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William Pawlett

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In this comprehensive and engaging study Georges Bataille's central ideas – the sacred, community and eroticism – are explored in detail. Bataille's project to understand social bonds and energies at their most fundamental level and to re-energise society by challenging individualism is argued to be of continuing relevance to sociological thought. Bataille's infamous *Collège de Sociologie* is placed in the intellectual context of Durkheimian and Maussian sociology. Social effervescence, gift exchange, and the dual, ambivalent and volatile nature of the sacred emerge as the central threads of Bataille's thought, ideas which challenge both capitalist hegemony and the reductive notion of society as exclusively normative and repressive. The study concludes by applying Bataille's ideas to contemporary issues including de-secularisation and the rise of religious fundamentalism, the vicarious experience of transgressive violence, and finally, to consumerism and the violence of globalisation. The study seeks to reposition Bataille as a key figure in sociological theory.

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