggle is palpably present can only be imagined without humans—deserted.<sup>22</sup> When humans inhabit islands, it is by becoming an inhabited “egg of the sea,” sealing out the sea: “It is as though the island had pushed its desert outside. What is deserted is the ocean around it.”<sup>23</sup>

Drinking the sea, we humans push our desert outside. We throw our trash *away*, and much of it makes its way to the ocean. Civilization is like the cruise ship industry, a multibillion dollar a year industry rendering the sea navigable and useful for humans while nonetheless maintaining a highly fortified boundary against it in the form of cruise ship infrastructure, which is connected with global networks of information, capital, technology, and law to manage the wild waves of the world. More to the point, the political and economic freedom of people in so-called democratic countries like the United States has disinhibited the most decadent desires. If civilization is a ship, it seems to bear a striking resemblance to the ship represented in Plato’s *Republic* (488c), when Socrates describes democracy as a ship whose voyage becomes a “drunken pleasure-cruise.”<sup>24</sup> The people do not know what is going on, but they cannot face their un-knowing. They resent the very idea of inquiry and the possibility that navigation could be taught to them by the captain of the ship or by anyone, not to mention the university of the waves. The people take the helm, and rapacious consumption commences.

Not everyone is invited to the pleasure-cruise. We might notice some ways that marginalized and excluded humans are relegated to a ship of fools that has no access to the drunken pleasures of the cruise. Whether on the drunken-pleasure cruise or the ship of fools or somehow both, the sea is held back, kept at bay, turned into an “away” for civilization. In short, the sea seems contained, but it’s been completely deserted.

## A Dissolute Solution

We drank up the sea, and now the fortified boundaries of the hedonic cruise ship are not *holding together* (*continere*). So, what’s the solution? Dissolution! The walls can come down, although that means that continental philosophy, and all philosophy is continental insofar as it holds back the sea, will have to let go, to release, which, as anyone with Bataille’s fondness for scatology would surely observe, also entails becoming incontinent: pissing and shitting ourselves. Aren’t we pissing and shitting all over ourselves anyway, complicit in mass extinction while we maintain business-pretty-much-as-usual in our daily lives? At least actually pissing and shitting would verge on the kind of transformative experiments that could make something different happen, perhaps. Let go, let the sea overflow the boundaries of whatever and whomever you might

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<sup>21</sup> Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: George Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (An Essay in Atheistic Religion)* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd ed.. Translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

be. Return to the oceanic matrix undulating underneath you. We all come from the sea, even humans, albeit in the relatively small-scale and quite temporary context of the uterine sea—the maternal ocean. The pull of that ocean is always already there, gnawing at us. It is not unlike what the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi called the “thalassic regressive undertow,” and it never goes away.<sup>25</sup> Dive in.

Becoming incontinent, continental philosophy would open up to philosophies outside the canon of the European continent, thinking with indigenous and decolonial perspectives, and learning from the ways of the inhuman, the nonhuman, and all of the multifarious entities classified in terms of a lack of humanity or lack of civilization. What this looks like in practice is more than I can say here, mostly because it depends so much on the context of the practitioner. What are you holding together, and what are you walling off? How porous is your container? What is it limiting and enclosing, and what is it releasing and liberating? Whatever it might be, the practice of this dissolute solution to nihilism is not a way of escaping nihilism. Escapism is the very nihilism that it wants to escape from in the world. The way out is through.

The problem with nihilism is that it is not nihilistic enough. It fortifies its boundaries, maintains sea-walls, drains marshes, reclaims land from the ocean, maps out everything with satellite surveillance, and invests in more cruises. Pushed to its limit, the nihilistic subject empties itself, with connotations of *sunyata*, *kenosis*, and incontinence all in tow. It empties itself like a river empties into the sea, and life into death. In Bataille’s words: “Life will dissolve itself in death, rivers into the sea, the known into the unknown. Knowledge is access to the unknown. Nonsense is the outcome of every possible sense.”<sup>26</sup> This self-emptying has no sense, no reason, no instrumentality. It is useless immanence, as Alex Dubilet rightly observes in his reading of Bataille within a long line of medieval and modern affirmations of self-emptying.<sup>27</sup> If it had any use, the emptying would only reproduce the nihilism that is otherwise being released.

Letting go, the desire to render everything estimable to humans drowns in the sea of unknowing. For Bataille, this is the point of the quest for knowledge. “Perhaps the desire to know has only one meaning: to serve as the motive for the desire to question.”<sup>28</sup> We are lost, “gripped by despair,” and “our thought is exhausted.”<sup>29</sup> At the limits of our quest, the desire to question breaks down in laughter, as sense flows into nonsense. Moreover, this flow is not without orgasmic excretions and expenditures of *jouissance*. “When inquiry fails, we laugh.” Ecstatic and erotic ravishments “are so many questions—without responses—to which nature and our nature are subjected.”<sup>30</sup>

I’ll give a couple more of Bataille’s sentences to indicate this equation of laughter and unknowing.

That which is laughable may simply be *the unknowable*. In other words, the unknown nature of the laughable would be not accidental, but essential. We would laugh, not for some reason which, due to lack of information, or of sufficient

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<sup>25</sup> Sándor Ferenczi, quoted by David Farrell Krell, *The Sea: A Philosophical Encounter* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> George Bataille, *Inner Experience*. Translated by Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), 103.

<sup>27</sup> Alex Dubilet, *The Self-Emptying Subject: Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval and Modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 150.

<sup>28</sup> Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*. Translated by Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 57.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

penetration, we shall never manage to know, but because *the unknown makes us laugh*.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, laughter moves like the ocean. For Bataille, “consciousness of the lack of stability...liberates the enchantment of laughter,” and laughter convulses, flows, waves.<sup>32</sup> Life passes from solidity “to the free tumult that water and air communicate to one another,” and every particular existence “opens itself to the contagion of a wave that rebounds, for those who laugh together become like waves in the sea, as long as the laughter lasts there is no longer a partition between them, they are no more separated than two waves, but their unity is also undefined, as precarious as that of the agitation of the waters.”<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, laughter is not separate from agony and despair. Rather, “it has no other source than anguish. What engenders it justifies your fear.”<sup>34</sup> It wouldn’t be so funny if it wasn’t unknown, and the unknown is terrifying. What exactly is it about the unknown that’s so frightening? Nothing.<sup>35</sup>

—...*fear...yes, fear, which alone reaches the unlimited thought...fear, yes, but fear of what...?*

*The response fills the universe, fills the universe in me:*

—...*evidently, fear of NOTHING...*<sup>36</sup>

There is a funny-frightful slippage in unknowing. It is tragicomic. “Of course, laughter remains joyous,” yet “that joy cannot, in my view, be separated from the feeling of the tragic.”<sup>37</sup> Bataille is explicit that he takes this to be a Nietzschean experience: “this is an experience I believe to be deeply consonant with that of Nietzsche.”<sup>38</sup>

As with Nietzsche, Bataille’s laughter is inseparable from the feeling of the tragic, a feeling that finds another variety of oceanic expression, a saline secretion: tears. If this existential laughter involves rejoicing in something which puts life at risk—the ocean that puts individual drops at risk of reabsorption—then surely this question (without a possible response) cannot be contained any single domain. It “cannot be isolated within the sphere of laughter. The same indeed applies to tears.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, “the only truth is in tears.”<sup>40</sup>

“Tears are deeply ambiguous,” Bataille reminds us. They can involve “a pleasure in crying,” or “something intoxicating,” and they seem to exhibit “an invasion of the unknown”; “tears, like laughter, are strange in nature,” including so many permutations: “the tears of pain, the tears of sadness, the tears of death, the tears of joy,” and “tears of success.”<sup>41</sup> When something

<sup>31</sup> Georges Bataille, “Un-Knowing: Laughter and Tears,” trans. Annette Michelson. *October*, 36, *Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing* (Spring, 1986), 90.

<sup>32</sup> Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 98.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> This hilarious yet terrifying unknown is part of Bataille’s “atheology,” for which “God is an effect of un-knowing,” and in that regard God can be known “like laughter, like the sacred.” Bataille, “Un-Knowing,” 99.

<sup>36</sup> George Bataille, *Guilty*. Translated by Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Bataille, “Un-Knowing,” 96.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Bataille, *Guilty*, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Bataille, “Un-Knowing,” 98.

breaks or disappears in our oceanic communication, miniature oceans drop from our eyes. Sometimes they pour—sobbing.

Sobbing signifies broken communication. [...] It is comparable in sobs to the spark that is caused by pulling an electrical cord out of the wall. It is precisely because communication is broken that we feel it as a tragedy when we weep.<sup>42</sup>

Life is “intense communication,” “contagions of energy,” “like a current or a kind of electrical stream,” pushing and pulling us around in its incessantly undulating waves, evoking the joys and fears of laughter and tears.<sup>43</sup>

A brief moment of pause: the complex, the gentle, the violent movement of worlds will make of your death a splashing foam. The glories, the marvels of your life come from this resurgence of the wave that was tied in you in the immense noise of the cataract of the sky.<sup>44</sup>

That ocean of energy is not unlike Nietzsche’s description of the world as a “monster of energy”:

a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving towards the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms towards the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, [...] without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will towards itself—do you want a name for this world?<sup>45</sup>

The ocean of energy eternally recurs. Never simply the sea, it is always at least double, “Thalatta! Thalatta!”—The sea! The sea!—as 10,000 Greeks supposedly exclaimed when they caught sight of the Black Sea during their retreat from an attempted attack on the Persian Empire. *The Sea, the Sea*, as Iris Murdoch’s novel has it.<sup>46</sup> So, so many repetitions.

The sea of eternally returning forces returns again in Deleuze. Repeating differences, differentiating repetitions, everything vibrates with the same voice, a univocal clamour, a single ocean. “A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings.”<sup>47</sup> “Being,” according to Deleuze, “is the unique event in which all events communicate with one another,” “the void of all events in one,” “the nonsense of all senses in one,” “a single voice for every hum of voices and every drop of water in the sea.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, 64.

<sup>43</sup> Batailles, *Inner Experience*, 96.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #167.

<sup>46</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, the Sea* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 304.

<sup>48</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. Translated by Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 180.

This communication is the useless communion of all things. The problem with the drunken pleasure cruise was that it was not drunk enough. It was drunk on a cruise ship, drinking up the sea, instead of diving into its wine-dark depths, letting go and letting the sea reclaim the drinker—a drunkenness unto drowning, choking on thalassic convulsions of tears and laughter at the unbearable nonsense of it all. Abandon the cruise ship, release into the mood incongruity of emotional incontinence (a.k.a. pseudobulbar affect), and dissolve in a fit of pathological laughter and crying.

After we drank up the sea, the humans cruising on the ocean need to become an ocean of humans. This is different from Foucault's observation that, if the assemblages of human knowledge continue eroding, humanity (i.e., "man," that relatively "recent invention") "would be erased like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea."<sup>49</sup> For Bataille, the edge of the sea is only the beginning of a more abyssal journey into the water, a journey whereby humans might transform (back) into thalassic beings. One might imagine the processes whereby some land mammals gradually returned to the sea, evolving and becoming marine mammals like dolphins and whales. Can the people who inherit the history of "man" release into a thalassic undertow? Can we return to our marine matrix? For Bataille, the salvation of the world depends upon precisely such a people. "Only this ocean of men in revolt can save the world from the nightmare of impotence and carnage in which it sinks!"<sup>50</sup>

On the face of it, this must be the worst environmental ethics. Now is not the time for laughing. Crying maybe, but not with such convulsions as to merge with the boundary-dissolving currents of life. Now is the time for practical solutions and sustainability transitions, right? No. The obsessive refrains about how we "have to act" and "must do something" are symptomatic of the nihilism that's driving our mass extinction event, the nihilism that seeks to maintain human constructs of domination. We have to learn to let go, to learn the joy of letting go, which is not without anguish, to be sure. We have to learn how to die in the Anthropocene, as Roy Scranton put it.<sup>51</sup> Learn to die in the exuberance of laughing and crying. Don't die in fear, confined to short-term and selfish interests.

There are no climate "solutions." Ocean acidification and mass extinction are wicked problems for which there are better or worse responses but technically no "solution." If there is a solution, it is dissolution: learning to drown in the Anthropocene. Return to our animal immanence, "like water in water," as Bataille says of animal existence in the world.<sup>52</sup> We do not need to learn how to sustain ourselves, which should be obvious to anybody with experience holding down a piano's sustain pedal for far too long. After we drank up the sea, we are also after any chance of sustainability. The excessive expenditures of water in water laugh and cry in waves of post-sustainability.<sup>53</sup> Some people say that eating less meat is the one best thing you can do to address our planetary emergency. I recommend incontinence: release an ocean of revolt.

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<sup>49</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2004), 422.

<sup>50</sup> George Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl. Translated by Allan Stoekl, with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 168.

<sup>51</sup> Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> "That one animal eats another scarcely alters a fundamental situation, ever animal is *in the world like water in water.*" Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*. Translated by Robert Huxley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 19.

<sup>53</sup> Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

We must learn how to drown in the Anthropocene. Ethical and political responses to mass extinction will amount to little more than distractions if this basic lesson cannot be understood. It is the same and single lesson eternally reiterated at the university of the waves. A lesson Bataille seems to have learned: “I remain alone, drowned in a rising sea: hilarity as gentle, as friendly as the movement of the sea. I lay down in the immense light of my night, in my cold drunkenness, in my anguish.”<sup>54</sup>

Learn to drown, and maybe you’ll come back, and bring an ocean of revolt with you. Don’t come back because it might be useful or because you want to. Then the revolt is already ruined by your nihilistic projection of human values onto everything. You can let that go. Come back not because you want to—you can get used to letting that go—but come back because the ocean doesn’t want you, a predicament we hear in a song by Tom Waits.<sup>55</sup>

Down into the endless blue wine  
 I’ll open my head and let out  
 All my time.  
 I’d love to go drowning  
 And to stay and to stay  
 But the ocean doesn’t want me today.

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<sup>54</sup> Bataille, *Guilty*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Tom Waits, “The Ocean Doesn’t Want Me Today,” *Bone Machine* (New York: Universal Island Records, 1992).

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