

Open Economy In Education: Question and Possibility to Make Education Open

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1. The idea of “beyond the economy of exchange and satisfaction”

In *Towards an economy of higher education*, the keynote lecture delivered by P. Standish, two dimensions of economy were indicated regarding education¹⁾.

One was a “closed economy” based on “all forms of exchange,” and the other was an “open economy” that breaks through the cycle of exchange without being drawn up by the closed economy. I would like to take particular note of the structural similarities between these two economies indicated by Standish and G. Bataille(1897–1962)’s “general economy” and “restricted economy.”

Looking at the two economies, and especially the open economy, that Standish notes regarding education, I would like to discuss from Bataille’s perspective the questions and possibilities for opening education. First, let’s take a look at the phenomena related to education indicated by Standish’s two economies.

According to Standish, “closed economy” is a collective designation for all forms of thoughts and activities that distinguish “exchange and the satisfaction of needs”. He says that all of the phenomena related to education, as we generally know it, are based on all of the forms of a closed economy. These forms are not only related to economy in the familiar financial sense as treated in economics and the market economy, but also include measures for making universities more accessible and broadening participation, documents explaining university ideals and attempts at making the clearly expressed educational goals and their overall application part of a comprehensive evaluation list, viewpoints on knowledge and learning, and even the student-teacher relationship.²⁾ These forms serve to regulate education based on established standards of evaluation. Learners expect to receive the kind of efficient learning instruction that will allow them to achieve certain standards, and educators establish indicators based on those needs, then providing instruction and evaluations.

In this sense, this economy places concrete demands on educators and university facility managers.

In contrast to this, the open economy focuses on experiences that extend beyond the type of thought exchange that provides the evaluations for responding to needs that bring satisfaction. These experiences are the joy to be gained from learning in and of itself; and this joy and learning leads to consideration of the exciting realization of newly opening learning.

As such, Standish's reflections on the closed economy of education today and his perspective on the possibilities an open economy can have for education maintain continuity with the ideas of "Alterity" (E. Levinas) and "Intensity" (F. W. Nietzsche), and denote the principle of the "gift" that surpasses exchange. At the same time, he is attempting to open the possibilities of education by putting into practice proposals for reforms to the educational system. Based on the preceding overview of Standish's discussion, I would now like to make comparisons with Bataille's theories, which envisage concepts of general economics, while reflecting on the principle of the "gift" as drawn from M. Mauss's anthropological findings.³⁾

2. Open economy in the context of G. Bataille

The primary theme in Bataille's *Accused Share* (1949) is the "movement of excess energy".⁴⁾ It makes clear distinction between productive expenditures and unproductive expenditures. Expenditure is a core concept of Bataille. This was already described as follows in *The Notion of Expenditure* (1933):

"... luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexuality (i.e. deflected from genital finality) — all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves. Now it is necessary to reserve the use of the word expenditure for the designation of these unproductive forms, and not for the designation of all the moods of consumption that serve as a means to the end of production."⁵⁾

To Bataille, expenditure is the most fundamental issue for humans and other living creatures. According to B. Noys, unproductive expenditure is not the result of

a principle of loss originating in a human drive best exemplified in ‘primitive’ societies, it is now the result of a “circuit of cosmic energy”.⁶⁾ In *Accused Share*, this issue deepens with the two radical axes of the integrity of life and the history of humankind.

For example, solar energy is the source of life’s exuberant development. That energy, however, is more than is necessary for maintaining life, and the excess energy can be used for the growth of a system like an organism. That growth, however, is in turn subject to an array of limitations. The excess energy that has surpassed the boundary must then necessarily be lost without profit, as it is not next applied to production. It is a fact that expenditure is gloriously or catastrophically considered a loss for individual or social people, but when considering energy on the whole, it is an outcome of energy’s overall dynamic flow. The overall picture becomes apparent when economics deals with the universe’s energy on the whole without applying limits. Bataille contrasts the overall flow of energy with a restricted economy, which makes an issue of the accumulation of wealth and energy, and presents it to us as general economy.

3. Is the idea of open economy in education possible?

Bataille’s general economy, as described above, exists within two ideological genealogies. One is Nietzsche’s idea of power, and the other is “potlatch”⁷⁾ reported by Mauss in *the Gift (Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques, 1923–24)*.

Bataille does not make direct reference to Nietzsche in *the Accused Share*, but it is often pointed out that the overall formation of Bataille’s ideas was greatly influenced by Nietzsche’s concepts, and especially those of *Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse, 1886)* and *The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht, 1901)*. Nietzsche does not address the contrasts of good and evil in *Beyond Good and Evil*, but conceives of a contrast between culmination and decline (or so Bataille seems to view it in this way). For Bataille, the two perspectives of culmination and decline are each in accordance with excess and accumulation and storage. In other words, they become part of the vocabulary, such as “festival and labor,” or “expenditure and accumulation,” that defines Bataille’s worldview.⁸⁾

At the same time, the concept of the gift as developed by Mauss cannot be completely defined within utility, which is an expression of the goal — method relationship, nor in exchange, which is the basis for utility, and its relation to unproductive expenditure=excess must be furthered as a principle in which conduct is a goal in and of itself.

It just so happens, incidentally, that the destruction of utility, and transgression, are common factors to the two concepts that distinguish general economy, namely, power as culmination and decline, and the gift as excess. For Bataille, man becomes holistic being by beyond utility at the very moment of transgression. Being holistic has been described as one who lives not for specific goals, but who diffuses throughout the world as an instant of movement, is himself a part of the flow of energy, and surpasses the good and evil that regulates morality (we can never call that being “him” or “her” any more, though.). What’s more, that type of moment is necessary for man, and, in fact, has already come into existence without our noticing. As an example, Bataille points to the individual experiences that transgress various social taboos, such as sacrifice and violence, eros, and being among crowd. Those experiences are sometimes indicated as ecstasy, and at other times it is the kind of violence that brings with it the danger of death. Nevertheless, it is also possible to view this in terms of the degree of power, “Intensity”, regarding human life. Issues remain, however, regarding the role of education in people’s social life.

Standish’s open economy has a very similar structure to one developed by Bataille. Thus, a question emerges, which is: How does Standish demonstrate the possibility of bringing the open economy into education in practical ways. Alterity may be the key here, and this may give a clue to the answering of this question.



1) At the International Symposium, “Beyond the Intellect in University Education”, sponsored by Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University, on Nov.-Dec. 2005.

2) Saito, N. ‘Summation of Beyond the Intellect in University Education’ in *the Report of International Symposium Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University*, Japan Foundation, 2006. (斉藤直子「京都大学大学院教育学研究科第二回国際シンポジウム『大学教育の知の彼方へ』総括」『京都大学大学院教育学研究科国際シンポジウム事業報告書』2006年3月所収)

3) Mauss, M. *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, Paris, Presses Unirevstaires de France, 1968, 4 éd,

4) Bataille, G. ‘La Part maudite’, *Œuvres complètes*, VII, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 20.

- 5) Bataille, G. 'The Notion of Expenditure', *Œuvres complètes*, I, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 305.
- 6) Noys, B. *George Bataille*, London, Sterling, Virginia, Pluto Press, 2000, p. 111.
- 7) "Potlatch" is an act of gift-giving, which is a challenge and demands a greater gift in return. This practice was found among North-western Native American tribes.
- 8) Yoshida, Y. 'How Bataille read Nietzsche?', *Temptation of Nietzsche*, Tokyo, Shoshiyamada, 1996, p. 206. (吉田裕「ニーチェの誘惑——バタイユはニーチェをどう読んだか——」、ジョルジュ・バタイユ『ニーチェの誘惑——バタイユはニーチェをどう読んだか』吉田裕訳、書肆山田、1996年所収、206頁)

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