

ENERGY

AND THE QUESTION OF INVESTMENT

**INTERDISCIPLINARY
CONFERENCE**

3-4 NOV 2025

CALL FOR PAPERS

**TECHNO-HUMANITIES LAB
FACULTY OF „ARTES LIBERALES”
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW**

Info about
the Conference:



Technology
and Socialization
Project:



CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers and panels are invited to the interdisciplinary conference "Energy and the Question of Investment", which will take place in Warsaw from **3-4 November 2025**. The conference, organized by the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" at the University of Warsaw (Poland), is part of the "Technology and Socialization" project directed by the Techno-Humanities Lab.

Georges Bataille's ambitious and dark thesis suggests that the essence of society is not lack but excess and that this excess produces losses, whether of war or conspicuous consumption, which ensure their vitality. From this formula, which, according to Bataille, applies to the general economy, the idea of excess and waste is constantly worth thinking through and applied to the emotional and material economy. We seem to be on the threshold of the necessity of rethinking energy and its relationship to life at all levels. It is not just about, and we are not only asking about, the types of energy that are necessary for our life - fossil energy, oil, solar energy, renewable energy, but also our libidinal energy, which is necessary for all investments in life.

In thinking about the energies and future libidinal investments of man,

we would like to bypass the simple hypotheses according to which death drive lies within the life drive and describe drive-based excess, the overflowing of the drives, as a true collective suicide, in which like lemmings who, pushing and shoving in large numbers, fall off the edge of cliffs, humanity itself is in the course of unconsciously rushing towards death. Certainly, capitalism has liberated what lies buried deep within it, and that moves it with all its energy: the death drive. We do not deny that capitalism is a particular moment in human history in which technics and science are perverted towards the over-productivity of labour. But we ask: do these statements about capitalism exhaust the spectrum of knowledge and analysis about the future of human energy and investment?

As striking as the analysis of contemporary capitalism may be, they are not convincing, for it confuses the accursed share analysed by Bataille with consumerist waste. Quite unlike the unbinding of the destructive drives by calculation, characteristic of unbridled capitalism, Bataille's general economy affirms incalculability – where the surplus, instead of submitting to calculation in reinvestment, is sacrificed and not simply destroyed. We ask in this context: is man caught up in the morbid tendency of capitalism? What does it mean that he does not just accumulate wealth, but also, above all, negative goods, waste destroying more than he accumulates? Does all

investment require abandoning immediate destruction and consumption and allowing deferred action and greater future consumption?

Max Weber argued in 1905 in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that "the impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money, has in itself nothing to do with capitalism". According to Weber, capitalism may even be identical to restraint, or at least tempering, in this irrational impulse. "But capitalism – Weber wrote – is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise". These claims seem to be seconded today by the words of Adrian Johnston, who claims that capitalism's "infinite greed" demands that individuals sacrifice their pleasures, their well-being, and even themselves to serve in human capital. Johnston argues that in capitalism, we are all subject to the imperative to accumulate in perpetuity without limits and disregard all the consequences.

We intend to ask with particular care during the conference: what is an investment in general? On the one hand, we doubt that what Freud theorizes as investment, under the name of *Besetzung* (*cathexis*), consists simply of deferring to much greater future destruction, for it is the complete opposite. In fact, the difference in

the satisfaction of the drives led Freud to introduce sublimation as a condition of all investment in an object of desire. On the other hand, we have reason to doubt that the libidinal economy of the drives is reducible to what economists present as an economic investment that more closely resembles speculation about the future than investment. For, in fact, it is highly debatable whether an investment is undertaken for the purpose of future destruction. In economics or Freudian theory, investment – as *Besetzung* – is, instead, undertaken in order to construct the future. Cathexis means the act of arresting, the act of retaining, of conserving, the act of intercepting or of containing.

As a result, we claim that any new critique of political economy should constitute a new economy, not of the morality of capitalism. For this, we should read Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, along with Spinoza, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, in the twenty-first-century context, that is, faced with what none of these authors could ever have known or even imagined. The political economy must be an economy of moral sentiments that includes Bataille's general economy questions and Freud's libidinal economy.

As such, today's capitalist economy is subject to a mortifying computational totalization that makes sublimation impossible, which it replaces by takeover bids and later by the short circuits to which the disruption strategies give rise. In such an energy-wasting economy, it

becomes possible to accrue huge profits, but at the cost of destroying what they exploit, as surely as the barbarians who formerly invaded civilized territories would ruin them by plundering them.

Presentations are expected to last 20 to 30 minutes. Please send abstracts of up to 300 words, attached in a Word document, with a short bio to technologyandsocialization@gmail.com by 30 September 2025. Should you need any further information, do not hesitate to contact us at the same email address. All information about the conference and the "Technology and Socialization" project can be found here. We are looking forward to your participation and to hosting you in Warsaw.

Organizing Committee:

Professor Szymon Wróbel

Dr Krzysztof Skonieczny

Dr Katarzyna Szafranowska

Mgr Adam Cichoń