

# 'A kiss is the beginning of cannibalism': Julia Ducournau's *Raw* and Bataillean Horror

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## Abstract

*In this article, I will put Julia Ducournau's 2016 coming-of-age horror film Raw in dialogue with Georges Bataille's general economic theory of transgression. The Bataillean saying 'a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism' is taken literally by Raw's protagonist Justine, as she explores her sexuality while simultaneously acquiring a taste for human flesh. I will begin by mapping the interplay between the transgressions of Raw and Bataille's general economy, moving forward to Raw's treatment of transgression as it both converges and diverges with Bataille's notion of sacrifice. While the film ultimately displays the pitfalls of transgression, I will conclude by evaluating how the role of eroticism in Raw illustrates the enduring importance of transgression for Bataille; as an immediate, sacred moment of inner experience in which the self luxuriates in its own death.*

**Keywords:** Georges Bataille; Julia Ducournau; transgression; death drive; eroticism; cannibalism

To say a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism is to recognise the inherent relationship between Eros and Thanatos, romance and horror, devouring and destroying. Such is the endeavour of Georges Bataille; to emphasise the centrality of death and desire to a general economy in which transgression gives way to a mode of non-productive expenditure. The sentiment 'a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism' is taken quite literally by the protagonist of Julia Ducournau's 2016 coming-of-age horror film *Raw*. Little is known about Justine except that she is going into her first year of veterinary college, an education that runs in the family. She identifies herself as average, a virgin, and above all, a vegetarian. As emphasised throughout the film, the consumption of meat is an enforced taboo in Justine's familial structure. This is the foundation for Justine's imminent transgression, taking form in not only the consumption of meat, but human flesh. Furthermore, it is a consumption intrinsically linked to the erotic. For in cannibalistic eroticism, Justine excessively consumes in such a way that extends beyond, but does not break, the institutional transgressive economy.

Current reviews of *Raw* praise Ducournau's portrayal of the transgressive nature of female sexuality, the subversion of the coming-of-age-narrative, and reference to the female cannibal in the history of French cinema. In one of the only academic essays on *Raw* at present, the book chapter 'Navigating the Mind/body Divide: The Female Cannibal in French Films *Grave* (*Raw*, 2016), *Dans ma peau* (**In My Skin**, 2002), and *Trouble Every Day* (2001),' Kath Dooley states that Justine 'disrupts the patriarchal gaze,' her cannibalism acting as 'an act of rebellion against established gender norms' (Dooley, 2019: 63). Another reviewer applauds how Justine 'becomes liberated from norms' (Rapold, 2016: 8). However, while these readings refer to radical liberation, *Raw*'s conclusion conversely struck me as deeply fatalistic toward transgression and its role in the gendered social order. This reads as a misstep for Ducournau, as her own statement about the film rejects patriarchal determinism:

*I wanted to get away from determinism... It was interesting to show a young woman who is not scared... This kind of representation of young girls' sexuality is too common, the idea that is it like losing something. Quite the opposite: Justine gains an identity and a unique relationship that cannot be pigeonholed, and she is triumphant* (Selavy, 2017: 53).

But by the end of *Raw*, no 'unique identity' is so. Her cannibalism as an unleashed, feminine excess that is active instead of passive is subsumed back into the nuclear family structure. The familial structure is not overturned, but rather accommodates Justine's rebellion as a product of its own design. Perhaps Ducournau's confused approach to dissent

testifies to just how incoherent a politics and aesthetics of transgression has become.

The conversation around transgression persistently revolves around its capacity for destroying limits and overturning systems, as if it is a tool for carving out radically new ways of being. For Bataille, transgression is powerful in that it is not a tool to be utilised, but is in excess of the utilitarian order. However, as a release of excess, transgression emerges within patriarchal-capitalist structure as an extension beyond systematic prohibition, cyclically recurring as a function of the system's own organisation. In this way, transgression is not a means to the permanent eradication of the prevailing social order, but rather an ecstatic event occurring through the codes of limitation. Bataille identifies eroticism as a key mode of transgressive, non-productive expenditure that is indicative of the dominant social strata. Nevertheless, in flashing moments of erotic feeling, Bataille locates a mystical inner experience that connotes an excessive 'spirit of sacrifice' that extends beyond, but does not break, the system organised transgression. The sacred instant of sacrifice is what Bataille values in certain transgressive acts, in that it is vital to communicate beyond the self as a thing, an object in the world of work. It is the transient, spiritual annihilation of the 'self' as defined by the human ideals of individualism, productivity, and teleological narratives of progress. It is a communication with death in order to live ecstatically, if only for a moment.

As I argue in this article, Ducournau's *Raw* ultimately depicts the inability of transgression to exit social laws entirely, extending Bataille's notion that transgression occurs through the socio-economic codes that bring it into being. However, while Ducournau's confused resolution portrays the destructive force of transgression as something to be overcome, Bataille insists that in the instant of sacrifice we embrace a transient pleasure that extends beyond the profanity of human endeavour. Therefore, I will begin by mapping the interplay between the transgressions of *Raw* and Bataille's general economy, moving forward to an examination of the pitfalls of transgression in *Raw*. I will then examine the role of eroticism in *Raw* in order to illustrate the remaining importance of transgression-as-sacrifice for Bataille; as a sacred moment of inner experience wherein the self luxuriates in its own death. This will be supported by a speculative psychoanalytic reading, Sabina Spielrein's premier 1912 essay 'Destruction as a Cause for Coming into Being.' Here eroticism is an operation of the death drive; a desire to exit the accursed, repressed existence to which humankind is fated, but with no teleological coherency of its fulfillment.

## Raw, Transgression, and the General Economy

While it is often placed at the heart of his work, transgression is only a fragment of what Bataille calls the general economy. This analysis is embedded in Bataille's wider evaluation of humankind's relation to excess in *The Accursed Share* (1949). Here Bataille aims to illustrate a *general* rather than *restricted* economy, the latter of which can only isolate and explain the forces of need. A general economic theory evaluates the wider dispersal of energy at play in the materially efficacious forces of desire. As Bataille explains:

*The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically (Bataille, 1988, vol 1: 21).*

Underlying human existence lies an excess of energy that is not accounted for in a life solely based on need. In this domain, dynamic life takes place and systems grow. Civilisations are built, but such civil harmony privileges a calculated precision to maintain productivity. In the modern world, enlightenment ideals make human existence synonymous with consciousness, reason, and progress. That is to say, the capitalist myth of progress wherein history is a linear continuum of improvement toward the goals of growth. Irrational drives and violent desires are in excess of such civilised calculations. So, the indulgence of excess moves toward the non-human, the irrational. As civilisation develops beyond its immediate needs, the excess that threatens the stability of human civilisation must be squandered in acts of mass frivolity. Bataille thus reads transgression, along with the taboo, as a release of excess energy in accordance with certain *organised* limits. In the case of patriarchal-capitalism, the taboo guards its two necessary foundations; productive work and the regulation of sexual promiscuity. This involves the temporal division of the world into two social realms; the *profane* and the *sacred* as they dictate the experience of work time, and that which disrupts work time respectively. In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1952) Bataille provides a revised definition of these two terms that differ from their common usage.

The *profane* dictates the law and defines what the taboo prohibits, thus allowing for work and productivity. As Bataille states; 'Taboos are there to make work possible; work is productive; during the profane period allotted to work consumption is reduced to the minimum consistent with continued production' (Bataille, 1962: 68). The profane, utile value of labour thus separates humanity from themselves as 'that which is,' a being

in intimate continuity with immediate experience, into a discontinuous *thing*, a means to productive forces: 'the introduction of labour into the world replaced intimacy, the depth of desire and its free outbreaks, with rational progression, where what matters is no longer the truth of the present moment, but, rather, the subsequent result of operations' (Bataille, 1988: 57). The profane thus dictates a teleology of progress, wherein the immediacy of the present, filled with desire and potential, is repressed by an accumulative striving toward the future goals of the prevailing system. However, the side of the sacred contains all that is repressed by the taboo; it is the realm of intoxication, intimacy, violence, and consumption. It is the domain of non-productive expenditure (Bataille, 1962: 68). But as Bataille insists, the nature of the taboo is temptation; it invites its own transgression. Profane time both prohibits, and is complemented by, the sacred time of transgression. Sacred days of the festival and other such intoxicating rituals allow for the necessary squandering of excess energy outside of work time. By organising transgressions based in ritual and custom, the civil world of work is maintained through the release of excess. To quote:

*Organised transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is. The frequency and the regularity of transgressions do not affect the intangible stability of the prohibition since they are its expected complement (Bataille, 1962: 65).*

In *Raw*, these ritual acts are expressed in the hazing Justine experiences as a freshman at veterinary college. The school itself is a dreary complex of brutalist architecture. The morbid occurrences that take place (surgery, slaughter) are contained within this harsh structure. On her first night, Justine is awoken by a terrorising band of masked figures who subject the freshmen to various levels of humiliation, before guiding them to a sweaty, drug-fuelled basement rave where debauchery runs rampant. In other words, it is a modern Dionysian festival. The harsh rigidity of the school environment is thus alleviated by the feasting that takes place within its subterranean depths. The next day, classes continue with discipline and rigour.

This organised, transgressive rite invites Justine's transgression of a second order; that of the familial. This takes place at the second initiate meeting. Here Justine is forced to break the most forbidden taboo according to her familial law; the eating of meat. Specifically, a raw rabbit kidney chased with a shot of tequila. The freshmen are also doused in animal blood as they chant ritualistic verses. Thus Justine transgresses the prohibition of her familial law in order to become a part of the larger, transgressive collective at play. This initiates Justine's appetite for meat

that will eventually lead to a transgression beyond the organised ritual through the (literal) cannibalisation of its own excesses.

When speaking of organised transgression, Bataille speculates as to whether transgression beyond organised limits is possible. Moreover, what is the role of cannibalism in this order? If transgression were to emerge as a complete override of the taboo, this would be a return to violence without a limited character. It would be absolute animal violence, a character of which cannibalism is a feature (**Bataille, 1962: 35**). Bataille historically interprets this possibility in the death of the sovereign: 'if death prevails over a sovereign whose exalted position might seem to be a guarantee against it, that sense of rupture gets the upper hand and disorder knows no bounds' (**Ibid: 66**). Here Bataille references Roger Callois, a contemporary and friend, who summates the traditional role of the sovereign-as-sacred: 'When social and natural life are summed up in the sacred person of a king, the hour of his death determines the critical instant and loses ritual licence' (**Callois, 1950: 151**). However, as Callois evaluates, the transgressions that occur during this time of disorder are still acts of sacrilege; the breaking of all-too-human rules that define the nature of the transgression itself (**Ibid: 153**). While it loses its organised character, the transgression beyond organised limits still 'has nothing to do with the primary liberty of animal life':

*It opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it* (**Bataille: 1962: 67**).

Transgression can never entirely return to a permanent, primordial stage, although it can reach the limit of its possibility when its sanctioned character is lost. Thus, as Bataille admits, when it comes to transgression as the absolute return to animal violence; 'nothing of the kind is so' (**Bataille, 1962: 35**). Let us now, then, examine the dynamic of Justine's cannibalistic transgression as it appears to breach the allowance of the organised ritual, and her own restricted humanity.

Toward the end of the film, Justine and her sister Alexia (both of whom have been exposed as cannibals) fight like animals on campus during class-time as their peers look on with horror. They have brought the sacred rite of transgression into the hours of profane work. This implies that the two have operated outside the transgressive limit at play in the institution, and the sisters walk away exhausted and bloodied, arms around each other in solidarity with their animalistic behaviour. However, while the sisters may glimpse beyond transgression's ritual character, *Raw's* final moments reveal that cannibalism is a hereditary urge inherited by the women in Justine's family. Her father has the bite marks to show for it. It is in this

way that Justine and Alexia are returned to the organisation of a specifically *feminine* excess within the familial order. *Raw's* treatment of female transgression leaves the law of the father intact. While it is constantly threatened, it is not destroyed. It is only scarred, as if to withstand collateral damage as repressed energy is transgressively released. What once separated Justine from the familial, the consumption of meat, is in fact returned with increased force to the patriarchal condition of repressed female sexuality. From this point on, the women of Justine's family are subordinated to a higher moral order wherein their excesses resume a state of regulation. While the women cannibals of *Raw* appear to be moving toward the radically other, they are rather performing another act of organised transgression in the coming-of-age ritual.

Ducournau's praise of Justine's 'escape from determinism' is an attempt to reject the determinism of transgression itself, of impulsive destruction and indulgence. Ducournau's answer is further repression, to turn from the violence of excess and gain a stable self-identity. But this attitude ignores what is valuable for Bataille; transgression as the sacrificial desire to exit the human condition, but which is precisely *impossible*. The task of transgression is an eternal drive toward the impossible at the *limit* of what is *possible*. For Bataille, this is the impulsive *spirit of sacrifice*; of non-productive expenditure in its formless immediacy that, *for an instant*, is not reducible to the means of production and the human ideal. Therefore, a focus on Bataille's sacrifice illuminates *Raw's* extreme transgressive moments as defined by their losses, not by their gains.

### **The Spirit of Sacrifice and the Sacred Instant**

Bataille exemplifies sacrifice as a sanctioned, transgressive form of excess expenditure in an analysis of the Aztec death cults (**Bataille, 1988: 45**). Therein, the ritual of sacrifice squanders excess resources in devotion to a shared, sacred belief. Sacrifice, wherein victim, executioner, and spectator identify as one in the presence of death, is a mode of non-productive expenditure that delivers one into a sacred continuity with the immediate experience of the collective:

*The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals... This sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one (Bataille: 1962: 22).*

For Bataille, this expenditure that is also a consumption is a means by which beings *communicate* beyond the homogenous structure of

language; 'Consumption is the way in which separate beings communicate. Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite between those who consume intensely' (Bataille, 1988: 58). Consumption delivers beings from their profane identity in the instant of the sacred act that, while serving the persistence of the dominant structure, travels to the limit of its suspension. As Bataille describes; 'there is a specific motive behind every sacrifice: an abundant harvest... or any other logical objective; nonetheless, in one way or another every sacrifice has its cause in the quest for a sacred instant that, for an instant, puts to rest the profane time in which prohibitions guarantee the possibility of life' (Bataille, 1955: 39). While transgression serves the completion of systematic prohibition, it also gives way to an ecstatic temporality of the *instant*. In the sacred instant, profane ground gives way to a totality which necessarily negates the oppressive, hierarchical structure of language and the subject-object relation. The instant is a *moment* of *nothingness* that is immanently non-productive to the profane temporality of capitalist progress; pure waste beyond the utility of work. It is the instantaneous space wherein the self and other are no longer separate as things, but continuous in the shared sacred experience.

But in the modern world of work, communal sacrifice does not emerge as it once did. The interests of the slaughterhouse are concerned with the production of meat for sale, with the language of labour. The sacrificial victim is not identified with in a collective sacred experience. However, as Bataille describes in an essay on the auto-mutilation of Vincent Van Gough, while the custom of sacrifice may be in decline, its spirit remains as a 'drive revealed by inner experience' (Bataille, 1985: 67). For modern humanity, sacrifice is not a 'vulgar figurative sense of the word,' but rather 'the facts with which it has remained unconsciously associated' (Ibid: 67). The assumption that the sacred is no longer present in the modern world of work is a myth; the sacred temporality of the instant persists as that which disrupts the profane order of objectification. The slaughterhouse is of the same sacred order as the temple, but its access has been restricted. The desire for excess expenditure thus fragments into a myriad of forms as the spirit of sacrifice persists. The decline of religious sacrifice in the modern world does not decrease its practise, but rather multiplies the potential forms of its occurrence in the absence of a single, homogenous rite. In lieu of the sacrificial temple, of sacred organisation in the place where blood flows, the irrational desire toward sacrifice erupts in a variety of everyday disorders. It may spontaneously erupt in the most maddening suspensions of profane life. Bataille gives the example of Van Gough cutting off his own ear; a self-mutilation emerging from an excessive inner experience in which the ideals of human consciousness are resisted in the writhing of flesh.

Thus, a look at the violent excesses of *Raw* in the spirit of Bataille's sacrifice may illuminate some redemptive qualities of its transgression. As I will argue here, this is incarnate in Bataille's assessment of eroticism, exemplified by Justine's erotic cannibalism as a moment of sacrificial communication. This plays out in *Raw* amid Justine's simultaneous drive toward pleasure, and drive toward death. In order to illuminate this libidinal sacrifice at play in Bataille and *Raw*, the theory of the death drive requires attention. This is primarily extrapolated in psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein's 'Destruction as a Cause for Coming into Being' (1912), and Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

### **Sacrifice as Death Drive, Death Drive as Eroticism**

In her premier essay, Spielrein defined the reproductive drive as consisting of two paradoxical but inherently entwined components: the drive toward destruction and the drive toward coming into being. Within this configuration, change cannot occur without an element of destruction—from the biological level of two cells merging, to the 'destructive component of the sexual instinct' in the intimate union of two beings (**Spielrein, 1994: 157**). To summarise, Spielrein states:

*Self-preservation is a static drive because it must protect the existing individual from foreign influences; preservation of the species is a 'dynamic' drive that strives for change, the 'resurrection' of the individual in a new form. No change can take place without destruction of the former condition (Spielrein, 1994: 174).*

The recurrent observation of joy in destruction cannot be explained by the reductive evaluations of the ego as only desiring *pleasure*. That is to say, a pleasure in stability and self-preservation. Rather, beings desire to communicate beyond the individual self, to be part of the collective. This requires a dynamic in which the individual must be de-stabilised in a form of death.

This is taken up by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he names the death drive, defining it as the irrational desire to undo the personal psyche. That is to say, it is the desire to return to an earlier state of being undivided by the repressive tendencies that preserve individual stability. The death drive is the repetition toward this satisfaction that, when obstructed by repression, takes the 'backward path... though with no prospect of bringing the process to a conclusion or of being able to reach the goal' (**Freud, 1961: 36**). The drive toward that which is absent, repressed, is thus to return to an earlier state of things that endlessly demands its impossible satisfaction. This necessarily involves the death of the present form, but without any interest in completing this task once and for all. Rather, traumatic actions and events are repeated; one falls

apart and comes together endlessly. The temporal order at play is not one of progress, wherein the self is continuously perfected with a higher purpose in mind, but the perpetual resistance to this ideal. Destructive moments erupt as a chance-becoming in the ongoing drive toward death that has no rational conclusion, but irrationally desires the perpetual return of desire itself in the ongoing cycle of destruction and rebirth. It desires the possibility for more possibilities, to plunge into the creative moment between destruction and rebirth that is filled with pure potential.

It is in this way that Spielrein and Freud speculatively deduce that the reproductive drive in fact strives for the 'destruction of the former condition' in order for change to take place, but without any teleological understanding of reaching an end goal once and for all. For it is not only death that is moved toward, but resurrection. It continuously desires to undo in order to become again. How, then, may one die while still living, live in order to die, die in order to live, again, and again? Bataille responds to such a question by pointing to the simultaneously gratifying and lacerating experience of eroticism.

Eroticism is so because it is in excess of the animal act of procreation; '...eroticism is the sexual activity of man to the extent that it differs from the sexual activity of animals. Human sexual activity is not necessarily erotic but erotic it is whenever it is not rudimentary and purely animal' (Bataille, 1962: 29). Eroticism emerges as an excessive desire that is not only concerned with the sexual act of reproduction, but the psychological implications of human sexuality. Eroticism is thus also informed by the social matrix of taboo and transgression with all its temptations, perversions, and ecstasies. In this way, eroticism is like the death drive in that it exceeds self-preservation, instead seeking a communication that threatens the stability of the individual. For eroticism is a spiritual sacrifice, wherein self and other must sacrifice their *discontinuous* existence as separate beings, in order to come together as *continuous*:

*We cannot imagine the transition from one state to another one basically unlike it without picturing the violence done to the being called into existence through discontinuity... The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives (Bataille, 1962: 17).*

The act of erotic consumption is 'violent' in that it momentarily destroys profane beings in order to communicate at the level of sacred continuity. The nature of eroticism as sacrifice thus led Bataille to declare: 'eroticism is assenting to life even in death' (Bataille, 1962: 11). Eroticism is one of the many ways one may travel to the limit of what is possible in the desire for the impossible: the loss of self to the point of death. In *Raw*, Justine's erotic impulses are inherently linked to an intense consumption that

delivers her into a state of continuity. This specifically takes place in the consumption of human flesh.

After eating meat, Justine develops a full body rash. It is literally an itch she cannot scratch until she feasts upon flesh once more. Her appetite for death is insatiable; it is an ecstasy craved by the body, found in the indulgence of luxury. It becomes apparent that Justine must indulge even further, or rot as her body literally rejects the repression she is attempting to re-instate. Her first taste of human meat occurs when her sister, Alexia, insists on giving Justine a Brazilian wax in a bid to encourage sexual promiscuity. During this procedure there is a freak accident. Alexia's finger is cut off, and Justine cannot resist the urge to taste it. Here Justine indulges her most transgressive desire in the act of incestuous cannibalism. The interplay between the erotic and the eating of meat finds its climax when Justine loses her virginity. During the experience, she bites into her own flesh, overcome by the desire to consume, and be consumed. Repression is discontinuous; Justine's body withers. But sacrifice is continuous; her body is not feeble and decayed, but luxurious and delectable. Here *Raw* actualises the way in which eroticism and sacrifice are inherently intertwined, not only in the spirit of ecstatic communication, but also in the way both necessarily, as Bataille attests, 'reveal the flesh.' As he continues:

*Sacrifice replaces the ordered life of the animal with a blind convulsion of its organs. So also with the erotic convulsion; it gives free rein to extravagant organs whose blind activity goes on beyond the considered will of the lovers. Their considered will is followed by the animal activity of these swollen organs. They are animated by a violence outside the control of reason, swollen to bursting point and suddenly the heart rejoices to yield to the breaking of the storm. The urges of the flesh pass all bounds in the absence of controlling will. Flesh is the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency (Bataille, 1962: 92).*

Bataille has a small passage on cannibalism in *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, speaking to its ritualisation by the 'pious cannibal' who consumes the symbol of Christ's body at mass (Bataille, 1962: 72). But this is a transposition of the flesh. No blood is spilled, no flesh consumed. It is the writhing of bodies, their swollen organs and viscera, that suspend the discontinuity of the individual will and travel to the limit of possible collective continuity. As Marx insisted that revolution start in the coal mines, in the 'bowels of the earth' as in the 'bowels of proletarians,' Bataille too insists on a sacrifice wherein the 'low' impulses of the body are a model for resisting the profanity of individualism, capitalist progress, and accumulation (Bataille, 1985: 35). For Justine, a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism because every erotic act is a sacrifice of profane self-

stability for the divine communication of the flesh. It is to become collectively continuous in the act of individual things coming apart.

Like Callois' king whose death erupts in a collective moment of transgression beyond the master's sanctioned ritual, cannibalistic eroticism is a similarly 'sovereign' experience for Justine beyond the ritual of the institution. But this moment does not last. Transgression may extend beyond the profanity of the human social order, but it does not destroy it once and for all. For transgression is inherent to the structure of human civilisation. There is no extinction of desire, no ultimate satisfaction. In the matrix of transgression, Justine perpetually drives. A few scenes later Justine is found pillaging yet another college party with the fervour of a starved Dionysian who is ultimately unsatisfied with the offerings of the buffet. The death drive is thus depicted with no knowledge of its absolute fulfilment. It is in this way, however, that existence is dynamic and asserts movement. It is the limit that makes transgression possible, that allows for the intensity of the impossible desire to be felt. For Bataille, this is what is relished in the moment of sacrificial potential: the suspension of the profane order in the sacred instant of immediate experience that will continue to threaten the prevailing system again, and again, again...

### **Concluding Remarks**

To conclude, I return to the existing evaluations of *Raw*, and indeed the proclamations of Ducournau herself. When viewed through Bataille's general economy of transgression, the claims that Justine is 'liberated from gender norms' and 'disrupts the patriarchal gaze' do not accurately explain what occurs. For in *Raw*, the institutional transgressive economy, and that of the familial order, complete the prohibition at play. Justine is not ultimately liberated from her profane existence, but rather remains stuck in a system of repression. As Bataille makes clear, transgression is complementary to the taboo; it allows for the release of excess that conserves social functioning in organised acts. However, in Justine's cannibalistic *moments*, she illustrates the importance of transgression for Bataille: that in this system of limitation an impossible, extreme desire to sacrifice the profane order indulges in its potential. For the system's very basis is a tumultuous oscillation between explosion and subservience, the taboo inviting its transgression, the excess of its own making spent 'gloriously or catastrophically.' It breeds the excess that constantly threatens the stability of profane ground. It is in this way that transgression should be understood as an irrational indulgence of an instability inherent to the system's in-built failures, not a dialectical means to eradicate social codes once and for all. For the nothingness of the sacrificial moment resists dialectical conclusions.

It is in the excessive *spirit of sacrifice* that Bataille locates the limit of what is possible for a transgression that extends beyond the sanctioned religious ritual. For sacrifice suspends the profane order of individuality and capitalist progress, giving way to the *sacred instant* of immediate experience. Regarding Duournau's rejection of the notion that sexuality is like 'losing something,' I conversely respond with affirmation. To Bataille, eroticism *is* to lose oneself. Not to be treated as an object, but to lose one's profane status *as* an object, thus predicating a sacrifice in order to communicate as a continuous being. Eroticism exemplifies the spirit of sacrifice as that which cannot be explained as static self-preservation, but rather an ecstatic self-destruction that gives way to collective communication. This is where primeval, non-human desire finds itself; not in its absolute fulfilment, but in its *drive*. In the impulse itself with no end point once and for all, but the eternal return of things coming together and falling apart. It is this recurring, sacred instant of lived experience that allows for the exuberance of death in the utmost pleasures of life.

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