

Violence and Heterogeneity: A Response to Habermas' "Between Eroticism and General Economics: Georges Bataille"

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This article begins with a response to Habermas' critique of Bataille. Habermas argues that the realm of heterogeneity/transgression is only opened up in moments of shock which overwhelm the subject. The rational categories of thought which maintain a useful relationship with the outside (i.e., with anything construed as unfamiliar) are fragmented in the excess and horror of Bataille's communication. Hence it is impossible to bring together under one theoretical umbrella the antitheses of subjectivity and its excluded other: by definition the other ought to be marginalized in its very objectification by the subject, normativity, rationality, etc. My response is that the two opposed terms/antitheses are indeed opposed, but they are not therefore abstract opposites. That is to say, the subject is always already an equivocation of terms, a kind of sacrilege which cannot be assimilated to an ideal completion. The law is itself a transgression.

The beginning was fear; fear and desire,
with a shuddering curiosity.

—Thomas Mann

Ambivalence

In all of Georges Bataille's works, a contradictory impulse is methodically and obsessively studied. Erotic debauchery and flights of Christian religious experience are said to have a common source.¹ The outcasts of society, the pariahs, the sick, the mad, the criminals, belong to the same world as the good, upright, and proper. A single individual is moved by kindness and cruelty, serenity and rage.² Horrified by so-called freaks of nature, we are nonetheless fascinated by hermaphrodites, Siamese twins, and two-headed calves.³ Our body parts often signify this deep-seated ambivalence: the big toe is a source of distinction, setting us apart from tree dwelling gorillas, orangutans, gibbons, and chimpanzees. But at the same time it reminds us that human life is both elevated and base: "Whatever the role played in the erection by his foot, man, who has a light head (a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things), sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud."⁴ In keeping with

this logic, it is not only the body, but our most highly treasured concepts and metaphors that register an irreconcilable ambivalence. The sun, being a source of light, warmth, and survival, is moreover the classic symbol of intellectual enlightenment. It is therefore associated with truth and universal goodness. But we also know that blindness results from staring fixedly into the sun and that prolonged exposure can be devastating: “The myth of Icarus is particularly expressive from this point of view: it clearly splits the sun in two—the one that was shining at the moment of Icarus elevation and the one that melted the wax, causing failure and a screaming fall when Icarus got too close.”⁵ Although it’s true in Bataille’s thinking that the restricted categories of work and subjectivity are bound up with their opposites—excess and violence—it is far from obvious how one side opens onto the other. Does taboo not separate the subject, as well as the community, from the aforesaid debaucheries and monstrosities? Humans are plagued by self-destructive behaviour—smoking, drinking, waging war, destroying the environment—but in most cases we’re able to rationalize the consequences: if only we knew better! if we weren’t so tempted! if we had more insight, foresight, and more self-control!

Jürgen Habermas deepens the problematic by making the following observation: “The realm of the heterogeneous is opened up only in explosive moments of fascinated shock, when those categories fall apart that guarantee in everyday life the confident interaction of the subject with himself and with the world.”⁶ The difficulty posed is one of thematics and reconciliation: if the rationalized world of the subject is defined by its opposition to violence, to the realm of the heterogeneous, then it is impossible to say how that subject relates to something which is irrational, incommensurable, and completely other. We cannot analyze or diagnose modern subjectivity without making use of the very tools under discussion, and thus Bataille’s attempts to think through heterogeneity are contaminated from the start. The remainder of this article, in large part, is a response to this Habermasian objection. Although the body of the text will be reserved for explicating Bataille’s study of ambivalence, in the final section we’ll see how this ambivalence resists the kind of abstract opposition that Habermas and others have imposed upon it.

Taboo and Transgression

The story of transgression is the same one as taboo, prohibition and

morality. This would not be the case if the origins of taboo were calm and rational: an abstract truth, a purely logical existence, does not give way to a passionate infraction of the law. Prohibitions, for Bataille, are not accepted extrinsically, from above or beyond, as if transgression of the law and the subject were independent of one another. Susan Rubin Suleiman observes that, in contrast to the Sadean lawbreaker who defies *external* social conventions in a cold, calculating manner, “In Bataille, the Law is internalized; the drama of transgression occurs *within* the subject. (He did not have a Catholic childhood for nothing).”⁷ The force and validity of norms owe their strength to a movement of repulsion which cannot be separated from the constitution of the subject on account of a fundamental abomination. In a lecture to the College of Sociology Bataille argued that the nucleus of human society, the recoiling movement of prohibition, is itself a manifestation of irrational terror: “The social nucleus is, in fact, taboo, that is to say untouchable and unspeakable . . . Everything leads us to believe that early human beings were brought together by disgust and by common terror, by an insurmountable horror focused precisely on what originally was the central attraction of their union.”⁸ Understanding Bataille’s notion of transgression, then, means that we should see it as a response to an essential, defining movement in the human subject, one which is itself a negation of something dreadful.⁹ To say that the taboo designating this negation is irrational does not suggest in any way that it is ill-founded or logically incorrect, but instead that it has its foundation in the passion of being horrified. In much the same way as Hegel’s servile consciousness is determined and motivated by an absolute fear without which the slave could never achieve complete self-awareness, the subject of Bataille’s interdiction (the adjective *interdit* can be taken here as either prohibited or taken aback, disconcerted) is overwhelmed by a feeling of shock and abhorrence. Now if this feeling grips the subject who is internalizing social taboos in a movement of renunciation which has something horrible as its object, what exactly is the forbidden “object”?

It is difficult to say. An anthropology professor of mine once called it the “public secret” *par excellence*. Implied in this public secret, I believed, was some kind of unconscious movement of social life, one necessitated by the internalization of taboos, and one which could not be raised to a collective awareness without threatening the very nature of social cohesion. In Bataille’s terminology, the “object” of this public secret is violence: “It is clear from the start that taboos appeared in response to the necessity of

banishing violence from the course of everyday life.”¹⁰ Taken out of context, this quote can be rather misleading. If violence is the ultimate object of prohibition, including modern moralities which have gone some way to distance themselves from so-called primitive, irrational or mythological taboos, it may at first appear to us that the object of prohibition is wholly negative, as one could make the case with the ritualistic taboos surrounding death, decay and murder. In actuality, the world of things, the world which Bataille describes as being founded on taboo insofar as the latter helps to create a world of duration and future goals,¹¹ responds not so much to an abstract absence of life as it does to the reality of life brimming with its own demise: “What has no place in the world of things, what is unreal in the real world is not exactly death. Death actually discloses the imposture of reality, not only in that the absence of duration gives the lie to it, but above all because death is the great affirmer, the wonder-struck cry of life. The real order does not so much reject the negation of life that is death as it rejects the affirmation of intimate life [*la vie intime, immanente*], whose measureless violence is a danger to the stability of things, an affirmation that is fully revealed only in death. The real order must annul—neutralize—that intimate life and replace it with the thing that the individual is in the society of labor. But it cannot prevent life’s disappearance in death from revealing the *invisible* brilliance of life that is not a *thing*.”¹² Elsewhere he writes that we could very well think of living matter, the “whole bloody mess” we’re ashamed of being, as the primary focus of our disgust.¹³

In accordance with the dominant function of taboos—to exclude violence from social reality—Bataille divides them into two main categories: those concerning death and sexuality. These are the two realms of human existence that attract imperative forms of renunciation, the feeling of insurmountable horror quoted in the above paragraph, and the establishment of collective taboos intended to resist the spread of violence.¹⁴

Just why Bataille views sexuality and death as intermingled, to the extent that each participates in what he calls the violence of intimate life, has yet to be illuminated. However, at this point we can say a couple of things about transgression which would not have been obvious without first having stated that the object of human disgust, which is always tied to passionate revolt, is the intimacy of life opposed to itself in death and destruction. We can say, for instance, that there is no pure, innocent return to nature in the crossing of boundaries. Bataille is emphatic that

transgression, on his model, is the furthest thing from a “back-to-nature movement,”¹⁵ a movement which would hark back to a golden age of carefree delights.

The suspension of taboo is not achieved without knowledge internalized by the subject in its revolt against life, of that which is itself at the heart of taboo: a profound loathing of noisome, decomposing, sticky, intimate life. Innocence presupposes that I have no familiarity with that which is excluded (often transformed and disguised, seeing as how life has a difficult time excluding itself from itself),¹⁶ but insofar as the taboo expresses a fundamental aversion on the part of the subject, I cannot escape the fact that I am repulsed by precisely that which temporarily suspends the taboo. Phillipe Sollers is right, then, to describe as pseudo-transgressive those pleasures and activities which are pursued in the belief that limits evaporate, taboos are lifted, and sexuality is exposed as unmysterious when science, perhaps in conjunction with capitalism, unveils for us the truth of desire and freedom.¹⁷

Neither Sollers nor Bataille accept an abstract notion of freedom disconnected from the irrational promptings of fear, guilt or disgust. Hence Bataille argues that the festival, while allowing for the release of forbidden urges, can only be comprehended within a socialized world of prohibition: “[I]t is of course, for a moment, the cessation of work, the unrestrained consumption of its products and the deliberate violation of the most hallowed laws, but the excess consecrates and completes an order of things based on rules; it goes against that order only temporarily.”¹⁸ Transgression, whether in the realm of the festival or the bedroom, is itself a testament to the world of things produced in hopes of quelling violence, and thus displays an ambivalent complicity with that same world insofar as its suspension of taboo declares a response, a kind of negation of negation, to the powerful hold that taboo has over subjectivity.

What has been said so far, in a somewhat negative fashion, that transgression is neither pure nor innocent, hints at a more positive elucidation. Transgression *is* a contradictory experience in that it suspends taboo without suppressing it: the horror and anguish which define taboo in its negativity is maintained in the experience of its violation. Intensity, tension and awakening are the terms Bataille used to explain what is impossible, i.e., the vertiginous loss of self which maintains the self in the agony of its own destruction.¹⁹ Taboo becomes the limit crossed yet sustained in the tension of a moment which is entirely self-contradictory:

“Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses.”²⁰ While the quote is certainly Foucault’s, taken from an essay published in a *Critique* volume dedicated to Bataille shortly after his death, the spirit of the quote pervades all of the latter’s writings post-1943 when he wrote *Inner Experience*.²¹ In that book he writes “anguish which turns to delight is still anguish,”²² thus indicating a paradoxical affirmation of that which we detest and exclude via prohibition.

In the fantasy of liberated desire, whereby transgression is the transgression of nothing, satisfaction is empty of all intensity and contradiction. A liberated sexuality, if there were such a thing, is precisely that which knows nothing of ambivalent subjectivity: it is neither haunted nor tempted by the exuberant defilement of its being. It is innocent, natural, untainted. It has no outside—no excluded—because liberated desire finds contentment in pleasure which is sufficient to itself, a kind of pleasure that undergoes no transformation, which implies an eruption of internalized barriers.²³

Bataille’s notion of excess and transgression is not an affirmation of life without restrictions, but is the contradiction of a being who affirms the anguish of life without thereby feeling any less anguished: *anguish which turns to delight is still anguish: it is not delight, not hope—it is anguish*.²⁴ The tension of the experience, to be sure, relies not only upon the persistence of boundaries, but just as much the violation of those boundaries: “[T]he limit opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it had rejected and fulfilled by this alien plenitude which invades it to the core of its being.”²⁵ It is in this way that taboo and transgression are ambivalent for Bataille, because each finds itself invaded by the other without thus losing its incommensurability.²⁶

Subjectivity and Communication

Discontinuity is Bataille’s term for a self-enclosed, self-protecting individual. It is a vital concept because if there were no discontinuous beings, ardently attached to the perpetuation of their singular existence, neither would there be violence or transgression. In a sense, then, the affirmation of a transgressive erotics, what Bataille also calls a return to continuity, is likewise an affirmation of the discontinuity without which

eroticism and communication are unimaginable.

To cast some light on these strange remarks it is paramount to first explain what is meant here by discontinuity. One way of ascertaining its meaning for Bataille is by looking at the interiority of individual existence, in particular the existence of a being who is aware of that existence objectively.²⁷ First, it can be said that the creation and conservation of interiority is inseparable from the movement of repulsion that was discussed in the previous section. Taboos are the socializing articulations of passionate loathing which cannot be disjoined from the individual's attempt to ward off danger, violence, or anything reminiscent of life out of control. Taboos therefore reinforce a sense of interiority on the part of the subject who removes herself, as best as she can, from the scene of violence. What is meant by this interiority is the subject's perception that intimate life has been excluded from the movements and operations of a life subordinated to the authority of prohibition.²⁸ In other words, the discontinuous being who lives in accordance with social regulation as determined by the banishment of violence no longer sees itself as participating in the excess of life destroying itself in dazzling, tumultuous upheavals. Banishment is unevenly realized, and the fact of the matter is that life is never totally forgotten even by those who live according to the strictest rules. The crucial point here, however, is that discontinuity, translated as interiority in the realm of things, takes on the meaning of disguising its innermost truth qua violence.

Let's take a look at how Bataille himself illustrates discontinuity: "Each being is distinct from all others Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity. This gulf exists, for instance, between you, listening to me, and me, speaking to you. We are attempting to communicate, but no communication between us can abolish our fundamental difference. If you die, it is not my death. You and I are *discontinuous* beings."²⁹ What is the importance of gesturing toward an infinite gulf separating all individual beings? What does this fundamental difference tell us about self-protecting, self-interested creatures? It seems to me that the infinite abyss, when taken seriously, reminds us that individuated existence is absolutely incomprehensible, unsynthesizable. I say this because if it weren't true then the discontinuous being could be subsumed by a system of thought which connected this being, in a manner befitting a logical organization of social reality, to all those other beings ostensibly divided by an infinite gulf. But in that case the gulf would be measurable and distinct beings would lose their

absolute particularity to a system of thought which beholds in particularity the birth of sameness. Insofar as a particular subject can be assimilated to an all-encompassing logic of reality, it follows that the individual is self-identical, unchanging, and wholly complete.³⁰ An unsynthesizable being can therefore be understood as devoted to its finite, particular ends only on the condition that its self-preservation is seen as a genuine effort. Such an effort assumes that the discontinuous self is vulnerable to all sorts of accidents, diseases, insecurities, predators, injuries, reprisals and the very loss of self which is so urgently defended. If the closure of discontinuity weren't vulnerable to the dangers of the outside, as well as the inside, no effort would be required to secure its borders.

It was stated before that we ought to expound the meaning of discontinuity in relation to interiority so that we could begin to explore the questions of transgression, eroticism and communication. We have determined not only that discontinuous, self-enclosed beings are motivated by desperate conditions, by the alarming fact that they are incomplete and porous, but furthermore that taboos provide us with a sense of interiority, that is to say, a means by which we distance ourselves from the anguished intensity of life. Combining these two conditions of human existence, the uncertain nature of discontinuity and the collective effort to exclude violence, in this case the violence represented by an incomprehensible subject, leads us back to the assessment that the interiority engendered by taboo is a form of discontinuity which takes itself to be other than the violence of separation which it is.

We have before us a rather interesting situation. The recoiling movement of taboo, which is both visceral and cultural, emphasizes a rejection of the unstable discontinuity that permeates living substances, while nonetheless contributing to a sense of interiority and isolation prevalent among socialized peoples.³¹ The closure of discontinuity is at once obscured and magnified. Compounding the paradox is the notion that interiority is an isolating investment of the subject only to the extent that it draws upon a socialized nexus of power and meaning.

"The foundation of one's thought is the thought of another," opens Georges Bataille's *Theory of Religion*.³² And in *Literature and Evil* we read, "[H]umanity is not composed of isolated beings but of communication between them. Never are we revealed, even to ourselves, other than in a network of communication. We bathe in communication, we are reduced to this incessant communication whose absence we feel, even in the depths

of solitude, like the suggestion of multiple possibilities, like the expectation of the moment when it will solve itself in a cry heard by others.”³³ An infinite gulf separates one being from another, and yet the most secret of secrets buried in the depths of solitude is bound up with history and culture. To make headway on this conundrum it may prove helpful to draw from an actual taboo, namely, the general taboo against human nakedness.

The psychologist Howard C. Warren is a quintessential example of the back-to-nature free spirit who rises above the superstition of needless conventions. The two basic conclusions of his 1933 article “Social Nudism and the Body Taboo” are that 1) the taboo on public nakedness is not an essential trait of humankind, and 2) the obscenity of naked human bodies has less to do with inherent properties of the bodies than a widespread social convention.³⁴ Observations that lead him to these conclusions are gathered, in part, from research in social environments that have embraced nudist living. He contends that the experiences of shock and shame, responses normally associated with the exposure of tabooed body parts—shock in the case of witnessing another person’s exposure and shame whenever the situation is reversed—that such experiences fall away in the absence of conventional body taboos.

In the circles of an enlightened nudist community there is no cause for being shocked by another individual’s exposed body, let alone to be ashamed of one’s own. Moreover, the natural acceptance of naked bodies in a liberated social context mitigates any feeling of erotic tension: “[S]ocial nudity is not productive of eroticism. There is less sexual excitement, less tendency to flirt, less temptation to ribaldry, in a nudist gathering than in a group or pair of fully clothed young people.”³⁵

Warren sees the elimination of sexual and bodily self-consciousness as an improvement in relations among those who might otherwise succumb to conventional restrictions. Whether or not he is justified in his approval of “more natural relations” in the domain of sexual behavior is not the relevant question here; what is noteworthy, considering that Warren’s outlook is diametrically opposed to Bataille’s, is that his findings unwittingly support the significance of eroticism as relying upon a consolidation, however uneasy, of subjective interiority in accordance with cultural taboos. Even if all taboos and societal restrictions could be stripped away, as it were, from the unenlightened subject, it would only prove to us that erotic tension is unavailable to creatures who live without passionate interiority.

The aforementioned paradoxes are perhaps unresolvable in any

clearly defined way, but we can now remark on their instantiation in a concrete practice. If shame or embarrassment commonly attend the exposure of tabooed body parts, it can be argued that this is the result of internalizing prohibitions aimed against the intimacy of life. Remembering that prohibitions have nothing to do with anxiety unless they determine and constitute subjectivity in a way that indicates a powerful revulsion, it is difficult to avoid the idea that the feeling of shame is bound up with a recognition of the body as menacing. This implies, in turn, that discontinuous bodies are both negated and affirmed. The negation occurs when the taboo renounces intimate life as embodied in discontinuity, but since the negation requires of the subject that something vile ought to be kept to itself rather than be shared with others, an awareness of separate identity is affirmed in the ritualized contours of interiority.

The second paradox builds upon the first because the ritualization of discontinuity, as witnessed in the conduct of bodies in relation to a variety of cultural expectations, points to a social intensification of tabooed body parts and functions. Whatever isolation is felt by the subject due to the regulation of borders, as with those conditioned by the taboo on nakedness, has to be qualified by the realization that neither shock nor shame would prevail if the body weren't at the same time culturally configured.

Because Bataille was indebted to the French School of Sociology, it remains fruitful to consider Emile Durkheim's famous principle that no human institution, including religion, is based on illusion or falsehood.³⁶ In contrast to Warren's demythologizing of conventional attitudes surrounding human nakedness, Bataille doesn't presume that the beliefs informing and shaping those attitudes are purely fantastic, silly, or constructed.

Nobody denies that prohibitions, especially those concerning the body and sexual reproduction, are deeply influenced by their sociohistorical conditions. There are probably more taboos regulating consumption, defecation, clothing, touching, sexuality, pregnancy, as well as the shape, weight, and color of bodies than the entire number of bodies so delimited. The astonishing number and diversity of taboos, however, does not in any way prove that they are groundless illusions. To the contrary, they testify to the universal impact of sexuality and death. And it is precisely this impact, in whatever time or location, that cannot be ignored in the experience of communication.

In the case of eroticism, the taboo on social nudism can play a substantial role in the movement of self-awareness away from itself, that

is, away from its interpretation of intimate life as reflected in the logic of interiority.³⁷ The laceration experienced in self-dissolution holds no significance for us unless we first of all embody our sociohistorical conditions with the energy and passion of life itself. The taboo against nakedness is one such value that may be incorporated by individuals in such a way that its infraction is invariably felt as shameful or obscene.³⁸ Bataille therefore writes, "Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity. Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality."³⁹

Communication and obscenity are interwoven here because the erotic movement is destructive to the self-contained reality of interiority. The taboos which helped to create that interiority are violated in a moment of dispossession that affirms the vulnerable nature of discontinuity. The obscenity of erotic life is not a delusional experience; it confirms that we're viscerally attached to the perpetuation of subjectivity that nakedness threatens to defile and dissolve. Communication is in this manner a degrading, anguished, obscene movement of loss in which the self, i.e., the consolidation of subjective interiority, is torn apart, thereby exposing its fragmented, broken existence. Ambivalence is therefore just as pervasive in communication as we observed in transgression: obscenity and shock are impossible without simultaneously exposing and resisting the ferment of life known as discontinuity. And insofar as discontinuity is shared in the moment of communication, it opens up to what Foucault called the limitless and Bataille evoked as intimate continuity. By virtue of its measureless depth, the infinite gulf that separates one discontinuous being from another is neither bridged nor reconciled, but is shared in its terrifying, mesmerizing dizziness.⁴⁰

The Beginning . . .

It is difficult, at this point, not to recall Thomas Mann's quote from *Death in Venice*: "The beginning was fear; fear and desire, with a shuddering curiosity."⁴¹ Fear and desire, life and death, agony and pleasure, are inextricably interwoven in Bataille's thought. So much so that he often

speaks as if human life were itself the embodiment of death.⁴² This is equally true for the other oppositions: the subject is other, work is play, and limits are limitless.

The response to some of Habermas's objections, such as the impossibility of theorizing "a transcendent source of power,"⁴³ is to be found in the heterogeneity of discourse, subjectivity, and every ritual practice that both normalizes and appropriates the Other.⁴⁴ If death and its "stinking putrefaction" were not at the foundation of life,⁴⁵ and taboos failed to draw from the violence which they universally exclude, Habermas would be undeniably correct that Bataille is enmeshed in a self-implicating critique. The beginning is a mixed phenomenon, an experience of closure that is open and "lacerated from the start,"⁴⁶ and it is such a beginning that lends itself to ecstasy and rupture. The project of work, to make the same point once again, has never been altogether active, but is in fact a *response* to uncontrollable circumstances.

Rebecca Comay, countering both Sartre and Habermas, reiterates the impurity of historical sovereignty as presented throughout Bataille's work: "There is no historic form of sovereignty which is not already implicated in the machinations of profane rationality. Even the most 'primitive' potlatches of the Tlingit and Kwakiutl were already contaminated by the calculus of acquired rank and power (Bataille does not, despite appearances, share Mauss's idealizations of the communifying bond of archaic 'generosity'.) Early potlatch was already caught up in the rational circuit of exchange."⁴⁷

Sovereignty, which Bataille connects with self-abandon, has no meaning for us independently of self-preservation. And vice versa: the rationalization of life and desire is itself an expenditure of force that cannot be stopped, measured, or contained. It is also worth noting that the impure beginning, the repugnance of birth, ensures for us an equally impure "return." But this is a discussion that will be saved for another essay, once we have taken up Mark C. Taylor's objections that Bataille's work is pervaded with nostalgia, with a longing for primitive origins. For the moment we can return to the earlier delineated oppositions and observe the influence of ambivalence at the heart of taboo, subjectivity, language, and work—the same terms and categories which apparently exclude all things heterogeneous.

Firstly, taboo is the complement to its transgression. Taboo, as stated before, is internalized. It contributes in a fundamental way to the profane constitution of subjectivity. Besides what has already been said in this regard,

Bataille adds that it is precisely the incorporation of lived values, values that prohibit an aimless squandering of life, which intensifies the inexorable movement toward death and violence. The self-aware discontinuity that is formed by the internalization of taboos only contributes to the wastage of life sacrificed for nothing; it speeds up the process of loss which is all the more intensely felt as anguish and despair to the extent that we continue to resist it. The anguish is not relieved for those who spend themselves in moments of self-annihilation, but the force of violent transgression would be absolutely empty if we had never opposed it. The compression of resistance, the welling up of desire, is the fervor of life which gives self-annihilation an explosive, vertiginous dimension: "The compression is not subservient to the explosion, far from it; it gives it increased force."⁴⁸

Laughter, ecstasy, potlatch, festivals, holidays, feasts, spectacles, mourning, eroticism, sacrifice, and war can all be viewed as moments of loss and transgression. This of course isn't to say that in each case, no matter the circumstances, Bataille is in favor of an explosive release of energy. To cite just one example, Bataille distinguishes military enterprise, or what he also calls the 'military order', from internal violence: "The methodical spirit of conquest is contrary to the spirit of sacrifice and the military kings rejected sacrifice from the beginning. The principle of military order is the methodical diversion of violence to the outside. If violence rages within, it opposes that violence to the extent that it can. And it subordinates the diversion to a real end . . . Thus the military order is contrary to the forms of spectacular violence that correspond more to an unbridled explosion of fury than to the rational calculation of effectiveness."⁴⁹ At any rate, the release of energy, more or less appropriated, is only experienced as an eruption of violence to the extent that we oppose it. For Bataille, then, prohibition is the internalized limit through which life is sacrificed. It is certainly true that we work, think, and generally speaking resist change. But in so doing we also affirm change as a radical alteration that cannot be avoided,⁵⁰ and thus it appears that taboo is the beginning of self-inflicted violence.⁵¹

Secondly, the outside is always already implicated by the inside. Although prohibition is crucial to the consolidation of subjectivity free from violence, it is itself passionate and therefore an indication of what Joseph Libertson calls "uncertain closure."⁵² Hence, not only is the "non-violence" of taboo invariably linked to a passionate urgency which overcomes the subject in a terrifying, self-destructive manner, as intimated

above, but it also betrays an immediate awareness of the excluded element: “Discontinuity, which devotes its energy to a struggle for survival which opposes the violence of continuity, must derive that energy from life itself which is defined as a continuity of energy transcending the life span of the isolated being.”⁵³

The continuity of energy is typically thought of as the outside, but the unthinking movement of instinct and passion is unthinking only to the extent that it responds to an exigency, that is, an utter lack of foundation. The constitution of the subject is therefore grounded in its own insufficiency. If the integrity of the individual were perfectly intact, then taboos would be neither passionate nor demanding. But in fact we pursue the ideals of subjectivity because we are all too familiar with its inadequacies, permeability, and fault lines. It is in and through these fault lines that continuity transcends the uncertain closure of ipseity.

Furthermore, if we ask what it is that confronts subjectivity as a transcendent existence, as Denis Hollier does in “The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille,” it is evident from Bataille’s writings that the interiority of self-consciousness is defined by its exclusion of the sacred. It is the sacred, in other words, which is absent from subjectivity. But if we understand the relation between the sacred and the profane as a matter of absence, division, and separation, then it becomes equally apparent that the *profane* is sacred: “[W]hat is fundamental here is less what is posited as transcendent... than the very separation as a structure of existence. It is thus profane existence itself which produces separation, institutes itself as separate from the sacred, and the transcendence by which it defines the sacred in fact characterizes the profane itself.”⁵⁴ This is more than a sophisticated word game. It only appears to be one so long as we assume that the sacred, or the outside, is an abstract entity.

Hollier continues, however, by formulating the essence of the sacred as being less a matter of thingness and more a matter of differing, modification, and self-contradiction.⁵⁵ The profane, while defined by its productive teleology, is nonetheless sacred because of its break from the totality of things. It is not given to us as a thing, but it is *constituted* as a thing. Its very constitution as self-identical, as a separate, abstract entity, presumes an extreme modification of its being and substance. In this way, again contrary to Habermas, the profane, the subject, opens on to the limitless only insofar as it is itself a radical modification. It is both substance and change, repulsion and attraction. But it is also communication.

Returning to the first statements of this paragraph, the uncertain closure of the subject is achieved via prohibition. When Bataille argues that we cannot leave ourselves without drama, that the moment of sacrifice marks the intensity of dramatization,⁵⁶ he is thinking not only of the performative mechanisms peculiar to religion, but of self-renunciation in general. If discourse is prohibition's mode of being, as Philippe Sollers puts it,⁵⁷ and discourse is social, then the movement of self-sacrifice is communication from the beginning: "[E]ach being is, I believe, incapable on his own, of going to the end of being. If he tries, he is submerged within a 'private being' which has meaning only for himself. Now there is no meaning for a lone individual . . . if I wish my life to have meaning for me, it is necessary that it have meaning *for others*."⁵⁸

Bataille is quick to note, shortly after this quote, that while the extreme limit of being is nonsense, it presupposes the meaning of that which is sacrificed.⁵⁹ Consequently, the meaning of subjectivity is not overlooked; it is defiled and penetrated, but even more it is the movement of loss without which communication ceases to exist.

Thirdly, the transformative action of work is a maintained tension that is unable to realize itself in its own results. Drawing from Hegel and Marx, Bataille agrees that work is the foundation of human self-awareness. It is true that work is motivated by fear, as well as class struggle, but it is likewise the dialectical means for achieving mastery and freedom. It is in and through work that humanity separates itself, in part at least, from the immediate drives and impulses of animalism: "Work was, above all else, the foundation for knowledge and reason. The making of tools and weapons was the point of departure for that early faculty of reason which humanized the animal we once were."⁶⁰ Reason is therefore grounded in a practical activity. But this activity is a rupture, a contracted movement of life that is motivated by future results.⁶¹ Indeed, for some, it is the exteriorization of self, or the alienation of the worker, which determines absolute freedom.

For Bataille, however, the projection of self into a future time is not only concrete and practical, but also unreal and imaginary. The individual that is sustained by work, or by the results of work, is transformed as a being that strives to attain the impossible: "[B]y his transforming action, man can experience and prove his essence only by negating all present states of things, without being able to recognize himself entirely within the result of this negation, for this would risk equating his being with the 'object' The *lost intimacy* of supposed immanence engages man

in transcendence, that is in the process of a contradictory quest: to attain *oneself* in the end by suppressing one's transcendence, although the latter is the condition of ipseity.⁶²

It can be seen here that Bataille has a broader notion of contradiction/alienation than either Hegel or Marx. For the latter, alienation is the tension of spirit or class consciousness which is overcome by its own negativity. Alienation is thus relative to time. In Bataille, it is not relative to any particular stage of history, but it is in fact the very condition of history. The individual cannot attain absolute freedom in history or time because the world of practice, the world defined by historical self-awareness, is a movement of difference in which the self is projected outwardly, that is, outside of itself. On the other hand, if the self is no longer divided, no longer alienated from its concrete truth, then it returns to itself outside of itself.⁶³ It is only beyond itself, at the end of time, that the absolute object is attained. But then it is no longer a thing that exists through time, as a practical transcendence, but rather is equivalent, as Sasso indicates, to an immediate "non-object."⁶⁴ So in one sense, for Bataille's predecessors, freedom is ahistorical. In another sense contradiction/alienation is overcome *within* history, for a community, and for self-actualized individuals.

Bataille himself does not resolve the paradox; he draws it out, extends it, and applies it to all of us: "The world of things or of practice is the world in which man is subjugated, or simply in which he serves some purpose, whether or not he is the servant of another . . . if his condition is that of a slave, he is entirely alienated; otherwise a relatively substantial part of himself is alienated, compared with the freedom of the wild animal."⁶⁵ Insofar as the contradiction of work cannot be resolved for transcendent individuals, it is argued that humanity is inherently alienated, that work is nothing but anguish, contradiction, and play. Because of work, we both anticipate and protect ourselves from death.⁶⁶

We are things, and yet we're not self-identical.⁶⁷ We develop an awareness of the outside, and yet we assimilate it.⁶⁸ Ultimately, then, the sovereign is not the master who enjoys an immediate relation to nature,⁶⁹ nor the worker who attains freedom via self-externalization,⁷⁰ but that alienated subject who loses himself in the play of oppositions that are never resolved.⁷¹

Fourthly, language begins nowhere.⁷² This is why Derrida writes that discourse is everything.⁷³ If there is no paradigm or central signified which escapes the infinite play of differences in language, then discourse is

everything. The origin, however, is metonymic. It begins nowhere in the sense that it is itself a rupture, a movement of supplementarity in which it draws from precisely that which it excludes. Derrida makes a similar point in regard to Lévi-Strauss's methodology of history. If we isolate the moments of history from their breaks and transitions, then they appear to us without difference, contradiction, or surplus. The unity of the historical structure is thus maintained: "[O]ne can describe what is peculiar to the structural organization only by not taking into account... its past conditions: by omitting to posit the problem of the transition from one structure to another, by putting history between brackets."⁷⁴

The violence of transition excluded by the specificity of the new structure, the new moment, is perhaps first recognized in the work of Bataille⁷⁵: "[W]e can grasp being only in history: in changes, transitions from one state to another, not in the sequence of states. In speaking of nature, of culture, Lévi-Strauss has juxtaposed abstractions, whereas the transition from animal to man involves not just the formal states but the drama in which they opposed one another."⁷⁶ So in both cases the logic is the same: structural integrity is maintained only by neutralizing the force of historical indeterminacy. The preservation of a unified concept, both historical and discursive, reinforces what Derrida refers to as the "continuist presupposition."⁷⁷ Whether it pertains to a structuralist moment or the privilege of metaphor, the continuist presupposition indicates a radical suppression of displacements without origin. The paradigm, for example, is a word or concept that generates a series of terms that are fully determined by an original signifier, namely, the paradigm.

The metaphoric trajectory, however, assumes a differential syntax. Insofar as the first term is a simple signified, or a metaphysical concept, it is perforce an operation of language defined by tropic supplementarity.⁷⁸ The first term, then, is a metaphor that exists outside of the field of play which it predetermines and organizes.⁷⁹ This would suggest that the first term, the paradigm, is a kind of surplus value that exceeds the differential axis of metonymy, displacement, and reinscription. In fact, the extra turn of speech, the metaphor beyond metaphor, is the missing turn of speech precisely because of its indeterminacy, i.e., its acentric position.⁸⁰

The indeterminacy is what ensures, at least for Bataille, that every known element, every linguistic phenomenon, has its blind spot.⁸¹ In this way Bataille is able to argue that a silent, elusive part subsides in us,⁸² that discourse and knowledge are related to a blind spot which is existence

and that discourse is the existence which cannot be reduced to itself: “Knowledge is in no way distinct from me: *I am it*, it is the existence which I am. But this existence is not reducible to it; this reduction would require that the known be the aim of existence and not existence the aim of the known.”⁸³ When Derrida writes that metaphor “carries its death within itself,”⁸⁴ when Foucault gestures toward a “nondiscursive language,”⁸⁵ and when Barthes analyzes the eroticism and linguistic displacements of Bataille as metonymic,⁸⁶ we know that these statements are enabled by exactly the kind of logic that underpins the above quote. Language is constantly abstracted from that which it signifies; it is abstracted from the violence of surplus and expenditure, and based on this abstract relation which is metonymic, it is found that the known is in fact unknown, and that a silent part cannot be removed from history, subjectivity, or language.

The End . . .

Habermas’s key objection, in light of what has been said, no longer seems to hold. He puts forth in his lecture “Between Eroticism and General Economics: Bataille,” that Bataille faces the same theoretical dilemma as Nietzsche before him and Foucault after him. The dilemma is that a genealogical unmasking of power, of discourse and subject-centered reason, is entangled in the very modes of production they hope to escape. Habermas concludes with the argument that knowledge and sovereignty are mutually exclusive: “If sovereignty and its source, the sacred, are related to the world of purposive-rational action in an absolutely heterogeneous fashion, if the subject and reason are constituted only by excluding all kinds of sacred power, if the other of reason is more than just the irrational or the unknown—namely, the *incommensurable*, which cannot be touched by reason except at the cost of an explosion of the rational subject—then there is no possibility of a theory that reaches beyond the horizon of what is accessible to reason and thematizes, let alone analyzes, the interaction of reason with a transcendent source of power.”⁸⁷

An oppositional structure based on Habermas’s interpretation would imply a totally successful division, an absolute sundering of subjectivity and its other. In contrast, Bataille stresses that the constitution of reason, or the rational subject, is itself contaminated by the violence which it seemingly excludes. The incommensurable, catastrophic object cannot be separated from its rational negation: “In this position of object as *catastrophe*, thought

lives the annihilation that constitutes it as a vertiginous and infinite fall, and thus has not only catastrophe as its object; it's very structure is *catastrophe*—it is itself absorption in the nothingness that supports it and at the same time slips away.”⁸⁸

Habermas, to some degree, is aware of this. He knows that for Bataille the elements and forces of heterogeneity, as much as they're marginalized, are inseparably mixed with taboo, rational production, and homogeneity. In his comparison of Critical Theory and Bataille's assessment of fascism, Habermas acknowledges that in both cases heterogeneity and homogeneity merge; that is to say, in each analysis the success of the fascist state is dependent upon the assimilation of “inner nature's revolts.”⁸⁹ This presumes, however, that the terms of opposition are ambivalent; they are only able to merge because of their interdependence. Habermas, on the other hand, would prefer to keep the realm of mediated reason free from power and violence. In fact, it may be his attachment to a theory of non-coercive intersubjectivity which prevents Habermas from recognizing the full ramifications of ambivalence in Bataille. If he's right to assume that a “violence-transcending point of reference” exists for the ego or subject, then his rejection of the objectifying attitude, i.e., the reflexivity of self-awareness, is completely justified.⁹⁰ But insofar as the human subject tends to be associated with calculated interests, with the concrete reality of work and prohibition, it is all the more difficult to accept, as Habermas does, a theory of mutual understanding which is liberated from alienation and self-division.⁹¹ This, unfortunately, raises a new dilemma.

It has been argued, up until this point, that the structures of opposition found in Bataille work are necessarily ambivalent. Discourse and silence, taboo and transgression, work and play, are oppositional terms that are mutually contaminated. So in what sense are they distinguished? What does it mean to say that taboo invites transgression when it is itself a mode of transgression? Are we still working with viable concepts and categories? Or should we now believe that all differences have been erased? The spirit of these questions will animate my next article.

Notes

¹ Bataille, *Erotism*, 9; *OC*, X: 13.

² *Ibid.*, *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism*, 21; *OC*, VIII: 17.

³ *Ibid.*, *The Deviations of Nature*, 53; *OC*, I: 228.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Big Toe*, 20; *OC*, I: 200.

⁵ Ibid., “Rotten Sun,” 58; *OC*, I: 232.

⁶ Habermas, “Between Eroticism and General Economics: Bataille,” 213.

⁷ Suleiman, “Transgression and the Avant-Garde,” 324.

⁸ Bataille, “Attraction and Repulsion I,” 106; *OC*, II: 310-11.

⁹ Whenever Bataille uses Hegelian terms like movement or negation it is clear that he intends to be subversive towards systematization without thus situating himself outside of its language. Joseph Libertson is right to contend that Bataille gives priority to exigency and differentiation as opposed to negativity (*Proximity, Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille, and Communication*, 12), but Derrida is equally right that Bataille questioned Hegelian reason without ignoring its internal rigor (“From Restricted to General Economy,” 253).

¹⁰ Bataille, *Erotism*, 55; *OC*, X: 58.

¹¹ Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 46; *OC*, VII: 308-09.

¹² Ibid., 46-47; Ibid., 309.

¹³ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism*, 63; *OC*, VIII: 52.

¹⁴ That a given society will sanction violence, e.g., as deflected toward an outside group, does not perforce contradict the essence of taboo.

¹⁵ Bataille, *Erotism*, 36; *OC*, X: 39.

¹⁶ Defecation is a terrific example here. We cannot exclude defecation *as such* from the realm of living matter, but we exclude it in the sense that we’ve ritualized it in accordance with the needs of the profane world—the world of life reduced to a thing—and this ritualization appears to have intensified with the rise of modern individualism, disgust, and privacy (closed bathroom doors, etiquette against farting in public, etc.) as argued by Laura Kipnis in her chapter “Disgust and Desire” from *Bound and Gagged*.

¹⁷ Sollers, “The Roof: Essay in Systematic Reading,” 76.

¹⁸ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism*, 90; *OC*, VIII: 78.

¹⁹ The next section will expand on this idea of losing the self in experience.

²⁰ Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” 33-34.

²¹ See Joseph Libertson’s discussion, pp. 9-13 in *Proximity, Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille, and Communication*, on the development of Bataille’s thought from one of privileging heterogeneity over the profane, servile world to that of seeing taboos as always already contaminated by the transgression of heterogeneous forces.

²² Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 35; *OC*, V: 47.

²³ I should be careful: transformation and change are permitted if performed in the appropriate ways.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” 34.

²⁶ In one sense it may be said that law and transgression are a single movement of expenditure, but in another we distinguish them according to economic and temporal considerations, e.g., the time of duration projects the self into the future while the time of the instant does not.

²⁷ By objective I mean anything known in the world of cause and effect, anything which can be observed clearly and distinctly inasmuch as it has been abstracted from intimate continuity.

²⁸ This perception can be so dominating that it erases its own irrational basis, as is the condition with a practice of science or philosophy which takes itself to be free from the exigencies of life.

²⁹ Bataille, *Erotism*, 12; *OC*, X: 18-19.

³⁰ Again, I should qualify this kind of assertion by adding that many systematizing philosophies allow for alteration and non-identity, as long as the change is predictable and the loss of identity recuperable.

³¹ Undoubtedly the degree of isolation felt by those individuals will vary from culture to culture depending upon the traditions, economies, politics, etc. of those social systems. The degree of isolation may or may not go so far as the alienation experienced, for example, by those who are working in exploitative labor conditions. In other words, I don't necessarily intend to signify the pejorative sense of isolation or interiority.

³² Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 9; OC, VII: 285.

³³ Ibid., *Literature and Evil*, 199; OC, IX: 310.

³⁴ Warren, "Social Nudism and the Body Taboo," 181.

³⁵ Ibid., 182.

³⁶ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 2.

³⁷ Susan Bordo has shown that the exhibition of naked bodies is rarely a matter of pure biology, since divergent cultural values have been encoded into those bodies. A superb example is provided by the different ways that men and women present themselves, in our society, when they're naked or semi-naked. Firm postures and challenging stares often oblige us to read male bodies as less exposed than their female counterparts (*The Male Body*, 25-30). Rather than disproving Bataille's argument apropos of social nudism, I believe that Bordo's illustration maintains the case that exposure invariably takes place in reference to particular, socializing taboos. Transgression is always a matter of exposure and violence, but this will be instigated differently due to the specific historical circumstances.

³⁸ To qualify this universal claim, I need to add that there are several versions of the body taboo. In a liberal society it's not as shameful to contemplate one's body as it is for others who have internalized the "complete taboo." One of the least rigid types is the "intersex taboo." As this one deems it admissible to be nude in the company of same-sex individuals, I assume -- absent another taboo, say, on homosexuality -- that there is less tension (moral, erotic, etc.) involved in those settings. Page 162 of Warren's article classifies the body taboo in four groups, which is a fair division for his purposes but a very low estimate in general.

³⁹ Bataille, *Erotism*, 17-18; OC, X: 23. At first I wasn't sure that the pun was intended here: secret channels (*conduits*) might also allude to pipes, canals, ventilation shafts. Then I noticed the direct reference on page 57 (OC, X: 60): "The sexual channels are also the body's sewers (*Les conduits sexuels évacuent des déjections*)." The pun likely does a couple of things: broaden the scope of what counts as the body's sewers; and reinforce the notion/feeling of obscenity.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 13; Ibid., 19. It's worth noting that one of the lines alluded to here—*Cet abîme est profond, je ne vois pas le moyen de le supprimer*—is translated by Dalwood as "It is a deep gulf, and I do not see how it can be done away with." The verb *supprimer* has many connotations, some of which refer back to Hegel and aren't fully captured in the translation, such as canceling, suppressing, eliminating, and removing an obstacle (this last has a psychoanalytic resonance). The French is important here since it reminds us that the abyss isn't only impossible to abolish but moreover cannot be suppressed in a manner resulting from incorporation or sublimation.

⁴¹ Mann, *Death in Venice*, 67.

⁴² Bataille, "Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice," 18. To this end he invokes both Heidegger's "being unto death" and Kojève's "death which lives a human life."

⁴³ Habermas, "Between Eroticism and General Economics: Bataille," 236.

⁴⁴ Bataille's take on the Other may grate on those who are unfamiliar with it. Adherents to a Levinasian approach, for example, would probably find the interchangeability of the Other and, say, death to be quite off the mark.

⁴⁵ Bataille, *Erotism*, 56; *OC*, X: 59.

⁴⁶ Comay, "Gifts without Presents: Economies of 'Experience' in Bataille and Heidegger," 79.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁸ Bataille, *Erotism*, 65; *OC*, X: 68.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *Theory of Religion*, 65-66.

⁵⁰ It is assumed here that even while change is repressed or teleologically sublimated, that it is ultimately uncontrollable, i.e., we lose ourselves irrevocably. If this premise is false, Bataille's theory of transgression is obviously weakened.

⁵¹ To put the same point differently, one more time: we adopt taboos which oppose change without eradicating it. The result is a compression of force that must eventually be released. Hence the taboos are themselves the affirmation, if not of change pure and simple, then most assuredly of change qua violence.

⁵² Libertson, "Bataille and Communication," 210.

⁵³ Libertson, "Bataille and Communication," 211.

⁵⁴ Hollier, "The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille," 65.

⁵⁵ Hollier, "The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille," 66. See also Sollers' elucidation of Bataillean play and mysticism as a "mutation of discourse" in "The Roof," 93.

⁵⁶ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 11; *OC*, V: 23.

⁵⁷ Sollers, "The Roof," 79.

⁵⁸ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 42; *OC*, V: 55.

⁵⁹ I add this because the quoted lines, out of context, might suggest that a recognizable meaning or subjectivity exists for Bataille. There is meaning, but only the sort which eludes our grasp.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *Tears of Eros*, 41; *OC*, X: 591.

⁶¹ Certainly thought is expansive: it reaches out and assimilates. So it contracts in the sense that it moves inwardly at the same time as it evolves and grows.

⁶² Sasso, "Georges Bataille and the Challenge to Think," 45.

⁶³ This is different from the projection of the self outside of the self in the previous line since, in the final surpassing of self by the self, there is neither self-division nor self-alienation.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁵ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Sovereignty*, 214; *OC*, VIII: 263.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, *Erotism*, 30 and 43; *OC*, X: 34 and 46.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, *The Accursed Share: Sovereignty*, 213; *OC*, VIII: 262.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, *Theory of Religion*, 31.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 118.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-19. Also, when Marx speaks of the necessity of alienation/exploitation reaching unbearable limits before we can imagine its revolutionary development (one citation out of many: *The German Ideology*, 170-71), the same idea is captured, albeit in a materialistic fashion.

⁷¹ An aside: viewing some of Diego Rivera's murals at the Detroit Institute of

Art strikes me in just this way. I see, obviously enough, the sweat and toil of Detroit's autoworkers. But I am perhaps even more attuned to the erotic play of it all: bodies pressed against machines, machines pressed against bodies, workers losing themselves in the power and steel of industrialism. Of course, Bataille would be unwilling to share in the utopian Marxism portrayed by those frescos.

⁷² In his essay "The Metaphor of the Eye," Roland Barthes writes that "paradigm begins nowhere." Barthes observes, in this manner, a metonymic eroticism in Bataille's "Story of the Eye," in which displacements of metaphor have no true, original source.

⁷³ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," 280.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁷⁵ At least in regard to Lévi-Strauss. It's difficult to assess if Nietzsche's version (*Genealogy of Morals*, 77) is more conducive to structuralist snapshots or Bataillean rupture.

⁷⁶ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism*, 52; *OC*, VIII: 43.

⁷⁷ Derrida, "White Mythology," 215.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷⁹ This is granted for the moment to show that if we assume the existence of a master word, a paradigm or a philosopheme, then by its own logic it falls back into relations of contiguity.

⁸⁰ To make the argument more explicit: if the paradigm were completely self-originating, as opposed to having a blind spot, it would not be prone to sliding, equivocal meanings.

⁸¹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 110; *OC*, V: 129.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 14; *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 110; *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸⁴ Derrida, "White Mythology," 271.

⁸⁵ Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 39.

⁸⁶ Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," 245.

⁸⁷ Habermas, "Between Eroticism and General Economics," 235-36.

⁸⁸ Bataille, "Sacrifices," 134; *OC*, I: 94.

⁸⁹ Habermas, "Between Eroticism and General Economics," 219.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, "Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason," 296.

⁹¹ I do not elaborate here because the basic point has already been addressed, in a number of ways, throughout the body of this chapter.

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