

Paul Chaney – The Sun is Black

Text to accompany exhibition at: Divus, Bubenska 1, Prague, Czech Republic.

17/12/11 – 17/01/12

Solar Hegemony

Established in Platonic philosophy, the Sun has traditionally been accepted as a metaphor for the source of intellectual illumination. The ancients worshipped the Sun as giver of life and radiant provider.

In his text 'The Accursed Share, George Bataille describes how the economy of the Sun fuels all life on Earth.

It is the green parts of the plants of the solid earth and the seas, which endlessly operate the appropriation of an important part of the sun's luminous energy. It is in this way that light – the sun – produces us, animates us, and engenders our excess. This excess, this animation are the effect of the light (we are basically nothing but an effect of the sun)

Bataille: Collected Works, Vol VII

In this and other texts, however, Bataille opens up to us another, malefic aspect beyond the Sun's apparent benevolence.

The economy of the Sun is an economy of extravagance and absolute wastage. The destiny of the Sun is to burn itself up – completely and with no reservation. The giant burning orb at the center of the planetary system is described by philosopher Reza Negerastani as a 'thermonuclear catastrophe', spitting, pulsing – a continuous nuclear explosion, that, were it not held in check by the gravitational pull of its own spinning mass, would envelope the whole planetary system. This is the latent destiny of the Sun, which, one day, will carry out this eschatological endeavour.

In this sense, the Sun is the original proponent of rampant Capitalism – all will be burnt up, everything must get used up, in a suicidal drive to self-annihilation. Enveloping all in its path and utilizing all potentially to make the consuming fire burn faster, the Sun has a singular unavoidable fate, and will eventually extinguish everything in proximity with it, along with itself.

To the extent that this fate is inevitable and unquestionable, the Sun, and therefore the planetary system, are 'already dead'.

However, something so far apparently unique – or at least the result of such compounded contingencies as to make it highly improbable – exists on planet Earth. This 'third rock from the Sun' is host to an active resistance to the solar hegemony – life itself.

Tenuously clinging to the surface of planet Earth, unable to fight the tyranny of gravity, there sits a thin conglomeration of elements in gaseous and liquid form – leftovers from the process of centrifugal solidification. Within this tiny hazy layer, and facilitated by the lubricating properties of water, the inexplicable processes of life unravel.

Carboniferous Insurgency

Through the improbability of photosynthesis, and fuelled by the eternal emanation of excess energy from the Sun, living entities absorb and transform gases into solid mass – thereby changing the chemistry of the biosphere. During the Carboniferous period, giant vertical mosses locked up vast amounts of free carbon to form coal. Trillions of tonnes of ammonites, and other sea creatures – unable to resist the gravitational imperative upon their death – formed limestone (calcium carbonate) in great strata.

Life is a geological force.

In this way, the plants and animals of prehistory have been instrumental in establishing the chemical structure of the biosphere. Life, as a progressive and evolving system, and faced with the capitalist hedonism of the Sun's overbearing extravagance, found ways to absorb the toxic gift of solar excess in a kind of 'do or die' move. In a clever sideways manipulation of its own materials, and as a result of multiple evolutionary traumas, life itself rose up against the Sun's dominance, initiating an insurgency which lasted millions of years, and which ended in the successful 'binding' into geological strata of excess solar energy.

These materials of revolution are the inner black sun described by Bataille – a stinking black petrochemical pus absorbed into the body of the planet, enveloped in cystic enclaves, vast sumps of photosynthetically fixed carbon capped by subsequent protective sedimentary strata, a result of climatic and geological complicity with the scheme.

'Recall, however, that they spoke always of a buried terrestrial sun which must be exhumed, a rotting sun oozing black flame, the black corpse of the sun'

*Dr Hamid Parsani – Negarestani's protagonist in:
Cyclonopedia – Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Re.press 2008)*

Children of the Sun

As the self-proclaimed Child of the Sun – and the only living entity to have effectively re-entered geological time – the human is proving efficient at undoing the work of the Carboniferous Insurgency. As the perfect host for the insane cancerous will of capitalism, the human de-constructs the biotic dam, temporarily put in place against the tide of Erathication (the joining of the Earth's inner sun, with the Sun). The Child of the Sun carries out the desire of the Sun, defined in a series of pacts mediated by capital. Upon its release, bound solar excess will always express itself as terrestrial excess, before becoming lost. This is the possible, perfectly coupled with the impossible – the Sun gives us everything, but also destroys us.

Whether the extraction of bound solar excess is undertaken through Bolshevik pride or Capitalist greed, it does not matter – the result is the same. The human works as an instrument of release, solely attracted by the power potential contained within the material, but only able to make use of the power for a brief moment, before it is dissipated. This is the only deal offered by the Sun: at our moment of highest glory, we will collapse from exhaustion, everything totally spent.

'...[E]xpenditure, or sacrificial consumption, is not an appeal, an exchange, or a negotiation, but an uninhibited wastage that returns energy to its solar trajectory, releasing it back into the movement of dissipation that the terrestrial system – culminating in restricted human economies – momentarily arrests. Voluptuary destruction is the only end of energy, a process of liquidation that can be suspended by the accumulative efforts whose zenith form is that of the capitalist bourgeoisie, but only for a while. For solar economy, and excess must, in the end, be spent.'

*Nick Land:
The Thirst for Annihilation – George Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (Routledge 1992)*

'Capital attempts to emulate the Sun, but inverts it...Capital inverts excess to scarcity. With scarcity comes the need-turn-desire to acquire. We are not natural consumers, but unnatural acquirers. Hence, Capital's need for each of us to think we are individuals-who-lack, so that Capital can extend [to] each of us the dream of the Sun's excess. Yes, Capital has appropriated the Sun. Capital, unlike the Sun, however, gives credit [access to excess] but demands a greater debt.'

*Victor J. Vitanza:
Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric.
(1997 Albany: State University of New York Press)*