THE INTOXICATION OF DESTRUCTION

Georges Bataille's Economy of Expenditure and Sovereignty in Visual Cultures

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces operations of destruction in visual cultures, describing these operations as they manifest in films and visual art practices. Beginning with Georges Bataille's general economy of energy, as it appears in *The Accursed Share*, this thesis deploys the concept of the simulacrum to argue that the operations of destructions in visual cultures produce particular forms of sovereign experience. It argues that while the object of expenditure can only be unique to each site of sovereign experience, appearance of an operation of destruction that produces the possibility of that sovereign experience remains consistent.

Bataille's sovereignty cannot be specified in relation to either the individual or the universal, because, as Bataille demonstrates, sites of sovereign expenditure are temporally, materially and culturally specific, unable to be repeated without differentiation, and unable to be expressed fully after the fact.

In order to argue this position, I deploy Bataille's economics of destruction which operates within the specific realm of visual cultural theory. Orientations derived from Bataille's work are positioned alongside the work of other theorists, and in particular, Pierre Klossowski and Gilles Deleuze, to produce a unique theoretical basis for the operation of art in culture. The thesis offers a theoretical development in the problem of representation in Bataille's work in the form of the simulacrum after Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*.

Each chapter is paired with another in a conceptual inversion that locates destructions in film, screen media and visual art practices. The thesis engages with operations of destruction in architecture, human extinction, identity and communication (through the performance of the artist and community in film), the physicality of destruction in the body and in sexuality, and finally, the order of destruction in the apparent dematerialisation of the image in digital culture.

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[Figure 1: Detail of Assyrian relief of lion-hunting, housed at the British Museum, London.]

THE INTOXICATION OF DESTRUCTION:
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INTRODUCTION

The Intoxication of Destruction[1]:

The General Economy of Expenditure in Visual Cultures

We can ignore or forget the fact that the ground we live on is little other than a field of multiple destructions[2]

[Figure 2: Final destruction of Earth (New York) in *Knowing* (Alex Proyas, 2009)]

Bataille presents his theory of the general economy of energy in the physical world as operating through an object of waste and expenditure. The focus of writing on the general economy of expenditure since Bataille has overwhelmingly been on the specificity of where such an object of expenditure might lie. It cannot be specified in relation to either the individual or the universal, because, as Bataille demonstrates, sites of expenditure are temporally, materially and culturally specific, unable to be repeated without differentiation, and unable to be expressed fully after the fact.[3] The object of expenditure, therefore, cannot be identified, as it is unique to each iteration of its occurrence. However, what can be theorised, is the constitution and orientation of the operation through which nonproductive expenditure could potentially be achieved. The object of expenditure itself can only be discussed in a very general sense, as can be read in *The Accursed Share*, where Bataille relates objects of

[1] The title of this thesis is taken from: Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 47, in which he lists "intoxication in destruction" as one of the intoxications that produces art.
[2] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 23.
[3] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 19 – this is the central argument of the first volume of the text. Bataille traces the general economy and sites of expenditure through various cultural phenomena, without being able to pinpoint a universal circumstance where nonproductive expenditure would occur.

expenditure through the operations (or "the Three Luxuries of Nature") of "Eating, Death and Sexual Reproduction."[4]

Bataille designates the three operations of destruction as physical operations that punctuate the biological functions of all animals (but which, particularly in humans) exceed that biological function. In this thesis, however, I present an argument for another species of operation that has the potential to produce sovereignty in the experience of technology of and material of cultural images. This aesthetic approach to the production of sovereignty is inspired by Julia Kristeva's designation of the sovereign potential in creative writing in the essay "Bataille, Experience and Practice". In this essay, Kristeva argues that while Bataille's concept of sovereignty might not free political and theoretical approaches from Hegelian dialectics, as "the transposition of the "sovereign operation" in language demands a *literature*, not a philosophy."[5] Where sovereignty is taken as a political position in previous approaches to Bataille's work, Kristeva argues that it should instead be considered to operate aesthetically, within the "sovereign subject" of literature. It is not a leap, then to extend the poetry of sovereignty from the subject of literature to another aesthetic operation, that of the experience of visual cultures. However, where Kristeva locates the experience of sovereignty within the "sovereign subject" of literature, I locate the potential for sovereign experience within the operation of interactions with visual cultures, and these include the observation of visual cultures, production of visual cultures and the material and technological contexts within which visual cultures operate.[6]

Therefore, this thesis uses the Bataillean concept of sovereignty, not as a position, but as an experience that has the potential to be produced by an operation of expenditure.[7] I argue, therefore that the aesthetic experience inspired by, produced in concert with and bound to the material and technology of the production of visual cultures is an operation that has the potential to produce a sovereign experience. The operation of the production of sovereignty is composed as a methodology for visual

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[4] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 33.
[5] Kristeva, "Bataille, Experience and Practice," 246.
[6] Kristeva, "Bataille, Experience and Practice," 247.
[7] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 317. In the essay "From a Restricted to General Economy," Derrida argues that Bataille's sovereignty is not a position, but an operation.

analysis, and this is achieved by approaching aesthetics through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's simulacrum.

The operation through which expenditure is achieved is destruction (the destruction of form and energetic potentiality). By definition, resources must be consumed and wasted in order to experience expenditure. Sovereignty, as an experiential potentiality that lies within the process of expenditure can only be accessible through nonproductive, or sacrificial waste and destruction, as a transgression of utilitarian forms.[8] The operation of producing the sovereign experience is linked to the sacred, primarily because in social life as it is characterised by organised religion, the sacred (particularly before Enlightenment and industrial modernity) is the primary outlet for the nonproductive expenditure of energy in human culture. The (re)introduction of culture reproduces the ideas and worlds of artists, writers, composers, and so forth, is also the introduction of the possibility of a secular experience of sovereignty, as where "life *beyond utility*" was once located (and controlled) by religious intervention, in secular cultures, it may appear in a heterogeneous range of cultural interventions, specific to the nexus of experience that circulates around each bodily agency.[9]

Art, in all forms has often been linked to the various incarnations, experiences and positions in relation to the notion of sovereignty.[10] As Bataille writes in *The Cradle of Humanity*, the desire for an experience free from the utility of survival, through the nonproductive expenditure of energy appears in the impulse to represent a thought, idea or experience to other bodies and to make it manifest in the world, separate from one's own agency, in other words, the impulse to immortality, exists in the birth of art.[11] The will to continue to live beyond the death of the body betrays the simultaneous will to exclude others from the same experience, rarity and ecstatic value are central to the possibility of the sovereign experience of art. The death, or non-existence (and the implied receptivity) of other bodies as the continuity of life in general gives the artist the singularity of her existence, and her ideas.[12] In Werner Herzog's film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, we see this expression of sovereign singularity

[8] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 198.
[9] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 198.
[10] Sovereignty is defined and explored in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis.
[11] Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity*, 101.
[12] The relational dialectic between the individual experience of discontinuous physical life, and the continuity of life in general can be found here: Bataille, *Erotism*, 12-13.

most clearly represented by the repeated palm-print on a rock near the entrance to the main site of the Chauvet cave, it is a distinctive, human signature that says, "I was here" (and others were not). This death is the birth of art.

The evolution of static communities of people (often referred to as the birth of civilisation) is evidenced first by a "Death Pit" (a static burial site dated at 5800-5600BCE) followed closely by the beginnings of architecture, and later the appearance of "public buildings" (c.4000BCE) in Mesopotamia.[13] This development is the next stage in the evolution of the imposition of law and prohibition on groups of human bodies, as the architectural form of "public buildings" produces a semiotics of lived space for the first time. The first appearance of writing closely followed the appearance of public buildings (first evidence of writing can be found in Uruk (southern Mesopotamia, modern Iraq) from 3800BCE.[14] The appearance of social order, or "civilisation" is also the evolution of the political will to impose prohibitions on the bodies and behaviours of those who live within it. This imposition is largely achieved through the expression of laws in the semiotic systems of visual cultures, in this case, the public buildings of Uruk, an ancient city that contains the earliest evidence of complex civilisation, and is also the first evidence of social and political manipulation. Early writing appeared as a direct result of the complexity of the economic and administrative activities that occurred in Uruk, which had a relatively large population, and traded extensively with surrounding areas.[15] Writing was developed as a way to keep track of economic activities and was developed to provide records for reference and exchange, including the recording of taxes, and subsequently, laws that applied to the large population.[16] The use of writing to further solidify social rules and codes that were once communal agreements, along with the exclusion of the (majority) illiterate from specialised activities in the administration of cities (political, accounting, legal, historical and religious activities) came soon after. The semiotics of visual representations were at that stage used primarily to further the political and social agendas of the day. Early examples of manipulation of the popular will and opinion through the use of specific visual representations included: Rameses II (still popularly referred to as Rameses the

[13] Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey*, 48.
[14] Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey*, 49.
[15] Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey*, 49.
[16] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 244. In this section of the essay, Benjamin describes nonviolent collective agreements transition into the imposition of law (and social organisation) through the inscription of the law (necessitated by the growth of a large group of people into a social order).

Great, as testament to the effectiveness of his campaign) whose extended projects to complete and restore public buildings in his own honour led to his unique place in Egyptian archaeology[17] and Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), another pharaoh who changed the religion of Ancient Egypt to the first known example of monotheism (he worshiped only the sun, Aten) and relocated the Egyptian capital to a site commonly known as El-Armana for the duration of his reign, and in doing so, influenced the style and practice of art and architecture (and its location) to reflect these changes.[18]

The ability to read and write remained the privilege of the very few until the invention of the technology of the printing press.[19] The devaluation (reduced exchange value) of books, in time, made them more accessible to more people, in subsequently, a greater number of the population learned to read, until "a culture based on the printed book" appeared.[20] Through changes and specialisations of industry, along with the evolution of mechanisation (and automation) education that included literacy became a standardised requirement to function in (Western) society, and essential to the performance of the majority of occupations. This made the once quasi-mystical ability to read mundane, and decidedly utilitarian. It devalued the skill of literacy along with the notion of privileged access to it.

The relative democratisation of the ability to read and write also meant that visual cultures were no longer required, to the same extent, for their political and social function. Conveying the mythologies of state and religious apparatuses – if people are able to read, then using visual representations to convey ideas about social order become less necessary. Medieval (particularly Western European, and within that context, Catholic) examples of the torture of sinners (and Jesus) give way to the Renaissance studies of form (and bloodlessness) and finally to the secularisation of visual arts. This is the point at which visual arts return to the cave (of forgotten dreams) in that visual representation, somewhat freed from the yoke of political and religious control, are once again able to convey phantom expressions of ideas, experiences and the sovereignty of the artist as an image that the artist wants to leave in the world after their death. Literature, visual arts, and other forms of cultural

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[17] Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 334-335.
[18] Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 18.
[19] McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 2.
[20] McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 2.

expression again convey the desire for immortality, and immortality, as a desire, is an expression of the knowledge of, and intimacy with death.

[Figure 3: Body of Christ after crucifixion, detail of fresco, San Maurizio al Monastero Maggiore, Milan.]

Each of these developments in the evolution of images produced by humans have a relationship with death, and each constitute the destruction of a system of representation, to be replaced by a new one. Underlying them are two intensive operations that constitute the experience of sovereign expenditure. The first is described by Bataille's general economy of energy, where actions and activities where nonproductive expenditure of energy outweighs the productivity, and the nonproductive is constituted by the waste of valuable resources, as the mode of expenditure must have a value to be wasted, and so at each point of the democratisation of culture (making it more accessible to more people) the mode of expression changes to maintain the possibility of the sacrifice of value in expenditure. The other operation is the recognition of the experience of an individual's sense of agency as distinct from other living bodies. This experience of discontinuous agency, particular to each individual body is known to be discontinuous (knowledge of imminent death) within the context of the continuity of life in general.[21] Our

[21] Bataille, *Erotism*, 14-15.

experience in the world is unrepresentable, and we know that we must die, and in that knowledge, we seek to leave something of ourselves in the world after us (and we do this in a variety of material forms, including reproduction, writing and art). We leave something to say (like the palm-print) "I was here."

[Figure 4: Palm-prints made by a single person (six-feet tall with a slightly crooked little finger) as shown in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*.]

In the transcription of Bataille's lectures on the Lascaux caves, an incident was recorded that perfectly demonstrates the fragility and volatility of material form in the face of the destructive forces of climate, and more importantly, the whims of humanity. Bataille attempted to present a film which (according to the notes accompanying *The Cradle of Humanity* volume) was a re-enactment of the discovery of the Lascaux caves and was therefore intended to give his audience access to images of the caves themselves, but the film recording has not survived as long as the decaying images on the cave surface.[22] The section of the film with the relevant images of the caves had been either stolen or the volatility of the chemical composition of the filmic image had decayed to the point where the relevant section of the film could no longer be projected. Bataille's exasperation with the inevitability of this decay is apparent when he announces in relation to the film that "one of its former users seems to have taken such an interest in it that he has absconded with the most significant part... my slide

[22] Note by Gallimard (French Edition Publisher), *Cradle of Humanity*, 201.

presentation afterward will, I hope remedy the mutilation of the film."[23] Since Bataille's presentation, the film in question appears to have been lost to history entirely, with the editors of *The Cradle of Humanity* volume writing that the film shown remains unknown, including in the notes for the chapter that "we do not know which film was projected on this occasion."[24] In the lecture, Bataille recounts the story of the discovery of the Lascaux caves in 1940. When the caves are discovered, decay accelerated exponentially and they are immediately placed in danger of being destroyed.[25] The regulation and restriction of access to the caves must take place to inhibit this destruction process but it has inevitably begun, as humans erode the Earth and art alike. Bataille writes that entering the cave has the effect of being "seized by a feeling of fabulous wealth."[26] The economy of destruction gives value to the experience of visual cultures.

Having been unable to screen the damaged film, according to the publication of the lecture, Bataille describes the admittance process for visiting the caves in the 1950s, which at the time, were similar to the bureaucratic processes of attending a cinema or art gallery. There was a system of admittance that includes a ticketing office, and restrictions placed on the visitors that control when and for how long they may view the images on the cave walls. Since 1963, there has been no public access to the Lascaux caves at all, as "any human presence to the caves is regarded as potentially destructive."[27] Copies of the cave paintings (named "Lascaux 2") were produced (in 1983) in an accessible cave nearby (200 metres away in Montignac) bypassing the effect of humans depleting the finite forms of the cave material entirely. Ironically, as "Lascaux 2" is situated so close to Lascaux, the original cave paintings have continued to degrade in response to the proximity of the visitors. Alternatively, if a potential visitor is disinclined to travel to Lascaux to view a "facsimile" of the cave, it is possible to explore the images of the cave walls thoroughly with the use of the Lascaux Caves highly produced, interactive information website about the cave paintings.[28] Despite the relative freedom of access to the caves that Bataille enjoyed in the 1950s, he describes them as "not the best conditions to be introduced to the world of the first

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[23] Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 92.
[24] Note by Gallimard (French Edition Publisher), *Cradle of Humanity*, 201.
[25] Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 96.
[26] Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 97.
[27] Lichfield, "Closed to the public, but Sarkozy gains access to threatened cave art."
[28] Lascaux Caves website.

men."[29] But these bureaucratic, measured conditions that he endures in order to view the caves, are, in fact, the perfect way of viewing them as they reflect the conditions with which we order all of our lives, and our interactions with culture, which are framed in terms of preservation. Because the caves are fragile, access to them is carefully measured out and restricted to individuals who have gained specific positions of privilege, to prolong the time until the cave images are destroyed.[30]

GEORGES BATAILLE'S GENERAL ECONOMY

> Destruction (even gratuitous) is always ambiguous, since it is the inverse figure of productive, and falls under the objection that in order to destroy, it is first necessary to have produced, to which Bataille is able to oppose only the sun.[31]

In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille defines an economic model for the consumption of energy between objects and organisms, "the movement of energy on the globe," that operates around a first principle of waste.[32] He presents the reader with a form of hyper-macro economics, a political economy constituted beyond (but including) financial exchange, or the exchange of forces in the particular or singular, and that instead considers the behaviour of currents of energy on the surface of the planet (and arguably the physical universe). Bataille acknowledges that he "did not consider the facts the way qualified economists do" but instead, seeks to compose a theory of the movement and exchange of energy that transcends disciplinary specificity, whilst also engaging with, or implicating the work of almost every area of study (each of the sciences, humanities, art, religion, politics and economics).[33] This approach comes from Bataille's ambitious hope that an economics of energy predicated on expenditure might "hold the key to all the problems posed by every discipline concerned with the movement of energy on the earth."[34] This macroeconomics on such a grand scale becomes one that implies "the excess of energy translated into the effervescence of life."[35] The potential specificity of this operation, however, is more difficult for Bataille to define, as in this sense, expenditure itself contains a rejection or a refusal of specifics in general. Instead of uncovering sites of expenditure through the dull

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[29] Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 94.
[30] Lichfield, "Closed to the public, but Sarkozy gains access to threatened cave art."
[31] Baudrillard, "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," 195 (second footnote).
[32] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 20.
[33] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 9.
[34] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 10.
[35] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 10.

processes of "the manufacture of a hat or a chair," Bataille embarks upon "tracing the exhausting detours of exuberance through eating, death and sexual reproduction."[36]

Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Joseph Goux have both critiqued Bataille's general economy in relation to its reliance on the notion of nonproductive expenditure. Jean Baudrillard writes that Bataille's economic principle suffers from a misreading of Marcel Mauss' work on potlatch, and that in fact, it is not the gift, but the "counter-gift" that produces the rivalry between bodies.[37] Luxurious expenditure, for Baudrillard, has a very specific goal of producing a rivalry in social relations, where one party is forced to produce a counter-gift of greater value in response to the original gift given. However, in this analysis, Baudrillard does not take into account the preface to the first volume of *Accursed Share*, where Bataille sets up the dialectic between productive and nonproductive expenditure as a relational dialectic.[38] Bataille acknowledges that there is no form of expenditure that is entirely productive or nonproductive, but every expenditure of energy in the world is comprised of both these species.[39] Having made this argument, *The Accursed Share* proceeds by giving examples of the object of expenditure, where nonproductive expenditure appears to outweigh productive expenditure in relation to social, cultural, political or economic gain.

Bataille's general economy is a theoretical model that is impossible to approach in an uncompromising way. The principle of the general economy is that the primary object is nonproductive expenditure, which, as Bataille acknowledges, cannot exist without the spectre or possibility of productivity.[40] Bataille introduces the distinction between productive and nonproductive expenditures of energy, with the latter being the object of the general economy.[41] However, as Bataille also writes, these positions are not absolute, and while they must be defined as opposing one another, specific events of expenditure are never either productive or nonproductive entirely, but rather, exist on a spectrum of productivity, whilst always being infected by the possibility of the other.[42]

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[36] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 13.
[37] Baudrillard, "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," 193.
[38] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 12.
[39] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 12.
[40] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 12.
[41] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 12.
[42] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 12.

In Baudrillard's critique of Bataille's general economy, this acknowledgement of the impossibility of absolute productivity or nonproductivity in the expenditure of energy is overlooked. As mentioned above, Baudrillard writes that Bataille misappropriates Mauss' work[43] on gift economies, and the related processes of sacrificial expenditure in Aztec culture as these exchanges contain a residual productive value, even as they appear as nonproductive expenditure.[44] The Aztecs sacrifice people in order to encourage the sun to continue to nourish their crops, and the use-value of obligation in potlatch constitutes a productive remainder. This is further confirmed in the examples of expenditure given by Bataille in the section "Laws of General Economy" where "The Three Luxuries of Nature" are given as eating, sexual activity and death.[45] All three of these examples of energetic expenditure have a productive aspect, but the nonproductive expenditure inherent in each of them far outweighs residual productivity, or utility. After Bataille's nonproductive expenditure, Baudrillard suggests a reconfiguration where the object of expenditure is not the destruction of energy in excess, but rivalry. He describes Mauss' potlatch as an example of "an incessant process of challenge" and in doing so, aligns himself with a Platonic form of representational hierarchy.[46]

In his critique of Bataille's general economy, Jean-Joseph Goux writes:

> The religious or artistic domain is not a simple superstructure of vague whims built on the economic infrastructure: it is itself economic, in the sense of a general economics founded on the expenditure of excess, on the unproductive and ecstatic consumption of the surplus, through which the human being experiences the ultimate meaning of existence.[47]

The nature, site, or how such an experience may be constituted is explored by Bataille as an ever-present pre-occupation with changing and numerous examples, but was not definitively formulated. Clearly, the constitution of an experience of expenditure – the sovereign experience – is particular to the body or agency that experiences it, but that transience is not the problem in Bataille's oeuvre. The constitution of embodied

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[43] Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. This is the publication to which Baudrillard refers, and Bataille would have read in an earlier French version, published in 1925, and originally titled "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques."
[44] Baudrillard, "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," 193.
[45] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 33.
[46] Baudrillard, "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," 193.
[47] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 197.

experience is compatible with the dissolution of subjectivity, and the death of the self in the risk of communication. However, Bataille's oeuvre variously locates sovereign expenditure in physical experience, and the viewing of or experience of art, literature, religion and architecture. Bataille distinguishes between these experiences as events and objects of culture, but neglects the operations that bring them about as different kinds of sites of sovereignty.

It is certain that Bataille fails to predict the developments that have led to the contemporary forms of Western Capitalism.[48] As Goux writes, "No society has 'wasted' as much as contemporary capitalism" and this is obviously the case.[49] What Goux fails to recognise, however, is that Bataille's principle of nonproductive expenditure is not directly relatable to the phenomenon of material waste in contemporary consumer culture. Bataille's distinction between the restricted economy (of industrial capitalism) and the general economy of energy demonstrates the difference between the encouragement of waste and usage for a specific, economic purpose (further production) and nonproductive expenditure of energy, which, can include, but is not limited to the waste of consumable material.[50] The potential for nonproductive expenditure lies in many forms of commercially consumed material, and this operates alongside the productive waste of resources that inspires the exponential acceleration of the capitalist economy. Goux reiterates Baudrillard's critique of Bataille's distinction between productive and nonproductive expenditure in relation to the economically productive potential and specificity of waste. He writes, in relation to the designation of expenditure, "it is in truth impossible to separate productive consumption from unproductive squandering."[51] Like Baudrillard, Goux understands Bataille's general economy as an absolute position of one or the other, rather than allowing for the possibility of recuperating the nonproductive from the apparently productive expenditure of energy, and vice versa.

Goux compares Bataille's general economy to the neo-liberal political economist George Gilder, who, in the 1980s, according to Goux, argued for the essential

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[48] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 207.
[49] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 199.
[50] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 25.
[51] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 208.

morality of capitalism as an advanced form of potlatch.[52] Goux's account of Gilder's work describes the industries of venture capitalism and investment banking as forms of potlatch (in reference to Mauss but not Bataille) where the gift (investment of money in a company, for example) is given without a guarantee of return (the possibility of not making one's money back).[53] Goux, after Gilder, relocates the object of Bataille's general economy away from nonproductive expenditure to the position of risk.[54] The investment banker risks (his client's) energy for the potential (but by no means guaranteed) return.[55] Thus, Bataille's general economy evolves into a position that *The Accursed Share* explicitly attempts to avoid, that of a model of bourgeois economics.[56] It becomes essential to distinguish Bataille's general economy from Gilder's position of investment banker as potlatch in the contemporary political and economic context.

Ultimately, though, Bataille's general economy, despite superficial appearances to the contrary is not so easily aligned with postmodern, or contemporary capitalism, and may very well be its antithesis. Goux writes that "Bataille did not imagine the paradoxical situation of post-industrial capitalism where only the appeal to compete infinitely in unproductive consumption... allows for the development of production."[57] This statement reveals the key distinction between Goux's description of Gilder and Bataille. In the designation of unproductive consumption inspiring further production, Goux shows that the consumption in the contemporary capitalist economy remains tied to the restricted economy of production and consumption, where the consumption itself maybe unproductive, but it produces the requirement for further production. Goux writes that contemporary capitalism enlists a spectacular aspect to consumption culture that undermines the material object to be consumed, thereby producing "an ideology of consumption that seems to transgress utility-value."[58] While the utility-value, or use-value may be transgressed for the consumer of the material

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[52] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 200.
[53] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 200-201.
[54] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 201.
[55] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 201.
[56] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 198. In this section, Bataille designates the bourgeois position as the one that is absolutely excluded from the possibility of sovereign experience. Echoing Friedrich Nietzsche's Prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "It is not your sin, but your moderation that cries to Heaven, your very meanness in sinning cries to Heaven!" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 4. Hollingdale Translation.) Bataille writes that the bourgeois are excluded from sovereignty because of their conformist "servility" that they may only enjoy something in a "furtive" manner.
[57] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 207.
[58] Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," 207.

object, the continued use-value of the product in the further accumulation of capital for those who produce it remains, and in fact, accelerates with this transgression.

Writing in 2008, Scott Wilson summarises Bataille's description of the "puritan" mode of capitalism (the avoidance of unproductive waste) that was borne from the horror of (Indigenous American) cultural practices:

> Western society, horrified at the immorality of the waste, uselessness and violence of archaic festive practices, has individuated and multiplied consumption in the second sense in order to utilise, rationally and morally, its excess.[59]

The progression, in the U.S. in particular, from industrial capitalism, to "supercapitalism" that supersedes governmental processes.[60] With reference to Goux's critique of Bataille's General Economy, Wilson writes that supercapitalism is characterised by an increased blurring between the categories of restricted and general economies, particularly in relation to the consumption and destruction of resources not previously so available for such absolute use, for example the human resource of the (short-term contract) employee in a position similar to the "heterogeneity of the warrior."[61] The stateless and companyless worker is contracted in a mode akin to "pure expenditure," however, the continued recuperation of material and monetary profit from this process (by the company and to a less reliable extent, for the worker in question) therefore remains within the Bataillean restricted economic system.[62]

Productive and nonproductive forms of expenditure are distinct but not discrete modes of expenditure, often found within the same object or experience, whilst they remain "inadequate" as a descriptor for the economic processes in question.[63] There is an increased blurring between these once apparently distinct categories Bataille defined as the restricted and general economies, but ultimately the distinction finally resides in the individual or agent's experience of material culture.[64] Rather than restricting the general economy to the discussion of political economy, I deploy Bataille's general economy in discussions of expenditure and destruction in visual cultures. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille uses contemporary political, economic and

[59] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 22.
[60] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 17.
[61] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 35.
[62] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 35.
[63] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 22.
[64] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 24.

cultural examples, alongside historical and non-Western cultural phenomena to present the reader with a universal system of energetic exchange. That theoretical constructs he describes through his observation of Western capitalist political economics no longer entirely fit current modes of capitalism, or supercapitalism, is not surprising. However, what remains relevant from *The Accursed Share* is the principle of the expenditure of energy itself, and whether it operates in a manner heterogeneous to, or co-opted within a capitalist economic model, there is always the potential for a nonproductive element of expenditure that lies in the experience of events by the discontinuous agent.

ECONOMIES OF EXPENDITURE AND DESTRUCTION IN VISUAL CULTURES

Bang Bang Bang
The Bigger the Better[65]

[Figure 5: Big Ben explodes in *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2005).]

While the use of Bataille's general economy in relation to operations of destruction and the experience of sovereignty is uncommon in the discussion of visual cultures, it is, however, not without precedent. An analysis of Bataille's theory of sovereignty with reference to visual cultures would require access to his complete works in their original format, and therefore could only be achieved by a scholar with access to the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and a mastery of French, neither of which I have. For this reason, references to secondary material that approaches Bataille's work are limited to those that have been published or translated into English. I am aware that there are many publications on Bataille's work in French, as well as numerous other languages which are untranslated and therefore, they do not appear here. The

[65] Yeah Yeah Yeahs, "Bang," *Yeah Yeah Yeahs.*

recently published monograph *Toward an Aesthetic Sovereignty: Georges Bataille's Theory of Art and Literature* (Kevin Kennedy, 2013) apparently fulfils the purpose of tracing Bataille's aesthetic use of the term "sovereignty" in relation to his studies of art and literature, and therefore this is not what I offer here.[66] Instead, I use the economy of destruction, as it appears in *The Accursed Share* as a point of departure in the identification and analysis of species of the operation of destruction in contemporary visual cultures.

It is often noted about Bataille's work that his areas of enquiry transcend disciplinary structures and limitations, making his ideas carry an aura of the heterogeneous, the broadly applicable refusal of categorisation (and potentially open to the charge of dilettantism).[67] However, while many scholars have noted what Leslie Ann Boldt-Irons summarises that:

> His philosophical writings are considered to occupy a frontier position, in that they put into question philosophy's tendency to exclude or "lock out" that which it considers to be "short of" or "outside of" its horizon.[68]

Despite this acknowledgement, few writers who engage with Bataille's legacy have exploited the potentiality inherent in such a disregard for the structure of academic discipline. Instead, most attempt to remain faithful to either their conception of Bataille's work, or to recuperate Bataille's oeuvre back into the operations of an academic discipline. Most writing that relates Georges Bataille's work to visual cultures constitute a reading of various other forms of culture through Bataille's literature (in particular, *The Story of the Eye*).[69] In this thesis, I have chosen to approach visual cultures through Bataille's economy of energy as a methodology, where the experience of sovereignty, constituted by operations of destruction and difference has the potential to catalyse this. Many scholars have sought to position Bataille in relation to the context of twentieth century French philosophy, particularly in comparison to (variously) Jean-Paul Sartre, André Breton, Simone de Beauvoir and his relationship

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[66] This recently published monograph is not widely available or accessible (and has not yet been acquired by any library that I have access to, including The British Library) at the time of writing. I have requested a copy of this publication from the publisher, but have not yet received it, and therefore, rely upon the publisher's promotional material regarding its content.

[67] Scholars that have observed this include (but are not limited to): Leslie Ann Boldt-Irons, introduction to *On Bataille*, Allan Stoekl, introduction to *Visions of* Excess, Carolyn Bailey Gill, introduction to *Writing the Sacred* and Richard White, "Bataille on Lascaux".

[68] Boldt-Irons, introduction to *On Bataille*, 34.

[69] For examples of this, see: Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Bataille in the Street," Donald L Anderson, "Georges Bataille: the Globular and the Cross" and most notably, Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille*.

with excommunicated surrealists.[70] Bataille is also often located in relation to the mostly French scholars (primarily postmodern cultural theorists) including Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag who have been credited with reintroducing him to broader scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s.[71] Bataille is additionally contextualised in relation to his friend Maurice Blanchot (usually along with other similar writers) and several books have been published in the nexus between their relationship and literature.[72]

Other writers engage in transdisciplinary approaches to Bataille's work in the following ways: In *Ecce Monstrum*, Jeremy Biles relates Bataille's early designation of formlessness (also taken up by Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain Bois in *Formless: A User's Guide*, 1997) to the monstrous, and the "conjunction of the monstrous and the sacred" where the monster appears as a portent of (the danger of) divinity.[73] Allan Stoekl's book *Bataille's Peak* deploys Bataille's general economy in yet another disciplinary area in the cultural adaptation and approaches to the global environment and sustainability. He uses the Bataillean model of the affirmation of destruction and waste in order to analyse the contemporary political nexus between religion and energy.[74] Amy Hollywood and Peter Tracey Connor primarily approach Bataille's work through the lens of the Christian theology that Bataille both exploited and despised. Hollywood addresses Bataille's approach to mysticism, particularly in relation to the feminine in Christian religious history and practice and exploits the characteristically adaptable and transdisciplinary aspects of his work.[75] In the book *Sensible Ecstasy*, Hollywood writes on Bataille alongside Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray and the Medieval writer and mystic Angela of Foligno (who Bataille also wrote on) to explore the self-loss inherent in the (transgressive event of) the festival.[76] Connor also locates Bataille's writing within the context of religious practices, but writes that Bataille's work in other areas is informed

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[70] This contextual positioning appears in scholarly introductions to Bataille's work, including (but not limited to): Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, and Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*.
[71] This contextual positioning also appears in works, including (but not limited to): Michèle Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille* and Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar*.
[72] Including (but not limited to): Leslie Hill, *Writing at the Limit*, Gerald L Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, Allan Stoekl, *Politics, Writing, Mutilation*, Jeremy Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*, Patrick Ffrench, *After Bataille*, and Eleanor Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise*.
[73] Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*, 3.
[74] Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak*, xiv.
[75] Hollywood, "Bataille and Mysticism: A Dazzling Dissolution," 74.
[76] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 26.

by, or through the lens of his experiences of mysticism and meditation.[77] In contrast, Nick Land's notorious *A Thirst for Annihilation* sees fit to position Bataille in the context of a brief history of (philosophically) nearly everything, and Deleuze and Guattari's works are fortunate enough to be some of the very few books mentioned in the bibliography. Land writes from the perspective of the philosophical discipline, and rarely engages with the anthropological in Bataille's work, explicitly abandoning the empathy of his writing in the process.

Given this, I have sought to disorient Bataille's work from this position in relation to other French theorists, and instead present a use of Bataille's economy of expenditure alongside the work of Gilles Deleuze, which might, at least at first, appear to be an antagonistic pairing. The relationship between the work of Deleuze and Bataille is not obvious, however it has been approached by some writers, including Steven Shaviro, Nick Land, Patricia MacCormack, and Fred Botting and Scott Wilson. Notably, with the exception of Nick Land, each of these writers combine the ideas of Deleuze and Bataille on a cinematic surface. In *The Cinematic Body*, Shaviro deploys Bataille alongside Deleuze (and the combined works of Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari) to offer alternative ways to consider embodied on-screen subjectivity and spectatorship outside of traditional Psychoanalytic modalities.[78] Patricia MacCormack refers to Bataille's writing on eroticism along with Deleuze and Guattari in her designation of "cinesexuality" as active forms of desire between the flesh of the spectator and the screen.[79] Fred Botting and Scott Wilson in *Bataille* present an analysis of Bataille's work through the context of not only Bataille's moment in French thought, but the identify a natural progression from Bataille and Lacan to Deleuze and Guattari through theories of affect, and subsequently explore Bataille's key notions through a variety of cultural examples, including several from Hollywood cinema.[80] While, in this thesis, I am not bound solely to cinematic examples, my writing is influenced by the discipline of film theory and philosophy. I believe it is particularly appropriate to write about visual cultures from this perspective, as film theory has borrowed from myriad other disciplines in order to construct itself, including art theory, architectural theory and cultural theory as well as philosophy, all of which I engage with.

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[77] Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, 6.
[78] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 25.
[79] MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, 89.
[80] Botting and Wilson, *Bataille*, 10.

The theoretical model for understanding destruction as the primary function of production, experience and conservation of visual cultures that I present in this thesis is underpinned by the work of Bataille. In order to further elaborate on this position, I deploy Bataille's general economy of energy, which, as discussed above, revolves around waste and expenditure within the specific realm of visual cultural theory. While my research into Bataille's work is not exhaustive, central orientations from his work operate alongside the writing of other twentieth century French theorists, and in particular, Pierre Klossowski and Gilles Deleuze to produce a unique if somewhat idiosyncratic theoretical basis for the operation of art in human culture based on Bataille's economics of destruction.

I offer a theoretical development in the problem of representation in Bataille's work in the form of the simulacrum. Klossowski, in writing on Bataille's mode of presentation and communication, first identified the simulacrum (of communication) in his work "the simulacrum is unable to establish the exchange between one mind or another, nor permit the passage from one thought to another."[81] Bataille's insistence of the imperfection of communication, particularly through language, where the speaker risks her monist integrity to speak, and in doing so, can be assured that the listener will misunderstand her intention, and see in it her own. Klossowski's simulacrum is an element of language that disrupts the exchange of ideas between minds, by calling into question the clarity of their understanding of one another through the misrecognition of concepts (and each communicator's individual understanding of and experience with words used to convey those concepts).[82] In writing on the simulacra in the history of visual art analysis, Michael Camille refers to Plato's description of sculptors adapting the proportions of large-scale works to accommodate the gaze of a viewer.[83] The pre-modern role of the simulacrum is as a trick of perspective, used to make an image appear accurate and lifelike for the benefit of the viewer, while the actual dimensions of the sculpture are less like their object-referent. From this point, the term simulacrum remained a derogatory description of artwork that appeared unskilled, and of "false idolatry" throughout pre-modern visual art analysis.[84] Platonic representation

[81] Klossowski, "The Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication," 148.
[82] Klossowski, "The Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication," 148.
[83] Camille, "Simulacrum," 31.
[84] Camille, "Simulacrum," 31.

operates by making a hierarchical distinction between truth and the false, or between "claimants" who represent a true copy of an "Idea" and those who carry a falsified appearance of the that Idea, who comprise "the problem of simulacra."[85] Gilles Deleuze's simulacrum, as defined in *Logic of Sense*, provides the notion of expenditure an exit from the (Platonic) dialectic between experience and representation and the rivalry between the real experience and the representational copy. Deleuze writes that the simulacrum undermines the distinction between truth (physical, objective experience) and representation (the copy) and in doing so, exposes it as false.[86]

I have structured and written these subsequent chapters with the relationality of each concept in mind. They are ordered in such a way that each concept presented bears a loose dialectical relation to the next, and each exceeds and transgresses its twin in unexpected ways. Each chapter contains a development in the theoretical approach to visual cultures that takes the production, experience and material technologies of images as species of destruction. My methodological approach to visual cultures varies depends on the specificity of each example, and therefore, in some instances, I present an analysis of a mode, or genre of filmmaking, in others, a comparison between specific films, and in others, a close analysis of a singular modality of cultural practice. These, appearing disparate, reflect the singularity of each species of destruction I attempt to designate.

The first chapter, "Sovereignty and the Simulacrum" presents a theoretical exploration that extends the above argument in relation to Bataille's economy of expenditure, the experience of sovereignty and the simulacrum. I introduce the following key theoretical structures that motivate the arguments of this thesis: First, I explore the relationship between sovereignty and heterogeneity by describing the lineage of Georges Bataille's theory of sovereignty and that of other political theorists. Secondly, I address the constitution of experience by arguing for a specific theoretical basis for the understanding and exploration of modes of experience. Thirdly, in the "Constitution of Objects," I argue for a specific theoretical basis for the discussion of art and film objects, and how they operate in relation to cultural economies. And

[85] Smith, *Essays on Deleuze*, 4-5.
[86] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 291.

finally, I argue for a relationship between the sovereign experience and modes of destruction in visual cultures in "Sovereignty and Destruction."

In Chapter 2, "Exploding Monuments," I argue that the destruction of political and religious monuments in visual cultures produces the effect of undermining the relationship between the body and the relative stability of architectural space. I discuss Hollywood disaster cinema in reference to Bataille's analysis of the Place de La Concorde, and Baudrillard's writing on the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. Following this, in Chapter 3, "Extinction (I Am The Only One)" I approach the figure of the Last Man, with reference to Apocalyptic cinema, and find that the Last Man experiences the tyranny of architectural space in the absence of other bodies, and therefore, this chapter loosely inverts the approach of the former. I argue that the simulacral figure of the Last Man reproduces the myth of a fixed identity. In doing so, I engage with extinction and post-anthropocene theory, alongside the work of Kojève, Bataille and Deleuze to demonstrate that the only possibility of producing a stable identity is in total absence of communication with other human agents and draw upon a number of filmic examples of this fantasy.

Chapter 4, "The Simulacrum and the Spotted Seppuku" discusses the phantasm of "self-obliteration" in the work of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. Drawing from Klossowski's writing on Nietzsche in relation to illness and criminality, alongside references to Bataille and Deleuze, I argue that Kusama has created a body of work that expresses a desire to disengage from the myth of identity through a mode of obsessive, repetitious iteration of her own image behind a veil of psychedelic hallucinations designed to return her experience to the active material of "the infinite universe."[87] Again inverting the position of the previous chapter, in Chapter 5, "Appearing as a Sacred-Image" I explore the alienated, fixed experience of identity unique to those who inhabit positions made sacred by the cultures in which they appear. I argue that contemporary celebrity culture produces "sacred-images" of adolescent women, who are unable to affect the culture constructed around them. The bodies who fill these positions are interchangeable, de-individualised and alienated from contemporary culture in a manner akin to that of the position of monks described by Bataille in Tibetan Lamaism, the outcome of which is a radical alienation.

[87] Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama."

The destruction of bodies for the production of mediatised spectacle is the focus of Chapter 6, "From Sacrifice to Execution." This chapter compares the cultural significance of execution and sacrifice through the material experience of pain with reference to Klossowski and Foucault alongside Bataille and Deleuze. In the US, where, theoretically, executions are intended to be painless, the process of destroying the body of the condemned is the work of the media (and in particular, the foreign documentary) where a mediated recuperation of the spectacle of sacrifice occurs. Chapter 7, "Becoming Immortal," the final chapter, approaches the destructive effect of the presence of bodies on material culture in instances of the experience of cultural consumption. I argue that the transferal of photography and film into digital imaging constitutes a dematerialisation of the image itself, and that the machinic repetition of the image avoids simulacral potentialities in difference and degradation. Where modes of recording and distributing film and photography have been subject to the organic decay of filmic matter through repeat exposure, the digitalisation of the image ensures that nothing is lost when film is viewed, or exposed to light. As such, this chapter argues that the process of consumption of the image is irrevocably affected by this permanence, and that a new location of destruction must appear in order for the image to continue to offer the production of sacred (through expenditure).

As this thesis is an interdisciplinary approach to visual cultures and critical theory, it does not elucidate the work of Georges Bataille, or any other theorist exhaustively, nor does it claim authority over the generic and aesthetic peculiarities of the filmic and artistic objects in discusses. Instead, this thesis lies on the intensive nexus between a number of luminaries in (particularly French) philosophy and critical theory and an array of visual cultures in the hope that it constructs a new theory of the visual cultures around the notions of sovereignty and destruction. The combination of media presented for analysis here is somewhat idiosyncratic, but demonstrates the complexities, and commonalities of the theory of intensity I establish. As such, it is a peculiarity of this approach to writing that each of the above listed chapters could have comprised an entire thesis. There are also a number of topics that could be further explored within the scope of this thesis, including: sovereignty and destruction in relation to representations of war, contemporary politics, sexuality, race and (apart from some elucidation in Chapter 4) class. In *Great Satan's Rage*, Scott Wilson presents

a critique of contemporary American capitalist politics, economics, and cultural material that arises from it. In this thesis, I do engage with American cultural examples, however, as demonstrated by the brief cultural genealogy of humanity that I presented in the first section of the introduction, visual cultures that operate as modes of destruction are not limited to contemporary American culture, and are instead the fabric of global culture and its heritage. Instead, I would argue that American capitalist culture merely presents us with an example of a certain kind of intensive mode of expenditure, catalysed by those economic and political circumstances that Wilson discusses. I have also omitted a discussion of the "festival," which is an expression of sovereignty (and the permissible transgression of taboos within the ritual, religious context of the festival). This has been intentionally omitted as the experience of sovereignty requires genuine transgression, and the festival offers a sanctioned, limited experience of expenditure, provided for bodies so that they may remain productive in the knowledge that they might get these limited, exception based opportunities.

CHAPTER I

Sovereignty and the Simulacrum: A Theory of Destructions

In the introduction, I introduced an argument for a relationship between the potentiality for the experience of sovereignty in operations of destructions and the notion of the simulacrum, particularly with reference to Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*. In this chapter, I present an elaboration these key theoretical terms that I then deploy throughout this thesis, along with an argument for the relationship between the sovereign experience produced by destruction and simulacra in visual cultures. In the first section of this chapter, I elaborate upon Bataille's use of sovereignty in relation to the ancient use of the term, and explore the difference between Carl Schmitt's sovereign exception, Walter Benjamin's designation of sovereign violence in relation to social and political structures and the potential for resistant activity that resides in Bataille's outcast sovereign. In the second section of this chapter, I discuss the constitution of experience as it relates to Bataille's work and the analysis of visual cultures. I introduce the theoretical construct of Klossowski's "impulse," to develop Nietzsche's writing on the instinct (in nature) in opposition to the morality of the social, which bears a relation to Bataille's delineation between knowledge and nonknowledge as one of the ways he distinguishes between experiences of servility and sovereignty. Following this, I approach discussions of form and matter, particularly in relation to the processes of transgression that Bataille's work inspires in Foucault. In the final sections of this chapter, I explore in-depth the relationship between the simulacrum and sovereignty in various forms of representation, including film and art practices, in order to provide a theoretical orientation for the remainder of the thesis.

SOVEREIGNTY AND HETEROGENEITY

> The 'dangerous class,' the social scum, that passive rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society.[88]

Bataille's use of the term "sovereignty" resists, but has a relationship with more commonly understood definitions of the term. Introduced to his theoretical vernacular

[88] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 231.

in "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" in 1933, Bataille first deployed the term "sovereignty" as a way to describe the active position of freedom from the state apparatus for the "heterogeneous" or "outcast" class from normative social order.[89] This early sovereignty is similar to the position of "the rebel" which Bataille uses to demonstrate an overcoming of the Hegelian master and slave dialectic, where the rebel is a slave who no longer seeks to be useful to the master.[90] As Bataille acknowledges, the term "sovereignty" has a history that pertains to both the sovereignty of rulers and of nation-states.[91] While he addresses the relationship between the sovereignty of the king, and of the outcast, the sovereignty of a state is not relevant, as it is associated with the organisation of a country, rather than an experience "opposed to the servile and subordinate."[92] Despite Bataille's denial of the relevance of his sovereign theory to the state, it would appear that sovereignty, as an aspect of the heterogeneous (which Bataille describes as being at both the top and the very bottom of the political hierarchy) is intrinsically bound to the state institution.[93] Where sovereignty is an experience, it is an experience that exceeds utility – and the utility it exceeds is the productivity of the state, its economy and its culture.[94] The relationship between the force of sovereign power (the fascist dictator Bataille describes) and the rebellion of the powerless, but active heterogeneous underclass must be understood in order to analyse sovereignty as a mode of experience of visual cultures.

Ancient models of sovereignty, which Bataille draws upon, demonstrate the religious as well as the simulacral intention of the term. In Ancient Egypt, the position of the pharaoh theoretically constitutes the nexus of political, economic and divine power which amounts to the absolute control of the citizens of the empire.[95] The specificity of the individual body inhabiting the position of Pharaoh was less important than the position itself, as a very literal incarnation of a deity, or, as Bunson quotes from an Egyptian tomb: "he is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men, alone by himself without an equal" – an absolute sovereign who mediated life,

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[89] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 137.
[90] Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 131.
[91] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 155.
[92] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 197.
[93] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 145.
[94] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 199.
[95] Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 303-304.

death, justice and fortune for the Egyptian people.[96] In the Christian model, the relationship between sovereignty and death is even more explicit as it appears in the final book of the Bible. In the Book of Revelation, four horses bear the four characters displaying the four signs of kingship, which are the characteristics of sovereignty (related, in this case, to the state of exception that is the Apocalypse). Included in this description are the crown (the will to conquer, and the position), the power (mandate to rule over subjects), judgement (the scales of justice) and death (and who to except from death).[97] A sovereign has the position and power to rule over subjects, and the privilege to judge them, and to decide who should be allowed to live, and who should be killed. Ancient sovereignty is founded in the individual's power over the death of the many (the community who supports the sovereign as well as the outsiders who oppose the position). This consideration of the position of the sovereign is essential to Bataille's evolving use of the term – the individual in possession of the title "sovereign" is anonymous and interchangeable (potentially simulacral). It is the position, and not the person that bears the power of death.

In some respects, there is little to distinguish this ancient sovereignty from modern incarnations of the term, particularly in the work of Carl Schmitt. Schmitt locates sovereignty in the right to decide the temporal and spatial location of a state of exception, when all so-called everyday rules are suspended, and therefore the power of the decision of the "suspension of the entire existing order."[98] The power of this decision, described by Schmitt as the "monopoly to decide" is held by those whose position is perceived by the subjects of a system to be mandated by god.[99] As Schmitt observes, the sovereign may appear to be separate from the system, but remains related to it, as the sovereign decides when the system "needs to be suspended in its entirety."[100] Tracy B Strong summarises the operation of Schmitt's sovereignty in the "relation between protection and obedience."[101] This indicates that for Schmitt, sovereignty relies on the citizens' fear of the other (the unknown) to motivate their obedience in exchange for protection. Schmitt writes that "the political is total" and therefore, any decision to exclude politics is always already an active political

[96] Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 303.
[97] *Book of Revelation*, 6:2-6:9.
[98] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12.
[99] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12.
[100] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 7.
[101] Tracy B. Strong, Foreword to *Political Theology*, viii.

position.[102] The sovereign figure appears and resides at the limit of "public law."[103] Schmitt's sovereignty is anchored in right to decide the context of exception when the rules and processes of common, or daily law have been exhausted by the situation, and therefore, the state of exception is in opposition to the general rule of the state.[104] Schmitt's sovereign takes over absolute rule in the event of the failings of so-called everyday systems of power (hierarchical structures around which social order is arranged) and the sovereign decides when these failings have taken place, and the sovereign decides when the law should be handed back to the day-to-day systems of law that are ordinarily in place. (Or whether it should be at all.)

The position of the sovereign cannot destroy the system it presides over without also destroying the sovereign position as described by that system that the monarch (the body in particular) inhabits. Despite his apparent attempt to detach sovereignty from its reliance on religion (by insisting on the concrete function of the sovereign state) Schmitt's model of sovereignty remains reliant on its legitimisation by both a perceived divine mandate (even if that mandate appears purely as the apparition of the leader in a sovereign role) as well as by the dominant or "everyday" socio-political order.[105] Schmitt is clear in demonstrating that the sovereign cannot suspend that order without relying on and referring to this mandate.[106] It is a position that remains bound within the confines of homogenous social order, and therefore, does not expose, undermine or annihilate the structures of human law that it remains reliant upon. This is most clearly expressed by Schmitt as he describes the construction of laws according to situations, and that the sovereignty of the state is not a "monopoly to coerce or rule..." but the "monopoly to decide."[107] Sovereignty is reliant upon a system that it appears to have a "monopoly" over – and Schmitt's sovereign can only act within the confines of that system.[108] Therefore, the position held by Schmitt's sovereign is inactive.

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[102] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 2.
[103] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 4.
[104] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.
[105] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 10.
[106] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12.
[107] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12.
[108] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12.

The incarnations of violence that accompany political power and sovereign rule are clearly delineated by Walter Benjamin in his essay "Critique of Violence" (1921). Benjamin describes the decay of justice in state institutions as a cyclical and inevitable regression from an originary point of the violent establishment of law.[109] Whether subscribing to either natural or positive law, where "natural law... regards violence as a natural datum" and "positive law... sees violence as a product of history," violence is an unavoidable part of both the establishment and perpetuation of law, which is legitimised by the abstracted assumption of justice.[110] In either legal system a "distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence must be made" so that justice can be reinforced by tracing lines of power to ensure that homogeneous social order is maintained.[111] This distinction is made in order to contain and repress that which is designated as illegitimate violence, with the fear that if it out of control, it may call into question the legitimacy of the legal system that contains it.

In order for the legal system to maintain itself, Benjamin argues that it must also allow a certain amount of rebellion, a permissible amount within the confines of legal and social acceptability. To demonstrate this, he uses the example of the popular fascination with the "great criminal" who the working class population in particular is encouraged to identify with and to support but who, ultimately, must be punished in some violent way (legal or otherwise) in order to reinforce to the subjects of the legal system that her actions, while charismatic, are unadvisable.[112] A collective mythology is constructed around this figure of the "great criminal" and used effectively to reinforce the demarcation of national identity.[113] Benjamin also uses the example of the workers' right to strike, another gesture of placation of behalf of the legal system. Here, violence or force is exercised as a refusal, and is "the only legal subject entitled to exercise violence" (outside of the structure of the state).[114] However, this right to violence is both conditional and restricted, and the right to strike itself is integrated

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[109] Throughout this essay, Walter Benjamin uses the German term "Gewalt", which can be translated as violence, power, force or control, as has been discussed broadly in relation to Benjamin's work (for example, in Massimilano Tomba, "Another Kind of Gewalt: Beyond Law Re-Reading Walter Benjamin").
[110] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 236-237.
[111] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 238.
[112] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 239.
[113] This seems to be particularly prevalent in Western colonial/post-colonial nations such as the US and Australia where national identity is at least in part bound up with resisting colonial governance. Consider the cases of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, Butch Cassidy, Jesse James, Belle Starr, Ned Kelly, George Melville.
[114] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 239.

into the mythology of the state who allows it. It is always a negotiation between the union and the state while both claim the other is acting unjustly. In the end, though, the state does not completely prevent strike action, and the workers, in turn, do not completely overthrow the state's authority. This negotiation is a re-inscription of state power in the state's agreement to the workers' freedom to rebel, as long as that rebellion has a limit. The negotiation between the state and the workers continues until an impasse in reached, and a "revolutionary general strike" occurs, and where the legal system (which the general strike is attempting to overthrow) will respond with militarisation, "the compulsory universal use of violence as a means to the ends of the state."[115] The outcome of the general strike then, is also the re-establishment of the law of the state, as well as the assertion of mythological violence of the state. Thus, Benjamin establishes the differentiation in the legal uses of violence as "law-preserving" and "law-making", or "mythic violence."[116]

The spectrality of law preservation is most clearly represented in Benjamin's description of the function of the police. The concept of the police force is characterised by the "the fact that in this authority, the separation of law-making and law-preserving violence is suspended."[117] The police, by preserving the rule of law, or enacting law-preserving violence, act as a spectral presence (known to be potentially or ever-present but only ever sporadically seen in public life) that governs the actions of the subjects of the state. As an active force, the police establish the rule of law in individual negotiations of power with the heterogeneous (the violence enacted upon the body of designated criminal or outcast as they are prevented, detained and punished). Without the power to act violently, the police, as avatars of the state cannot perpetuate the rule of that state, and both the police and the state are rendered impotent. The dual role of policing ensures the homogeneous social order is either passively maintained (phantom, or implied surveillance) or actively enforced (violence) but neither of these roles interact with or renegotiate the homogeneity of the system itself, and thus systemic power is maintained (passively).

[115] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 240.
[116] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 241.
[117] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 243.

In the final words of the essay, Benjamin reasserts his categories of violence: law-making violence is executive violence (moulds a community into a status quo – and which is also, importantly, termed "mythic violence"), law-preserving violence is administrative (attempts to maintain the status quo), and "divine violence," as an act of a monotheistic deity that obliterates in a "law-destroying act" that supersedes human law.[118] Benjamin's "divine violence", which he also terms "sovereign violence," operates as absolute annihilation and a transcendent act of justice.[119] Benjamin's use of the term "sovereign" as a synonym for divinity betrays an alternative possibility for the act of violence itself. I argue that in Benjamin's work, it is made clear that the relationship between the sovereign and religion and theology hinges on the determination that one cannot exist without the other. Benjamin's use of the term "sovereign" is quietly indicative of the analogous structure a divine identity shares with that which seeks to expose and destroy it, the implication being that there is potentiality for a mystical or divine act of annihilation beyond the (Judeo-Christian) monotheistic God figure that Benjamin had envisaged.

Bataille's 1933 essay, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" operates as a critique of Schmitt's argument (although it is not directly referred to) in the discussion of two modes of sovereignty in relation to heterogeneous positions in society (where the heterogeneous is defined by being of a position that is unable to be assimilated into a homogenous social governance) one being inactive, and the other active.[120] The two positions are the king, and of the outcast, with the latter being the only position from which one is able to be active, as it is only in this position that one is not reliant on the structure of social homogeneity for power, as one has nothing. It is from this position that Bataille reconstructs a notion of sovereignty through those excluded from homogenous social order. The "unruly elements" that exist outside of social homogeneity are in Bataille's estimation, active agents of sovereignty, as they are not beholden to the economic production that sustains social homogeneity.[121] Economic and social outcasts are described as those who "give character" to the "homogeneous class" but must be controlled by them.[122] In this observation, Bataille echoes

[118] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 249.
[119] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 252.
[120] This essay can be found in: Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 137-160.
[121] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 139.
[122] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 139.

Benjamin's argument about the delineation between legitimate (state) and illegitimate violence for the purpose of maintaining the legitimacy of state power in "Critique of Violence," but extends this observation to demonstrate the precarity of social homogeneity, which is "at the mercy of violence."[123] According to Bataille, the idea of the state has formed in response to this precarity, and that "the function of the state consists of an interplay of authority and adaptation" akin to Benjamin's state violence, and its tools, the spectral police.[124]

Bataille identifies the heterogeneous as being awoken by "dissociation" from social function contained in the economy and production.[125] Bataille's heterogeneous is a position excluded from economic, social and political production by the homogeneous structure of the state or system. This implies that the experience of the heterogeneous is inextricably bound to uselessness and waste – the heterogeneous is characterised by the expenditure of energy without a productive outcome.[126] The outcast-sovereign has no discernable socially productive use and "the heterogeneous world includes everything resulting from unproductive expenditure."[127] Bataille argues that sovereignty and heterogeneity appears in the positions of king (loosely the Hegelian/Kojèvean master) and outcast. The heterogeneous sovereignty of the master is reserved only for the cruellest of fascist dictators (Bataille refers to Hitler and Mussolini) as by "simple fact of dominating one's fellows implies the heterogeneity of the master... he designates his nature as something other."[128] However, regardless of how heterogeneous the cruelty of the sovereign-master, this position remains sanctioned by and bound to the rule of law and the state in which it has been allowed to occur.[129] Even though it is heterogeneous to a concept of Western social order, it is still written into the law of the state presided over by the dictator that this type of violence is permissible, and therefore, sovereign violence as a transgression of homogeneous social order has not taken place. As Bataille observes, "the king's rights are unconditional" but the right to legal unconditionality is still given by his legal status within the system of the state, and therefore the homogeneity of the state apparatus

[123] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 139.
[124] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 139.
[125] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 140.
[126] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 142.
[127] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 142.
[128] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 145.
[129] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 148.

cannot be transgressed by his actions.[130] This restriction of the sovereign-master belies absolute impotence to act outside of the state system, and therefore to enact sovereign violence.

This impotence of the master-sovereign also indicates the unexpected primacy of outcast-sovereignty. Following a section in which he condemns fascism as the weakness of populations to be seduced by (nationalistic) unity, Bataille notes that the master-sovereign is "immobilised" in that "the authority of the king coincides reciprocally with the upholding of these forms and this framework" of state law.[131] Bataille concludes that the outcast sovereign, may become a "subversive form" of heterogeneity by "entering into movement," characterised by action and that this subversion is based on the exclusion of that position from the legal framework entirely.[132] While he describes the heterogeneous elements of experience as "provoking affective reactions of varying intensity" he does not pursue the experiential and fictional import of sovereignty until later in his career.[133]

From Hegel, via Kojève, Bataille takes the poetic struggle for recognition as a fight to the death.[134] With this in mind, he constructs a way of accessing sovereignty as distinct from mastery – Bataille's sovereign does not require the mastery of another person in order to escape slavery – it is sovereign enough to risk living in excess of production and utility.[135] Bataille's sovereignty, therefore, is a radically heterogeneous position to economic utility, and most importantly, what makes it distinct from other forms of sovereignty is that it does not require recognition for its position.

THE CONSTITUTION OF SOVEREIGN EXPERIENCE: IMPULSE, KNOWLEDGE AND NONKNOWLEGE, EXCESS

Following the publication of "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" and the beginning of World War II, Bataille began to develop the concept of sovereignty away from the specificity of a particular subject-position or agent in relation to social order,

[130] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 148.
[131] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 157.
[132] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 157-8.
[133] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 142.
[134] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 7.
[135] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. I*, 197-198.

and toward the description of an experiential singularity outside of temporal awareness. Throughout *The Accursed Share*, the reader is given a variety of examples of what might constitute a sovereign experience, namely, unproductive expenditures, including erotic pleasure, death, and the consumption of food.[136] These expenditures, before being delineated by individual preference, are "undifferentiated objects of desire" that may constitute a sovereign experience.[137] Bataille argues that these experiences exceed the utility of language, culture and the expected (the everyday) in that they transgress the structure of language and perception, rather than preceding these structures. Diverging from the instinct-driven philosophy of Nietzsche, Bataille defines the sovereign experience as coming after the restriction of language, rather than coming before or instead of it, and is hence, constituted by the "operation" of formlessness (where material form precedes the destruction of its boundaries to the "informe" or the formless).[138]

In considering his "method" for the analysis of the sovereign experience, Bataille describes knowledge (after Hegel) as a "discourse" or "the entire operation of a system" rather that the endpoint, or outcome only.[139] In this way, Bataille describes the appropriateness of a pursuit of knowledge that can result in nonknowledge, just as a product can be made and then wasted. For Bataille, the sovereign outcome divorces the product from the "operation that produced it."[140] However, the economic exchange that resulted in the production of an outcome, even if that product is then separated from that exchange continues to bear a relation to that exchange, and hence, still engages with the restricted economy. For example, time, misuse or neglect may separate an object from its productive value in economic processes, but that product still bears a trace, like a serial number from its production.

Bataille's sovereign experience thus bears a relation to the structural constitution of the experience that preceded it. Bataille insists that between the production of language and sovereignty, there is a radical break, but necessarily, the accumulation that produces a sovereign intensity continues to haunt that experience. In Bataille's

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[136] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 33.
[137] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 199.
[138] Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 15.
[139] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 202.
[140] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 202.

writing, the production of a sovereign experience is catalysed by a crossing over of the limit of knowledge into nonknowledge – a transgression that requires knowledge to come first. Therefore, in order to describe the experience of sovereignty, the constitution of experience itself must be addressed. The following section constitutes a theory of experience through impulse, knowledge and nonknowledge and excess.

IMPULSE

Klossowski used the term "impulse" after Nietzsche's "instinct" to designate the nucleus of thought. "Impulse," observes Daniel Smith, in reference to Klossowski's system of thought production, is a term for an affective-thought event, circling, without restriction through the synapses of the brain (indistinct from the remainder of the body).[141] Impulses are then ordered into thoughts, and eventually will and the instruction for action by their strength and magnetism, with the strongest attaining what Nietzsche refers to as "sovereignty" (primacy or attention) in the body and mind.[142] The impulse, and relations between impulses are intensive and chaotic, plural, non-linear, pre-linguistic and this approach to the nature of thought and experience remains constant throughout Nietzsche's writing after the "discovery" of the eternal return, as it does in Klossowski's account of Nietzsche's work.[143] Impulses are a symptom of what Smith describes as "Nietzsche's insistence on taking *the* body rather than the mind as a guide for philosophy" and is also evidence of Nietzsche's rejection of Cartesian reason in favour of what he commonly refers to as "nature."[144] The impulse in Smith's and Klossowski's work refers to the apparition of the undifferentiated synapse-shock of a thought that Nietzsche refers to as "the instinct" or "emotion" and describes them as a bodily, material event rather than something confined to the mind (like the structure of reason).[145] Nietzsche uses the instinct to demonstrate that the appearance of thought itself is not necessarily engaged with a moral order, at least until further impulses that catalyse thoughts, instincts or

[141] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 13.
[142] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 13.
[143] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 20. In this section, Klossowski writes on the effect of illness and pain on Nietzsche's elucidation of the concepts not as an experience (or affects) that hinder the impulses of the brain, but that constitute and shape them.
[144] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 8.
[145] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 23. (Although, this is something that is repeated periodically throughout the text in various guises.)

emotions interfere with it, and depending on the will made up by those instincts, are shaped according to moral codes in *Beyond Good and Evil.*

Nietzsche addresses morality and will through the absurdity of the separation of thought as cognition from emotion, impulse and plurality.[146] He endeavours to re-begin philosophy, without the "fundamental error" of Platonism, which he describes as the "invention of pure spirit and transcendental goodness."[147] Nietzsche's critique of "moral prejudice" is a demonstration of the unreliability of thought and the creative potential of perception responsible.[148] This is not to say that knowledge of the fallibility of perception and awareness of the influence of moral prejudice can change the force of the thought itself. Impulses, the affect before the thought, are not changed by conscious thought or applied will, and remain at the mercy of the inescapable ingrained moral prejudice of the mind.[149] Nietzsche demonstrates that we don't consciously select our fixations, obsessions and desires, the prejudices of morality constructs them for us. Hence the Nietzschean sneer at the absurdity of "free-will."[150]

Writing on Klossowski, Deleuze describes language as beginning from an undifferentiated position, "an egg... proceeds by fits and starts, hesitates and bifurcates at each level."[151] The metaphor of the undifferentiated egg reproduces the image of thought that Klossowski presents (after Nietzsche) as the impulse – the undifferentiated thought. Just as language begins undifferentiated, so does thought. Where language languidly oozes through morality until its every inference is fraught with layers of knowledge, the impulse is shaped, redirected and bound by the weight of other impulses. The next development is the question of what causes each pause and each decision to each turn to differentiate into specificity. Deleuze defines this "moment of difference" and "suspense" as a source of "perversion."[152] This applies to the logic reason, language, and most specifically to (the construction of) bodies. Deleuze refers to Klossowski's *Such a Deathly Desire* and quotes:

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[146] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3-4.
[147] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3.
[148] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 23.
[149] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 23-25.
[150] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 18
[151] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 321.
[152] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 322.

> "there is nothing more verbal than the excesses of the flesh... the reiterated description of the carnal act not only reviews the transgression, it is in itself a transgression of language by language."[153]

As bodies are constructed and politically inscribed, rather than naturally occurring surfaces as they interact with the material world.

KNOWLEDGE AND NONKNOWLEDGE

Bataille understands knowledge through a process of consciousness, structured by language and ordered by time.[154] Undertaking a morphological study of the apparition of sovereignty in *The Accused Share*, Bataille explicitly eschews the rigour of singular academic study in favour of a multidisciplinary, theory-making process that makes use of a range of disciplines, while adhering to none (as discussed in the introduction).[155] This, he says, is because "knowledge is never given to us except by *unfolding in time*. It is not given in a sudden illumination of the mind but in a *discourse*, which is necessarily deployed in duration."[156] Whereas the experience of sovereignty lies outside of the experience of time, in a temporal no man's land of immediacy that appears beyond the linear temporality through which we experience the acquisition of knowledge:

> To know is always to strive, to work; it is always a servile operation, indefinitely resumed, indefinitely repeated. Knowledge is never sovereign: to be *sovereign* it would have to occur in a moment.[157]

As sovereignty must exist outside the production of knowledge, Bataille associates it with nonknowledge – the production of knowledge without economic or cultural value - that occurs when one "suppresses thought."[158] The association between knowledge and sovereignty, however, remains bound in a relational struggle to one another (much like the relationship between mastery and slavish morality in Nietzsche) where one term is exceeds the other in the context of specific intensities. Nonknowledge clearly cannot exist without knowledge for it to exceed and undermine, however, this position doesn't automatically designate nonknowledge as reactionary, as one might assume, but rather, relational and excessive. When Bataille writes of moments of

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[153] Klossowski quoted by Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 322.
[154] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 202.
[155] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 201.
[156] Bataillle, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 202.
[157] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 202.
[158] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 203.

"rupture, of fissure," the structure and slavish production of knowledge provides the ground that the sovereign experience of nonknowledge breaks.[159]

EXCESS

Excess appears as a Nietzschean inheritance in Bataille's writing that serves to resist what Bataille sees as the straitjacket of Hegelian dialectics. Sovereignty, in particular, is written as a resistance to the Master and Slave dialectic. For Bataille, it serves as one of the ways in which he attempts to find a way of thinking beyond or outside of the dialectics of Hegel, by transgressing the limitations of the structure. Sovereignty, which comes to designate the excessive experience (excessive to productiveness or usefulness) appears alongside the apparent limitations of the structural utility that Bataille sees in Hegel. The relationship between the positions of master and slave is flooded with excesses in experience that the structure of the relationship cannot account for. This is the foundation of the Nietzschean description of relationality between mastery and slavish morality.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche approaches the morality of mastery and enslavement in concert with a discussion of the paradox of opposites, and asserts that both master and slavish morality might exist in the same individual is a gesture in the direction of relating the two thoughts. Values perceived as the opposite of one another, are, as Nietzsche says "'How *could* something arise from its opposite? Truth from error for example?" instead, Nietzsche says, these values arise from the same origin, and are therefore, more similar than they are opposite.[160] Where life is not the opposite of death, but instead, life appears from and exists in excess of (beyond) death, and only for a short time, before it returns itself to nothing.

Nietzsche resolves to begin with the premise that the universal order of morality is not universal at all, but based on the value judgements of those whose will is asserted over the will of others (curtailing physical or bodily instincts). In writing a responsive alternative to the Hegelian Master and Slave dialectic, Nietzsche demonstrates that the morality of mastery is *in* excess of the morality of slaves. Master morality "*creates*

[159] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 203.
[160] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5.

values" whereas slavish morality is "a morality of utility."[161] Therefore, by creating values, master-morality creates excessive values, beyond those needed for everyday life and function. This wasted economy of morality becomes the economy of wasted energy in the work of Georges Bataille. Bataille's discussion of pain appears to be directly drawn from Nietzsche's descriptions of suffering migraines – both concur that without pain, one is nothing, but an absolute excess of pain consumes everything else about a person, "intense pain reduces one to nothing."[162] Bataille's fixation with sovereign experience is a fixation with excess – experience in excess of itself.[163]

Bataille was introduced to Hegel (along with a number of twentieth century French theorists by Alexandre Kojève. Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* which is the compilation of a series of lectures that Bataille attended "assiduously," introduces Kojève's reading of Hegelian dialectics.[164] He begins by distinguishing between "man" and animal, where "man" is able to consider what is beyond himself (and his own physical needs).[165] This opening distinction already indicates the potential for an alternative to the man/animal dialectic Kojève (after Hegel) introduces. In the consideration of being beyond the dialectic between man and animal, then, the subject (man) appears from, and is inextricably linked to, but is in excess of the notional animal. Language is key to consideration beyond the self and the differentiation between self and other, "to understand man by understanding his 'origin' is therefore, to understand the origin of the I revealed by speech."[166] This indicates that to be in excess of the dialectic must be beyond the reaches of language. The contemplation of objects results in a temporary loss of the self, which is returned by the pang of physical need. This indicates that for Kojève, the desire for objects that do not fulfill an immediate physical need form the basis of the creation of an appearance of a unified self in relation to the world.

Recognition is at the basis for struggle in Kojève's presentation of the Hegelian Master and Slave dialectic. Recognition in the human relationship is characterised not only by the desire of the object but also by the desire to be desired (and the recognition of

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[161] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 154, 156.
[162] Botting and Wilson, Introduction to *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 1.
[163] Botting and Wilson, Introduction to *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 1.
[164] Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 189.
[165] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 3.
[166] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 3.

the value of the other) and therefore "all desire is a desire for value," and therefore for recognition.[167] For Kojève then, in negotiating relationships with other humans, people risk themselves for in their desire for recognition, and in order for these power relations to be negotiated without slaughter, there must be those who give in before death. Hence the Master (continues to risk death) and the Slave - the two consequences of the battle for recognition – "one is always necessarily, and essentially, either Master or Slave" and this, according to Kojève, via Hegel, is the origin of social order.[168] The outcome of the battle for recognition is that recognition of subjectivity is not reciprocal – but is manifested as a Master/Slave or Subject/Object hierarchical relation, where one party is reduced to a position below the other.[169] This confirms the Master's identity by the total alienation and subjugation of the slave as Other. Clearly, however, the problem inherent in the fight for recognition is that the resultant recognition is not authentic, and amongst equals, "he is recognised by someone whom he does not recognise" and therefore this recognition is "without value."[170]

Where Kojève (after Hegel) describes human consciousness in relation to spatial desire and comparison, Nietzsche introduces the novel step of relating consciousness to the human awareness of time. In developing a release from the oppression of Hegelian dialectics, Nietzsche appears to realise that it is the awareness of our physical relationship to time that separates our consciousness – hence, the Nietzschean eternal return.

Subsequently, Botting and Wilson that Bataille gives Foucault with the tools to "exit from Hegelianism," or in other words, to explore thought beyond Hegel's dialectical bind, as excess and transgression.[171] Foucault relies heavily on Bataille in his writing on sexuality and excessive experience – experience unbound by language and discourse, "Foucault notes, then, a proximity and a radical difference in modes of ecstasy and enjoyment...a difference not dialectically recuperable."[172] While Foucault observes that the relationship between language and experience changes through modernity as excessive experience is more readily represented and expressed, there remain

[167] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 6.
[168] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 8.
[169] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 10.
[170] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 19.
[171] Botting and Wilson, Introduction to *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 2.
[172] Botting and Wilson, Introduction to *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 3.

excesses that cannot be incorporated into modern discourse – some experiences cannot be contained by language.[173] This leads Foucault back to Bataille's approach to unknowing, and his novel way of dealing with experience that remains in excess of expression.[174]

Excessive experience exists beyond the Hegelian dialectic – it is always, already, outside of the oppositional structure erected to contain it. In "A Preface to Transgression" Foucault argues that excessive (sexual) experiences express and reveal the limitations of language – a disruption that Foucault attributes (at least in part) to the death of God:

> The death of God is not merely an 'event' that gave shape to contemporary existence as we now know it: it continues tracing indefinitely its great skeletal outline.[175]

Kristeva writes that Bataille deals with the ignorance of Christianity (after Nietzsche) and its denial of experience in the development of the subject. On Bataille's approach to experience and nonknowledge, Kristeva writes:

> "Hegel suppresses negativity by means of the concept and absolute knowledge. Bataille rediscovers negativity in that repressed moment of the absolute knowledge that is immediate experience."[176]

Bataille's avoidance of the Hegelian dialectic is immediate, in that it is in the experience of negativity that the dialectical limit is approached. Immediate experience is in excess of the Master and Slave dialectic, as it is not contained or framed by it, and exists outside of it.

In Bataille's work, the Hegelian dialectic became synonymous with utilitarianism, insofar as both are a denial of anything other than useful, productive labour. The Hegelian dialectic, like utilitarianism, is a model for economic efficiency, free of any phantasm, any unproductive, incommunicable fixation, which Bataille writes is an impossibility, as "We cannot reduce ourselves to utility and neither can we negate our conditions."[177] This phantasm is the irreducible element that Bataille argues Hegel fails

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[173] Botting and Wilson, Introduction to *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 3.
[174] Botting and Wilson, Introduction to *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 4.
[175] Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 26.
[176] Kristeva, "Bataille, Experience and Practice," 239.
[177] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 343.

to account for in Hegel's description of the conscious being.[178] Therefore, as Germerchak observes, we cannot claim definitive self-consciousness, but only consciousness in relation to ourselves.[179] After Nietzsche, Georges Bataille recognised that being in excess of the dialectic is to live beyond the utility of economic and social production. The heterogeneous excess beyond the dialectic is unrestrained by language and relates only to time insofar as it reproduces the Nietzschean eternal return.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE OBJECT: FORM, MATTER AND MATERIALISM

In order to further discuss experience, a theory of the constitution of an object must be outlined. In this section, the constitution of cultural objects is developed in relation to materialism and form, the community and the simulacrum. The ubiquity of hierarchy in both Idealist and Material philosophies is overcome in Bataille's work by his insistence on the inclusion of all matter in materialist thought. In the early essay "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," Bataille defines materialism, perhaps after Nietzsche, as "the obstinate negation of idealism" (despite what Bataille observes as numerous attempts to confine materialism to the overwhelming enclosure of the contrary).[180] This means that the production of knowledge lies in the interaction with matter and power relations, or the discourse between force and matter (as also described by Gilles Deleuze in *Foucault*). Deleuze's estimation of the relationship between experience and language resonates with Georges Bataille's writing on eroticism in *The Accursed Share* and the relationship between language and the construction of eroticism:

> "Not the intrusion of bodies into language, but rather their mutual reflection and the act of language which fabricates a body for the mind"[181]

Deleuze continues to describe (in an argument that first appears similar to that of Walter Benjamin's) the destruction of the mysticism of religion by theology – the revelation of the structure of belief undermining the belief itself (which is built on

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[178] Germerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative*, 3.
[179] Germerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative*, 4.
[180] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 45. (According to Michel Surya's *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, Bataille had read Nietzsche extensively before this essay was written.)
[181] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 322.

mysticism). Deleuze observes "the unity of theology and pornography" in Klossowski's writing, which is, of course, another spectral appearance of the work of Bataille. Deleuze designates Klossowski's preoccupation with pornography "a superior pornology."[182] Overwhelmingly, however, Deleuze finds (as James reiterates) that Klossowski's literary project is "to assure the loss of personal identity and to dissolve the self" through doubling, multiplication and the apparition of simulacra.[183] Pornography is based on the repetition and iteration of the body – it is a language relation used commercially and aesthetically reproduce the reduction of body as object to be used for pleasure.[184] Deleuze develops the opposition between purity and impurity in language. The clarity of pure speech attempts to supersede impure thoughts.[185] Obscurity is impure, as is sense (affect) and the memory of words and bodies.

Theology and the rivalry between God and the Antichrist is a systematic "disjunction" for Deleuze after Klossowski.[186] The order of God (the once, returned and stable being) is associated with "identity and immortality."[187] The death of the body, then, is a "true spiritual event."[188] The immortality of identity is challenged and undermined by the event of death, and therefore, disrupts the "Identity of God as the ultimate foundation."[189] Therefore, there is always already a rebellious intention in our acknowledgement of the decay of our bodies, which is "an intention to escape God's judgement."[190] The subjugation of myth and mysticism in the formalisation of theology and the exposure of the mythic structure is the resistance of judgement and the undermining of the system of Christian law. To acknowledge one's own body is to engage in the "order of perversity" which is the order of matter.[191]

The order of matter, is to Deleuze in his analysis of Klossowski, the order of the Antichrist, and is predicated on reversal and opposition. Deleuze demonstrates that Klossowski insists that the idea of the self is inextricably linked to the divine order and

[182] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 323.
[183] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 324.
[184] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 332.
[185] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 331.
[186] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 332.
[187] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 332.
[188] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 332.
[189] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 332.
[190] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 333.
[191] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 333.

to God, so the "death" or revelation of God coincides with the destruction of identity and the self.[192] Therefore, "the identity of the self always refers to the identity of something outside of us."[193] God's order, Christian law is therefore disjunctive as it holds "the negative values of exclusion."[194] This means that in the order of the Antichrist (the order of matter, perversion) "disjunction... becomes as such an affirmative and affirmed power" where God's order, the Christian-capitalist order is a negation of life.[195]

COMMUNITY, COMMUNICATION AND THE SIMULACRUM

Consumption is the way in which separate beings communicate.[196]

"The herd" is a term used by Nietzsche to refer to groups of people "which reduces the singularity of the individual to a common denominator and expresses only what can be communicated."[197] This term demonstrates the post-enlightenment impulse to individuation (to set oneself apart, or, as Nietzsche often repeats, to avoid being "mediocre") and the simplicity of the groupings to which people who need to be differentiated from are divided. The characteristics of the herd, as the above quote demonstrates, are at best, superficial, aesthetic observations that bind people together so as to delineate a threatening other than confirms their identity by negation. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche refers to "the community" and "the herd" as interchangeable terms for groups (that dictate moral codes).[198] Morality arranged and enforced by the herd or community is in opposition to both "nature" and "rationality."[199] Nietzsche argues that the prohibitions of morality are the least "natural" thing for people to adhere to, but they do so for the sake the ease of communal living associated with herds.[200] He describes the impulse to conform within a social group that appears to be stronger (because it is easier) than the impulse to nature or reason, or as Nietzsche states, "it is one long coercion."[201]

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[192] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 334.
[193] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 334.
[194] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 334.
[195] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 336.
[196] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 58.
[197] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 9.
[198] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 58.
[199] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 76.
[200] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 76.
[201] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 76.

Whilst acknowledging Nietzsche's estimation of groups of people as "the herd" I also argue for a separate definition of the term "community." The word community itself implies communication (and religious communion) and communication implies the risk of meaning, which means that meaning has not yet solidified, and become a "stereotype... 'the code of everyday signs.'"[202] For Klossowski, after Nietzsche, once meaning becomes a stereotype, it is no longer negotiable without the intervention of radical heterogeneity. Stereotypes are what morality is constructed from, and how a herd is defined. A distinction between the herd and the community must be made, where the term community refers to a collection, or assemblage of wills that resonate with one another (even if they are not perfectly in tune). This community can appear as a political movement, a social group, a relationship between two bodies, or, indeed, any single body. A community, unlike a herd, allows for the heterogeneous.

The apparently false spontaneity of morality is, instead, based on the manipulation of the few to gain the obedience of the many in order to form a community (which may be a state, democracy, a town or a religion) whereas nature remains "indifferent" to the politics of the herd.[203] This is evidenced, according to Nietzsche, by the fact that regardless of the specifics of the referential moral code, each:

> teaches us to hate the excessive freedom of *laisser-aller* and instills a need for limited horizons, for immediate tasks – it teaches us to *narrow our perspective* and thus, in a certain sense, to be stupid as a precondition for life and growth.[204]

This morality, or socialisation, leads to the development of limited, and in a sense, creative perspective. Nietzsche describes how a person, unavoidably instilled with a moral order (socialised) may witness an object, and, having seen many before like it, fabricates many of its attributes as a kind of presumptive shorthand:

> Even in the middle of our strangest experiences, we still do the same thing: we fabricate the greatest portion of the experience and can barely be forced *not* to observe any one event as its 'inventor'.[205]

This creative perception that Nietzsche refers to is the effect of the moral code of the herd, and of the learned behaviour to which people adhere in order to function in social groupings. The cultivation of fabricated perception through a moral code is an

[202] Smith, Translator's Preface, x.
[203] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 77.
[204] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 77.
[205] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 81.

effective way of exercising control over groups of bodies, intentions and sensations – impulses. The generic construction of cultural artifacts relies on this fabricated, creative perception. The common goal of the herd grouping is underpinned by morality, and importantly, the imposition of hierarchy that moral prejudice produces.[206]

The consequences of the institutionalisation of sexuality, in relation to the nature of self-hood and individuation has resulted in the validation of discrimination based on the generic or collective notions assigned to groups of people who are assumed to carry certain physical, material or psychic characteristics. This can be clearly observed in Nietzsche's descriptions of women, non-white Western European ethnicities and religions. The descriptions appear to pertain not to a single instance, or iteration of "women" or "Jews" but to the notional group of "women" without a referent among that group of individuals.

Foucault introduces *The History of Sexuality* as an exploration of sexual history as a form of power relation. The privatisation of sex (the making of sexual acts as explicitly socially private events) coincided with an increase in the exploitation of bodies (as workers) and the industrial revolution. The Victorianisation of sex – sanitisation, demarcation of appropriate behaviour in regards to sexuality amongst classes and the emphasis on the protection of children against knowledge of sex, and as non-sexual entities resulting in a repression. However, Foucault contends that, far from resulting in the limitation of sexual development, the Victorianisation of sex resulted in a diversification of sexual acts themselves. Eroticism, fetishisation and creativity around sexuality and the representation of sex dramatically increased during and following the Victorian era. Foucault indicates that the Victorians were obsessed with sex, as implied by both the diversification of eroticism and the stringent restrictions placed upon it, "a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required" for the utterability of sex to be a possibility.[207]

Foucault emphasises the relationship between sexuality and power, while noting that to speak of sex, in some ways remains transgressive.[208] The post-Victorian, so-called

[206] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 113.
[207] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 5.
[208] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 6.

liberation of sexuality, Foucault notes, is an affirmation that it was and still is a taboo, "the lessening of prohibitions, or as a more devious and discrete form of power".[209] A re-regulation, or control of commodified sexuality is not a liberation. The apparent regulation of sexuality after the 16th century acts, as Foucault notes, as a "putting into discourse of sex."[210] The prohibition itself is the making of sexual power relations specific to modernity and the beginning of the consideration of sexuality as a relevant issue. Foucault refers to the "will to knowledge" in resistance to the Victorian prohibition of sex which he sees as having resulted in the "science of sexuality."[211] This science, led by psychoanalysts after Freud develop a science around "the pursuit of normality."[212]

THE SIMULACRUM

Plato discovers... that the simulacrum is not simply a false copy, but that it places in question the very notations of copy and model.[213]

The simulacrum is the repetition of an image that produces difference, through the introduction of the impossible or unanticipated in representation. When the simulacrum produces difference in the image it resembles, it appears as something that the producer and the bearer of that image had not considered or anticipated would appear. It is, therefore, an operation through which the experience of sovereignty can occur. The simulacrum appears in "the opposition between exchange and true repetition."[214] The distinction here is between (as it is in the essay "Plato and the Simulacrum") that repetition repeats the same, whereas an exchange (between meanings) "*authenticates the different.*"[215] Deleuze acknowledges here that this exchange is developed in Klossowski's work with reference to Bataille's "economy of the gift."[216] The proposition of the simulacrum-exchange is further explored in relation to repetition and resemblance.[217]

Deleuze identifies the difference between copies (those images that contain a true representation of the model) and simulacra (those images that are predicated on a

[209] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 11.
[210] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 12.
[211] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 12-13.
[212] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 5.
[213] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 294.
[214] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 328.
[215] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 328.
[216] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 328.
[217] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 329.

"dissimilarity" from the model) "false pretenders" that are "implying an essential perversion or a deviation."[218] Deleuze then likens this to human behaviour toward God – we are not God's resembling images because we sin and therefore have "forsaken moral existence in order to enter into aesthetic existence" – in other words, in relation to Christian mythology at least, we are the simulacra of God.[219] The key aspect of the simulacrum is difference, and that aspect is created by repetition of the copy of the original – make enough copes, and eventually one will be different to the model one is working from, "the simulacrum is built upon a disparity."[220] The repression of simulacra is the foundation of Platonic philosophy, "the domain of representation filled by copies-icons."[221] Deleuze considers the simulacrum in excess of the "bad copy" or "false pretender" of Platonic order. Instead, Deleuze emphasises the creative potency of the term, which is contained in its seditious potential for the "destruction of Platonism."[222] The simulacrum undermines the relationship, or rivalry, between the model and copy, and in doing so, shows the artificial nature of that relation as it "places into question the very notations of copy and model."[223] The simulacrum appears as a copy, but as it is disloyal to the intention of the model, if exposed, it destroys the veracity of both the copy and the model.

This destruction (potentially in the service of the provocation of a sovereign experience) is caused by the simulacra that the eternal return produces, and this destruction of culture is enacted by the sovereign violence that these simulacra represent. As Deleuze is adamant that simulacra have creative potency, so too does the law-destroying annihilation of sovereign violence. The degradation that produces sovereign violence demands the sacrifice of any cohesive, legal or classifiable identity and position of those who enact it. Bataille's model of sovereign experience is reliant on both the sacrifice of the self for the sake of sovereignty, and unintentionally, the multiplicity such a sacrifice provides. As Deleuze describes in the essay "Klossowski or bodies-language," the differentiated first produces fixed identity of god, and that identity is undermined by the rivalry of the reflective structure of the Antichrist as

[218] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 294.
[219] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 295.
[220] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 295.
[221] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 296.
[222] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 303.
[223] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 294.

"the system of the Antichrist is the system of simulacra opposed to the world of identities."[224]

In considering Benjamin's structure of the establishing "mythic" or "law-making violence" and the repetition of the mythic principle in "law-preserving violence" (as defined earlier in this chapter) it appears to be one that closely resembles Gilles Deleuze's description of the Platonic order of representation in the 1969 essay "Plato and the Simulacrum" that appears in *The Logic of Sense*. In this essay, Deleuze describes the Platonic order as a hierarchy negotiated by rivalry – between the establishing "model," an originary point, and the repetition of that model in the "copy" and in doing so, Deleuze demonstrates that Platonic divisions reveal the methodology of "the entire system."[225] This methodology establishes the terms of Platonic representation as being formed by the paradoxically circular and foundational process of myth-making, which gives us the "criterion of selection" so one might distinguish the true from false pretenders.[226] When considering Benjamin's description of violence, we can understand "mythic violence" to be analogous to the model – that which establishes the law, and "law-preserving violence" to the copy.

The relationship between Deleuze's Platonism, and Benjamin's structure of violence can be most clearly observed in Benjamin's description of the decay of justice in parliamentary proceedings and law courts. Benjamin describes a progressively impotent "law-preserving" violence – each repetition of which draws proceedings away from the revolutionary focus of the original, the mythic model.[227] Consequently, due to the "decay" in power caused by this degrading repetition, "mythic violence" must be periodically enacted to return force to the structures of legal power.[228] However, this process itself is repetitive, and one which would closely align itself with a demonstration of the Deleuzian reading of Nietzsche's eternal return, which is also briefly alluded to in this essay as a process that the simulacrum cannot appear without.[229]

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[224] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 331.
[225] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 291.
[226] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 292-3.
[227] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 244.
[228] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 244.
[229] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 300.

As Deleuze demonstrates, the concept that the "model" enacts and the "copy" repeats does not participate in the creation of meaning, the "Idea" itself, as "to participate is at best second rank."[230] So a violence that annihilates the order of law-making and law-preserving violence, while exposing the arbitrary nature of that violence, could not be associated with the markedly "unparticipatory" abstraction, the concept of Justice. This suggests that Justice as a pre-originary and abstract concept (which Deleuze terms the "Idea") to which law-making and law-preserving violence as the practical participants are referring, cannot be itself enacted. Instead, the lineage is as follows, "Justice, the quality of being just, and just men..." the "Unparticipated, the participated and the participant."[231] This means that one never participates with justice directly and eventually this lineage degrades in repetitive participation until a simulacrum of justice is formed (and which resonates with Benjamin's decaying legal institutions directly). When sovereign violence intervenes, it is prompted by this dirge-like degradation inherent in the repetition of the relations between mythic and law-preserving violence and seeks to undermine their power.

Klossowski's simulacrum disrupts the exchange of ideas between minds by calling into question the clarity of their understanding of one another.[232] This occurs because the simulacrum is an attempt at the representation of a phantasm. The phantasm, as described by Klossowski in reference to Nietzsche's repeated discussion of the "spirit." He realises the importance of the eternal return as a phantasm that drives Nietzsche's work after his quasi-religious (sovereign) experience with it, "Nietzsche's most intense phantasm was the *eternal return*."[233] Klossowski uses similar vocabulary to that of Deleuze in the appendices of *Logic of Sense* in discussing the simulacrum and the phantasm in language and experience. In prefacing his translation, Smith describes Klossowski as primarily a translator, and noted that he translated several of Benjamin's essays from German to French.[234] In the introduction to the book, Klossowski focuses on Friedrich Nietzsche's project of obscuring the implied lucidity of philosophy. He identifies the "Nietzschean conspiracy" which he describes as a tactic to invalidate Nietzsche's work by attacking his life, illness and character.[235] He observes that

[230] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 293.
[231] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 293.
[232] Klossowski, "Of the simulacrum," 148.
[233] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche", 14.
[234] Smith, Translator's Preface, viii.
[235] Smith, Translator's Preface, xiv.

Nietzsche's "*thought revolved around delirium as its axis*" which is dismissed through the tendency to pathologise his lived experience and the fragmentation of his identity (though illness and obsessional behaviour).[236] Klossowski argues that Nietzsche's writing serves to disrupt historical "*the principle of reality described... historically*" and that in his work, Nietszche both approaches, and demonstrates the limit of "*the principle of identity*" which undermines the primacy of the historical subject itself.[237] By working from these principles (historical reality and historical subjectivisation) Nietzsche exposes their shortcomings to contain an experience of delirious excess.

Klossowski offers the premise that non-knowledge begins with the death of thought in the essay "Of the simulacrum in Georges Bataille's communication."[238] Klossowski's understanding of Bataille's non-knowledge appears to be filtered through his work on Nietzsche's description of suffering and illness (where absolute "delirious" pain, like that of Nietzsche's migraines prevents thought entirely).[239] Therefore, this dissolution of cohesive thought, and more broadly, Klossowski's dissolution of the identity of the subject, can only be through an experience of non-knowledge (outside of thought) and therefore must be sovereign.

Klossowski describes Bataille's persistent avoidance of notional clarity in speech as being the performative representation of a simulacrum of communication. He further complicates Bataille's communication by discussing it in relation to sovereignty. As soon as the sovereign moment is framed as an expression, it is reflected upon, and therefore, is readapted by the impulses of those with whom Bataille is attempting to communicate. However, Klossowski argues that if the subject itself is "dissolved" then that subject can only produce simulacra, as its terms of expression.[240] This is an adaptation of Bataille's system of non-knowledge as a system which takes the absence of god to be the absence of a cohesive self.[241] If you have dissolved your fixed identity, then you can only speak in simulacra, in which case, you are sovereign.

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[236] Smith, Translator's Preface, xiv.
[237] Smith, Translator's Preface, xvi.
[238] Klossowski, "Of the simulacrum," 154.
[239] Klossowski, *Nietzsche*, 156.
[240] Klossowski, "Of the simulacrum," 154.
[241] Klossowski, "Of the simulacrum," 147.

After Klossowski and Smith, the term phantasm describes the impulse, which the creator of a work fixates on, repeats and returns to while creating a work, which causes traces in the artwork, which are designated simulacra. The phantasm is a fixation that underlies the production of expression as it solidifies into representation. It is not mystical, apparently material or shared, but confined to the inexpressible, prelinguistic impulses of consciousness, it is a fixation, that, with or without awareness, expression continually refers to.

SOVEREIGNTY AND DESTRUCTION

Writing on the experience of sovereignty in relation to visual cultures conjures a variety of challenges, the most immediate being Bataille's theoretical inability to distinguish a representation from the event itself.[242] This appears to be a side-effect of Bataille's will to contract the distance between his experience and the intensities he sees in cultural images in order to experience sovereignty. In the chapters that follow, I argue that there are sovereign intensities in visual cultures, including those that appear within the representative object (as an aspect of the narrative or the materiality of film or art) and those that are conjured by the experience of consuming those visual cultures. These sovereign intensities are produced by the destruction of the structure, or the language of an experience, a destruction that is metered out in order to go beyond that structured experience, to the "unanticipated" moment outside of time.[243]

This conceptualised fiction is discussed by Julia Kristeva in the essay, "Bataille, Experience and Practice" as a way to position the sovereign as a fictional subject, with creative writing at its core. When Bataille develops this argument in the third volume of *The Accursed Share* (1976) sovereignty becomes a position and experience held solely by the heterogeneous as it appears excluded from the structures of political and social power and Bataille argues that sovereignty is most clearly experienced and enacted by those least bound to what we could consider law-preservation. Bataille shows that the heterogeneous is a position that is imposed through social and political exclusion and unsustainably isolated but that the activation of transgression cannot

[242] This is most clearly exemplified *The Tears of Eros*, where the pain of the torture victim in the representative photograph Bataille carries with him is indistinguishable from the event of the torture as it occurred.
[243] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 206.

occur without it. Sovereignty, for Bataille, becomes a momentary glimpse at a world beyond the oppression of economic production – using the metaphor of the worker having his glass of wine at the end of the day – a glimpse that ends "no sooner swallowed than the worker forgets it" but the "miraculous" experience of that instant remains.[244]

Derrida observes that Bataille uses the term "operation" to describe sovereignty, bringing it from a state or position, to being a process, or experience.[245] Derrida also emphasises the centrality of the relationship between sovereignty and death to the operation of the former. According to Derrida, the sovereign, much like the Hegelian Master, is freed by the willingness to die for the freedom of sovereignty.[246] The sovereign resists being enslaved, but instead of recreating the dialectic through mastery, the Bataillean sovereign operates without a subject – in excess of the dialectic – "it no longer seeks to be recognised."[247] Klossowski observes that Nietzsche's thought, unlike Hegel's and unlike the Schmitt-sovereign, does not rely on the reciprocity of recognition of that sovereignty. Nietzcshe's position is alienated to the point that the "very idea" of relational consciousness is utterly "foreign to Nietzsche."[248] According to Klossowski, Nietzsche's sovereignty, like Bataille's, is inextricably associated with affect, rather than predicated on the recognition of others that Schmitt's sovereign relies upon in order to function as sovereign.

The experience of sovereignty in relation to destruction is repeated in multiple guises in each of the following chapters, but any notion of the totality of sovereignty is mythical. As Bataille has demonstrated, sovereignty can never be reached by an encompassing linguistic definition, and as it can never be represented, therefore, sovereignty remains as "incommunicable" a phantasm as ever.[249] What this thesis sets out to achieve, however, is to demonstrate the peculiarity of its effect as it appears from the experience of destruction as it appears in visual cultures. The impulse of a

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[244] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 199.
[245] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 321.
[246] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 323.
[247] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 335.
[248] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 9.
In this chapter, Klossowski also notes that Bataille characterises this dismissal of the need for reciprocal recognition as "ignorance" in *Inner Experience*, but arguably, this spectre of isolation or alienation from community repeatedly appears in Bataille's work.
[249] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 14.

sovereign experience behaves differently when it appears as a simulacrum, from those other repeated phantasms described by Smith after Klossowski and Nietzsche. Nietzsche's sovereignty is inextricably associated with affect. Nietzsche's aim to reverse culture, and to rebuilt it, a "*combat against culture* – in the name of a culture of affects" begins, as Klossowski shows us, with the demonstration of the limits of language in the excessive face of experience. In defining Klossowski's simulacrum, Smith states that it is, "a willed reproduction of a phantasm (in a literary, pictorial, or plastic form)."[250] The phantasm of sovereign experience, when represented as a simulacrum, can add experiential to the list of guises under which the simulacrum may occur. When the simulacrum appears as a repetition of the phantasm of sovereignty – sovereign experiences most often appearing as phantasms – this simulacrum manifests materially and experientially.

Sovereign violence acts as an experiential simulacrum, and this is because the experience of sovereignty requires the dissolution of the cohesive self. This means that it is the opposite of the divine, the absolute stable identity and the named and is instead the only form of rebellion. Sovereign violence exposes the petty repetition and degradation of mythic violence by law-preserving forces, and as such, uncovers the methodology of the system itself. The behaviour of sovereign violence is demonstrated by the Deleuzian simulacrum insofar as it is a usurping term that undermines the structural integrity that produces the status quo of legal violence.

Radical heterogeneity, as imagined so vividly and frequently by Georges Bataille in numerous literary and philosophical works, seduces the reader with its will to resist any and all domination. In its many incarnations, the radically heterogeneous is characterised by Bataille as sovereign, allowing the political, creative, working or fictitious subject the luxurious experience of waste as an affront to the productive economy.[251] In Bataille's writing, the sovereign, or the sovereign experience, as a marker of radical heterogeneity, appears in the guises of the drunk, the prostitute, the writer (writing is characterised as an excessive waste of productive energy), the revolutionary and the wilfully self-destructive. Bataille's sovereign differs from other versions of sovereignty as it has been disentangled it from kingship. The annihilating

[250] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 16.
[251] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 198-9.

gesture of sovereign violence cannot be enacted by the king, monarch or fascist ruler - however absolute - it belongs to those broken subjects who exist in the margins who don't rely on the continued deference of others for their position.

In the remainder of this thesis, destruction as it appears in film and visual art will be discussed as sites or locations of sovereign experience, beginning with the definition of destruction as the (violent) dispersion of matter as it is constrained by form to dynamic formlessness (where a pre-existing form is required by formlessness. I develop the notion of sovereign experience as an experiential simulacrum catalysed by the species of destruction that follow.

CHAPTER 2

Exploding Monuments: The Destruction of Architecture

what *general economy* defines first is the explosive character of this world, carried to the extreme degree of explosive tension in the present time.[252]

[Figure 6: The smoking but defiant Twin Towers as they appeared in *Armageddon* following an asteroid shower (Michael Bay, 1998).]

Representing the destruction of architecture is the radical but unwavering implication of the fragility of spatial relations implied by and embedded in the presence of the architectural edifice itself. In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between architectural form and the constitution of its destruction as sites of simulacral images with the potential to provoke experiences of sovereignty. With reference to disaster cinema that exploits the aesthetic singularity of the destruction of monuments, buildings and cities for spectacular simulacral effect and the recent historical event that has disrupted and resituated the contemporary (and in particular Western) experience of the mediatised destruction of architecture in the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. In order to consider the sovereign potentiality of architectural destruction, I explore Bataille's writing on architecture as a tool of and expression of social formation and control.

By appearing to be permanent and immovable from the perspective of the transient human form, the building, the skyscraper, the monument and the city skyline attract a

[252] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 41.

fascination with and the implication of their demise. In representations of the destruction of architecture, the depiction of the destruction of buildings is intensively and labouriously created (either in set-construction or, more recently, with increasingly sophisticated computer animation) in order to produce the quasi-orgasmic expenditure for the pleasure of an audience by lingering over the novel formlessness of a once familiar city. When a building or cityscape is destroyed, whether it is represented as fantasy in film or visual art or mediated by news media, or before us in time and space, it is the imagined impossibility of the event that marks it as a sovereign expenditure.[253]

In the experience of architectural destruction, it is not the (largely unseen) people who may have died during the event, but the collapse of the appearance of permanence that demarcates the experience of an impossible event that produces sovereignty. In witnessing a building collapse, we see the symbolic collapse of the architectural systems that we socially and politically rely upon to keep us productive, useful, and in place. The image of the demolition of a monument is a simulacrum-event, which produces an experience of sovereignty in that destruction of the architecture that provides structure to the physical experience of spatial relations in contemporary civilisation. In Bataille's description of the constitution of the sovereign experience, he designates the "miraculous" as being the catalyst, where the miraculous is designated by the "unanticipated" and the "impossible" event framed by destruction and death.[254] He uses the example of the death of the "death of a king" to illustrate the effect it has on the king's subjects (ironically) as sovereign and transgressive, and in the experience of living in a contemporary city, architecture, and particularly the buildings (skyscrapers) that function as locations where bodies are subjected to conditions of servility and utility (work) function in the same way as a king of an "Oceanic" tribe.[255] The destruction of architecture, then is an event willed into being by its appearance of impossibility – destruction is a demonstration of the fragility and impermanence of the even the most imposing structures – the event of which cannot be accounted for by the predictable, habitual experience of bodies moving through spaces.

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[253] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 207 (Bataille writes that the "negative miracle" is constituted by the impossibility of the event as it occurs).
[254] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 211.
[255] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 210.

Destruction of architecture appears as an event because of the immutable normative experience of buildings as solid, unchangeable structures without movement. Bodies, humans, agents and images negotiate the solidity of architectural structures as they move through the spaces created by those structures, each designated space is an intentionally differentiated experience for the bodies who use it. Those bodies decay far more rapidly and visibly than the architectural structures they inhabit, and so structures are experienced, superficially at least, as permanent. Bataille designates the "impossible" or the "unanticipated" along with temporal disengagement as the definitive components of the experience of sovereignty.[256] In doing so, he describes the means, without the specific process by which a sovereign experience might be produced. Sovereignty requires repetition, difference and destruction in order to exceed the limits of habitual experience, or expected experience that can be understood within the bounds of cultural knowledge and language.

The human experience of permanence and materiality are, in this sense, measured by speed. The faster an object moves, the more quickly that object appears to decay. In this way, sound waves appear less tangible than living organisms, light less tangible than sound. The relation between sound and the object that creates it is replicated in the relation between the bodies of people and the buildings that organise them. Architectural permanence, an illusion maintained by the fact that buildings move and decay more slowly than our bodies, is an illusion novelly and spectacularly transgressed by the renderings of disasters in film, alongside the challenge to architectural space performed by visual artists, and practitioners of methods of social and physical resistance like Psychogeography, Parkour and Skateboarding.[257] [258] Each of these examples resists the architectural structuring of physical relationships in space and movement by demonstrating that even though a structure may appear to be static and impermeable, even the most rigid and imposing edifice contains potential for alternative uses and for movement, and therefore, the socially prohibitive structure that architecture imposes upon bodies is able to be undermined. The desire for architectural destruction appears to have increased along with the technologies that

[256] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 206.
[257] On (Guy Debord's) Psychogeography, see Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*, 58.
[258] On resistance to social homogeneity and expressed by architectural hegemony in the development of the practice of parkour, see the documentary film *Generation Yamakasi: The Art of Displacement* (Mark Daniels 2002) which can be found online here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOYpHLHg6io

allow it to be depicted in the current Western cultural context that fuel the burgeoning Hollywood disaster film genre. In addition to mainstream disaster films, many contemporary art shows about the ruination of architectural structures continue to appear. The Tate Galleries in London alone have had two shows in the last year, including *Ruins in Reverse*, 2013 (documentation of decaying film sets in the Mexican desert) and *Ruin Lust*, 2014 (a survey exhibition designed as a "reminder of the universal reality of decay") that focus on artistic preoccupations with architectural destruction.[259]

However, the fissure that catalyses the sovereign experience is not simply an unidentifiable but instinctually "unanticipated" or "impossible," but is instead the apparition of a simulacrum.[260] The Deleuzian simulacrum (as it described in Chapter 1 of this thesis) is produced by difference that appears from within apparently uniform repetition in a hierarchy of iterations (which constitute Platonic representation), it is the bad, seditious copy among a sea of well-behaved clones.[261] This diversion from the expectation of repetition that the simulacrum represents is a destruction that creates the potential for a sovereign experience. The simulacrum is unpredictable, but it is not an entirely impossible or unanticipated apparition within the endless serialisation of the experience of the same. The experience of sovereignty can be anticipated as a deviation in the repetitions of a system or structure – the experience of sovereignty is not the "impossible," in this sense, but the simulacrum. The simulacrum has a relationship with the expected, and the habitual, but exceeds, transgresses and undermines it by exposing the mechanisms by which structures remain intact. Both the sovereign experience and the appearance of the simulacrum, therefore, rely on pre-existing structures of language, representation and experience to transgress, and therefore expose to those who witness them.

The appearance of a collapsing skyscraper is a species of simulacral-image. The skyscraper is unique as it is a reflection of the engineering ability of the industrial and post-industrial era and reflects a victory over impossibility and the unlikelihood of such an edifice. The skyscraper is the edifice that implies the permanence of industry and

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[259] Dillon, *Ruin Lust*, 5.
[260] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 306.
[261] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 293.

capitalist homogeneity. The representation of the collapse of a building (whether fictional or in news media reporting) can be experienced as an event that calls into question the experience we have of architecture as permanent, unchangeable and immovable. This experience of the simulacral, an event of destruction and the representations that circulate around it, becomes sovereign as the event itself cannot assimilate into our experience of temporality, where we are mortal and buildings are not. The destruction of architectural structures implies a collapse in the order of spatial relationships – between bodies and perceptually inanimate structures – and in doing so, undermines the structure of the authority of socially imposed order.

Bataille, in writing on architecture, extends his theoretical presentation to include aspects of culture formed around a perceivably architectural practice. The authority of architecture can be detected in any other form, "whether it be physiognomy, dress, music or painting."[262] Leaving aside the first two for the purposes of brevity and relevance to this chapter, the authority of architectural structuralism can be easily detected in both "classical" and popular music (consider the rigid structure of a Beatles song) and in visual art, both in the architecturally reminiscent (formal) paintings artists such as Bridget Riley or Wassily Kandinsky[263] and the site specific, or architecturally prescribed "land art" works of iconic American artists such as Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark, as well as the architectural, experience-based installations of such artists as Yayoi Kusama (who will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3) and Rachel Whiteread (whose work *Embankment* (2005) installed at the Tate Modern invited visitors into a chaotic maze of white blocks, controlling their movement in the Turbine Hall space, which was referred to as an "anti-monument" in the sense that it was not exclusionary and uninhabitable like The Shard).

Given this identification of architectural authority in both music and visual art practices, it is not a stretch to extend the theory of architecturally preoccupied cultural practices to the cinematic image. A filmmaking technique that concentrates on the form and structure of its material to point of absolute, claustrophobic control can be observed in the practice of Lars Von Trier, and most explicitly in *The Five*

[262] Bataille, "Architecture," 35.
[263] Kandinsky's obsession with structural authority was so complete that he wrote a visual art manifesto titled *Point and Line to Plane* (1947/1980).

Obstructions (2003) and *Dogville* (2003). Films like Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958) explore a preoccupation with architectural form, how it dictates movement through spaces and communications, and therefore, how it produces social difference. The negotiation of the architecture of a city can be observed in a vast number of films ranging from romantic comedies explicitly located in a particular setting (i.e. Woody Allen's oeuvre in New York) to heist and spy thrillers that use the architecture of a city to present obstacles for the narrative and spectacle for the viewer. There are also many films that use a famous building or structure as the focus of the narrative, with characters having to negotiate and (usually) escape the confines of the building. Examples of these include prison break films like *The Rock* (1996) and *Escape From Alcatraz* (1979) and films focused on a single iconic building, or series of iconic buildings like *V for Vendetta* (2005), *White House Down* (2013) and *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013).

The authoritative, controlling effect of architectural presence can therefore be observed manifesting in films in a variety of ways. However, as alluded to above, there are also modes of filmmaking where the subject of the narrative is the destruction of architectural organisation of bodies in space. These films constitute a narrativised resistance against the architectural mode itself through the fetishisation of the destruction of (recognisable) architectural monuments. The final films listed above, *V for Vendetta*, White *House Down* and *Olympus Has Fallen* are arguably examples of this, but are focused on the destruction of a single monument that has a tangible sociopolitical meaning (primarily buildings that house processes of governance). In contrast, other films such as *2012* (2009), *Independence Day* (1996), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2003) (all directed by Roland Emmerich), *Knowing* (Alex Proyas, 2009), *Battle Los* Angeles (Jonathan Liebesman, 2011) *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), *The War of the Worlds*, (Byron Haskin, 1953) War *of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005) *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998) and *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998)[264] are less focused on the destruction of a single, architectural monument that represents the authority of a particular state order.[265] Instead, these films explore the more radical possibility of the

[264] This film is a peculiar example as it is the only one in this list where the destruction event is averted. It does, however, contain a spectacular scene near the start where a meteor shower devastates New York in a spectral foreshadowing of September 11, 2001.

[265] In the course of researching this chapter, I have discovered that there is a wealth of made for television films that explore the same topic. As they have much lower budgets than their "blockbuster" counterparts, the computer-generated graphic animations (particularly of explosions and destructions) are subpar and so highlight the aesthetic primacy of expensive digitalised explosion scenes.

generalised destruction of all forms of authority, represented by the annihilation, or sovereign destruction of the illusion of permanence that architecture exudes. Disaster films that explore the possibility of city-wide, nationwide or global destructions of architectural space undermine the relationship between architectural spaces and between those spaces and the bodies that inhabit them.

While representations of the destruction of specific monuments amounts to a simulacrum experienced as a destruction of the sociopolitical order referred to by those monuments, it is an experience of destruction containable within that social order in which they appear (and from which the society in question could conceivably recover from – albeit in an altered state). The destruction may refer to the end or the reconfiguration of a particular political structure, but the possibility of a social order (however different from the one in place before the architectural destruction) is maintained. However, where the destruction of social order is represented as total, or unrecoverable, the film narrative is forced to compensate (with a socially re-stabilising resolution) for the heterogeneous representation of destruction that cannot entirely be neutralised or accounted for by reinscription back into the homogeneity of the commerce driven blockbuster format. The generalised destruction of the authoritative social control that architecture exerts over human experience requires that the spatial relationships that architecture dictates be annihilated. When disaster films represent this destruction as an fetish-aesthetic, they destroy every social relationship that architecture frames. While this sovereign destruction is generally compensated for by the narrative focus of the conservative, nuclear family there is an element of sovereign destruction that cannot be recuperated by capitalist homogeneity.

ARCHITECTURE FORMS SPACE

In the eyes of the Egyptians, the pyramid was an image of solar radiation.[266]

[Figure 7: The view from the base of the Shard, London.]

For Bataille, architecture is only ever an authoritative presence that reflects the "ideal form" of society as decided upon by those agents in positions of power.[267] He argues that architecture primarily reflects the aspirations of the society that builds it, and the governance of the social order in which it is found, and only secondarily, the cultural context in which it subsequently exists. For example: The recently built London skyscraper "The Shard" does not reflect the London that is, as it appears in its current perennially unfinished, austere and homogeneous modality, but how London aspires to be – an ultramodern global presence that dominates every negotiation. The edifice of The Shard, dominates the experience of living in central London, while remaining entirely excluded from the majority of people who live around it.[268] [269] Architecture,

[266] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 223.
[267] Bataille, "Architecture," 35.
[268] The viewing decks of The Shard are extremely expensive to access, so most Londoners primarily experience it as an insistence presence in the city skyline, or from the base of the structure itself.
[269] Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage*, 23. In this section, Wilson refers to "cathedrals to capitalism" (in reference to another recent UK development, the Trafford Centre in Manchester) highlighting that

then, is primarily an expression of aspiration – the expression of authority that aims to control bodies that comprise the governed populace in order to actualise the aspiration of that governance. It is an effective method of imposing spatial and temporal order on the disorderly bodies of the living.[270] Bataille does not engage with the subtleties inherent in the social organisation that architecture offers, but writes from the point of origin as the architectural imposition of authority, from which the projects of Denis Hollier and Michel Foucault develop. Architecture can only appear as a formal representation of control, "it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State speak to and impose silence upon the crowds" and any form of control, for Bataille, is a prison.[271]

In *Against Architecture*, Hollier begins with Bataille's relationship to architecture as one of resistance and critique, "Bataille denounces architecture as a prison warden."[272] He describes Bataille's work on architecture as loosely post-structural before its time, and implies his influence on the events of May '68, particularly in Paris and by extension, the Situationist Internationale, and Guy Debord.[273] Later, Hollier asks, "What is architecture?" and his reply, via Adolf Loos is that "architecture is first recognised by the affect it produces" and therefore, by the behaviour it directs and curtails.[274] Bataille links architecture to the power and control of state and religion, both in the way it organises bodies into certain activities, directions of movement, usage, and can be used to create an affect, like overwhelming awe or wonder for the institution that it houses – a trait expressed particularly in religious and state (public) architecture, which, as was discussed in the Introduction, appeared in earliest examples of static communities.

Architecture's ability to affect bodies and to exert power over the populace in Bataille's work, becomes a form of social and biopolitical control for Michel Foucault. Bataille's theory of architecture hinges on architecture's ability to create meaning through visibility, where bodies are controlled by the experience of seeing and living amongst the material limits of architectural structures, and can subsequently be

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these structures have the awe-inducing structures of cathedrals rather than the utilitarian architecture of prisons.

[270] Human, animal and vegetative.

[271] Bataille, "Architecture," 35.

[272] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, ix.

[273] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, ix.

[274] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xxi.

dominated by its presence and permanence. Architectural structure lies in its fundamental relationship between the formation of social order and its maintenance through spectacular structural imposition. Bataille is concerned with how architecture shapes the subject's experience of space, and what that experience tells the subject about who "we" are.[275] Hollier compares Bataille's architecture to Foucault's, where Bataille writes on "authoritarian representations" Foucault writes about "technologies of power."[276] Both of these theories of architecture resolve into a single "generic" intention for the phenomenon of architectural design in the behavioural control exerted by the modern prison.[277] At this juncture, Hollier asks if there can be the possibility of a reversal of this system, in the form of a non-institutional, non-subject-producing mode of architecture. He describes (in vague terms) a "current important project for public spaces in Paris" which he feels is fulfilling this goal.[278] The key to the project appears to have been the expansion of (unstructured) space, negative space, in central Paris through a "performative loosening" or "loss of meaning" which interacts with the structured (Napoleonic) basis of the city, potentially as a mode of formlessness, after the imposition of form.[279] But, as Bataille argues in "The Obelisk," space, punctuated by a monument, or contained by any kind of city-planning designation is also institutional architecture, as it delineates where the "human dust" is permitted to waft.[280] The only way to transgress the socio-structural effect of architecture, therefore, is to destroy it.

[275] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xi.
[276] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, x.
[277] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, x.
[278] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xi.
[279] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xi.
[280] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 215.

EXPLODING MONUMENTS:
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

We have dreamt of this event...*We wished for it.*[281]

[Figure 8: An alien spaceship looms above New York City (and the Twin Towers) in *Independence Day*.]

The destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 is the simulacral event to all which disaster films made before and since cannot help but refer. The complex and ongoing political and social issues that surround the event, along with the trauma of the affected population are well beyond the scope of this thesis, and so I approach this event solely as a symbolic destruction of architecture, designed and executed for its spectacular effect. The destruction of the Towers appears to be an event that was positioned to address itself to the visual and repetitive global news media. The spectacular aspect of the attack was quite obviously inspired by the many mainstream Hollywood films that have used the idea of such events as premises to spectacular films. The coordinated events that occurred, which, even as they occurred, were noted by eyewitnesses as "like a movie" were to attack what the terrorist organisation recognised as key architectural symbols of US society. The Pentagon Building (which houses the Central Intelligence Agency) is the architectural and physical base for United States' international operations. The White House (which is the assumed target of a plane that crashed in a field nearby) contains the seat of American national and political governance. And finally, the Twin Towers

[281] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 5.

were the architectural symbol of America's economic position of financial dominance over the rest of the world, and operated as the spiritual home of the capitalist economic system. It is the destruction of these towers that was the most widely televised, spectacular and visually dominant horror of the day, not simply because it was where the most people died, but because it was the most visibly traumatic spectacular destruction of architecture, and the most radical annihilation of the pinnacle of American governance. To the terrorist organisation who organised the attacks the Twin Towers appeared to have symbolised the head of the beast, the visible removal of which might just bring it down entirely. However, the capitalist system cannot be destroyed, or even significantly harmed by the destruction of even the most symbolic of its churches. Capitalism is a Hydra economic and social system, its heads are dispersed, multiplying even as they are removed, and as Baudrillard argues, any symbolic attack only strengthens and multiplies its dominance in now ever-vigilant "perpetual deference of an invisible enemy."[282] The effect instead was to hasten the evolution of the capitalist economy to combine it with a surveillance system that seeks to identify and eliminate resistance, to "criminalise the entire populace" with vigour and focus.[283]

As I progress toward completion, the National September 11 Memorial Museum has just (finally) been opened.[284] It is a museum situated at the memorial complex on the site of the Twin Towers, and has attracted criticism for the inclusion of a gift shop. However, the "crass" commercialisation of atrocity is not at all surprising, and is expected and common in late-capitalist culture, with museums built to commemorate various traumas in the US and elsewhere having gift shops.[285] Examples cited in the Washington Post article to include the US Holocaust Museum in Washington and the Pearl Harbor Memorial in Hawaii.[286] Other examples include the museum shop at The House of Terror Museum in Budapest (which features festive candles in the shape of busts of Lenin, Marx and Stalin and reproductions of ration tins, with "Terror Haza" printed on the side) and the DDR Museum in Berlin, which, in addition to cheerful, nostalgia-driven displays about communist life, visitors can buy reproductions of

[282] Baudrillard, *Spirit of Terrorism*, 82.
[283] Baudrillard, *Spirit of Terrorism*, 20.
[284] The opening ceremony was held on May 14, and it was opened to the public on May 21, 2014. The opening was initially scheduled for September 11, 2011.
[285] Phillip, "Families Infuriated by 'crass commercialism' of 9/11 Museum shop."
[286] Phillip, "Families Infuriated by 'crass commercialism' of 9/11 Museum shop."

products made in East Germany while it endured trade sanctions. A museum shop can also be found at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum where "materials on atomic bomb and peace issues are available for purchase."[287] What this demonstrates is that the "crass" commericalisation the primary way in which the contemporary culture mediates traumatic events, and this commercialisation includes the reproduction of those events in mainstream filmmaking.

Shortly after the events of September 11, Jean Baudrillard wrote a series of essays (collected and published on the first anniversary of the day under the title *The Spirit of Terrorism*, another arbitrary repetition) responding to the attack and the symbolic order it produced. One of these essays, "Requiem for the Twin Towers" described the buildings as a demonstrably digital architectural edifice, they appeared as two copies without an original.[288] The apparition of the Towers, for Baudrillard, upset the competitive, pyramidal aesthetic of the New York skyline, which, before the towers were built, had assembled itself in an organic but hierarchical structure. The exact duplication represented by the capitalist monoliths heralded a simulacral end-point, the Tower-"clones" were a symbol of the erasure of the value of origin.[289] In response to which, Baudrillard writes: "there is, admittedly, in this cloning and perfect symmetry an aesthetic quality, a kind of perfect crime against form."[290] Therefore, as Baudrillard notes, the Towers were symbolic objects, not only of the primacy of Western civilization and its imposition on the rest of the world, but the primacy of late-capitalism, the production of value for its own sake (without the original or inherent value of an object). Baudrillard, plainly influenced by Georges Bataille, describes the Towers as being "a party to their own destruction," or in other words, the audacity of their presence inspires the will to destroy them.[291] "Even in their pulverised state, they have left behind an intense awareness of their presence."[292]

Baudrillard, plainly alluding to the "unanticipated" of the negative miracle in the constitution of sovereignty in Bataille's *Accursed Share*, writes that the destruction of

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[287] Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum website, "Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum English Pamphlet."
[288] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 38.
[289] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 42.
[290] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 42.
[291] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 45.
[292] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 48.

the Twin Towers is "unimaginable."[293] However, it is precisely because such a spectacular destruction of the monument is imaginable, and representable in visual cultures, that the simulacrum-event of September 11 was both able to occur and able to carry off the effect that it had. The imaginability of the destruction of the Twin Towers gives the event its symbolic gravity. In the first essay (and the temporally most immediate response to the event) Baudrillard describes the event as the physical, sovereign articulation of a morbid collective will, "we have dreamt of this event" and now it has occurred, fulfilling this willful impulse.[294] More than a dream, this fascination with the destruction of architecture appears as spectrally, haunting all forms of representative media, repeating itself as threat and event. Far from being either unimaginable, or impossible, it is a primary preoccupation of contemporary American filmmaking (and arguably the one most heavily invested in) both before and after September 11. In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard frequently mentions "disaster films," as the ubiquitous quintessentially Hollywood genre of filmmaking that excessively represents the destruction of architecture for the purpose of visual pleasure, "we wished for it" he says, by making films that suggest it.[295] It is the affective quality, as the overwhelming, cathartic spectacular that is the destruction of a monument (and not the genocide) that such filmmaking courts, as a simulacral potentiality of sovereign experience.

[293] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 28.
[294] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 5.
[295] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 5.

[Figures 9 & 10: The destruction of the Chrysler building in *Armageddon*, demonstrating the ludicrous fragility of the human form in relation to the destruction of architectural form.]

The relationship between architecture and bodies is a tension based in temporality. Architecture organises the space through which bodies move, and as such, bodies perceive architectural structures to be static, while they move through space over time. This provides architectural structures with the appearance of permanency from the perspective of the bodies who inhabit it. Accordingly, the most startling image of the relation between architectural destruction and the experience of human bodies could be seen in the phenomenon of the (almost 200) people who jumped from the top of the Towers after the impact of the planes.[296] The stark distinction between the organic brevity of the bodies that fell and the suddenly unstable architecture collapsing around them is one of the most striking, simulacral images from the event. In the film

[296] Whitworth, "9/11: 'Jumpers' from the World Trade Center still provoke impassioned debate."

Armageddon, the "jumpers" are foreshadowed in a scene that shows people falling from the Chrysler building ahead of the top half of the tower. Notably, though, the Twin Towers survive the asteroid attack on Manhattan, and remain standing in smoking defiance. In *2012*, images that also bring to mind the jumpers of New York appear in the destruction of Los Angeles. As the family drives through the city (in search of a route to the airport) they swerve through collapsing office blocks with distant bodies falling from windows and newly emerged fissures. In this instance, the bodies appear as a distant reminder of the consequence of ignoring the warnings of the paranoid, "the end is nigh."[297] The effect of explosive architectural destruction is cruelly seductive to those bodies who witness it (either directly, or through representative media) and thought of such a squander of resources and resistance to the control they effect - the accursed share of a sacrificed building and the collapse of something that is perceptually permanent - is the creation of a sacred object - external intimacy. People are built to die; and from the perspective of individual lives, buildings aren't, so the destruction of architecture is experienced as pure expenditure. This is the pay off provided by the disaster film, that Baudrillard associates as a triumph of pornography (visual representation of sexual expenditure, commodified).[298]

Both these genres of film deal in the repetitive transgression of boundaries between the productive and expenditure. While Baudrillard identifies a relationship between disaster films and the destruction of the Twin Towers, he locates September 11 as a "Real event" that he insists, transcends the simulacral historicity of the 1990s (Fukuyama's End of History).[299] Baudrillard describes terrorism as the heterogeneous other that responds to late-capitalist hegemony with violent and impossible acts against its structures. It is in this sense, the heterogeneity that the socially and politically homogenous refers to in order to justify its entrenched, inflexible structure. This terrorism of meaninglessness (for Baudrillard) implies that the state, itself, does not exist, the humiliated sovereignty of which is superseded by economic manipulation:

> The impossible exchange of death, the challenge to the system by the symbolic gift of death, which becomes an absolute weapon (the Towers seem to have understood this, since they responded with their own collapse).[300]

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[297] The character Carl Anheuser (Oliver Pratt) says to the president "It's kind of galling when you realise that the men holding the signs saying "the end is nigh" were right," *2012*.
[298] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 89.
[299] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 3.
[300] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 57.

Baudrillard's analysis of this event is plainly influenced by Bataille's theorisation of sacrifice, death and potlatch (humiliation through generosity), but at the heart of the gift of death in Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, there is a substitution; the simulacrum.[301]

Far from being a Real event in Baudrillard's terms, the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11 was a phantasm of the disaster film genre, and a simulacrum-event, numerously repeated prior to, and after the date of the event as it occurred in time. As Baudrillard acknowledges, terrorists meant to exploit the rapid dissemination of images, made possible by the technologisation of representative media, and the effect the longevity of the images of the destruction would have.[302] The events of September 11, 2001 were explicitly designed for the repetitious American media format, and manipulated the Western-psyche's understanding of such an event as part of the disaster genre. The temporal organisation of the event, the time of day that it occurred (in global terms, when the majority of the citizens of the Western world would be awake and in contact with news media) the second plane hitting the second tower some time after the first (allowing enough time for every news crew in the New York City area to have every camera trained on the building) ensuring that the impact of the second plane on the building was witnessed, live on television, by a large proportion of the population of Western nations. The amount of forethought that apparently went into the spectacular manipulation of the event belies its effect, the destruction of an economic symbol "worth destroying."[303]

In sympathetic response to the spectacle of the destruction of the Twin Towers (like for like) a number of films produced at the time were significantly edited (both in form and narrative content) or had their releases delayed. Action and disaster films (most notably, *Spider Man*, *Collateral Damage* and *Men in Black II*) were affected, completing the Hollywood response to the Hollywood-conscious terror-event. The destruction of the Twin Towers is a phantasm that affects film made prior to it, as well as films that have followed. Numerous films have featured the Twin Towers in states of defiance and destruction in post-Apocalyptic settings (*Armageddon* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999),

[301] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 45. In this section on Aztec human sacrifice, Bataille writes that the Aztecs used "stand-ins" (usually slaves or prisoners of war) who were constituted as representational simulacra of their own bodies and families.
[302] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 26.
[303] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 46.

Escape from New York (1984),[304] *King Kong* (1976 version) and *King Kong Lives* (1986)[305], *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), *Deep Impact* (1998)) The presence of these ghostly towers becomes a phantasmic intensity to the event that marks their future. The destruction of the Towers, as a symbolic act, is the use of the Hollywood aesthetic system against itself, to intense, spectacular effect. If, as Bataille argues, architecture is the symbolic embodiment of social homogeneity, then, destroying the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center is akin to the destruction of the relations that maintain the social order of late-capitalism itself.

In the essay "The Obelisk" Bataille discusses the spatial effect of the Egyptian monument that stands in the Place de la Concorde, a monument that marks the event of execution by public guillotine during the French revolution. The monument mediates the path between the Louvre (a museum that was once a palace) and the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile – a structure erected by Napoleon to the memory of his victories, and which is positioned with a vantage point that surveys the grand avenues of Paris radiating from it. The Obelisk in the Place de la Concorde still punctuates the "multitude of insignificant lives" that move around it and imposes itself in the vastness of the space (and the chaotic traffic) that surround it.[306] The weight of the monument's lineage is not considered by most of this movement, but the trace of the Pharaoh's sovereignty still lingers in its permanence. For Bataille, the obelisk "focuses the attention on the guillotine" recalling and re-asserting the social order that the guillotine created.[307] The Obelisk geometrically marks the "duration" of the space around it, "it is the 'breath of empty space' that one inhales" in passing through its dominion, between the Louvre and the Arc de Triomphe.[308] The position of the Obelisk is loosely analogous to the Twin Towers as it sits between the cultural and military institutions that characterise the sociopolitical organisation of France. The Place de la Concorde is a ground-zero[309] of the modern French governmental system (the point at which law-making violence was enacted by executing Louis XVI and many

[304] In *Escape From New York*, the protagonist Snake Plissken, lands a plane on the roof on one of the towers to infiltrate a New York which has been established as a penal colony in the dystopic future of 1997.
[305] In *King Kong Lives*, King Kong falls from the Towers, and obviously, the Towers are not in the 1933 or the 2005 iterations of the filmic narrative.
[306] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 221.
[307] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 221.
[308] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 221-222.
[309] Another more commonly used term to describe the ruins of the Twin Towers after September 11, and the title of Paul Virilio's book on the topic.

members of the French aristocracy at that spot). The Place de la Concorde and the Obelisk that marks it mediates the space between culture, political positioning and the military in the contemporary French psyche in the same way that the presence or absence of the Twin Towers mediates the American relationship between governance and commerce.

[Figure 11: The Obelisk at the Place de la Concorde, Paris.]

As Bataille writes, the Obelisk organises bodies and movement through the use of geometry – the glazed eternity of control that imposes on the space used by the physical presence of transitory human bodies. Bataille mobilises the link that the Obelisk holds between his Parisian present, and a beginning of architecture in ancient Egypt. He attributes "sovereign permanence" to the apparition of the Obelisk as a

marker of the Pharaoh's power in life and connection with the (pre-Judeo-Christian) sacred.[310] Bataille draws a relation between architectural geometry and the materialist hierarchy inspired by the sun.[311] The rebellious predilection for creating representations of the destruction of such monuments belies the control they exert over bodies, and the social control that such a physical control implies. When visual cultures represent the destruction of such monuments, they explore the demise of the social structure the monument represents.

In another essay on the use of public architecture, "The Museum," Bataille further implicates the notorious events of another social upheaval in the Louvre's transition from palace to public collection by noting that "the origin of the modern museum is thus linked to the guillotine."[312] In this brief essay, Bataille describes the architecture of the museum, the organisation and curation of its materials, or the "halls and art objects" as a "container" for the spectators to become ensnared by.[313] This container inscribes the values of the civilisation that produced the museum by means of creating "an object of wonder" out of the spectators themselves, and as such "the museum is a colossal mirror" for an audience to gaze into.[314] The architecture of the museum organises bodies in a way that educates them about the structure of the social order in which they find themselves. Museum design draws bodies through collections to view, consider and move to the next exhibit, reflection and movement are designed to be rhythmic, for limited portions of contemplation in advance of movement.[315] The effect of mirroring that Bataille describes appears in Nietzschean affirmation – the ancient repetition of the process of becoming artefact is reflective of a will to sovereign permanence, as well as a resistance against the will to sovereign permanence of others.

The positioning of crucifixes on top of the obelisks in Rome is described as a "botched copulation" of the sovereign permanence of architecture and the hierarchy of values that Bataille believes, after Nietzsche, Judeo-Christian monotheism introduced into the world, by way of Socrates' assertion of the good and in doing so, "turned TIME into

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[310] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 215.
[311] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 215.
[312] Bataille, "The Museum," 24.
[313] Bataille, "The Museum," 24.
[314] Bataille, "The Museum," 24.
[315] Further discussion of the architecture of viewing and participation and visual art is contained in Chapter 3, in relation to the environmental design of the work of Yayoi Kusama.

EVIL" in Western thought.[316] In Bataille's thought, absolute sovereignty is extinguished by the introduction of valued hierarchy of good and evil, and by extension, modern religion and "the equivocal image of the death of god" crouching over the obelisk in the form of the crucifix is a hijack, and a destruction of the sovereign permanence the obelisk imposes.[317] For Bataille, the pre-Judeo-Christian Egyptian Pharaoh is unfettered by the imposition of monotheistic religion and is therefore, in his estimation, absolutely sovereign in a way that post-Christian monarchs are unable to achieve. He describes the Egyptian Pharaoh as existing in a state of absolute permanence, "a kind of luminous and living edifice" whose physical existence repeats, but whose position remains unwavering.[318] As briefly referred to in Chapter 1 in relation to ancient forms of sovereignty, for the people of Egypt, the Pharaoh represented an incarnation of the deity Ra (sun-god) and in theory, ruled absolutely and without external influence.[319] While the architecture of the pyramid memorialises the death of the Pharaoh's physical presence and journey to return to his place with the other deities, the Obelisk insists upon his immortality and continued imposition of structure on the anarchic populace by virtue of his embodiment of Ra.

[316] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 218.
[317] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 218.
[318] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 215.
[319] Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 303-304.

THE APPARITION OF SPATIAL DESTRUCTION: ARCHITECTURAL DESTRUCTION AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world. Ends.[320]

[Figure 12: Los Angeles sinks into the sea in *2012*.]

The ongoing aesthetic shift caused by the events of September 11, 2001 can be observed in the representation of disaster in films made after the event. There have been surprisingly few films made that explicitly use the event as the anchor for a dramatic narrative, although notable examples include: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Stephen Daldry, 2011), *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, 2006) and *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006). Those that have been made appear to have been commercially unsuccessful, and unsurprisingly were not developed with the same excessive glee to be observed in other films whose narratives centre around the disastrous destruction of architecture. September 11, as a political and national event has an equivalent semiotic power to that of the executions in the Place de la Concorde. However, unlike the French Revolution, which expressed the political will of the population of France, the events of September 11 both demonstrated the limitations of the apparently dominant American hegemony and the beginning of new modes of surveillance and control as they were exercised on the world's population. The key difference between disaster events as depicted in most of the films I have

[320] Eliot, "The Hollow Men," adapted with the above punctuation (and reversed) and used as a mantra for *Southland Tales* (Richard Kelly, 2006).

discussed here, and the events of September 11 being that the latter was not a "natural" disaster, or one enacted upon the American populace by malevolent aliens with unknown chemical composition, but the banality of terrorism, which as Baudrillard notes, is a heterogeneous reaction produced in response to the global homogeneity of American culture itself, where "America is here merely the allegory or universal figure of any power incapable of bearing the spectre of opposition."[321] Terrorists, for Baudrillard, are "prisoners of resemblance" in a statement recalling both Bataille's description of Aztec practices of human sacrifice (where the slave, servant or prisoner of war is used as a stand-in for the family from whom sacrifice is required) and also Deleuze's description of the simulacrum.[322] And as such, it is terrorists (as unknown bodies inhabiting a position that exceeds all individual experience) that seek the mediatisation of their most spectacular attack, in a simulacral repetition of the American filmmaking tradition.

The relationship between disastrous events and media reporting is articulated in many disaster films. September 11 was exceptional in its demonstration of the mediatisation of disasters, and the reverse experience of an event through media reporting. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, various ominous weather events that foreshadow the speedily encroaching ice age (snowing in New Delhi, tornadoes in Los Angeles) are framed by instances of journalistic reporting. These scenes are marked with some darkly comic moments (cheesy presenter hit by car-sized debris) and largely appear to demonstrate the ridiculousness and ethical void of journalistic reporting in the face of a disaster. While pre-September 11 films also have journalistic scenes (*Deep Impact* follows the character of an ambitious journalist who climbs to prominence as the world ends) these scenes become multiple in films made after September 11.

In disaster films, iconic, or monumental buildings, cities and landscapes are almost exclusively chosen for the most spectacular and familiar destructions. In films such as *Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *2012* and *White House Down*, Roland Emmerich provides spectators with spectacles of destruction, always using iconic, recognisable American cities. In *2012*, Los Angeles is shown crumbling into the sea, in *The Day After Tomorrow*, the articulated downtown Los Angeles skyline is beset with

[321] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 63.
[322] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 64.

tornadoes that even go as far as removing the Hollywood sign on their way through, and in *Independence Day*, both New York and L.A. host scenes of excessive destruction (along with a number of other major US cities) as the product of the first phase of an alien invasion, and where *White House Down* obviously focuses on the White House, it obliterates it entirely (along with half of Washington). The destruction of the Washington Monument also appears in *2012* in a very literal demonstration of the economy of destruction in Bataille's monumental hierarchy. The president (Danny Glover) ineffectually attempts to help emergency workers with an overwhelming number of injured people (and a lost child) as ash settles ominously on the scene. An earthquake affects the area, and the president looks up to discover the Monument falling, descending upon the scene, and targeting him. When the audience is returned to the Washington area, a tidal wave has reached the area, and the president lies among the people who have been affected by the earthquakes that continue. As the tidal wave reaches, the Washington Monument collapses on the President, who the film focuses on, even as other people are crushed around him.

Central to these films is the destruction of recognisably iconic, or monumental architecture. As they are constructed, the deaths of the people caused by the destruction only serve to further illustrate the destruction of the architecture itself. In *2012*, as Jackson Curtis (John Cusack) drives through Los Angeles with his family, the streets undulating around them, two old women in a car serve as an obstacle to be avoided and removed from the path of Curtis' limousine. (They meet their end a short time later in spectacular fashion, slamming against a wall of earth that appears without warning from the moving ground.) As Curtis and his estranged family group cross the city, buildings collapse into one another, with people hanging from each floor – a feature that serves only to emphasise the spectacle and scale of the destruction of architecture.

Bataille describes the pyramids as "rising up like the totality of centuries... they transcend the intolerable void" which bears a close relation to Deleuze's description of the Great Pyramid in writing on the event.[323] In this chapter of *The Fold*, Deleuze describes the Great Pyramid as an event, and as an "Eternal Object" as its presence

[323] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 216.

refers to the material of history that has passed around it.[324] Deleuze constructs a theory of the event around the similar but competing theories of Leibniz and Whitehead. He begins by referring to the intervention of "the screen" resulting in chaos existing "only in abstraction" where the screen is a mediatory plane that creates meaning from occurrences.[325] Therefore, says Deleuze, chaos is "the sum of all possible perceptions" that the screen (of mediation) orders into hierarchies of meaning.[326] The geometry of the screen – the plane – has an interventionist quality, a state of permanence, like the Obelisk, where the "perceptions" that circulate around it are as transitory as the "human dust" in the Parisian square.

The Great Pyramid is both an event, and "also an eternal object that remains the same over a succession of moments" that gains immortality within the confines "only in the limits of flux that creates them."[327] The pyramid is a monument to the passing of time, and bears witness to it, but remains unchanged by it – as long as it remains within the limitations of its genesis. The pyramid, like all architecture, is the imposition of control and order on the movement of human bodies, and when that order (which can be loosely conceived of as civilisation as it has developed and conceives of itself in a narrative fashion) disappears, so too will the meaning of the pyramid as an eternal object. In visual cultures that represent the fantasy of disaster, this process of gradual decline is replaced by a violent destruction of the monuments of civilisation, and by extension, civilisation itself. This destruction is a transgression of the limits of the mediatory screen. The depiction of generalised, worldwide architectural destruction in disaster films like *2012*, *Independence Day* and *Deep Impact* imply the destruction of the relation between people as mediated by the citizens of states. This is not a violence that reasserts social order through chaos and resolution, but rather, a sovereign violence that wipes cultural memory clean of the narrative of civilisation itself.

Bataille celebrates the possibility of this destruction by describing "a feeling of explosion and a vertiginous weightlessness surround(ing) an imperious and heavy obelisk."[328] The relationship between happiness and joy with the potential for

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[324] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 86.
[325] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 86.
[326] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 87.
[327] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 90.
[328] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 217.

destruction, and more specifically treacherous instability that the static Obelisk implies, mirrors the ecstatic pleasure derived from the representation of destruction of architecture in visual cultures. Hollier refers to Bataille's article on the "storming of the Bastille as the revolt of the mob against monuments."[329] Here again, Bataille has demonstrated that violent destruction is the only response to the geometry of institutionalised control that is architecture. Hollier, in relating architecture to form, suggests that the form of architecture mirrors the form of us, and therefore, "man's revolt against architecture is a rebellion against his own form, against the human figure."[330] He relates this rebellion to Bataille's formation of "headlessness" as the "dismemberment of meaning" and therefore, formlessness as the destruction of meaning that comes with the destruction of geometric order.[331] Bataille connects architecture to sacrifice as they perform the same social function – the performance and reiteration of the social order – the imposition of the limits of human behaviour. The sovereignty of kings and dictators is overthrown by dust (material) and time, but the sovereignty of the eternal object remains, "the horizon nonetheless remains bound by these great figures."[332] Therefore, it is sovereign permanence and as such, the destruction of architecture is an absolute annihilation – the sovereign destruction. Just as the monument, the eternal object only ceases to carry meaning after its symbolic function has no point of reference, the destruction of such architectural forms signify the collapse of that social order.

In the film *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001) which was intended to narrativise the entrapment of American soldiers in Somalia's capital Mogadishu in the 1990s, the destruction of the landscape contains an undercurrent of the events of September 11, which occurred when the film was being made. The film clearly intends to serve as a parable for the American population as to why the occupation of foreign countries may not be in their best interest, but the film exists in the shadow of the future militarisation of the search for the terrorists who enacted September 11, and the invasion of several countries by the US to that end. Unlike disaster films set in the US, *Black Hawk Down* depicts the destruction of an already decaying urban context full of delicate colonial buildings that have fallen into disrepair in the hands of local warlords.

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[329] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xi.
[330] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xii.
[331] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, xii.
[332] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 217.

The US soldiers, bored, and riding a helicopter along the Somali coast converse with one another about how the area would be a perfect holiday destination. Another soldier retorts that even the water is shark infested. Even the most pristine, inviting beach in Somalia contains hidden threats. This is a metaphor for the entire film – there is an explosion behind every wall.

[Figure 13: The constantly explosive Mogadishu in *Black Hawk Down*.]

Where the US cities that we see destroyed in Hollywood films are recognisable skylines, pristine and maintained before they are destroyed, in *Black Hawk Down* and more recent (post-Iraq) films like *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008) show destruction in the already other-world post-apocalyptic and anonymous landscapes which are presented as Somalia and Iraq respectively (*Black Hawk Down* was filmed in Morocco, *The Hurt Locker* was filmed in Jordan). In these films, American soldiers carry out the destruction of monuments primarily while groups of largely anonymous locals watch on, or are caught up in the explosions.

[Figure 14: Baghdad and the continuing threat of explosion after the destruction of architecture in *The Hurt Locker*.]

While Bataille's architectural theory remains strictly within the public domain – the public and social organisation of bodies in order to inflict social control, the generalised destruction of society in visual cultures often begins with the destruction of private, domestic space. Gordon Matta-Clark's art focuses on the reconfiguration and destruction of homes, which implies the domestic sphere and familial relationships. Roland Emmerich's (and indeed many other disaster films) begin with an ostracised father or dysfunctional family unit which is then redeemed by the negotiaton of the disaster event. Their local, private spaces are the first spaces to be destroyed when the disaster, in general, appears. In this sense, both Matta-Clark, and filmmakers including Emmerich use the family unit and domestic space as a symbol of the social order in general, and its dysfunctional mode.

The representation of architectural destruction in *V for Vendetta* is reminiscent of the opening sequence, and storming of the beach scene in *Apocalypse Now*, which serves to illustrate the connection between the destruction of architecture and sonic simulacra. Napalmed trees burning to The Doors' "This is the End" resonate with the attack on the Vietnamese beach community, punctuated by Wagner's war cry, "Ride of the Valkyries," which apparently has lost none of its fascist glare. In *V for Vendetta*, when V begins conducting the destruction of the Old Bailey, the irritatingly familiar and

dramatic strains of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony materialise in order to punctuate and augment the explosion of the building.

The title character, V, destroys monuments for an explicit and restricted political purpose.[333] The narrative begins with V "conducting" a series of explosions that destroy the Old Bailey in a gesture of defiance against the fascist governance of a near-future England. Subsequently, V hijacks a state-run broadcasting system, announces the purpose of exploding monument and implores the population of London to stand with him in a year's time, when he intends to complete the work of Guy Fawkes and blow up parliament. Leaving aside the ironies of using the face of a Catholic Royalist as a symbol of "anarchy", the film's narrative is explicit and direct in its aims. The simulacrum of the explosions themselves are not located in the excess of destruction caused, but in the revelation of the political structure they are used to undermine. In this way, the explosion of monuments can be understood as the expression of a restricted economy of resistance.[334]

The naivety that the destruction of a single monument, or figurehead, like the "chancellor" of *V for Vendetta*, is indicative of this restriction. The violence inherent in the destruction of monuments is limited by the willingness to destroy only some monuments, some figureheads in order to achieve a finite outcome – an overturning of contemporaneous system. For all the catharsis of a sonic confluence of a monument exploding with fireworked accents, to the tune of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the act of destroying a particular building with a discrete aim remains restricted within a productive economy. The explosion of monuments is not only for the viewer of the film in *V for Vendetta*, it is also a spectacle performed for the oppressed but unaccountably politically savvy populace of the fascist future England. The destruction of monumental architecture is a simulacrum because the destruction is already implied by the presence of those structures. The filmic aesthetic that produces the sovereign experience does so by expending the energy of explosion those monuments already hold.

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[333] Directed by James McTeigue and released in 2005. The film's narrative was adapted from the graphic novel of the same title by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, published in 1982.
[334] Referring to Derrida's terminology for Bataille's "general economy of energy" in

[Figures 15 & 16: The destruction of spatial relationships in the destruction of architecture, when Los Angeles descends in *2012*.]

The distinction between the simulacral effect of monumental destruction, and the destruction of architecture *in general* lies in the multiplication of an explosion from an event to a spatial experience. Unlike in *V for Vendetta*, where the act of sovereignty is bound to the political activist, V, in disaster films, the operation of destruction is given over to the audience as an affect produced by the film, sovereignty lies in the unrecuperability of the loss of relationships between objects in space. In *2012*, it is not just iconic buildings have been destroyed, or that a city has been leveled, it is that the relationship between organic bodies and the inorganic structures that they in habit is destroyed. The reliable, temporal and spatial permanence associated with architectural space is undermined to the extent that there is no conceivable safety - no higher ground to go to except the sky (and that too proves more than problematic).

The difference between the restricted resistance of exploding monuments, and the generalised destruction of architecture is form. In the former, formal relationships between objects in space are maintained, while in the latter, spatial relationships themselves are destroyed, and material becomes formless – this destruction is a sovereign operation. It is in the generalised form of destruction, the destruction of spatial relations without recuperability, that the sovereignty of the simulacra of architectural destruction is located.

[Figures 17 & 18: the undulating roads of Los Angeles in *2012*.]

In the film *2012*, the destruction of architecture becomes the destruction of predictable (physical) relationships between material objects on Earth. In a scene where one of the protagonists, Jackson Curtis drives his two children, his ex-wife and her new husband through the crumbling streets of Los Angeles, the film establishes that there is no haven or stable ground to run or return to. This generalised,

unfocussed destruction – the sovereign destruction of architecture – shifts to simulacral focus from the imagining of the destruction of a single building, to the representation of destruction *in excess* of human culture *in general*. In other words, there is no single social structure, or political structure destroyed in *2012*, ostensibly, they are all destroyed.[335] The bodies of people are entirely displaced by the destruction of architecture, and by extension, the destruction of spatial relations. According to the plot, the Earth's crust is displaced, and shifts around, causing worldwide destruction.

The destruction of spatial relations as represented in disaster cinema constitutes a displacement of the assumption of permanence we attribute to the experience of architecture. In these films, the trauma or tragedy of the deaths of masses of human bodies is subsumed by the unnerving spectacle in which the spatial relationships that we experience as the maintenance of physical structures are destroyed. Conversely, in the following chapter, I will discuss the tyranny of architecture as a remainder in the depiction of extinction events that avoid undermining the constitution of spatial relations. In relation to the experience of isolated identity in the figure of the Last Man, I argue that the oppressive organisation of space (architecture) in excess of human life operates as spectral trace (image) to the memory and culmination of human history.

[335] In the closing moments of the film, there is an announcement that the continent of "Africa" remains "virtually untouched." The captain of one of the arks commands that a course be set "for the Cape of Good Hope." There are multiple, and obviously shocking implications of this announcement, including that a) Africa, in its entirety could remain untouched by the natural disaster that has consumed the rest of the world, despite the fact that Africa, as a land mass is connected with Asia, and the Indian Steppe was inundated by a catastrophic tidal wave, and b) that Africa is somehow unpopulated, or would be happy to welcome a group of Western European and American politicians and multi-billionaires to their shores.

CHAPTER 3

Extinction (I Am The Only One): The Destruction of Everyone Else

There was thunder
There was lightning
Then the stars went out
And the moon fell from the sky
It rained mackerel
It rained trout
And the great day of wrath has come
And here's mud in your big red eye
The poker's in the fire
And the locusts take the sky
And the earth died screaming
While I lay dreaming of you.[336]

[Figure 19: The Last Man wakes in *The Quiet Earth* (Geoff Murphy, 1985).]

The illusory notion of a singular, uninterrupted experience of subjectivity and agency is central to both the appeal and the horror of literature and film (and other cultural objects) that engage with the mythology of the last man. In the novel, *The Last Man*, by Mary Shelley (originally published in 1826) is a speculative epistolary novel, in which letters detailing the demise of the Anthropocene and a prophetic account of the last surviving man are found in a cave near Naples. Shelley's novel, along with an earlier French version (of the same title, written by the French priest Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville and published in 1805) were the earliest examples of the exploration of the apocalypse in modern fiction. With reference to this literary history, this chapter

[336] Tom Waits, "The Earth Died Screaming," *Bone Machine*.

discusses contemporary narrativised representations of human extinction in relation to the attractive conceptual singularity (the somebody) it produces in the illusive position of the Last Man and the frustration of the Last Man in his rediscovery of community.

Visual cultures that produce a simulacral experience of the end of the world sacrifice humanity to produce the last man in this position of some body (the final, and only natural production of identity). In the previous chapter, I argued that the destruction of monumental architecture produces the simulacral effect of the destabilisation of the human experience of spatial relations. I demonstrated that architecture, both the structure of buildings and negative space produced by their presence dominates the movement and passage of bodies in space forming social constructs through the repetition of moving through these places. The destruction of architecture, then, constituted a simulacral destruction of spatial relations as a sovereign experience. Therefore, in this chapter, the ubiquity of architecture in the absence of human bodies also constitutes a simulacrum of destruction, albeit of a different species. The appearance of the Last Man disrupts the concept of human consciousness, insofar as consciousness appears in the nexus between the risk of communication, and the discontinuity of individual beings.[337]

[Figure 20: Ralph Burton (Harry Belafonte) searches New York for survivors in *The World, The Flesh and The Devil.*]

The spontaneously organic appearance of consciousness is a phenomenon that could easily and quickly be obliterated. In Claire Colebrook's recent discussion of the demise

[337] Bataille, *Erotism*, 12.

of the posthuman, she identifies the way people relate to the material around them as entirely through destruction (consumption).[338] Material must be consumed - destroyed - in order that the identity of the human, and the posthuman might be established. This is always a process, an apparently accelerating and ostensibly endless destruction of useful and useable material, which, naturally, must have a point of absolute exhaustion. Colebrook writes that the climate (the material environment, both human and inhuman, living and inanimate) has a distinguishable consumptive end-point where the material that people consume in order to survive (physically and intellectually) will be used up. This outcome (the end of physical bodies, the end of material) is what Colebrook identifies as the potential for a physical world that exists as "image only."[339] As Colebrook writes, "we are not minds who represent a world, but organisms *from which* the capacity and figure of knowing mind emerged."[340]

In order to perform the thought experiment and fantasy of a world without other people, film, after literature, uses the image of the last man as an avatar of universality through whose orientation an audience can witness the possibility of a world in which people have become extinct, a "world without bodies" where people only exist in residual memory and image-traces.[341] As an audience, we identify with the survivors of an apocalyptic film, not only as they are our filmic avatars, but also because we all assume that we would be among the leftover living. From early literary examples (Shelley's *The Last Man*, is written in the first person in letters that address the reader) to contemporary films, these narratives are constructed in such a way that we can all imagine ourselves as (finally) Someone, in the position of the Last Man. End of the world films have as many incarnations as any potential apocalypse does; zombie films, natural disaster films, alien invasion films, disease epidemic films, evolutionary biology films, Biblical narratives, and so on. Every kind of filmic incarnation of the extinction event, there are survivors (even if they don't always survive the film) through whom we can attach our experience of the end of the world. There is a magnetic attraction to the "thought experiment of human extinction" reflected in the apparent repetition and acceleration of the production of these films that is not entirely accounted for by the obvious association with destruction paranoia as it relates to a politically

[338] Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 3.
[339] Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 28.
[340] Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 15.
[341] Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 28.

hackneyed awareness of catastrophic climate change, overpopulation and unstable governance.[342] There is a playful potential borne in the possibility of an apocalypse, which is directly drawn from the horrors of the thought of the death of our families, friends and fellow human beings – the thought of the destruction of everyone else - that produces our final, uninterrupted selves. In filmic meditations on the topic, the end of the world is approached with a sense of glee, thinly veiled by the previously noted mentioned concern for impending extinction. Apocalypse and extinction in visual cultures expresses an attraction to the surety and finality of a single identity, produced by the removal of communication from the destructive consumption of the everyday material experience of life. The sovereignty of the Last Man as the final representative of the human species is produced, not by the destruction of humanity, per se, but by the completion of the possibility for construction. Extinction offers the comfort of a final outcome of the appearance of the imaginary project of human consciousness.

The production of the position of the Last Man comes at the cost of the sacrifice of the rest of the human population. In order to perform this conceptual experiment, the absence of everyone else must be imagined to have been achieved. Imbued in the character of the Last Man is the memory of human history, and his experience is one of the absence of bodies, and the tyranny of the material (mineral) remainder of the Anthropocene era. However, the use of the Last Man as a central protagonist in film is designed with an invitational universality in mind, and the attraction of such films is clearly the possibilities of pleasure and horror that the Last Man experiences. In this sense, the Last Man is our simulacral avatar, a position that could be filled by anyone, with the possibility of the experience itself as everyone's.

The demonstration of absence, a process relatively familiar to many extinction narratives, is essential to the exploration of the Last Man's suddenly alienated existence. The Last Man has entered a state of sovereignty insofar as he apparently the sole occupant of the planet, and is unable to participate in the exchange of energy necessitated by the general economy of civilisation.[343] Without the ability to communicate and participate with other human beings, the man is stuck in a mode of

[342] Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 27.
[343] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Volume I*, 21.

entirely unproductive consumption.[344] He may only move around the material of the Earth without the gaze, judgement or recognition of other human beings – a state that is enviable and novel, but that carries with it an absolute terror – a combination which gives some explanation for the complexity of the attraction of such an image (and the sheer volume of films and other texts that have been made on this subject).

[Figure 21: Robert Neville (Will Smith) hunts deer in Manhattan, New York, in *I Am Legend*.]

While there are countless films that explore the close of the Anthropocene, in this chapter, my discussion will primarily be limited to two groups of films that explore the experience of the human extinction event through a single (always male) survivor.[345] The first group of films I will discuss are based on the 1954 novel *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson. These films include: *The Last Man on Earth* (Ubaldo Ragona, 1964), *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971) and *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007) and are about a man who survives the extinction of humanity because he has a resistance to a plague that infects everyone else on Earth, and turns some of those infected into zombies. The second group of films I discuss (in more detail) in this chapter are: *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* (Ranald MacDougall, 1959) and *The Quiet Earth* (Geoff Murphy, 1985), the latter of which is loosely based on the former, and both of which follow the journey of a man who (for varying reasons) reappears in the world after an absence (trapped down a mine in *The World*... and attempted suicide in *The Quiet Earth*) and discovers that he is alone. The beginnings of these two narrative groups

[344] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Volume I*, 23.
[345] While an indepth exploration of this issue is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter, I emphasise that it is important to recognise that extinction narratives are overwhelmingly about a Last Man, specifically. I have not been able to find an example of a film where the last representative of humanity is a woman.

differ in one main respect – in the first examples, the bodies of humanity continue to exist as dangerous traces of their former existence (as zombies) whereas in the second example, the bodies of other people have simply evapourated, and all they have left as evidence of their existence are the material objects and images they have affected in the past. Common to all these films, the figure of the Last Man, as the final witness of the extinction event, is the only person who has an identity as he is the summation of all human existence or the last separation of consciousness before all matter is returned to nature (physics). The Last Man is the confirmation of the destruction of everyone else, and the confirmation of the meaninglessness of the efforts contained in human history.

The significance of this distinction lies in how the Last Man experiences the post-Anthropocene world. In the first version, the residual bodies of people-turned-zombies operate as an excessive, fleshy, "emphatically embodied" and imposing populace.[346] They are bodies that over-populate the space that the Last Man inhabits, and in doing so, is both able to distinguish himself in relation to and derive hope for a potential future from. Zombies retain a residual sense of the form of humanity:

> They are not wolves or women (because they are no longer striated and signified within a human taxonomy) but they are human to the extent that they belong to the same form-structure, albeit increasingly tentative depending on their state of dishevelment.[347]

As a result of the zombie presence, the Last Man in each of these films has a predetermined way to live (in relation to these attacking bodies, determining the best times of day to gather resources, and when to shelter or barricade himself in) and a goal (finding a way to either eradicate or restore the bodies to their former selves. In the second group of films, which include *The World...* and *The Quiet Earth* a more radical proposition is presented, as the narrative isolates the Last Man from any discernible aim, or relationship with other present or animate bodies and materials. Beyond the sustenance of life, there is nothing for him to do, protect himself against, or work towards. This means that the excessive object-oriented consumptive pleasures (the residue of capitalism) available to him (vehicles and shopping centres full of goods to be taken) become pleasureless and empty, as they have no opposition, struggle or utilitarian economy attached to them. Extinction causes the Last Man to

[346] MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, 104.
[347] MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, 112.

experience only sovereignty without the possibility of a return to utilitarianism and productivity.

In *The World...*, a miner named Ralph Burton (Harry Belafonte) is trapped in a mineshaft by a cave-in, and while he waits to be rescued, the world ends, by virtue of global nuclear arrogance. When he finds a way out of the mine and re-emerges onto the Earth's surface, he discovers that there is no one else and no bodies (everyone appears to have evapourated) and that he is alone. In *The Quiet Earth*, the world has been almost completely cleansed of living matter by what the film vaguely designates as a nuclear "event."[348] As the film eventually establishes, the only survivors of this event are those who died at the exact moment at which the event occurred. Initially, the film introduces only one of these survivors, Zac (Bruno Lawrence) who inhabits the position of the Last Man, and for the first thirty-five minutes of the film, Zac is the only body that appears on-screen. In each of these films, the discovery of being the Last Man means operating within an ecstatic grief, living out fantasies of a world without rules, while waiting for those rules to return so that they can each return to the reassurance of their respective former utilitarian positions.

Both films approach issues of racial discrimination, particularly in relation the social prejudice and constraint placed upon interracial sexual relationships. In *The World...*, the main character, Ralph, is an African-American man who, upon meeting a white woman, Sarah Crandall (Inger Stevens) in the deserted city, articulates his anxieties about their relationship and attempts to undermine and displace her desire for him for the sake of what he sees as social continuity. The film ends with Ralph, the woman and a white man, Benson Thacker (Mel Ferrer) whom they have subsequently found (and whom Ralph insisted to Sarah to be a more appropriate partner for her than he was) walking off together to start the world again (with all relevant sexual and reproductive implications intact). In *The Quiet Earth*, the position of the third person in the group is filled by a Maori man, Api (Pete Smith) who displaces Zac as the primary sexual partner of the surviving woman, Joanne (Alison Routledge) in their group. In the final moments of the film, they are shown having sex, while Zac has left them to make an attempt to re-stabilise the world's atmosphere by causing a large explosion (by suicide). This, in the time in which it was made, was more controversial than it may

appear to foreign eyes, and the ongoing issues of discrimination against the Maoris (first inhabitants of New Zealand) are chronicled in New Zealand's national film industry.[349]

[Figures 22 & 23: Stills from the final scene of *The World, The Flesh and The Devil.*]

Films that explore the possibility of various extinction events frequently depict the effect the destruction of people has on the social inequity of the culture in which they were made. George A Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* is known for having an African American protagonist, Ben (Duane Jones), who defends his fellow survivors from constant zombie attack, only to be shot in the head himself (in the final scene filmed several weeks before the assassination of Martin Luther King Jnr.) by official forces attempting to restore order. Romero has acknowledged that the news of the assassination added gravitas to the final scene, but insists that the film was completed

[349] Some examples include: Utu (Geoff Murphy, 1984), Once *Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1994), *What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted?* (Ian Mune, 1999) and *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002).

prior to it.[350] Nevertheless, the content of the film reflects social anxieties and inequities of the context in which it was made. The freedom to explore the possibility of a world unbound by social, political and economic inequity, is, as Wheeler Winston Dixon argues, a key attraction of the extinction narrative.[351] In writing on the prevalence of extinction in contemporary Hollywood cinema, Dixon locates the "appealing" idea of extinction as the destruction of all life implies that "at last, all class, social, and racial boundaries will have been erased."[352]

However, significantly, Dixon fails to mention (or acknowledge) is that while social and racial barriers are renegotiated by the extinction of most (or all) of humanity, sex inequality remains. In each of the films I have discussed so far, along with countless other examples, prejudice and inequity between sexes survives everything, including extinction. It appears that as long as there are survivors, there will be gender inequity. In *The Quiet Earth*, Joanne's character is submissive, manipulated and discounted by the two male survivors, both of whom explicitly compete for sexual access to her. In *The World...*, even in the process of stating his own experience of prejudice and disadvantage, Ralph refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the sexual desires of his female companion as she is apparently too intellectually feeble to identify them for herself, while at the same time, admonishing her for using the phrase, "free, white and twenty-one."[353] In *Night of the Living Dead*, which is widely acknowledged as a film that addresses the issue of civil rights in America in a groundbreaking, politically critical and progressive way, the female character, Barbra, is reduced to a screaming liability, who supports "sexist assumptions about female passivity, irrationality and emotional vulnerability."[354]

In more recent films and television series, and including those that pretend to address sexual politics in a more equitable manner, women continue to appear primarily as at-

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[350] At the Melbourne International Film Festival on July 27, 2008, at a Q&A session for the documentary *Dead On: The Life and Cinema of George A Romero* and the release of *Diary of the Dead* (2008), Romero stated that news of the Luther King Jnr shooting was reported on the radio when he was driving to New York (from Pittsburgh, where Romero resided) with the canisters of *Night of the Living Dead* in the boot of his car.
[351] Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse*, 3.
[352] Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse*, 3.
[353] Sarah Crandall, *The World, The Flesh and the Devil.*
[354] Waller, *The Living and the Undead*, 283. (Also quoted in discussing sex prejudice in zombie films by Stephen Harper, "Night of the Living Dead: Reappraising an Undead Classic.")

risk objects who are unable to demonstrate agency or action.[355] Films such as *Land of the Dead* (George A Romero, 2005), *Armageddon*, *I am Legend*, *The Book of Eli* (Hughes Brothers, 2010), *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006) along with the television show *The Walking Dead* (Frank Darabont, 2010-present) all characterise female characters primarily in relation to their sexual and reproductive use-value, as well as their vulnerability to rape, rather than as active participants or partners in survival. It seems that some prejudices do survive the apocalypse, unless there are no survivors.[356]

The event of extinction, defined as the destruction of human life, or life in general on the planet (with, or without survivors) continues to remain an attractive proposition for filmmakers and audiences, even if it doesn't offer the liberation such a thought experiment promises. This attraction cannot be accounted for by what Dixon describes (in 2003) as the "global cultural meltdown" of the present era (the argument for which implies a ludicrously nostalgic former era where culture managed not to reflect the "failures of humankind"). [357] The attraction to the destruction of humanity, and in some cases life in general, is generated by the opportunity for novelty beyond social order (access to and fetishisation of consumer goods) and the desire to achieve an identity, which, as I have argued above, is only possible in the absence of communication, and therefore the absence of other people, the remainder of this chapter will explore these ideas as simulacral impulses.

EXPERIMENTING WITH SACRIFICE: HOW TO MAKE A LAST MAN

Making the Last Man appears to be simple. He is the final (problematically universal) human body, when all other appearances of humanity have been removed from the universe.[358] The position of the Last Man is as a simulacral body, comparable to the position of the sacrificial (human) body in Bataille's description of Aztec culture.

[355] Martin, "Anti-Feminism in Recent Apocalyptic Film."
[356] In the chapter "Zombies without Organs," Patricia MacCormack demonstrates that some zombie films, in particular, overcome identity politics in the dissolution of the restrictions that form the cohesive human self. However, this chapter primarily refers to non-Hollywood (primarily Italian) zombie films, and is focused on different species of zombies, than the ones seen here, which appear only secondarily to human extinction, rather than as the main focus of the film.
[357] Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse*, 2.
[358] This is refered to as problematic because, as Moira Gatens writes in *Feminism and Philosophy*, and Liz Grosz writes in *Volatile Bodies*, there is no such thing as a universal human body, although when it is represented, it is universally male.

Bataille describes the body of the sacrifice as a symbol, or stand-in used (generally a slave or prisoner of war) in the place of a family member.[359] The family assimilates the sacrificial body into the domestic sphere in order to construct the appearance of that body's relation to them before he or she is killed.[360] In that way, the body may symbolise the family, without the family losing a valued member. This is a process of constructing a simulacral body, or "second self."[361] Similarly, in visual cultures that focus on extinction narratives, which include a version of the Last Man, a narrative is constructed around the avatar of the last man (who we are all identified with, as he is the culmination of human history) while the sacrifice made to produce him is the human history he represents.

The body of the Last Man, as in the film, *The Quiet Earth* and *The World...*, is unproductive, and like the Aztec sacrifice, has no opportunity re-enter the domain of productivity. The ability to lose oneself into deference to a state, community or family group is evapourated, along with all living creatures. The Last Man has no option left to him except for unproductive expenditure (he cannot grow, and he cannot reproduce, so he must squander the resources he sees around him). This, to some extent, explains the scene, common to many apocalyptic films, where survivors gleefully indulge in excessive object-oriented commodity accumulation and waste.[362] There is no longer exchange value in money, and in the products they help themselves too, the superfluous resources contained in the shopping centre can only be squandered.[363] It is a gleeful, but empty experience that serves to emphasises their extraction from the social order, and from community. There is no longer a reason, or sense, or opportunity to accumulate, and they must live only in the present, squandering everything.

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[359] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 45.
[360] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 54.
[361] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 54.
[362] This occurs in: *The Quiet Earth*, *Dawn of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 1978 and Zack Snyder, 2004), *Night of the Comet* (Thom Eberhardt, 1984), *28 Days Later* (2002, Danny Boyle) as well as others.
[363] This relatively ubiquitous scene is also (ordinarily) dominated by any female survivors in apocalypse films, who are shown gleefully grabbing the products they can finally have access to, now that the world has ended and wealth has become irrelevant, with the explicit implication being that they are more frivolous and stupid (and less practical) than their male counterparts.

[Figure 24: Ralph heads toward Manhattan (another island) in *The World, The Flesh and The Devil.*]

Living without concern for operating within a social context is living without expending energy to grow or produce the larger whole. The last person left alive is only accountable to a community of evapourated nobodies, with a single, fading memory to sustain them. This is how the extinction of everyone else produces the final position of Somebody (in the absence of all other bodies) as the final experience of sovereignty. The position of Somebody is interchangeable, and supercedes identity (like the position of Pharaoh, or the Dalai Lama in Bataille's *Accursed Share*) and that single, unreliable memory is a final summary of all the nobodies, to produce that somebody.[364] No longer being in relation to the group, the community or the herd, the last man exists only in relation to himself, and the material world.

The nature of sovereignty lies in the experience of pleasure in the present without productive thought or planning for the future. The sovereign rejects work and productivity, and resides only in expenditure. The attraction of alienation lies in the impulse toward sovereignty. The veracity of sovereignty amplifies when the subject is removed from the milieu of potential practical energy. In other words, this chapter will explore the notion of sovereignty without the possibility of a return to productive work, which is a situation that an eschatological protagonist finds him or herself in. Living when everything else is dead, which is living in excess of life. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille describes the ritual processes of human sacrifice as performed by the Aztecs. In doing so, he provides a proto-model for the process of substitution and

[364] The sovereign position that supercedes individual identity, as Bataille describes in relation to both the Egyptian Pharaoh and in Tibetan Lamaism is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

religious representation that Klossowski later describes as his simulacral mode of communication.[365] Bataille writes that the sacrificial victim is produced (through lavish expenditure - food, alcohol, sex, luxury) as an avatar for the family who sacrifices him or her. Similarly, the Last Man is produced as the sacrificial avatar of a collective extinction fantasy through the unlimited expenditure that accompanies the experience of being the Last Man. He has all the resources that remain behind at his disposal, along with the knowledge and memory of all human achievements and technologies.

In the chapter that describes the position of unproductive expenditure in Aztec social order, Bataille describes their sacrifice of slaves and prisoners of war at the apex of (architectural) pyramids.[366] Sacrifices were made to appease the sun, to offer energy and resources to the object that sustains life. While the Aztecs might have considered the sun to be a limited object, which might, without constant human expenditure, stopped providing light and energy to the population, this association of exchange does not account for the process of the sacrificial ritual (and the expenditure it entails) itself. According to Bataille, the body of the human sacrifice (who, once appointed to be a sacrifice is also made an object) is invested in all manner of excess and expenditure. More and better food, clothes, alcohol and sex (in the case of male sacrificial bodies) was offered to the those to be sacrificed than could ever be hoped for in the lives of the Aztec population.[367] Bataille, like Aztecs themselves, goes to some trouble over the comfort and pleasure (unproductive expenditure) afforded to the sacrificial victim prior to being killed.

The sacrifices, made at the apex of the pyramid to get as close as possible to the sun (as the object of death, consumption and energy) so it can eat the heart (essence) of the sacrificial object (the body).[368] The Aztec population would offer either slaves or prisoners of war as sacrifice victims as a stand-in for their own bodies, who were a symbolic "second self".[369] The relationship between the victim and the people who offered her body for sacrifice, Bataille says, was intimate. Particularly in the case of prisoners from foreign tribes, who would be allowed to live with the family for whom

[365] Klossowski, "The Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication," 147.
[366] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 46.
[367] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 54.
[368] Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. 1*, 49.
[369] Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. 1*, 54.

they would be sacrificed, and would be considered to have a familial bond with that family, prior to the sacrifice itself. The people who offer the sacrifice and the priest or executioner (who performs the sacrifice) have intimate rights over the body and use of the person after the killing as well. Bataille details the blood ritual, which includes cannibalism – consumption of the body – of which those people who offer the sacrifice are first able to take part.[370]

The Aztecs believed that the sun required human sacrifice from their own families, but unwilling to part with their own lives, they produced simulacral kin as substitutions for themselves to appease solar hunger, "this was a sacrifice of substitution."[371] The use of the human body as an object made sacred by sacrifice is by no means unique to the Aztec cultures, however, their practices make plain what is suggested by other sacrificial cultural practises. It is the reduction of a body from a human to its best use – it is the position of slavery, made masterful by death. To live as a slave means to be alive, but mundane, whereas the slave who becomes a master (through sacrificial processes) must be killed in order to complete the transition.[372] Once the body is dead, it is consumed, "the consumption of the offerings, or the communion" with the order of consumption itself ordered by the hierarchy of the people who offered the sacrifice.[373] This belief system restores the sovereignty to objects that are otherwise reduced to their utility (best use) "sacrifice destroys that which it consecrates."[374] This is why religion is best produced by martyrs and destructive events. This surplus energy, whether it is the Aztec sacrifice, or the redundant body of the last man, as the accursed share, that energy that must be expended uselessly.[375]

There is a relationship with the Aztec form of human sacrifice, and the representational order of visual cultures that we experience in that we make sacred by the means of sacrificial consumption the bodies and objects that comprise our visual cultures (specifically popular media) that dominate our lives. It is therefore important to perform an analysis of visual cultures that takes into account the consumption that

[370] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 53.
[371] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 55.
[372] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 57.
[373] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 56.
[374] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 58.
[375] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 59.

creates the sacred object of visual culture itself.[376] The life of the last man is the opposite of Bataille's description of Stalinist communism in that it is all whimsy and no accumulation.[377] In mythologising the experience of the last man, film explores the displacement of utility and accumulation, but beyond the capitalist metaphor inherent in most apocalyptic cinema, the figure of the last man is a simulacral sacrifice, through whom we destroy the possibilities of humanity for pleasure.

FINALLY, SOMEBODY!
RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND THE LAST MAN

In an appendix of *Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze gives an account of Michel Tournier's adaptation of Robinson Crusoe. In this analysis, Deleuze argues that the distinction between Defoe's and Tournier's Crusoe is a shift from the process of the thought experimentation of a possibility of a man without peers, to an exploration of outcomes of such a position without a regard for the origin of the subject. In other words, from the possibility of a man without a human context to the finality of the position of the man without an other.[378] Deleuze locates the latter position in perversion (after Lacan) which is defined as the collapse of spatial and temporal distance between the self and the other. It is the absolute risk of sameness contained in the communicative potency of perversion that defines the absolute identity of the Last Man.[379] This is because the pervert no longer constructs the other (person) as a focus of desire, desire is displaced onto the material of the fetish object, and the material processes of bondage and other sexual practices, "the Other, as structure, is *the expression of a possible world.*"[380] The Last Man experiences the end of the possibility of alternative worlds, when he realises that his world is the only one that remains, and therefore the only one that matters.

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[376] This is a point that will be returned in to in the final chapter, where the consumption of the destruction of film and art will be examined with reference to the work of Paolo Cherchi Usai and the unavoidable destruction of the film and photographic archive.
[377] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 159-160.
[378] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 342.
[379] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 343.
[380] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 345.

[Figure 25: Zac alone on the beach in *The Quiet Earth*.]

A sense of self, which is only ever constructed in the past and in relation to the consumption of the object-other (sexual, relational) serves to constitute the self, and the desire for, consumption of and loss of self that such a consumption entails allows the subject to experience the possibility of the other, beyond the self as a self-narrativised history. In *The Quiet Earth*, Zac wakes naked and sweating from a chemically affected suicide attempt the previous night and finds himself alone in the world, wandering around Auckland. All life (or all fauna anyway) appears to have evapourated from the planet by the effect, catalysed by a cleansing incarnation of nuclear holocaust. He travels into the town, and tries, unsuccessfully at first, to find fellow survivors. He broadcasts himself begging for company, he gathers supplies, he engages with the standard filmic post-apocalyptic behaviour of driving around in expensive (fast) cars, destroying property, trying on women's clothes and taking over a mansion.[381] He revels in his ability to abuse and waste consumable products, to break conventions and laws, and to transgress cultural boundaries, unhindered by the now-blinded surveillance of the state.

The event has caused anything living to be vapourised at the instant it struck. This leaves Zac, who we later find had died at the moment of the event and that is why he has survived. As a result of finding himself totally alone in the world, Zac experiences a

[381] See also numerous filmic examples, including *Dawn of the Dead* (1978 and 2004), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *28 Days Later* (2002), *Omega Man* (1971), *I am Legend* (2007), *Zombieland* (2009) and so forth.

sovereignty that he cannot escape. As there are no other people around, temporal and cultural modality, insofar as it is based on human association, ceases to have a tangible effect. At the same time, Zac cannot be productive, no matter how he tries, as there is no one to produce for or in relation to. So Zac is forced to expend energy in an exuberant fashion, free of the domination of productivity. He no longer belongs to the world in which he has spoken, and therefore, can be separate long enough to be used to discuss the sovereign experience. This sovereign experience, however, becomes a tyranny of its own. After the world and remaining on the now unstable earth condemns Zac to permanent sovereignty, permanent expenditure without escape or reprieve, the consequence of pure sovereignty is madness.

As Zac begins to realise the totality of his solitude, his mind unravels, and his behaviour alternates between manic outbursts and moaning lows. He begins to construct methods by which he might feel as though he has communicated, and has been recognised by others, most particularly, in one scene, by constructing an elaborate king's address scenario on the back lawn of the mansion where he now resides. He gathers cardboard cut-outs of famous figures, football players, regents, and historical villains, and constructs an unstable speaker system through which he may announce his thoughts. Finding this unfulfilling, he shoots the television he has rigged so that he can watch tapes of old news reports, while wearing a slip dress from the wardrobe of one of the previous occupants of his accommodation. Somewhere in the throes of rampage, he injures himself, whereby he leaves the house, and around dawn, wanders, bleeding in alienation, through an expansive rugby oval, and eventually to a church. Once inside the church, Zac challenges God to show himself, threatening to "shoot the kid" if he doesn't. Zac shoots the crucified figures of Jesus with his shotgun, and rather logically pronounces that he is "now god." This would seem like a reasonable conclusion to come to at this juncture. It is not made known to the audience how long Zac has been alone, but the process seems to have been drawn out enough for it to be a significant period. This expression, "and now I am god" demonstrates that in the absence of bodies, but in the presence of the ritual architecture that implies their existence, Zac can understand his position to be synonymous with god – the final example of an experience of subjectivity separate from the (dying) natural world.

Finally having an entirely stable identity (in the complete absence of community), insofar as it is akin to being god, is, as it implies, an experience of sovereignty. The significance of Bataille's sovereignty is its exclusion of time, produced by the ecstatic exclusivity of a physical experience. A sovereign state is without temporal referent or origin - once inspired, it is a pure experience– until the mundane chores of cultural and temporal rivalries intervene. In this way, an experience of sovereignty can exist outside of tyranny of cultural production while both exposing and resisting representational hierarchy. To experience sovereignty, is then, to be momentarily god. Bataille describes the sovereign experience as that which anyone can gain access to, and for that moment, no one else can master.[382] To be sovereign in these terms is to become the phrase "And now I am god," without speaking, while forgetting in fleeting ecstasy the limitations of the production of language. The experience of communication, and the relational construction of the self is conversely what makes sovereignty both rebellious and appealing, as is the promise of the limitation of sovereignty, to a moment outside of time, which reflects Kojève's adage that "human reality can only be social."[383] Without a social framework which offers recognition and communication, Zac lives the consequences of the absence of other human bodies.

The experience of sovereignty as unbearable is crucial as sovereignty is normally voluntary and actively pursued and claimed (although not necessarily consciously). This section deals with a scenario where sovereignty has been thrust upon experience without that pursuit, which makes it perceptually inescapable, and therefore, unbearable. The phrase, "and now I am god" is illustrative of the position Zac finds himself in. As there is nothing but his former life to relate to his experiences, his position can only be one of absolute primacy in his absolute solitude. To experience sovereignty, then, is in a sense, coming to the (perhaps less conscious) conclusion that one is god. The experience of communication, and relational construction of the self is conversely what makes sovereignty both rebellious and appealing, as is the promise of the limitation of sovereignty, to a moment outside of time.

In addition to the recognition of time, 'man' is also distinguished from 'animal' the human formation of self in relation to the recognition of others. The human

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[382] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 200.
[383] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 6.

relationship is characterised by a desire to be desired, and for ones own value to therefore be recognised. This, in Kojève's estimation, is in opposition to the desire of animals, who want only to consume the object of desire.[384] The extended torture of sovereignty that Zac experiences in *The Quiet Earth* wavers between a desperate longing for recognition without hope (after a time) of a response, and false reproductions of the trappings of recognition created for comfort. Once Zac has accepted that he can't find anyone else in Auckland, he establishes himself in the grandest home he can find, and after attending to it for a time, he finds himself aimless and depressed without recognition. He rigs up a video player and slumps, watching television. In a particularly dramatic (and iconic) gesture, he shoots the television with a shot-gun, and subsequently whispers "I'm taking over" (one of the rare instances of speech during this first section of the film.

Another distinction that Deleuze makes between the two Crusoe narratives is in the account of their actions. Defoe's Crusoe is driven by a utilitarian subsistence, as he does not collect or produce anything unnecessary for his continued survival (which is a course of action not unlike the first group of films referred to above). In this sense, Defoe's Crusoe maintains an expectation of re-entering a normative social context at some point. By comparison, Tournier's Crusoe collects and produces supplies far in excess of what he needs, "the sole evil being that of consuming, since one always consumes alone and for oneself" and therefore the consumption of the excess is deferred, stockpiled and accumulated.[385] His position is analogous to the second group of films (*The Quiet Earth* and *The World...*) where accumulation is practiced in order to inhabit and control the space fully, in a manner that grows enough objects to fill the island. These objects then must be wasted in a nonproductive manner, or they will supersede Crusoe as the inhabitant of the island.

The distinction Deleuze makes between Defoe's and Tournier's Crusoes is therefore similar to the distinction made earlier between extinction narratives between those that maintain the bodies (if not the civilisation, community or companionship of the past world) through extinction by disease, zombification, and those narratives that remove the bodies and the direct physical traces of humanity entirely. In the latter, the

[384] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 6.
[385] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 353.

Last Man figure is more radically isolated from human history, and without the hope that residual bodies (however malevolent their behaviour is) contains. Like Defoe's Crusoe, who sets about constructing an order about his life (ostensibly with the thought of being rescued, or his situation ending in some other way) the Last Man of this scenario acts as though the situation might change, improve, or resolve itself. In this sense, he is not fully constructed as the Last Man even if he does contain the last separate conscious experience of the world. On the other hand, the Last Man of isolation experiences a world of absolute isolation without the possibility of hope. The sovereign annihilation of all direct physical traces of the human population means that there is no possibility of a resolution.

POSITIONING YOUR VICTIM: THE STRUCTURED SPACE OF THE LAST MAN

In Chapter 2, I argued that the representation of the destruction of architecture in visual cultures produces a disruption of our physical relationship to how our bodies are organised in space. The experience of architectural destruction, then, calls into question the arrangement of the social order that architecture expresses. Given this, the event of extinction – the destruction of the biological matter (living bodies of humans and animals) in films like *The Quiet Earth* and *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* – produce an intensive alternative in architectural tyranny. Architectural structures, as the most tangible remainders of human existence, impose order and form onto the expression of existence experienced by the last man. In these films, the image of the Last Man constitutes a lone human figure, moving through the over-organised space of a social past, a body overwhelmed by inorganic structures with obsolete intentions to keep him in place, in a repetition, but also a reversal of the images of the jumping people that appeared from the Twin Towers during the events of September 11, 2001.

In *The Quiet Earth*, when Zac has established that he is alone in the world, there is an extended montage of Zac's activities during his initial days as the Last Man. After a very sensible interlude of investigation, and radio broadcast, Zac is at a loss for what to do. So naturally, he commandeers a police car, driving it around and making announcements. He plays the saxophone down the deserted main street of Auckland in the rain, wearing a costume, and decides after five days remaining in his home that

its "time I moved up in the world" and moves into a mansion. He had previously recorded a radio broadcast, alerting other potential survivors to his whereabouts, but when he moves, his newly recorded radio message is far more playful and sarcastic, a vaguely sinister demonstration of a loss of hope, a manic enjoyment and a deterioration of his mental stability. He drinks champagne mixed with an egg for breakfast, and plays a recording of birds singing as a soundtrack to his breakfast routine.

In this sequence, the residual presence of remnant architecture forms a reminder to the populated past, and also the redundancy of the gesture of architectural control without docile bodies ready to be shaped by it. Similarly, in *I Am Legend*, scenes of a decaying New York with Robert Neville (Will Smith) hunting the deer amongst the ruins establish his position as the Last Man. In *Omega Man*, Neville (Charlton Heston) patrols the deserted Los Angeles, with allusions to the ever-present threat of viral zombies. And in *The Last Man On Earth*, Robert Morgan (Vincent Price) goes about his daily business through an abandoned city, with the spaces occasionally littered with the viral-zombie dead (who are, in this version, only aggressive at night). The most striking rendition of the architectural establishment of the Last Man is in the viral-zombie film *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), where Jim (Cillian Murphy) wanders through a remarkably abandoned London, in a sequence of still shots, that emphasise the brutally apparent immovability of architecture in opposition to the frail, lone body moving through them.

[Figures 26, 27 & 28: Jim leaves the hospital in search of other living bodies in London in *28 Days Later*.]

IL Y A TOUJOURS UNE AUTRE ÎLE[386] (THERE IS ALWAYS ANOTHER ISLAND): WHEN OTHER BODIES INTERVENE

Just as Crusoe discovers that he was never really the only human being on the island when Friday appears in Tournier's version of the story, in many films that depict extinction, the Last Man discovers that he is not alone. In *The World...* and *The Quiet Earth*, as well as in *I am Legend* and *Omega Man* and *The Last Man on Earth*, the assumption that the protagonist makes about being the culmination of human history is overturned with the reintroduction, or reappearance of other people. This is a cause of further disruption and horror for the Last Man, who has reconstructed himself (as the fixed identity of the culminated human history) on the basis that there will no longer be any challenge to his experience of sovereignty, to a greater or lesser extent in each iteration of the narrative. The reappearance of other people after the Last Man inspires the figure, particularly in the second group of films, to self-destruct (or to at least attempt self-destruction), death then being the only possibility of relief from the trauma of communication.

In his analysis of Tournier's version of Robinson Crusoe (*Friday, or the Other Island*) Gerald L Bruns describes this reconstitution of the self in the absence of the other to after the abandonment of hope that communication (other life) might intervene.[387] In each of the above listed films, the first person to reappear for the Last Man is a woman. This returns hope, as is expressed in each film (more or less explicitly), because her presence implies reproduction, as well as the further pleasure of the opportunity to engage in sexual activity (in excess of reproductive function). The possibility that the woman in question may not want to engage in a sexual relationship with the Last Man is not addressed, but it is articulated in each of these cases (with varying degrees of accuracy) that she requires his assistance or protection, and is therefore somewhat obliged to engage in a sexual relationship with him in exchange for this assistance. The plot device of the appearance of the woman is plainly a heteronormative in addition to being a sexist approach, as discussed above, to the Last

[386] Tournier, *Friday or the Other Island*, epigraph.
[387] Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, 23.

Man narrative, but it also reveals what Bruns describes in relation to Tournier's Crusoe, that once the Last Man has accepted his identity as such, he can no longer be anything else. The Last Man can no longer acknowledge the presence of another person, and when another human being appears, they cannot be "regarded, experienced or treated as a human."[388] The memory of the last man (which has been produced by both communication and the experience of temporality) might pull him back towards the "human-ness" of the acknowledgement or recognition of the other.[389] Ultimately, however, the Last Man seeks to regain the sovereign experience of being inhuman, which, as Bruns writes is "a condition of exteriority."[390]

In *The Quiet Earth*, this is expressed through the apparently creeping sense disassociation that Zac appears to have as he progresses through the narrative. The culmination of his inhuman isolation occurs immediately before he encounters another human being, Joanne. After the drawn out period alone (the film implies it may have been months) Zac immediately invites Joanne to live with him, embracing her, and immediately embarking on a sexual relationship with her. It is apparent that she could easily have been any other (woman) on who had managed to remain alive. The pair swap stories, although, the audience is not given much information about how she had survived until that point, but it is apparent that Zac, in the position of the Last Man, is only interested in the phenomenon of her presence rather than her speech or her past. Not long after their encounter, however, the third survivor they find, Api appears, initially taking attention away from Joanne. Rather than engaging in what might be a predictable primordial struggle over sexual access to the last woman on earth, and instead of having sex with one another, Zac takes the opportunity of Api's appearance to retreat from the bourgeoning community he finds himself included in. He removes himself from the restraints of interpersonal communication as he has become the awkward third wheel in the coupling between Joanne and Api, and instead concentrates on stabilising the physical properties of the earth. (A goal that inspires his suicide, as the potential solution to the instability of the atmosphere, and results in Zac waking alone on a beach with Saturn collapsed into the sea on the horizon.)

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[388] Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, 23.
[389] Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, 26.
[390] Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, 28.

In contrast to *The Quiet Earth*, the ending of *The World...* shows Ralph, Sarah and Benson forming a community. In this film, however, as Ralph is positioned by his memory of being heterogeneous to the former social order (in which he was discriminated against, and segregated from other people). In this way, he is unable to fulfill the narrative position of the Last Man entirely, as his experience of identity is produced negatively (being discriminated against, he is produced in relation to what he is not – he is not white). This causes Ralph to always consider the potential for other people to continue to exist, even if he views them with contempt (in the case of Sarah) or indifference (and eventually competition) in the case of Burton. In this sense, *The World...*, is far less conservative, or perhaps simply less bleak than many of its more recent counterparts, as it approach to racial identity is centralised (which is also the case in *Night of the Living Dead*, although in that film, as earlier discussed, the central character dies at the end). In *The World...* then, it is ostensibly Burton's character that experiences the world without relationality, as the Last Man, but as the audience does not experience the narrative from his perspective, the film never offers his history before he appears in the lives of Ralph and Sarah.

The irony of each of these Last Man narratives is the conceit with which the Last Man assumes and accepts his fate as being the last surviving person on the planet. In each of these films, there comes a time when the Last Man is confronted with his (to reference Tournier's Crusoe) Friday. As these films adhere to conservative social conventions, the Last Man is always heterosexual, and the woman he inevitably finds is always available, heterosexual and willing to embark upon a relationship with him. Thus reappears the presence of another human body, the appearance of an alternative subjectivity to construct one's identity in relation to, and someone with whom one risks the autonomy of oneself in the process of communication. This event is approached with caution in each of these films. In *The Quiet Earth*, Zac sees Joanne and shouts at her that he won't harm her, as she hides from him. In *The World...* when Ralph encounters Sarah, he tries to dissuade her from her interest in him, demonstrating his adherence to the social restrictions of the time, even in the absence of the world's population. This mirrors Deleuze's description of Tournier's Crusoe, who is unable to recognise Friday as another human being when they encounter one another, as he has removed the possibility of an other from his experience of the world. In both films from the second group, the protagonists attempt to re-isolate

themselves and return to the experience of being the Last Man. In *The Quiet Earth*, Zac succeeds. By re-enacting the process of sacrifice by which he became the Last Man in the first place (attempting to catalyse a new "event" that would supersede the effects of the previous "event") he succeeds in isolating himself in what can only be assumed as another event, and this time, he does really appear to be alone (with the physical properties of the world like gravity, material objects, relation to other planets and so on, radically and irreparably changed).

The Last Man is a simulacral image in the narrative of extinction. As such, he signifies the embodiment of the culmination of human history, along with its demise. His isolation is the only opportunity for "self-creation" and in forming an identity without the intervention of communication, he becomes inhuman, and finally someone, which is his sovereignty.[391] At the opening of this chapter, I argued that one can only become Somebody (instead of no one) when everyone else is dead. What extinction narratives have demonstrated is that if you want to remain someone, you had better be sure that everyone else is dead. In the following chapter, I will discuss the reversal of the alienation of the Last Man in the art of Yayoi Kusama, whose performance of representational suicide is an ongoing project to obliterate her experience of identity into the void of communication.

[391] Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, 26.

CHAPTER 4

The Simulacrum and the Spotted Seppuku: The Destruction of Identity

Beware: Whoever pretends to be a ghost will eventually turn into one[392]

[Figure 29: Kusama doll in the window of the Selfridges flagship store, Oxford Street, London, October 5, 2012.]

Yayoi Kusama is a Japanese artist and writer who has produced a significant body of work across discipline areas and materials since the 1950s. Throughout her career, she has returned to a single intensity that haunts her practice, an impulse to communicate a self-obliteration as a representative suicide performed through objects of visual culture that blur any distinction between herself, her work and the void. In order to pursue this aim, Kusama uses techniques of mimicry and repetition to express a "psychasthenia" or obsessive hallucinatory vision as a return to the indistinguishable.[393]

[392] Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 91.

[393] Psychasthenia is a term no longer used in contemporary psychiatric practices. It refers to the repetition of obsessive impulses and images, and can be loosely related to the more commonly known term "Obsessive Compulsive Disorder" (for more information, refer to the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders, DSM-5* (2013)). However the term was used by Jo

The "I, I, I, I" repetition narcissism of Kusama's work, particularly through proliferation of her images (and likeness) has the ironic effect of eradicating any authentic subject-position within a forest of simulacral images, which is an effect that has also been attributed to the writing technique of Bataille.[394] In Kusama's earlier works, she focused on ways to destroy the integrity of her body and other objects by obscuring the presence of objects with dots (*Infinity Net, Self-Obliteration*) and with tuberous soft-sculpture phalluses (*Phalli's Fields*). In her more recent work, and in particular, in the 2012 collaboration with fashion design corporation Louis Vuitton, Kusama has more directly attacked the integrity and unity of her body and identity through the repetition and dispersion of her simulacral image – the ubiquitous Kusama dolls – which could be found adorning the windows of Louis Vuitton stores worldwide that year.

[Figure 30: Kusama doll clones in the Louis Vuitton window display at Selfridges, Oxford Street, London, October 5, 2012.]

Applin in *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* (2012) to describe Yayoi Kusama's aesthetic and mental state. The condition was also of interest to Roger Caillois.

[394] Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, xv.

In Kusama's account of events offered by her autobiography, she describes herself as having a collection of mental and affective disorders that motivate her to obsessively continue to produce repetitious art objects:

> The focus of the mental and nervous ailments afflicting me is a condition labelled 'depersonalisation'. I feel as if I am in a place where pleated striped curtains completely enclose me, and finally my soul separates from my body... I have no sense of my body as something real... 'Depersonalisation' refers to the phenomenon of experiencing a loss of personality...a hellish reality is still better than the experience of losing yourself, the world, and time. It is terrible seeing existence annihilated.[395]

Her self-conscious and performative identification of those disorders as "depersonalisation" is expressed through a series of theoretically framed artistic practices including those she names *Infinity Net* (including the *Infinity Mirror Rooms*), *Self-Obliteration* and *Accumulation*. Kusama's artistic categories are occasionally interchangeable, and the above listed cover almost her entire body of work. If the Last Man discussed in the previous chapter seeks to cement an identity in response to (or even in the fantasy of) the extinction of everyone else, the populated world causes a disassembling of impulses that form the illusion of identity for Kusama.

In this chapter, I profile Yayoi Kusama in relation to the main concern of her work as the paradoxical performance of making herself disappear. I do this in relation to Kusama's artistic development, in which she has produced simulacra in the repetition of the performance of her own disappearance in an attempt to transgress the confines of the limiting, structured identity that has been thrust upon her. As a female, sexually ambiguous Japanese artist, she inhabits and experiences a position of radical alterity with relation to any social context in which she finds herself. She writes:

> I fluctuate between feelings of reality and unreality. I am neither a Christian nor a Buddhist. Nor do I possess great self-control. I find myself stranded in a strangely mechanised and standardized, homogeneous environment. I feel this most keenly in highly civilised America and especially in New York... and my work is forged in the accumulation of these frictions.[396]

Her refusal of tradition, and the undertow of sexual anxiety and fascination in her work makes her position heterogeneous to tradition in Japan, and the nexus of her various markers of identity exclude her in relation to a Western art context as well,

[395] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 87.
[396] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 57.

and yet she has repeatedly succeeded in manifesting a form of outsider, or active sovereignty in relation to her excluded position which relies on nothing but the desire for her own disappearance in order to operate. Where, in the previous chapter, an illusion of final identity (of being Somebody) is created from the alienation of the finality of human extinction. By comparison, in this chapter, I write that Kusama's repetition of her iconic motifs, as well as the more recent cloning representation of her own body, indicates the paradoxical desire to disappear into the continuity of life (and the physical expanse of the universe) and conversely, this repetition articulates those aspects of Kusama (gender, race, ethnicity, mental health) that exclude her from social homogeneity.

The ongoing *Infinity Net* (or *Net Painting*) series, which began with a group of canvases Kusama painted soon after she moved to the United States, reflects her early fixation with the project of obscuring the self. The initial series of works are large, textured monochromatic oil paintings of meticulously articulated spots on a low-contrast background (predominantly whites and greys) that produce the effect of an infinite without an origin or a point of focus to refer to.[397] While these works clearly reflect the "Action Painting" mode, a trend particularly prevalent in the United States, and in New York (the most known proponent of which was Jackson Pollock) at the time in which they were produced, their meticulous execution and Kusama's prolific obsessive repetition of the initial idea indicates a unique impulse behind them.[398] The control and intimacy expressed in these paintings opposes the violence of Action Painting, while at the same time deploying the conceptual basis of Action Painting as a physical labour and commitment to a large-scale abstract art work. Kusama herself identifies the Net paintings as one of the many series of her works that express her "neurosis" and that she painted them in a state that was both obsessive and hallucinatory, while living in "abject poverty" in the late 1950s and early 1960s in New York.[399]

[397] Taylor, "Early Years 1929-1957," 44-52.
[398] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 21.
[399] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 17.

[Figure 31: Detail from Yayoi Kusama, *No. 2 Infinity Net*, 1959.[400]]

By the end of the 1960s, however, Kusama was a recognisable and successful New York artist, who "had developed not only as a painter, but as an environmental sculptor" and this development lead to the next intensive moment of self-loss in Kusama's work, the *Self-Obliteration* project.[401] The project began with a short, polka dot infested film in 1967, and incorporated many of Kusama's "Happenings" and other related events. These were performative political, social and sexual protests held in public places in New York, where Kusama would either entice or employ groups of people that she has subsequently identified as "Hippies" to attend and participate in the usually naked spectacle.[402] Notably, Kusama never participated in the sexual acts that she encouraged or employed others to perform and maintained the role of organiser and instructor at public events:

> I instructed them to remove all their clothes and burn some sixty American flags. I stood amid the smoke, tossing bibles and draft cards into the flames. Once that part of the performance was over, the naked youths embraced and kissed, and some even began having sex.[403]

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[400] Image from Naparstek, "Retrospective: Yayoi Kusama at The Whitney."
[401] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 18.
[402] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 99.
[403] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 100.

This reticence to participate in the performance herself, and in particular, to put her own body (and legal status) at risk as she has asked others to do throughout the series of "Happenings" she organised appears to be at odds with the position of Kusama as a proponent of the orientation of depersonalisation. While this reticence could be explained by the lingering conservatism of a traditional Japanese upbringing, coupled with her frequently self-proclaimed psychosexual neuroses, it also indicates that Kusama inhabits a very particular position in relation to the experiences she offers her participatory audience. Kusama as the facilitator of her "Happenings" acts as a conduit and choreographer, through whose orders and gestures other bodies might communicate. In this sense, the preservation of her physical self from the vulnerability of public nudity (and often, subsequent arrest) that her participants and employees are exposed to is the denial of her self-hood in relation to them. By not participating physically in her own "Happenings," Kusama finds a manner in which she can preserve the integrity of her Japanese identity, while simultaneously acting as a communicative conduit for the event, offering herself to be consumed by the physical acts of everyone else.

Kusama's *Accumulation* projects also begin as a "process of obliteration."[404] Kusama describes how she presents an apparently infinite repetition of objects that for her, related to fears she has about food and sexual contact, "I make them and make them and then keep on making them, until I bury myself in the process. I call this 'obliteration.'"[405] These works, generally featuring either macaroni or phalluses are prodigious in their accumulation. The objects of fear are repeated on a scale that, inspires a physical and materially overwhelming experience, and these objects are often further expanded by the use of mirrors to give the effect of the infinite. At first observation, it may appear that Kusama's process is a form of therapeutic desensitisation, as though she repeatedly exposes herself and her audience to the apparition of an infinite repetition of objects that inspire her horror so that she might stop fearing them.[406] However, instead of experiencing the semiotic power of the object being destroyed, Kusama experiences this repetition of the object of fear as a

[404] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 47. In this quote, she refers to the repetition of both macaroni and phallic objects as her fears that require such repetition.
[405] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 47.
[406] Kusama acknowledges this aspect of her accumulation works as 'Psychosomatic Art' in *Infinity Net*, 42. Then, just a few pages later, designates the work as a from of self-obliteration (*Infinity Net*, 47).

self-destruction.[407] She disappears into the infinite repetition of her fears. This premise is the foundation of many of her works, and in the *Phalli's Field* works, she has articulated that she focuses on a fear of sexual penetration by attaching soft sculptural phallic objects to everyday objects including tables, sofas and chairs, clothing and in particular, underwear as well as other identifiably domestic structures. Kusama has also populated entire rooms (or "fields") full of phallic protrusions, their grotesquery enhanced by garish colour and polka-dots (symbols of disease or infection), with a narrow path drawing the participatory audience through the terrain.[408]

[Figure 32: Title still from Yayoi Kusama, *Self-Obliteration* (film) 1967.[409]]

Most recently, Kusama's pursuit of self-obliteration through accumulation and recognition has been expressed through the collaboration with Louis Vuitton that began in 2010, and was launched at Selfridges & Co, London (a large high-end

[407] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 47.
[408] Applin, *Infinity Mirror Room*, 1-3.
[409] The film can be found on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7h0hExzfS5Q (in three parts).

department store) in August 2012.[410] This launch occurred shortly after a major retrospective of Kusama's work was held at the Tate Modern (with the financial support of Louis Vuitton) that ran from February 9 to June 5, 2012. For the Louis Vuitton collaboration, Kusama designed a series of products including clothes, shoes, bags and other accessories that incorporated design elements from each of Kusama's thematic interests. In particular, the accumulative Kusama polka-dot (one of her earliest techniques to achieve the obscuring of the boundaries of objects) featured on almost every product. To promote these luxury consumer items, the windows and environments of Louis Vuitton stores were taken over by spotted pumpkins and phalluses and most significantly, an army of vaguely sinister Kusama-dolls. These were glossy, identical sculptures of Yayoi Kusama in a red (Louis Vuitton) smock-dress, glaring at passersby. The largest of these sculptures was mounted in front of the crest that adorns the flagship Selfridges store in London, the smallest were about the size of matchboxes and appeared like a clone-army, in pockets of display and side windows in Louis Vuitton stores. The campaign to market the collaboration of Kusama and Vuitton also included a major retrospective of Kusama's work housed in the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (12 July – 30 September 2012). This exhibition was also financially supported by the Louis Vuitton corporation. The following year, smaller exhibitions of Kusama's more recent work were shown around the world.[411]

CONSTRUCTING KUSAMA
(BETWEEN AMBITION AND ILLNESS)
"an international avant-garde artist"[412]

Kusama's meticulous construction and promotion of her artistic and personal image belies her equally often-articulated ambition to disappear into the cumulative infinite of her artwork. The tension between these two positions recalls the paradox of Bataille's oeuvre, which, as has so often been articulated, lies between alienation and the ambition to be consumed by and assimilated into a community.[413] Like Bataille's,

[410] Selfridges & Co. website, "The Collection 'Yayoi Kusama Louis Vuitton.'"
[411] A list of these exhibitions can be found here: Phaidon website, "Yayoi Kusama's 2013 World Tour."
[412] Kusama (quoted by Nakajima), "Abstraction and Pathology," 128.
[413] This is often noted in relation to Bataille's work, including: Leslie Ann Boldt in the introduction to *On Bataille*, Stuart Kendall in the introduction to *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, Allan Stoekl in the introduction to *Visions of Excess* and by Andrew Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree in the introduction to *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*.

Kusama's communicative practice is simulacral and resonates with Klossowski's observations in writing about Bataille's speech: "he speaks and expresses himself in simulacra of notions, inasmuch as an expressed thought always implies the receptivity of the person addressed."[414] Kusama's body of work has always been designed to adapt to the needs and "receptivity" of the audience she addresses in a way that obscures the possibility of her own identity positioned in relation to her work. The experience of her physical and psychological self is always subsumed into the communicative practice of self-obliteration – where the audience's perception consumes any reference to her authentic and independent experience.

Yayoi Kusama was born in 1929 and despite being from a wealthy and traditional Japanese family, her adolescence was punctuated by forced labour and deprivation as the result of Japan's involvement in World War II.[415] She also describes having a dysfunctional childhood, and an abusive mother, although accounts of this vary.[416] Her Japanese contemporaries include artists Nobuyoshi Araki, Eikoh Hosoe (who collaborated with Yukio Mishima, and who also photographed Kusama in one of her *Phalli's Fields*, creating an image that has since been used for the promotion of the 2012 Tate Modern retrospective), Shomei Tomatsu and Daido Moriyama, all of whom are primarily photographers and film artists and all of whom are male. Hosoe and Araki in particular specialise in erotic photography, representing the practice of Kinbaku (rope binding) and other fetish cultures specific to post-war Japan in their work. Their work refers to the Japanese traditions of erotic art (Shunga) including the wood-block representations (see Figure 34 below). Similarly, Kusama's work often addresses sexual fetishes and neurosis prevalent in post-war Japan, while referring to the Japanese tradition of erotic art. She was, or is (again depending on which account one reads, this phobia is either continuous or cured) famously phobic of sexual encounters (and specifically penetration) and has described her *Phalli's Field* (1965) as a way of overcoming this phobia by recreating and repeating the object of fear:

> "My sofas, couches, dresses, and rowboats bristle with phalluses... As an obsessional artist I fear everything I see. At one time, I dreaded everything I

[414] Klossowski, "Of the Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Commuication," 147.
[415] Yakamura, "Rising From Totalitarianism," 169-170.
[416] In her autobiography, *Infinity Net*, Kusama describes her mother as being abusive. (See Part 2, pages 59-97.)

> was making. The armchair thickly covered in phalluses was my psychosomatic work done when I had a fear of sexual vision."[417]

The phallic objects of Kusama's accumulations also resemble the tentacle pornography (Shokushu Goukan – tentacle rape) that is derived from the famous example of Shunga, *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife (Tako to Ama)* (Hokusai, 1814). More recently, Shokushu Goukan is predominantly found in Japanese animated pornography (although there are live examples) and depicts scenes where women are penetrated by multiple tentacles (but predominantly without a human-masculine presence). This absolute focus on multiple penetrations of the (mostly female) body has the effect, not only of reducing that body to an object to be penetrated, but overcoming that body entirely through what Kusama might describe as an accumulation, an overcoming through exhaustive proliferation. In Shokushu Goukan, the penetrated body is overwhelmed and consumed by penetration until it no longer appears or functions as a body. In light of this, Kusama's *Phalli's Field* soft sculptures take on additional meanings and allusions to those she has explicitly ascribed to them. The images of Kusama writhing amongst the soft-sculpture phalluses appear as a direct visual parody (a simulacrum) of *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, and in this sense, presents and challenges the absurdity of this (masculine) Japanese fantasy with her appearance.

[Figure 33: *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife (Tako to Ama)*, Katsushika Hokusai, 1814.]

[417] Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama."

[Figure 34: *Kinbaku* (1980-2000) by Nobuyoshi Araki in an exhibition of his work, which was displayed alongside 18th and 19th century Shunga prints at the Michael Hoppen Contemporary Art Gallery in London, May-June 2013.]

[Figure 35: "Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field*, 1965, sewn stuffed fabric, mirrors, 455x455x250cm, installation view, Kusama lying on the floor, 'Floor Show,' Richard Castellane Gallery, New York, 1965."[418]]

[418] Applin, *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field*, opposite contents page. This image description is taken from the description of the cover image of Applin's publication.

While living and working in New York, Kusama formed relationships with artists Donald Judd and Joseph Cornell, the former being a pioneering minimalist artist, while the latter was decidedly opposed to the minimalist aesthetic, and instead focused on the assemblage of found and produced objects (most notably taxidermy arranged in a manner reminiscent of the display of sacred objects found in some Roman Catholic churches).[419] However, Kusama more often worked alongside, or in collaboration with female and explicitly feminist contemporaries, including Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois, with whom she held collaborative exhibitions shortly before leaving New York in 1968.[420] Other contemporaries whose work appears aesthetically similar to Kusama's include Bridget Riley and Lygia Pape, both of whom create similarly digitised representations of abstract space.

Kusama had moved to the US in 1957 with the expressed intention of "becoming an international avant-garde artist."[421] This statement, in and of itself, demonstrates both the singular ambition Kusama has always held, and which has undoubtedly driven her to her current celebrity status in global art culture as well as the naïvety with which she approached the sophisticated and exclusionist New York art scene in the late 1950s. This is also the first glimpse at what became the development of the idea of Yayoi Kusama as a type of event, and as divorced from any kind of pretense at authentic subjectivity or identity. In "Yayoi Kusama between Abstraction and Pathology," Nakajima observes that Kusama traces the limits between gender, race and sexual distinction, from the perspective of the absolute outsider (in all counts) in America.[422] She cites Kusama's earliest incarnation of her "Net Paintings" (part of the *Infinity Net* series) as functioning "outside and beyond the dominant, phallocentric Symbolic realm of two cultures between which her work is stretched."[423] While Nakajima approaches the transgression of these limits from a strictly psychoanalytic perspective, the apparition of the *Infinity Net* paintings also demonstrate Kusama's yearning for the self-obliteration that would later become articulated and central to

[419] Taylor, "Return to Japan 1973-1983," 123.
[420] Queensland Art Gallery website, "Yayoi Kusama: Look Now, See Forever Timeline."
[421] Kusama (quoted by Nakajima), "Abstraction and Pathology," 128. Nakajima writes that this statement was written in a letter to Georgia O'Keefe, who replied with a letter saying that she found such ambition "strange."
[422] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 129.
[423] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 128.

her work. The *Infinity Net* is the first indication of a lust for the absolute and public performance of annihilation.

Yayoi Kusama's "Net Paintings" (part of the *Infinity Net* series) were first shown in New York around eighteen months after she arrived there (in 1959).[424] This first solo show was well received by critics, who identified both "oriental" and contemporary American artistic practices (primarily Action Painting, as mentioned above) as having influenced her work.[425] Nakajima also notes that despite frequent favourable comparisons between Kusama's work and that of her New York contemporaries (including Mignon Nixon, quoted as saying that Kusama's "Net Paintings" "trump" the work of Pollock)[426] she nevertheless remained an outsider.[427] Nakajima refers to the writing of Trinh T Minh-ha who has written on a similar experience of American culture, and who observes the possibility for a doubled position of radical alterity. Kusama is an outsider in the US for her race and gender, and when she returns to Japan, her rejection of the Japanese traditions only enforces this alienation further and is therefore an example of this doubled radical alterity (the no place of non-identity). In essence, Kusama's trading of one limiting patriarchal system for another means that she remains a heterogeneous and transgressive force in both, regardless of how those systems might have subsequently moved to co-opt her celebrity (for example, the use of Kusama in the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1993 which was her first return to the Biennale since her representation of the US in 1966), "the cultural colonisation of Japanese art(ist) by the American abstract art paradigm has lessened, if not banished, the authoritative power of the domestic paternal figure over the Japanese woman."[428] For Kusama, then, negotiating the American art scene through a position of radical alterity has the effect of lessening the grip of cultural tradition and oppression on her own artistic practice.

Nakajima describes post-war Japan as having a "newly opened encounter with the Gaikoku (foreign countries)."[429] This encounter, according to Nakajima, is reflected in a confusion and perversion of the experience of sexuality and gender roles in Japanese

[424] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 129.
[425] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 130.
[426] Nixon (quoted by Nakajima), "Abstraction and Pathology," 149.
[427] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 130.
[428] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 140.
[429] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 141.

culture, which Kusama cannily expresses, particularly in relation to a fear of the phallic in her work. The "Net Paintings," which are designed to appear without a point of origin, as an expression of "the supernatural 'obsessiveness' of the artist" are not purely an expression of obsession, but contain, embedded in their fabric, a sense of purpose and resistance to the structural containment implied by the use of a point of origin and form.[430] Nakajima describes a sense of cognition and conscious repetition, and in addition to this, an active resistance in relation to the "masculinist" art practice popular at the time "Kusama drew on this familiar form to deploy her painting for an informed and evident art-historical attempt that was primarily addressed toward American painting legacies."[431] Specifically, this referred to a rejection or "negation" of Action Painting where the artist "splashes" the canvas as an expression of "violent mastering of pictorial space."[432] In addition to the resistance of form and origin in her "Net Paintings," Kusama challenges Action Painting techniques by deploying the opposite – during the painting of the nets, "her brush does not leave the canvas," so she maintains physical proximity and tactile intimacy with her work (and at this point) does not employ others to produce it for her.[433] Therefore, rather than the violent assertion of (what Nakajima designates as masculine) selfhood as the imposition of gestural form on the blank expanse of a canvas, in Kusama's work, "the self is not articulated, but is continuous in connection with the "body" of the canvas."[434] Kusama's "Net Paintings", as well as her later soft sculptural creations recall the traditional feminine practices of weaving and sewing, but on the grandiose scale of Abstract Expressionism.

The "Net Paintings" were, in contrast to Kusama's claims, prefigured by work she completed while still in Japan. The distinction between the Nets and her earlier work is the medium with which she painted. Whilst in Japan, Kusama used predominantly watercolour media which, as Nakajima observes, gave her greater textual depth through staining techniques. An illustration of Kusama's 1951 painting "Infinity Polka

[430] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 143.
[431] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 145.
[432] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 146.
[433] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 147.
[434] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 147.

Dots (Red)" demonstrates this – the spots in their varying intensities take on a sense of depth and undulation not found in Kusama's oils.[435]

[Figure 36: Yayoi Kusama, *Point*, 1951 (similar to the above discussed image).]

In Nakajima's account of Kusama's early career, she makes plain the construction of a persona that Kusama embarks upon. This is drawn from her initial assertion of her work as "oriental, mystic symbolism" to a later being "relentlessly critical" of Japanese art and culture, the influence of which she completely rejects in her work.[436] Both positions being, according to Nakajima, a reflection on what Kusama thought would most likely engender notoriety and interest in the New York art scene. While Kusama lived in New York, she is then "habitually featured as being scandalous and morbid" in the Japanese media.[437] The artist, herself, is presented to us as the simulacrum of a personality that seeks celebrity, notoriety and absolute, or radical alterity.

[435] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 153.
[436] Kusama (quoted by Nakajima), "Abstraction and Pathology," 138.
[437] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 141.

[Figure 37: Yayoi Kusama, Detail of *No. F, Infinity Net*, 1959.]

In the preface to *The Thirst for Annihilation*, Land reiterates, after Bataille, that the desire for annihilation is inherent in communication.[438] Bataille's consistent and obsessive reference to himself, "the obsessive reiteration of the abstract ego, mixing arrogance with pallid humility" implicates identity as it is destroyed.[439] Similarly, Kusama's work is constantly, and obsessively self-referential, in order to perform a self-destruction, self-obliteration by simulacral means. The use of simulacral communication both destroys any connection to a fixed identity while preserving the speaker from the vulnerability of authenticity. This is the only way that the static representation of the artwork can communicate with its audience – the audience is arrested by the sacrifice of the isolation of the artist that it represents. When, as Nakajima observes, the analysis of Kusama's work centres around "a strong interest in the biography of the artist, especially the history of her mental problems," that analysis both enhances and misses the point of her work.[440] By continuing to focus on Kusama's mental health, art criticism and art theory amplifies the mythology of an event that Kusama has built in order to destroy herself, while at the same time, missing this sophisticated

[438] Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, xiv.
[439] Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, xv.
[440] Nakajima, "Abstraction and Pathology," 131.

manipulation of the Kusama-event that Kusama engages with in order to create this very effect. By pointing to Kusama's art as the therapeutically produced offerings of the patient confined to an institution, Kusama's suicide is assisted.

In "A Preface to Transgression," Foucault describes sexuality bound by the limitation of language. He observes that modern (post-Victorian) sexuality is "characterised" by "the violence done by such languages" that separate sexuality and eroticism into categories and annotations.[441] Foucault argues against sexuality as being an expression of animality, insisting that sexuality demonstrates our distinction from animality, and argues that desire and sexual expression as it is coded by language is a decidedly human trait – more so than rationality – and as much as transgression.[442] Foucault binds the developments of post-industrial individuality or identity, with the commodification, limitation and codification of sexuality and a prevalence of religious transgression, "speech given to sexuality is contemporaneous, both in time and in structure with that through which we announced to ourselves that God is dead".[443] The death of God is the event of modernity – the institutionalisation of the recognition of individual identity, and the formation of hierarchy between those identities formed. Foucault refers to Bataille's acute awareness of what it might mean to kill a non-existent god – the sacrifice of God in order to experience "this existence that limits it... to kill God in order to lose language... and this is communication."[444]

When Nietzsche discusses subjectivity and the self in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he contextualises the conceit of the individual as a product of the (post-Industrial, capitalist) Victorian era.[445] The institutionalisation (and pseudoscientific rationalisation) of a set of certain unwanted traits that constitute fixed identities (which are set in opposition to the white, masculine, western subject position) are then imposed upon the bodies of individuals, who are then categorised accordingly. Individuation, beginning with the Enlightenment, is the root cause, and also the eventual solution to the tension between Self and Other and the bid for recognition.[446] Therefore, when Nietzsche writes in relation to certain groups (like women, or "Oriental" or "Eastern" people)

[441] Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 24.
[442] Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 25.
[443] Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 25.
[444] Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 26.
[445] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 93.
[446] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 94.

he refers to the Victorian categorisation of those subject positions, rather than strictly the experiences and bodies of the people to whom he refers. These categories, or groups of people (Nietzsche argues) are governed by the solidification of communal agreements about moral laws, which stand in opposition to both "nature" and "rationality."[447] Resistance to these moral laws, then, is what constitutes both the artist, and the criminal.

Klossowski delegates the symptoms of Nietzsche's illness, and madness in relation to "decadence," which he relates in opposition to "vigour."[448] Like Kusama, and those who write about her work, Nietzsche's thought is informed and affected by symptoms and illnesses that remain medically vague, and without immediate evidence or physical referent (there is not observable physical manifestation outside Nietzsche's account of his own suffering). This again echoes Kusama's position, whose symptoms are said to have manifested where "Kusama experiences odd bodily sensations despite the fact that there is nothing physically wrong with her."[449] This inexact and itinerant medicalisation of psychological health issues translates as the excessive aspect of decadence, which includes sickness and weakness (in opposition to the healthy male body) and in Klossowski's work, this evolves into creativity and resistance, and he quotes Nietzsche, saying "the sick... are more interesting than the healthy."[450]

In his later work (and as his physical and psychological health descends) Nietzsche associates the criminal and the artist increasingly closely (particularly in *Ecce Homo*). Klossowski argues that in Nietzsche's writing, the artist becomes the simulacrum of the criminal, and artistic representation and expression, a simulacral apparition of criminal transgressions.[451] Here, Klossowski is guilty of drawing Nietzsche's work toward his own preoccupation, which mirrors Kusama's in her insistence upon the destruction of (her) identity and the "monstrous act" such a destruction might imply.[452] In reference to *Literature and Evil*, Land refers to Bataille's use of the authors in the book, observing that they are "concerned with communication, which means the

[447] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 76.
[448] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 152.
[449] Mizota, "Sharon Mizota on *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*."
[450] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 154.
[451] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 155.
[452] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 156.

violation of individuality, autonomy and isolation."[453] Again, this impulse is clear in Kusama's work, which aggressively addresses and engages its audience, ending the comfort of isolation for both the artist and the participant.[454] This violation of personal isolation is made brutal by Kusama's living arrangements – a static confinement in a psychiatric facility since the early 1970s, that has been described, variously, as both self-imposed, and a necessity:

> I returned to Japan because of my deteriorated health. My Japanese doctor in New York failed to detect the illnesses from which I suffered. Upon returning to Japan, I received treatment for and recovered from the two diseases: Basedow's disease and myoma of the uterus—not cancer of the uterus as rumored. Subsequently, I was hospitalized because of my obsessive-compulsive neurosis. In the articles written about me it is assumed that I voluntarily chose to live in the hospital; this is wrong. I am not suffering from manic-depressive psychosis, either.[455]

In *Infinity Net*, Kusama describes her ongoing afflictions in relation to coping mechanisms that precede her experiences in New York, and are instead the result of her difficult childhood:

> Born into a hopeless situation with parents who did not get along; growing up tossed about by the daily storms that raged between mother and father; tormented by obsessive anxiety and fears that led to visual and auditory hallucinations; asthma, and then arrhythmia, tachycardia, and the illusion of 'alternate bouts of high and low blood pressure' and 'blood seeming to flood the brain one day and drain from it the next': such eruptions of mental and nervous disorder, wrung from the scars left on my heart during the hopeless darkness of adolescence, are fundamentally what keep me creating art.[456]

Where other writers (in this case, in a review of Kusama's autobiography) have reported the following:

> Kusama's psychiatrist, Dr. Nishimaru Shiho, diagnosed her with hallucinatory cenesthopathy with bipolar and schizophrenic tendencies.[457]

The simulacrum in Klossowski's writing appears as a consequence of any attempt at communication through language. Klossowski writes that the simulacrum is the "residue" of what we intend to communicate, and that "far from excluding the contradictory, it naturally implies it."[458] Klossowski describes Bataille rejecting the idea of communication as a failed project, while speaking in simulacra he presents ideas that

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[453] Land, *The Thirst for Annihilaton*, xix.
[454] Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, xix.
[455] Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama."
[456] Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 87.
[457] Mizota, "Sharon Mizota on Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama".
[458] Klossowski, "Of the Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication," 148.

shift with thoughts and experiences of the audience addressed.[459] Yayoi Kusama clearly inhabits a similar position, and deploys a similar technique in producing her work. She is constantly stating, restating and adapting what she assures the audience is the meaning and intention of her popularist and accessible work, while all the time allowing the simplicity and obvious symbolism of it to create, for the audience, whatever meaning they want to find in their experience. In this way, she has managed to find a way to disappear amongst the repetition and accumulation of a suicidal communication. The narrative of her (predominantly) mental illnesses (and how they have changed over time) assists in this cumulative disappearance, the construction of a simulacrum of her identity continues.

In *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, Klossowski repeatedly refers to Nietzsche's "crises" which can be loosely understood as his deteriorating health, and simultaneously deteriorating mental state (described by both Nietzsche and Klossowski as a unified affair).[460] The combination of "madness" and "migraine" apparently had the effect of interrupting his writing, "the words were effaced, and a new and terrifying aggression exerted itself on Nietzsche's brain."[461] Focusing on Nietzsche's suffering, Klossowski acknowledges that his work can't entirely be attributed to his pain, but as pain dominated his existence, that aspect of his experience demands further engagement. Alongside lengthy quotes from various letters that Nietzsche wrote about his illness and the cures he tried, Klossowski describes the symptoms of Nietzsche's migraines which include affected vision and hallucinations. Klossowski observes that Nietzsche attempts to describe the "suspension of thought" that occurred during the overwhelming pain of the migraine.[462]

Migraines, for Nietzsche, indicated that his brain was attacking his thoughts, in order to arrest the process that, as Klossowksi sees it, the self-dissolution that was occurring in his thoughts.[463] Nietzsche (like Kusama) developed an "obsessive fear of suicide, born out of the despair that his atrocious migraines would never be cured."[464] In reaction to this, Nietzsche "developed a mode of intelligence which he wanted to submit to

[459] Klossowski, "Of the Simualcrum in Georges Bataille's Communication," 147.
[460] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 12.
[461] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 12.
[462] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 18.
[463] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 19.
[464] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 19.

exclusively physical criteria. He not only *interpreted* suffering as energy, but *willed* it to be so."[465] This indicates that in Nietzsche's later work, thought is framed by physical parameters, and mediated, or even controlled directly by physical experiences. Pain, the result of twitching nerves, becomes the semiotic of the body. It is the communicative device between the physical experience of an event in particular, and the thought of it itself, "consciousness is itself, nothing other than a deciphering of the messages transmitted by the impulses."[466]

Klossowski charactersises consciousness as a repetitious exchange between two states, "somnolence and insomnia... like a play of mirrors" in a description reminiscent of the effect of some of Kusama's participatory installation work, and specifically the most recent *Infinity Mirror Room* (2012) which exploits this experience of consciousness to dislocate the presumption of fixed identity from the experience of the work itself.[467] The work is a pathway through a room of mirrors (and water) reflecting thousands of tiny, gently glowing lights, pulsing faintly like distant stars. Except that they glow primary colours, and their presence is truly infinite in the phenomenon of endless reflection created by the opposing mirrors that surround the space. The work is overwhelming and disorienting, and in the right kind of mood, a participant could almost imagine she was no longer a human, but instead just a tangle of impulses dispersing through blackness as the stars blink.

[465] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 20.
[466] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 21.
[467] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 21.

[Figure 38: Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirrored Room – Filled with the Brilliance of Life* 2011 as shown at the Tate Modern, London, February-June 2012.]

Both Nietzsche and Kusama's work appear from the starting point of illness, but develop in excess of such a limited, Victorian category as "madness." Klossowski describes Nietzsche's delegation of the symptoms of "sickness" (and madness) in relation to "decadence" and "*vigour*."[468] The excessive nature of decadence indicates that human weakness, sickness, madness and the tendency toward criminality become part of the process in which creativity and resistance are formed. As Klossowski observes, in his later work, Nietzsche associates the criminal and the artist in increasing intimate exchanges. The artist becomes the simulacrum of the criminal where artistic representation appears as the simulacrum of criminal transgression. Here, Klossowski uses Nietzsche to return to one of his own phantasms, the disintegration of identity by way of false repetition.[469] Klossowski argues for a flattening of the space between thought, representation and act, so the artist, as a simulacrum of criminality, becomes indistinguishable from the criminal she apparently mimics, "thus, there is no longer anything that separates two different domains of the real – the simulacrum of the act, and the act itself."[470]

[468] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 152.
[469] In addition to Klossowski's repetitious allusions to a predilection for the absolute annihilation of identity found in a range of his works, this fixation is exhaustively described by Gerald L Bruns in *On Ceasing to be Human* (2011).
[470] Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 156.

There is a temptation to see Kusama's entire body of work as an expression of symptoms of her (unclear but ongoing) mental illness. She offers opaque descriptions of painting her hallucinations alongside statements such as, "my artwork is an expression of my life, particularly of my mental disease."[471] She has also described her practice as a repetition of her phobias (as mentioned above) or that the use of polka dots either to "symbolize disease," or to reintegrate the objects covered in dots (which include Kusama herself, other human bodies, animals and inanimate objects both in public and in domestic contexts) with the infinite by obliterating the distinction of the boundaries of that object.[472] Kusama has expressed "horror toward infinity of the universe" but remains seduced and obsessed by it.[473] She is deliberately unclear about her art as she is about her psychiatric diagnosis, and just as Nietzsche's body of work was informed by, but cannot be reduced to his various afflictions, neither can Kusama's. However, to accuse Kusama of somehow engineering or fabricating mental illness, a theory that many critics have suggested, is also equally absurd.[474] Questioning the authenticity of Kusama's psychological illnesses is as ridiculous as attributing her body of work solely to them. As Kusama has indicated, she does not operate within her artwork as a person, she has sacrificed her "personality," her personhood or experience of identity in order to be able to communicate the circular, mythological event that is her art.[475]

[471] Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama."
[472] Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama."
[473] Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama."
[474] This latest trend in the discussion of Kusama's work is mentioned in the opening paragraph of Soojin Lee's review of Kusama's autobiography, also titled *Infinity Net* published in Art in America in February 2012.
[475] Kusama, quoted by Lee, "Infinity Net."

SELF, OBLITERATED

"By obliterating one's individual self, one returns to the infinite universe"[476]

[Figure 39: Yayoi Kusama, *No. 2, Infinity Net*, 1959.]

[Figure 40: Yayoi Kusama, Still from *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (film) 1967.]

[476] Yayoi Kusama, quoted by Turner, "Yayoi Kusama.", *Bomb Magazine*, Winter 1999, accessed 16 May 2013, http://bombsite.com/issues/66/articles/2192.

One of the first appearances of Kusama's project *Phalli's Field* was shown in New York in 1965 at the Richard Castellane Gallery.[477] The work was made up of a field of non-uniform soft-sculpture phalluses in a room confined by mirrors on each wall. Participants who attended the gallery were invited to walk through the garden of these objects, presented in a chaotic manner that actively resisted any geometric apparatus. The tension between the conceptual masculinity of the phallus, and the organic fabrication of the work is a playful transgression of the boundaries between masculinity and femininity as they are constructed in contemporary culture. The spotted, soft sculpture phalluses that overwhelmed the space of the room, are made infinite by the reflections of mirrors around them. In the publicity photographs for the show (photographs referred to above taken by Eikoh Hosoe) Kusama is shown in a lyotard, writhing amongst these spotted phalluses (defeating her phobia, as, according to her own mythology, the spots return the phallic shape to the unformed material of the universe). In doing so, Kusama creates a performance of putting the illusion of her subjective continuity at risk by coming into contact with a phobic object that she maintains will overwhelm it. She overcomes the phobic object (the phallus) through accumulation, spots (which signal a return to formlessness) and her physical domination of the installation space. Klossowski writes that undressing a person is a violent desubjectivisation of a body, from the language of clothing to the naked object of human flesh, an "abolition of the person one strips."[478] Kusama's art, and her interaction with the phobic objects of the accumulation *Phalli's Field*, is a performance of this violent desubjectivisation, but on herself, and on her own body, in order to disentangle the impulses of her experience, and return her physical presence to material formlessness.

Applin characterises the *Phalli's Field* as the production of "phenomenological and psychological uncertainty in participants" not sure how to approach their entrance into a room of spotted soft phalluses.[479] When Applin describes Kusama's work as "open" and unprescribed as to how it is to be experienced and understood, she demonstrates the dominance of psychoanalytic analyses in theoretical approaches to Kusama's work,

[477] Applin, *Infinity Mirror Room*, 1.
[478] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 70.
[479] Applin, *Infinity Mirror Room*, 3.

and in particular, the use of Donald Winnicott's work (after Melanie Klein) in relation to object-oriented development of subjectivity.[480] In fact, as evidenced by the careful architecture of her experiential environments, and the tension between inviting, soft-sculpture objects and the sexual grotesquery of oversized misshapen phalluses, Kusama has a very clear idea about how the participatory audience might engage with her work. Kusama is extremely prescriptive, and in the rooms she designs, she provides a clear pathway for a participatory audience to traverse, and in some self-obliteration rooms, the prescriptive formula includes instructions that participants are to use stick on spots to obliterate various objects. This echoes her earlier "Happenings" in New York which, as discussed earlier, appeared as highly choreographed events, with most participants employed to perform. There is a controlling architecture in Kusama's exhibition space guiding the participating body, and what it sees (mirrors) and how it moves (pathways). However, while she often gives insight into how she thinks about what she has created, she does not attempt to dictate how the participants will understand or produce meaning from the work. The participant, as Applin writes, becomes "trapped within a kaleidoscopic regime" that transgresses the illusion of cohesive subjectivity.[481]

[Figure 41: "Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirror Room - Phalli's Field (Floor Show)*, 1965 (1998), Photo: Hans Wilschut."[482]]

[480] Applin, *Infinity Mirror Room*, 29-30.
[481] Applin, *Infinity Mirror Room*, 3.
[482] Art Tattler, "Yayoi Kusama, More than Six Decades of Multi-Disciplinary Works." Image and description.

Analysis of visual cultures, in general, tends to focus on the effects an object has on the audience, viewer or participant, rather than on the author or artist of the work. For Kusama, however, it is as appropriate to conceptualise how Kusama, the character, identity, event or effect is affected by her artwork as it is to consider the effect of the experience of her work on a participant, or non-participatory audience. In Smith's work on Klossowski, he describes the composition of the self as a competing entanglement of impulses, or a "so-called self-identity is in face a differential flickering from drive to drive."[483] In response to this, Kusama becomes an orientation, a point of departure that is directed, driven and refocused by the competing drives of the artist's body. This outward orientation, characterised by the unveiling, or the performance of phobia itself (the phobic object being the phallus, which in psychoanalysis is supposed to be displaced onto another object, rather than remaining with the literal phallus) puts at risk the structural integrity of her fragile, "depersonalised" inner experience.[484]

The destruction of the cohesion of identity is a fundamental gesture of Kusama's oeuvre. Kusama sacrifices the pretense of identity in order to produce the simulacrum of communication for those who participate in or view her work. She performs a seppuku, a ritualised destruction of her experience of identity, in order to communicate an expression of her perception of objects in the world. The desire to self-obliterate (to reduce her experience of identity and physicality to formless materiality) is the phantasm of Kusama's work, and therefore, as Klossowski writes, as a phantasm, it can never be fully expressed, but must be repeated in the various guises of communicative and performative simulacra.[485]

Writing on Kusama's work, Applin emphasises the psychological expression and effect of the *Infinity Mirror Rooms* over the material experience of encountering them. It is difficult, however, to argue that when a participant is in a space like the *Infinity Mirror Room* defining and redefining a conscious identity, over the experience of the sensation of losing it entirely, in the accumulative process of the representational infinite, that Kusama constructs over and over again. To encounter the infinite, as it is expressed by the placement of opposing mirrors is to transgress the boundaries of language that

[483] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 10.
[484] Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 28-31. (This section contains a critique of the Freudian description of the development of sexuality.)
[485] Smith, "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche," 13.

fence subjectivity, and to find an experience beyond that limitation. Kusama's work challenges the participant to go beyond the learnt processes of fixed identity, in order to reconnect with the competing impulses that flow beneath the habitual performance of cohesion, or, as Deleuze and Guattari write in opening *A Thousand Plateaus*, "since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd."[486] In order to theorise the production of this dissolved post-subjectivity, however, I will now explore it in relation to Deleuze's simulacrum.

If Klossowski's use of the term simulacrum designates an adaptable fluidity based on the transience of identity and intentionality in relation to communication and representation, then the Deleuzian simulacrum has the effect of destroying the relationship between representative intentionality and any sense of authenticity in relation to selfhood or identity entirely. Kusama's project and performance of *Self-Obliteration*, is constructed through this destruction of identity by the appearance of the simulacrum, which appears in the production of the repetition and accumulation of images (language). Deleuze describes the difficulty of distinguishing authenticity in the presence of simulacra, which, by their existence, demonstrate the arbitrary delineation between authenticity and pretense (or performance).[487]

In order to define the simulacrum, Deleuze first identifies the Platonic structure of representation as a system by which the identification of difference can occur.[488] This difference is not inherent in representation itself, but rather, defined by Deleuze as a "rivalry" used in "distinguishing the 'thing' itself from its images, the original from the copy, the model from the simulacrum."[489] The Platonic methodology of competitive division results in a value-based representational hierarchy, where the original is always better, more desired, or more authentic than the copy. It is the basis for identity. For Plato, participating in the process of representation is already secondary to the original, "it is at best to rank second."[490] The repetition of the representative process, by virtue of the appearance of difference, or deviation in repetition results in the corruption of copies, and therefore, simulacra. In this sense, the cumulative weight of

[486] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.
[487] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 293.
[488] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 291.
[489] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 291.
[490] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 293.

repetition changes representation of the image the representation refers to, and in doing so, changes the meaning of the image, and that object for the witness to the simulacral process. Therefore, embedded in the accumulation of Kusama's *Phalli's Field* lies the distortive process by which she obliterates her identity as the object to which her representative efforts refer.

The Deleuzian model of the simulacrum has the consequence of obscuring the issue of Kusama's authenticity (the question of sick, or not sick) in favour of the problem of outcome of the art object itself in relation to both the participant who experiences it, and the event, character or identity that maintains the designation Yayoi Kusama. What effect does the disappearance of the identity "Yayoi Kusama" have on the performance of the artist-character "Kusama?" In order to achieve this disappearance, Kusama has to continually repeat the name of the character she has composed from herself, and from her body of work, and the accumulation of Kusama (most literally with the use of the Kusama dolls) works to annihilate any notion of an original, or authentic "identity" from the character performance. The effect is the solidification of the character, Kusama, who is as much part of her body of work as the work itself.

BUYING SEPPUKU, SELLING SUICIDE

[Figure 42: Yayoi Kusama-Louis Vuitton collaboration pop-up store at Selfridges, Oxford Street, London, October 5, 2012.]

Yayoi Kusama's continued international and popular success has been as reliant upon her talent for aggressive self-promotion as her talent for producing contemporary art. The irony of her self-promotion as an artist who is primarily concerned with self-obliteration reached its peak when she worked in collaboration with Louis Vuitton, in which her phantasmic obsession with the performance of self-obliteration was mass-manufactured and globally commericalised. Kusama's gesture in the *Self-Obliteration* works is illustrative of the dissolution of subjectivity described by both Julia Kristeva and Klossowski in their analysis of Bataille's sovereignty. Kristeva writes, "the sovereign subject can only be someone who *represents* experiences of ruptures: his *themes* evoke a radical heterogeneity."[491] The suicide contained in the obliteration of Kusama's identity is radically heterogeneous, and undermines the stability of her position as an artist, particularly in relation to this most recent hypercapitalist venture with Louis Vuitton.

[491] Kristeva, "Bataille, Experience and Practice," 247.

[Figures 43 & 44: Kusama doll mounted on the front of Selfridges, Oxford Street, London, October 5, 2012.]

Kusama's regime of *Accumulation* mirrors the development of the capitalist economy in Western European and North American societies in the twentieth century. Bataille has argued that the development of capitalism is dependent on an emphasis on an eternal delay and diversion of the expenditure of excess, which he also terms "accumulation."[492] The consequence of an austere life without an external force to push against (growth and conflict) and a prohibition of assisting the less fortunate (for example, the alms and charity and community of the Islamic religion) results in the eventually displaced excess energy exploding as acts of war (again as a profitable excess). Industrial development in Modernity, has as its outcome, the primacy of "things" or objects for consumption.[493] This development has the effect, or appearance of "freedom" (liberation from the feudal system for the Medieval indentured worker).[494] The worker becomes a commodity for the bourgeois to deploy. However, if this is the effect of industrial capitalism, then Marxism has systematised it, by failing to recognize the "human" need for sovereignty.[495] The implication of the mutual accumulation in Kusama's work and in late-capitalism is the unsustainability of the

[492] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 115.
[493] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 129.
[494] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 129.
[495] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 129.

overwhelming growth, and the obvious outcome of destruction and domination that it inspires.

As Bataille describes the capitalist process as a system of accumulation where the pre-existing emphasis of survival and enjoyment shifts to an emphasis on survival and growth and further production. This results in the accumulation of goods for the sake of having more, and the practice of storing and saving money and goods for a later time. This constitutes the (unlimited) deferral of expenditure that Bataille argues, cannot persist indefinitely as "neither growth, nor reproduction would be possible if plants and animals did not normally dispose of an excess."[496] Expenditure (the destruction of resources and excess energy) is the foundation upon which the economics of living energy operates, and the quest for energetic expenditure (pleasure, sexual experience and so forth) becomes, in the capitalist economy the quest for an accumulation of goods, "capitalism in a sense is an unreserved surrender to *things*" where pleasure is displaced onto the (fetishised) material object.[497]

In the example of elite luxury goods, like those offered by Louis Vuitton (where a handbag can cost in excess of £20,000) the existence of those products is predicated on the need to be able to demonstrate to others that the accumulation of resources exceeds theirs, and that accumulation represents power in a capitalist economy, in a gesture commonly termed "conspicuous consumption."[498] The appearance of such goods also demonstrates the need for expenditure, where accumulation has become so excessive that some resources must be expended in a luxurious, needless manner (and in order to produce further wealth and recognition).[499]

Where Kusama accumulates objects that relate to her phobias, allowing herself to become consumed by those accumulations, and destroying the illusion of a personality with the title Yayoi Kusama in the process, the relationship between that more traditional capitalist resource, money and the consumer of Louis Vuitton products mirrors this. Kusama frees herself from these accumulations first by indulging in her

[496] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 27.
[497] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 136.
[498] Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 49.
[499] For further exploration of this extreme from of (productive) luxurious expenditure, see also "Chapter 2: Supercapitalism" in Scott Wilson's *Great Satan's Rage*.

obsessive compulsions, and secondly, by allowing her sense of self to be consumed by them. The capitalist psyche is similarly subsumed by the obsessive accumulation of resources, with money and objects that retain monetary value.

In the chapter that follows this one, I explore the economics of accumulation and deferral further, with reference to the films *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring*, where those whose images are used to perpetuate commercial culture are excluded from the process of affecting it, and are therefore alienated from the possibility of affecting that culture entirely, as well as the possibility of communication. The following chapter pairs this one in an excessive, opposing conceptual orientation (as referred to in the introduction). Kusama is situated as heterogeneous to the cultural context in which she resides, according to recognisable and externally identified markers (gender, race, mental health, sexuality and so forth). In comparison, the groups of women in *The Bling Ring* (Sofia Coppola, 2013) and *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013) appear as sacred images within the hegemony of Western contemporary capitalist culture, but sacred images are not allowed to create or speak.

Kusama's ambition and commericalisation of accumulation and the luxury-goods based economy of Louis Vuitton is fused in an ultimate expression of self-destruction. The giving-over of the accumulative objects (the polka dots and the increasingly tentacle-esque phallic symbols in particular) to a mass production and commericalisation process appears to be the final stroke of the seppuku sword in the creation of a simulacrum through self-obliteration. Where Kusama has attempted to subsume her identity and her experience of her physical self into the objects she fears, she has finally achieved this in her project with Louis Vuitton. As the name and image of Kusama was hoisted above department store signs around the world, the plastic veneer of a seditious, yet empty simulacrum was completed.

CHAPTER 5

Appearing as a Sacred-Image: The Destruction of Communication

The problem of leisure
What to do for pleasure
The body is good business
Sell out, maintain the interest
Ideal love a new purchase
A market of the senses
Dream of the perfect life
Economic circumstances...
This heaven gives me migraine[500]

[Figure 45: Alien captures a moment with the Breakers in *Spring Breakers*.]

[Figure 46: The Ringers light up Rodeo Drive in *The Bling Ring*.]

[500] Gang of Four, "Natural's Not In It." (Featured during the title sequence of Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*.)

In this Chapter, I draw an unlikely (and perhaps even playfully offensive) correlation between the sovereign isolation of Tibetan monks described in Bataille's analysis of Lamaism in *The Accursed Share* and the conjoined American contemporary experience of femininity, adolescence and celebrity, and in order to do this, I will primarily be referring to two films, *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013) and *The Bling Ring* (Sofia Coppola, 2013). In the previous chapter, I argued that Yayoi Kusama performs a simulacral suicide in the various forms of her work in order to at least conceptually return to the continuity of being, while paradoxically rigorously articulating herself in name and image for the pursuit of fame and notoriety, and most recently in collusion with a form of supercapitalism with the branding of Louis Vuitton. By comparison, in this chapter, I will discuss the groups of interchangeable bodies of adolescent women in the films *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring*, as they traverse a culture that takes them as sacred images, and simultaneously excludes them from cultural production. This chapter approaches the rigidity of the experience of identity that is largely dictated by external social forces and the destruction of communication that such an alienated, adolescent position provokes.

There is an established tradition of filmmaking that circulates around adolescence and early adulthood. From *Rebel Without A Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) to *Puberty Blues* (Bruce Beresford, 1981) to *Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2003) films have attempted to capture the struggle and pathos of adolescence. Films like those of John Hughes (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, 1986, *Sixteen Candles*, 1984) and Amy Heckerling (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, 1982, *Clueless*, 1996) reflect the restriction, frustration and confusion of adolescence for the audience's cathartic amusement. While other films, like the *American Pie* franchise (Paul and Chris Weitz, 1999–2012) exploit the awkward physical and emotional manifestations of adolescence for the sake of gross-out body comedy, and others, as a source of black humour (*Heathers*, Michael Lehmann, 1988) or horror (*Carrie*, 1976, Brian de Palma). All of these films that engage with adolescence, in one way or another, are focused on the communicative (and generally homosocial, but heteronormative) experience of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Boys might not be able to talk to girls, but they can talk to their friends, and eventually (and usually through team consultation) learn to communicate with girls (*American Pie*). Girls might not know how to talk to boys or think much of them, but they discuss with their friends how to attract them and navigate their advances (*Clueless*, *Puberty Blues*). A

group of friends might not be able to talk to their parents, but they can help each other through whatever problems they might be having (*A Rebel Without A* Cause, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*). The intense relationships of adolescence can be represented as frightening and prone to extreme fluctuation. By negotiating the pitfalls of these relationships, teenagers are shown learning to communicate more effectively with people around them who are trying to help and who remain distantly concerned for them (usually their parents) (*Heathers*, *Thirteen*).

The Bling Ring was scripted and directed by Sofia Coppola and released in 2013. The narrative was based on a *Vanity Fair* feature article published in March 2010 by journalist Nancy Jo Sales titled "The Suspects Wore Louboutins." The film fictionalises Sales' account of a group (which will be referred to in this chapter as "the Ringers") comprised predominantly of adolescent women who robbed the houses of several celebrities (Paris Hilton, Audrina Partridge, Rachel Bilson, Orlando Bloom, Lindsay Lohan) in Los Angeles. Most of the members of the Ringers were from privileged (upper-middle class) backgrounds and, as the film suggests, were not as interested in the monetary value of the goods they stole (as they had access to enough money in their own lives) as in pursuit of recognition, "the fame monster" produced by contemporary celebrity fetishisation (where the celebrity body is an object to be consumed).[501] While the majority of the Ringers were young women, the film primarily follows Marc Hall (fictional representative of Nick Prugo) who was dubbed "The Rat" by the *Vanity Fair* article, for confessing to crimes, including those the police were unaware of, as well as detailing the involvement of his friends.[502] By her own admission, Coppola chose to use Prugo/Hall as the focal point for the film as he appeared to be the most "sympathetic" of the group.[503] In addition to being panicked enough to divulge afore mentioned details of previously unknown crimes, Prugo had made a video of himself smoking weed while dancing and miming to music and posted it on Facebook, that was so "raw and personal" and so embarrassing, that she felt he could (unlike the other characters) be a point of empathy for the audience (as well as in

[501] Sales, "The Suspect Wore Louboutins," 1.
[502] Sales, "The Suspects Wore Louboutins," 2.
[503] Coppola, *Summer Talks at the Lincoln Center: The Bling Ring Q&A with Sofia Coppola.*

terms of her own filmmaking practice).[504] The video Prugo made was recreated as an interlude in the film itself.[505]

[Figure 47: still from the recreation of Prugo's awkward social media video in *The Bling Ring*.]

The Bling Ring is the latest film added to Coppola's body of work, which has developed an aesthetic that approaches the experience of living in a position superfluous to production and the experience of need as an affectation of boredom and aimlessness – the sovereignty of rich-kid ennui. Her films and their characters explore the boredom of having access to every product and experience, without the need for aspiration or accumulation. In *Lost in Translation* (2003), Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) is trapped by the tedium of an expensive, faceless hotel in Tokyo with a distracted, absent husband and the uncertainty of an unnecessary career (improbably in philosophy). In the film *Marie Antoinette* (2006) the title character (Kirsten Dunst) is shown, bound by the structure of European nobility, to have little else to do but squander vast amounts of wealth, with little pleasurable return. In *Somewhere* (2010), a washed up actor (Stephen Dorff) and his daughter (Elle Fanning) float through interchangeable hotel rooms and scenarios, with the occasional faceless servant in tow, consuming luxury with little acknowledgement of its broader value. So in Coppola's most recent film, *The Bling Ring*, the boredom induced by the saturation of constant luxury - constant surplus - is

[504] Coppola, *Summer Talks at the Lincoln Center: The Bling Ring Q&A with Sofia Coppola.*
[505] The Prugo film can be viewed on youtube, here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQzlQoL-erc

extended to the Ringers who robbed celebrity houses as a sinister development in the iteration of the same aesthetic.

Where *The Bling Ring* is constituted by characters that aspire to be recognised as celebrities (played by mostly relatively unknown young actors, with the notable exception of Emma Watson as Nikki), *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013) is comprised of celebrities styled to appear with the vulnerability and imperfection of amateur, ingénue actors. The film focuses on a group of three women (Candy, Brit and Cotty played by Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Benson and Rachel Korine, respectively) who attend a nameless, generic university in Kentucky, and their devout but disenchanted Christian friend Faith (Selena Gomez) who they enlist in their group (assuming she has money) to further the goal to go on "spring break" (for the remainder of this chapter, this group will be referred to as "the Breakers"). Finding their collective savings inadequate, they decide to rob a restaurant and its customers, repeating the mantra "pretend it's a video game" to accumulate sufficient funds for a holiday.[506] Having successfully stolen adequate resources for the trip, they take a bus to Florida, where the excess of the film's opening sequence awaits them. After a few days of the festivities they are arrested for drug consumption, or drug adjacency ("you didn't have any illicit substances in your possession") and gangster/rapper Alien (James Franco) bails them out of jail.[507]

While visually styled as relatively average adolescent girls, three of the four actors cast in these roles are former Hollywood child stars, and two were members of the garish Disney Channel institutional stable of adolescent princesses (Vanessa Hudgens and Selena Gomez) the meaning of which Korine uses to compose a sub-textual engagement with celebrity culture. The characters pursue the experience of pleasure (underpinned by the accumulation of objects and money) without the communicative and temporally composed accumulation of desire (everything must occur immediately, and is therefore without value). The film addresses boredom and anonymity as an experience of young women in the (white) American lower middle class, characterised by social and cultural disengagement and desperation borne from an overwhelming sense in which all experience is repetitious, meaningless and pleasureless.

[506] Candy/Brit, *Spring Breakers*.
[507] The Judge, *Spring Breakers*.

Disengagement from culture and communication has as its consequence the ability to view transgression and violence as an equally unsurprising element of detachment.

While these two films have marked differences, which primarily include questions of identity politics and aesthetics – class, gender, race – as well as the material of the films themselves (In *Spring Breakers*, Korine collages different film stocks, but predominantly uses 35MM, while *The Bling Ring* was Coppola's first foray into digital film, using the Redcode RAW format) the similarities in their approach to celebrity culture, particularly in relation to the position of young women remain compelling. Structurally, the films also bear resemblance to one another, as both films use repetition and rhythmic distortion to build an anti-narrative around the pursuit of the consumption of objects and experiences. Both films depict forms of criminality (specifically robbery) and not labour as the most efficient method of obtaining products and resources for consumption in relation to a sense of entitlement to the experience of that consumption. Both films demonstrate that this waste, however excessive, does not fulfill the characters' need for expenditure (as they do not desire, per se) and there is always more surplus to be consumed. Also common to both these films are overwhelming, suffocating affectations of boredom and alienation. Despite the sociopolitical distinctions between the subject matter and positions of the films and how they approach the individual's relationship to the society in which they find themselves (through divergent questions of assumed identity) the similarities between them and their approach to the monstrous combination of celebrity and consumer culture in contemporary American society resonates with this particular moment in American history. The position of young women in relation to contemporary American media is made clear between them, they are situated in a position of radical alienation caused by the saturation production of sacred images, celebrities. Images of adolescent and young adult women are the central obsession of media and celebrity culture, but they are only allowed to engage with cultural production as image-objects, without the space to be either communicative or productive. Young women can be image-objects, but they are excluded from the affecting the production of those images – their bodies are idols for celebrity culture to be built around.

The inability to affect a culture to which the image of your body is intrinsic and sacred (as a generalised image of commodified desire) alienates the experience of subjectivity

of an individual from the possibility of communication. In both films, communication between characters, as well as any productive relation to their social context is irredeemably severed. Rather than simply being alienated from clearly identifiable others, the characters of *The Bling Ring* and *Spring Breakers* are radically alienated from everyone they encounter, including the audience, the filmmakers, the social context in which they are placed, and their direct narrative peers. The source of this alienation is this position of the sacred image that these characters hold in contemporary culture, which I compare to that of Bataille's description of Buddhist monks in Tibet.[508]

Lamaism, Bataille writes, is constructed around the sacred image-object of the monk, who refuses the complexities of a socially and economically productive life in order to live in a sacred, and sovereign position that is alienated from it. Monks are denied any form of social or cultural productivity, and must (silently) remain in monasteries, relying on the labour of others for their sustenance. The monks form a significant proportion of the population of Tibet and yet are barred from any form of energetic or cultural production.[509] These monasteries, then, are filled with isolated, groups of indistinguishable parasitic bodies who have relinquished communication along with productivity (labour, growth, reproduction, accumulation) in order to achieve the self-obsessed goal of personal Nirvana. Bataille's account of the role of monks in Buddhist Tibet, then, fulfills a similar function to that of the late adolescent women in the above-mentioned films. By using this model, I will then analyse how the other characters in these films, the culture they reflect, and the filmic material itself situates these women in this position, and construct a theory of communal alienation around it.

[508] Found in "Part Three: Historical Data II, Section 2: The Unarmed Society: Lamaism," in Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 93-110.
[509] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 105.

[Figures 48 & 49: Stills from *Wheel of Time* (Werner Herzog, 2003). Tibetan Lama Lhundup Woeser travelled more than 3000 miles over three and a half years from his monastery to Bodh Gaya, India for the Kagyu Monlam Festival "with prostrations" at every step (process shown in still above) and in doing so, relied on the resources and generosity of nomadic tribes he encountered along the way.]

PARASITIC POPULATIONS:
FROM MONASTICISM TO CELEBRITY

I'd like to have my own lifestyle brand[510]

[Figure 50: The Ringers discussing their lifestyle, as a brand, in *The Bling Ring*.]

Spring Breakers and *The Bling Ring* are filmic engagements with the experience of living as an adolescent woman in the context of contemporary American society, which is to say, to live as a sacred object, an image that reflects the culture in which it is situated without the opportunity or ability to influence it. Celebrities, and particularly those who are young women, function in mass culture as sacred images. Their bodies, or more specifically, ideal images of their bodies, are the primary focus of contemporary celebrity culture, which operates around these representations of young female bodies as desirable commodities. As a result of this focus, the women themselves, as subjects, agents or identities are excised from any form of productive agency or communicative engagement with the culture that circulates around them. If celebrity culture, and more broadly, "mass culture" as the cultural expression of capitalism can be said to function as a religion, then these women's bodies are the sacred objects of worship.[511] Additionally, if capitalism does indeed function as a religion (as Walter Benjamin, amongst others, has argued)[512] with celebrity bodies as consumable sacred objects,

[510] Marc, *The Bling Ring*.
[511] Adorno, in *The Culture Industry* identifies the expression of late-capitalism as "mass culture", and in the essay "Capitalism and Religion," Walter Benjamin describes capitalism as a "cultic religion."
[512] Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," 288.

then this inactively sovereign position in culture is reminiscent of what Bataille describes as the position of the Dalai Lama and the monks of Tibet in relation to Buddhist monasticism.[513]

In another, related account of the process of producing sacred image-objects, Pierre Klossowski's novel *Robert Ce Soir* serves to demonstrate how a female character can be constructed as an image without the opportunity to affect the opinion of others. Interspersed by the play of identity and actuality, the narrative illustrates the relationality between what is perceived to be the identity of a name that is attached to that body and how that identity is thought, experienced and performed by that body. Roberte's position in Klossowski's novel is comparable to the women in these films, as her identity is decided for her, and the narrative is built around her, based on the presence and appearance of her body. Her speech and actions, however decisive, and however opposed to what Octave (her husband) assumes them to be, count for little in comparison to his perception of her based on an image of her body (a photograph which he analyses with his nephew). The book, like the films in question, shows how a cultural product can be organised around the presence of a woman whose identity has been decided by outside observation and without consultation with the woman herself. In the book, Octave and Antoine (her nephew, who she and Octave are the guardians of) relate her actions and her character to the reader. Octave shows Antoine the photograph of Roberte, whose skirt caught fire while she was speaking. The content of her speech is not discussed, only the movements of her body, which Octave believes to have conspired to ensure that her skirt was set alight, and that a particular audience member came to her aid.

Their discussion explores both the representational order of the photographic object (in relation to the bodies and objects it has captured). Octave discusses this with Antoine in order to reveal that despite Roberte's rejection of both religion and sexuality, her physical actions suggest that she engages with both regardless (revealing the irony of her role as a censor of both pornography and religious texts).[514] Following this discussion, Octave "names" Roberte, because she "eludes" him.[515] Roberte

[513] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 93.
[514] Klossowski, *Roberte Ce Soir*, 17-22.
[515] Klossowski, *Roberte Ce Soir*, 26.

represents a presence that cannot be accounted for entirely by language, and therefore for Octave, she must be named in order to contain this unruly form and so that she no longer poses a threat to his system of communication, language. Antoine and Octave also discuss how they experience Roberte's identity differently, but in doing so, each reveals only her identity in relation to how they perceive her, rather than what she has articulated about herself, and therefore her identity becomes a mirrored (sacred) image of their own experience in the world. In removing Roberte's self from the discussion of identity, as she exists only in relation to them, she is barred from entering into communication with them in order to establish her character apart from them. In this exchange, she is established as a (sacred) image-object by being denied agency and an identity. This process is a reversal of the production of the Last Man (discussed in Chapter 2) where the Last Man engages in the process of "self-creation" in order to become Somebody in the absence of relationality to an other human being.[516] In this instance, the identity of a body is created without giving that body an opportunity to influence the construction of that identity, and it is therefore the experience of subjectivity only in relation to an other. The identity of Roberte appears as the simulacral reflection of Octave's sense of self, and what he desires her to be in relation to that sense. Both of these processes exclude the possibility of communication, and therefore, produce an experience of exclusion from culture in the form of a radical alienation.

In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille describes Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism) in opposition to the community of Islam. Where, for Bataille, Muslim social order functions by entirely subsuming the individual to the communal whole and is characterised by its austerity, practicality and outward-looking militarisation, Lamaism is characterised by luxurious (in excess of need) religious behaviour along with an absolute adherence to belief in non-violence:

> Just as Islam reserved all the excess for war, and the modern world for industrial development, Lamaism put everything into the contemplative life, the free play of the sensitive man in the world.[517]

In this example, Bataille uses this distinction to demonstrate that where social growth, or geographic growth can no longer be achieved (for whatever reason) the excess

[516] Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human*, 26.
[517] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 109.

energy of the social group is directed inward, as inactive and in this case, as religious. Bataille describes the Dalai Lama in a position of religious sovereignty whose only function is to die (and to be replaced by his reincarnation) and therefore, the individual body that takes the position of the Dalai Lama is a simulacrum of sovereignty, an appearance of leadership without power. This is a wholly non-militarised, and therefore inactive and inactionable power, "a *power that could not be* exercised" in a manner explored in more detail in relation to other forms of sovereign power in Chapter 1.[518] Before the modern era, the Dalai Lama had absolute power over the Tibetan people, but as that position was not actionable, "the sovereignty of the Dalai Lama was fictitious: It may have been divine, but it was also powerless."[519] As a useless, religious position, it is a power without force or violence and is therefore, without the possibility of exertion, and entirely reliant upon the system over which it presides.[520]

When the thirteenth Dalai Lama attempted to introduce a more robust military strategy to Tibet in the early Twentieth Century, Bataille (in reference to the biography of the Dalai Lama, written by Charles Bell) describes it as a failure that led to the unraveling of the Tibetan system as a whole. This was because the sacred image of Lamaist monasticism – around which the social structure was organised – was undermined by the thirteenth Dalai Lama's individualist pursuit of active power, and by extension, his continued reign (rather than submitting himself to die and be reincarnated, in accordance with the Lamaist system). This undermined the fundamental proposition of Lamaism itself, where the Dalai Lama does not have an identity, his is not a subject-position, but a sacred-image object. He has no discernable self other than that which he shares with his predecessors – he is simply the current incarnation of this sacred-image. In order to produce that sacred image, the Dalai Lama's predecessors have been sacrificed, as death (in order to facilitate reincarnation) is the primary function of the position.[521]

Like the Dalai Lama, the Breakers and The Ringers exist in order to be consumed by the cultural order that is formed around an ideal version of them. Hollywood, like

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[518] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 102.
[519] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 97.
[520] This is an indirect reference to Walter Benjamin's essay "Critique of Violence" where he demonstrates that without force (violence), power cannot be exerted.
[521] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 97.

Tibetan Lamaism, functions around death and renewal, Dixon, in writing on the death and reincarnation in the film industry writes, "no wonder William Fawkner observed, "they worship death here. They don't worship money, they worship death.""[522] Celebrities like Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan are to the Breakers and the Ringers as the Dalai Lama is to the rest of the monks in Tibet. The Dalai Lama inhabits the pinnacle of Tibetan monasticism, the absolute ideal version, and more specifically, a recognisable identity in relation to the culture of Tibet, which is arranged around it. Bataille observes, in Tibet "if someone, against all likelihood, were to turn away from religion, he would still derive his meaning and his possibility of expression from the monks." [523] Similarly, if we ignore contemporary media and culture, we still derive our experience of culture in negative relation, or resistance to the hegemony of Hollywood celebrity. However, as discussed above, the nature of the position of Dalai Lama is such that he cannot inhabit a subject position unique to his own experience, as he is simply the latest appearance in a series of interchangeable bodies that inhabit that sovereign position. Similarly, each sacred-image object (identity) in the celebrity culture is easily replaced with the next body to can inhabit that position, and willing bodies with even features and the required shape are apparently not in short supply. The consequence of being denied an individual identity is that one has nothing to put at risk, or to sacrifice in order to communicate. Being without access to a subject-position is to be unable to communicate within the context of culture, and is therefore, to be radically alienated.

Bataille's description of the system of Tibetan Lamaism operates in the same manner as the system of celebrity in relation to Western capitalism. In the same way as the Dalai Lama exists only in relation to other incarnations of that position, so to do celebrities, and they are equally interchangeable, and they inhabit the same (sovereign but inactive) position in relation to the culture that is built around them. Where the Dalai Lama has a religious authority, the remaining monks (who, prior to the twentieth century, according to Bataille) constituted nearly a third of the male population of Tibet, were an interchangeable mass of non-identity from whom the next Dalai Lama might be chosen.[524] This closely resembles the anonymity with which the young

[522] Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse*, 5.
[523] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1.*, 103.
[524] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 102.

women of both films operate within mass culture. The ideal version of young women (celebrity or starlet) is constructed as a sacred-image through acts of consumption, constituted by exposure and those who fulfill the task of being a sacred-image are prohibited from inhabiting a culturally productive subject position. In other words, they are positioned as useless, heterogeneous objects that contain the potentiality to be sacred to mass culture, and are otherwise excluded from it.

In describing the sacred, Bataille reiterates a principle throughout *The Accursed Share*; that the construction of the sacred involves the reduction of the thing to its function and utility as an object, and the subsequent destructive consumption of that object. The consumption of (making sacred) of the sacred object is, for Bataille, "the way separate beings communicate" and therefore this is the process that ensures Tibetan people might define themselves in relation to Lamaism, and what enables people to communally pore over gossip magazines and discuss celebrity appearance and behaviour.[525] Writing on the production of the sacred, Bataille refers to the examples of human sacrifice and martyrdom (Aztecs and Saints) and Klossowski develops the example of pornography as a "reiterated description" of a "spiritual event" where acts like undressing is a violent desubjectivisation, which is the reduction to an object that has a specific function and utility (the removal of clothes, as the removal of a semiotic system, becomes the removal of the subject's will).[526] [527]

In contemporary commercial media, the "celebrity" body is made sacred. Examples such as Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan and Audrina Partridge (each of whom are targets for the *Bling Ring* robbers) are people whose bodies are reduced to the function of being seen, the utility of which is to sell "stories" (narratives of their lives) and images, which in turn sells copies of publications, and in order to do so, must be made to appeal to the readers of those publications alongside advertising for consumption.[528] While visual consumption of celebrity and the desire to be recognised appears to be as

[525] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 58.
[526] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 67.
[527] This was also noted in the previous chapter in relation to Yayoi Kusama's horror of (particularly heterosexual) sexual behaviour, with reference to her Japanese contemporaries' use of the semiotics of Japanese pornography in their work.
[528] "Stories" such as the feature article written by Nancy Jo Sales, and films like Sofia Coppola's.

old as culture itself,[529] the remembrance of a name or image is linked to the positions or actions connected to it.[530] In late-capitalist commodity culture, the position of celebrity operates in a manner akin to religious iconography, where the repetition and recognition of the sacred image itself is the focus, "famous for being famous."[531] Hilton, Lohan and Partridge are examples of this celebrity body as *solely* an image for consumption, where the locus of their fame lies in the proliferation and repetition of images of them, and the recognition of those images by a consuming audience. These are examples of pure, sacred celebrity bodies created for the sole purpose of visual consumption, without the taint of productive use-value. This pure celebrity position is recognised as aspirational and desirable by the characters of *The Bling Ring* (and it is no accident that Hilton, Lohan and Partridge are primary targets of their crimes). The purpose of celebrity, for them, is not to have access to money, opportunity or power (all of which they could easily obtain without it) but to be recognised, and therefore, consumable as sacred-image objects. As those celebrities are in such a position, there is a sense of entitlement over their bodies and private spaces (a sense of entitlement encouraged by visual media), and as all avenues by which they might ordinarily gain access to the position of celebrity appear to them to be laborious, they decide to instead simply invade the houses of pre-existing celebrities and take their possessions.

Key to the position shared by young women as celebrity bodies, and by Tibetan monks, is their primary function as a sacred-image object. Women in the context of mass culture (and in Western civilisation more broadly) are encouraged to relate to their experience of identity chiefly in relation to their appearance, which is an invitation that is both amplified and policed by celebrity culture.[532] Similarly, Tibetan monks are important for the image they produce, and the idea they represent, rather than the individual actions of any one monk. As Bataille describes, what little they might be permitted to accomplish is subservient to the image of the monk, an image primarily inhabited by the Dalai Lama, in Buddhist Tibet.[533] So where the monk is

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[529] And as universal as cognition, as evidenced by the entrance to the Chauvet caves which are emblazoned with the repeated handprint of a single, determined artist, ostensibly asserting "I was here" with the mark of his distinctively crooked finger.
[530] Various Pharaohs (Rameses II, Amenhotep), Cleopatra, the Venetian Doge Loredan and the Florentine Medici family (of the Italian Renaissance period) are all historical examples of the active production of celebrity, but all are linked to specific positions or actions.
[531] Boorstin, *The Image*, xxxviii.
[532] Woolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 58.
[533] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 94.

obliged to replicate the sacred image of the ideal monk (the Dalai Lama), women are obliged to replicate the body of the celebrity, as the sacred image of mass culture. In *The Bling Ring*, attempts to inhabit the position of celebrity take on a sinister (and criminal) appearance as the ringers attempt to replicate the visual appearance of the bodies of the sacred-image celebrities by stealing and inhabiting their clothes. *Spring Breakers* destroys the sacred-image of the celebrity bodies it uses by presenting them as average girls. Both engagements reveal and undermine the pursuit of celebrity that infects young women's bodies.

Bataille goes on to describe that in the system of Tibetan Lamaism, where approximately a third of the male population of Tibet (at the time Bataille was writing) were monks who were not permitted to work to produce anything or to have children. In a physical sense, then, they are not permitted to undertake any growth or accumulation of energy, or work and therefore spend their lives focused on wasting the energy and resources provided for them:

> A population that cannot somehow develop the system of energy it constitutes, that cannot increase its volume (with the help of new techniques or of wars), must wastefully expend *all* the surplus its bound to produce.[534]

Bataille designates this large portion of the country as "parasites" who resolve the situation of energetic excess well enough that the general experience for the population living in Tibet was, at the time, of a higher standard than in other comparable areas.[535]

Where the Tibetan Buddhist system of expenditure is "also a renunciation of expenditure," in that the monks live in a relatively spartan manner, the parasitic system by which the monks consume the excess energy of the larger Tibetan society is comparable to that of the depiction of post-adolescence in the films *The Bling Ring* and *Spring Breakers*.[536] Like the monks, the characters in these films are parasitic in that they own and produce nothing in order to sustain themselves, and rely on the energy, work and productive capital of others in order to continue to exist. The process of religious expenditure practiced by Tibetan monks is comparable to the alienated lives

[534] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 108.
[535] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 109.
[536] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 110.

represented by these films through an object-oriented subsumption into pure expenditure. For both the monks and the characters in both the films, eroticism is completely displaced and expelled from their lives, and the only communication they are able to undertake is between themselves, and consumer objects. If Western capitalism shares characteristics with fundamentalist religions, then adolescence as it is constructed in films like *The Bling Ring* and *Spring Breakers* is an expression of extremist capitalist monasticism. The practice of Tibetan Buddhist monks is entirely without community, as it is an absolutely individualist way of being. Living in this manner is the assertion of an inactive sovereign identity (of a monk, of the Dalai Lama) over either communication (between individuals) or the larger community (as per the above example in Islam, where the individual is always secondary to community). This is an approach that finds a perverse simulacrum in the characters of *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring*. They cannot communicate, bound by the system of object-oriented capitalism to destroy both communication (eroticism and language) and community, and as the simulacra of Bataille's monks, they experience radical alienation, "a world that is unsubordinated by any necessity."[537] The monasticism of Bataille's description of Lamaism is exclusively the domain of men (the role of women in Tibetan Buddhism is unclear in Bataille's chapter) where the consumer, object relation system is constructed as a conspicuously feminised, and vacuous distraction from the (masculine) utility of life. This is another sense in which the Breakers and the Ringers are simulacra of Tibetan monks.

Both mysticism and eroticism are "modes of consumption of all the individual being's resources" that require the risk of communication.[538] The displacement of eroticism onto a material object is to displace the deathly expenditure, as there is no risk of self-loss (death by communication) in relation to objects (even when you use armed robbery to get them). Mystics, like monks use their energy solely in pursuit of the experience of the sacred. Monks and mystics sustain themselves only to sacrifice that energy for the experience of nothingness with is akin to eroticism – this is the obliteration of energy for an experience of the void. The expenditure of energy in pursuit of eroticised-material-object (fetish) experiences in these films is similarly constituted, but without the cumulative commitment of anticipation.

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[537] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 110.
[538] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 2*, 170.

CONSUMPTION AS CULTURE:
PRODUCING SIMULACRA OF SACRED IMAGES

Look at my shit![539]

[Figures 50 & 51: Alien demonstrating his successful accumulations in *Spring Breakers*.]

While Candy and Brit writhe around the bedroom, Alien of *Spring Breakers* lists his accumulations to the lazily underwhelmed girls. Describing the direction for this scene, Korine states that he asked the actor (James Franco) to improvise a speech demonstrating "Alien's reinterpretation of the American Dream, which consists completely of just stuff" and in the same interview, Korine goes on to say that this performance went for well over an hour, and he was tempted to include the entire take in the film (but thankfully did not).[540] [541] In the cinema-released version of the film, Alien picks up objects around him (cologne, firearms, clothing) and lists them,

[539] Alien (James Franco), *Spring Breakers*.
[540] Korine (quoted by Franklin), "Spring Breakers' Harmony Korine..."
[541] The listing of consumer goods to demonstrate the commodification of culture in *Spring Breakers* also appears to be a reference to Bret Easton Ellis' novel *American Psycho* (1991) in which the character Patrick Bateman fills entire chapters listing and describing the items he has amassed. (In addition to *American Psycho*, this device has appeared a number of Ellis' other novels, including *Glamorama* (1998).)

punctuating his performance with the mantra "look at my shiiiiit." In doing so, he demonstrates the relationship between commodity culture, accumulation, repetition and surplus – he has accumulated massive amounts of stuff, all of which was marketed to be the (displaced) sacred object he desired, and, while the feat of accumulation itself, for him, is something to brag about, the objects themselves are disappointing and inert. Now they have been accumulated, Alien has little idea about what to do with all these objects (other than listing them as a performance-catalogue) and so they take on the position of unresolved surplus, lying around his drug den house, to be put to use in a performance to impress the Breakers.

In Bataille's assessment of economic development, accumulation and growth without the release of expenditure is the fundamental character of the capitalist system. Like Alien, the capitalist accumulates wealth, or "shit" and this accumulation is the focus of the system, not the expenditure of that wealth (the experience of what it can buy). This system produces an endless delay or diversion from the expenditure of excess energy, instead of wasting excess energy and resources; they are diverted to further production, or stored for later use.[542] Bataille observes that this system leads to massive industrial growth (citing the period of peace between World War I and World War II) and eventually the inevitability of war. Bataille uses the model of the general economy in the discussion of both individual bodies, and the function of society more generally, and it is therefore illuminating in the function of Alien in *Spring Breakers*, who accumulates "shit" until the breakers come along, catalysing a violent expenditure that results in his death, along with the massacre of his enemies at the hands of Candy and Brit.

Brit and Candy's response to Alien's arsenal is to sexually humiliate him by forcing him to fellate a gun, implying to the audience, at least for a moment, the possibility that they might kill him and take his much-loved "shit." But the Breakers aren't interested in accumulation. Unlike Alien, who has focused on the accumulation of goods, the group of girls are parasitic and only consume energy while being counted amongst the objects Alien has accumulated. As Scott Wilson writes, Bataille makes a clear distinction between the commodity for consumption within the "restricted economy"

[542] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 115.

of production and consumption, and the necessity of "nonproductive expenditure."[543] The key to the distinction between these two positions is an outcome of economic utility and recuperability. The consumption of commodities within the restricted economy of production and consumption is useful, whereas the waste of energy in pursuit of nonproductive expenditure is the destruction of resources and energy without any return for the individual, or the social order beyond the pleasure and expenditure of that waste.[544] Given this model, Alien in *Spring Breakers*, has (despite his criminal activity) has operated within a restricted economy, through which he has accumulated commodities for consumption, but can find no way to consume them all as he has no use for them. The Breakers appear, first as a source of investment for Alien when he bails them out of jail, and in doing so, he effectively purchases them as another commodity. However, unlike the other commodities that Alien has accumulated, the Breakers have value in excess of their direct economic use, and he purchases them as though they are symbolic objects to be sacrificed, where "sacrifice is nothing other than the production of sacred things" through destructive consumption.[545]

In Wilson's analysis of *Trainspotting*, he describes the creation of the "needless need" as the creation of a need (appetite) for a consumer product, without the intervention and accumulation of desire with the example of addiction.[546] After William Burroughs, Wilson compares this creation of needless need to the development of physiological addiction where addiction to an object (a substance, for example, heroin) creates a situation in which the addict cannot function (be useful or productive) without the object of addiction in the same way that some people cannot function without a Smartphone.[547] By consuming the object of the addiction, the addict can become both useful (in terms of a restricted, production and consumptive economy) and construct that object as sacred.[548] But, simultaneous to this reliance on the sacred object in order to function, the removal of the individual from the productive economy in capitalist culture, results in what that culture deems to be acts of criminal transgression. Wilson discusses the characters of the film, bound by their addiction to

[543] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 118 (Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 39).
[544] As I have first discussed in the introduction, and in Chapter 1.
[545] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 119.
[546] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 40.
[547] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 44-45.
[548] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 40.

heroin, as living outside of, and beyond utility. This, as the novel, the film and Wilson assert, is the alternative to life as a series of commodified experiences, which is the appearance of choice without choice.[549] The commodity culture represented in *Trainspotting* (a 1990s precursor to the culture that the Breakers and Ringers inhabit) in order to create "needless need... a concept very close to desire, but significantly different in that ultimately it collapses the spatial difference temporal deferral necessary for desire, thereby precluding it."[550] This model of the construction of "needless need" demonstrates the mode of consumption of an addict (but is also used to illustrate how products are sold to consumers in commodity culture). It is, therefore, a need that has been artificially created, but is, nevertheless, a specific physiological and identifiable need. The needless need is expressed in the consumer as the constant pursuit for more (and novel) experiences with and in relation to the object of need.[551] Where the assemblage of characters in *Trainspotting* constitute social outcasts, heterogeneous to the social context that has produced them (via the production of needless need) the groups of *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring* operate differently, because they are not analogous to addicts, they are the heroin.

To confirm this, Alien treats the Breakers as luxurious commodities – the kind that represent social status – and not unlike his custom car. He describes them, documents them constantly (with an imaginary camera) as he looks at them, as though they are objects that he's attempting to get all available value out of, as he consumes them. For him, as they exist in a group, they are interchangeable and replaceable. As Faith leaves, followed later by Cotty, it is as though each girl has been consumed, or used up. Their limit has been reached and their presence in the film has been exhausted and so they disappear. The loss of each girl has little impact on Alien, as sacrificial objects, such consumption is their primary function. However, during the final scene of the film, this position is reversed as Alien succumbs to his needless need for the Breakers. The final two girls (Candy and Brit) are not consumed by Alien, and therefore, exceed their position as sacred (addictive) objects. Following the montage of a crime spree and the departure of Cotty, Candy and Brit (who are absolutely interchangeable throughout the film) are left with Alien. The three of them have sex in the pool, which appears out

[549] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 36.
[550] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 44-45.
[551] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 44.

of place (the entire film is obscene and completely unerotic) as the only previously shown sexual contact between the three of them was the gun-fellatio scene, in which the domination of the Breakers over Alien is implied. It is as though this scene is a reiteration of the earlier fellatio scene, with Alien again consumed by his needless need for the presence of the girls. However, in the events that follow, Candy, Brit and Alien go to the house of the gang-rival (who had shot Cotty, prompting her to leave), and while Alien is killed as he arrives, the girls (still pretending "it's a videogame") shoot everyone they see, including the head of the rival gang, Archie (Gucci Mane) and leave in his car. Not able to be assimilated into an economy where they are consumed, the girls leave, exceeding the grasp of Alien, Spring Break and Harmony Korine.

The Ringers by comparison, are aware of their function as sacred images in commodity culture and in the course of the film, attempt to exploit, amplify and manipulate that function. Nicki (Emma Watson), her sister (Georgia Rock) and her "adopted" friend, Sam (Taissa Farmiga) are trained by their mother to promote themselves as sacred-image objects, the consumption of which is the basis for their cultural context and self-worth. They are taught to aspire to celebrity, which is to be a surface onto which the necessity of cultural consumption appears, and pursue this position at every opportunity that becomes available. Their friend Marc expresses this appetite for the position of celebrity as sacred-image object when he discusses his ambitions with Rebecca and Chloe at the beach. He wants to have a "lifestyle" associated with his image, in essence, he wants to transform a carefully articulated image of himself into a brand. This ambition manifests as self-obsession, particularly in relation to appearance – the girls and Marc preen constantly – and take incessant photos of themselves while out clubbing (the performance of which is to show an imaginary audience how fantastic their lives are, in order to inspire aspiration to the future "lifestyle" brand their bodies represent). When socialising, they are never shown conversing with, or reacting to one another, nor do they interact with other club goers. Instead, their time at bars is spent posing for photos, which they immediately post on social media, and then check their posts on their phones to see who is noticing them (both at the time, and later on their computers at home).

In the examples of *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring*, the needless need of the addict or the consumer (for a specific substance, or a specific, aspirational product) becomes

generalised. In *Breakers*, needless need becomes the need for novelty, experiencing something new, when everything is mundane. In *The Bling Ring*, this becomes the need for contact with the celebrity body as commodity – but any identifiable celebrity body, every commodity.

REPETITION AND THE ALIENATED COMMUNITY

I wanna rob[552]

[Figure 52: The Ringers accessorise and plan their evening of crime in *The Bling Ring*.]

A striking similarity between *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring* is in the lack of communication (real, perceived, attempted, linguistic or non-verbal) between characters and between bodies on screen in each film. In *Spring Breakers*, the Breakers chant and repeat empty phrases that might signify the underlying ideas of the film to the audience, but have little or no bearing on the internal narrative itself. The phrases uttered by the characters repeat and reappear in much the same way as key scenes and images do, and may foreshadow an event in the film, but are not used to create communication between characters in the film. When characters have conversations, they speak at each other, and they repeat phrases to each other, "pretend it's a videogame" "it's our chance to see something different" "look at my shiiiiit" but they never show any sign of having heard one another, or of having empathised or been affected by the speech or actions of another person.[553] In *The Bling Ring*, the characters

[552] Nicki, *The Bling Ring*.
[553] Faith/Candy/Brit/Cotty/Alien, *Spring Breakers*.

pose alongside one another, and talk at one another as though they are performing for an unseen audience, rather than for the sake of conversing. Every movement, speech act, photograph and clothing choice is focused on a performance for an imagined public audience, rather than communication between friends.

Throughout the film, wherever they are; at a bar, at the beach, in a car, the Ringers take photos of each other to post on Facebook, but they don't actually speak to one another. The only male member of the group, Marc, articulates the importance of appearance and performance, both of which are at the expense of communication frequently in The Bling Ring. In his interview with *Vanity Fair* writer Nancy Jo Sales (as depicted in the film) he reiterates his position in relation to his appearance several times, but never discusses an inner experience independent of his understanding of his physical presence. He describes himself as "not having a-list looks" which is his invitation for Sales to negate the description with shallow compliments.[554] This articulation of appearance, along with the revelation of vulnerability in relation to them removes Marc, to some extent, from the position of appearance-only façade that his co-conspirators permanently inhabit. The irritating revelation of vanity ironically serves to illustrate a communicative insecurity, adding to character-depth that the women of the film entirely lack.

Communication is founded in the sacrifice of the unity and integrity of the identity of the individual in order to enter into a communication with either another individual, or a larger communal whole. As Bataille says, "to communicate means to try to establish a unity, to make one of many."[555] This, as discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to Yayoi Kusama, whose work is focused on the performance of a sacrifice of identity in order to communicate, is the basis for all linguistic and nonlinguistic exchange between people. However this process is predicated on the assumption that the individuals that participate in communication have an identity and the potential and opportunity to produce and affect culture. As the Breakers and the Ringers simulate the appearance of an identity, but are reduced by mass culture to the position of sacred-image objects, they are unable to communicate with one another, or with anyone else. Instead, the Ringers constantly reproduce images of themselves, while performing their

[554] Marc, *The Bling Ring*.
[555] Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 5.

constructed celebrity personas at one another and watching out of the corner of one eye, in case anyone of note notices. The Breakers chant repetitious phrases at the world, like monastic mantras, but disembodied as though aware of their position as watched object, rather than source of experiential pleasure.

In *Trainspotting*, Wilson writes that the need for heroin binds the group of characters together, their physical dependency to the drug providing a kind of communicative solidarity. The community of addicts, those who have chosen to be nonproductive, who have "chosen not to choose life" are bound by their substance, and their choice.[556] The groups the Breakers and the Ringers, by comparison, have no substance, symbol, needless need to mediate the construction of their alienated community. This is because they are themselves images of the needless need, not those who consume it. The model of the needless need becomes the instance of the Breakers and the Ringers, needless need comes in the form of the consumption of commodity and the consumption of novel experiences. *Spring Breakers* empties the experience of eroticism by the repetition of the representation of flesh. The meaning of bared breasts and wiggling arses is negated through repetition and saturation, and the temporal and energetic accumulation of desire is never allowed to build sufficiently for the audience to derive pleasure from what they are seeing. It becomes too much too quickly, and the sensory overload renders it both uncomfortable and meaningless.

In both films, the crimes committed by the characters quickly become redundant with routine, repetition and a complete lack of the suggestion social transgression. They are crimes devoid of the experience of criminality. In discussing the production of the film, Coppola describes having to think of different ways to illustrate each robbery, as the acts themselves and a repetition of the first event, the first transgression, after which, the robberies become mundane.[557] Similarly, the crimes of the Breakers (armed robberies) appear redundant principally because they don't affect them. They are, as they chant, like videogames, distant disconnected representations of events, instead of intimate transgressions of legal and social structure and limitations.[558]

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[556] Wilson, *The Order of Joy*, 40.
[557] Coppola, *Summer Talks at the Lincoln Center: The Bling Ring Q&A with Sofia Coppola.*
[558] This is another reversal of the conceptual orientation of the previous chapter, where Yayoi Kusama inhabits the Klossowskian position of artist as a simulacral criminal.

Roberte's journal in *The Revocation* intensifies at the point where her criticism of her husband, Octave, becomes her criticism of the male-dominated estimation of feminine sexuality. Roberte concludes that a woman who "appears holding the attributes of force" is to be undermined in a position of power, and demoted to the position of a sexual object so that she can't be taken as a contender.[559] The position of women in cultural estimation has changed little, and in *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring* we see women's reaction to the inertia of a prescribed position of passivity, which can only be experienced as mundane by the subject. In both of these films, groups of post-adolescent women are shown behaving in a way that appears socially unacceptable and unpredictable, or more specifically, criminal. The intended "shock" factor of both these films relies on the socially defined assumption that women are less likely to act criminally or violently, and the depiction of them doing so is somehow far-fetched and surprising. In *The Bling Ring*, the characters operate above suspicion for a surprising length of time (and even after they post images of themselves with stolen goods on Facebook, and are shown on security footage at one of their victim's houses) as the confluence of their identities informs their assumed innocence – they are white, predominantly women and from upper-middle class families. In *Spring Breakers*, the characters get away with robbing a restaurant armed only with a water gun and a mallet. Korine frames the scene with semiotic inferences of danger and unlikelihood. As the girls go through the restaurant, the camera lands, and the extra-diegetic sound changes when they hold the water pistol to the back of the head of a large black man. Korine invites the audience to assume that the man will react to them, and that their robbery will go badly in some way from this point, and that their efforts to acquire the funds for spring break will be thwarted, and that they might even be injured. However, he simply hands over his wallet, and they continue on their way. The audience is left to consider why this scene is apparently so dangerous, and what the politics of identity involved in representation to frame it in that way. Intensive points where the audience is lead to assume that something will happen that will arrest the progression of the girls' journey appear along the way. The next is a scene where a drunken Cotty (Rachel Korine) writhes almost naked in front of a group of frat-boy-esque men – a scene that has drawn a number of criticisms for the position Cotty appears in.[560] Again,

[559] Klossowski, *Roberte Ce Soir...*, 174.

[560] Many reviews have criticised the film on this basis, including: Long, "Spring Breakers isn't just a terrible movie, it reinforces rape culture," Ross, "'Spring Breakers' Review: This is Not What a Feminist Looks Like," Russell, "The Rapist Next Door: On Harmony Korine's Spring Breakers."

like the first moment of intensity, the tension dissipates without the expected outcome – Cotty is not harmed or raped, and the film proceeds. Again, the audience is left to consider the cultural coding that leads them to expect that a drunk girl in a room with a group of men will necessarily be gang raped.

The narrative of Korine's *Spring Breakers*, along with the script, and the aesthetic presence of the film, is built around excessive repetition. Everything that is shown is repeated until it is mundane, meaningless and wholly empty. During the title sequence, the theme song (Skrillex's "Naughty Spirits and Nice Sprites" which reappears in different forms throughout the film) plays over the luminously coloured scene of "spring breakers" (students on university holiday) on a Miami beach – dancing, drinking and engaging in a variety of simulated sex acts. In doing so, none of the bodies involves appear to be responding to the others around them or expressing any form of erotic involvement, instead, it is the performance of the act for the camera, along with the pleasure of the appearance of transgression for an imagined viewer that seems to motivate them (and they address the camera as such, baring themselves to it and giving the camera the finger). The audience, instead of being invited to experience pleasure in the spectacle of semi-naked and naked bodies writhing in pseudosexuality, is made to feel uncomfortable by the intense bareness of the scene. Nothing is glimpsed, everything is seen, and without the inference of the accumulation of desire required for erotic pleasure.

[Figures 53 & 54: Hedonism without the accumulation of desire as depicted in the opening sequence of *Spring Breakers*.]

The soundtrack of *Spring Breakers* is designed to reflect the immediacy of the embodied experience transgressing and exceeding the intervention of language that characterises the position the Breakers find themselves in. In an interview about the film, Korine cited Werner Herzog as an influence, and in reference to the score (a collaboration between veteran Cliff Martinez and Skrillex) saying "I wanted to make a film that was more like a physical experience, something that was post-articulation."[561] The music, and in particular, "Naughty Spirits and Nice Sprites" by Skrillex (Sonny John Moore) reflects the bypassing of anticipatory desire and like the scene it accompanies, it accumulates nothing. Dubstep (however problematic Skrillex's inclusion in the genre might be) and electronic music more broadly has an explicit history of a feature identified as the drop, or bass-drop. Steve Goodman, in describing the material affect

[561] Korine, "Spring Breakers' Harmony Korine..."

of this phenomenon describes it as "deploying waves of bass, an immense magnet that radiates through the body of the crowd."[562] This is the electro-counterpart of the climatic resolution of a melody in more traditional musical forms, which is formed by the completion of the arpeggio at the conclusion of the melodic line. The pleasure derived from the bass drop (much like a melodic resolution) is anticipatory. For example: in the piece "Organ Donor" by music producer DJ Shadow (Josh Davis), the repetition of the electro-melodic line repeats with increased speed and emphasis until it implies the bass (and in this case, percussive) drop. When performed live, the electro-melodic repetition is then gradually slowed until it consists of single notes with which DJ Shadow teases the audience until the anticipation of, and desire for the impending drop is experienced as a physical anticipation in the energy of the crowd. When DJ Shadow finally drops the bass, the cumulative melodic line is exceeded and the audience responds with the relief and frenzied pleasure of expenditure.[563] In contrast Skrillex's compositions consist almost entirely of drop with little or no anticipatory accumulation. The music reflects the immediacy of the experiential order of the film itself, as there is no temporal or energetic anticipation of the transgression of the threshold between accumulation and waste, instead there is simply and only waste, in repetition.

The remainder of the *Spring Breakers* soundtrack (aside from the occasional, specific song) is a score reminiscent of John Carpenter's ambient synthesizer compositions from *Escape From New York* (1981) and *They Live* (1988) and was composed by Cliff Martinez (a *Red Hot Chilli Peppers* survivor who composes videogame scores as well as film scores) in collaboration with Skrillex. The use of such a score recollects the uncanny and the sinister in science fiction, which is something that Sofia Coppola acknowledges she aimed to produce in *The Bling Ring* in order to enhance the sense disconnection between the appearance of the Ringers and their crimes.[564]

The radical alienation of the Breakers and the Ringers in these films is constituted by a destruction of communication. The position in which these characters are placed, perversely synonymous with Bataille's description of Tibetan Lamaist monks, breaks

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[562] Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, 28.
[563] A recording of DJ Shadow performing "Organ Donor" can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO5PCru_Z-E
[564] Coppola, *Summer Talks at the Lincoln Center: The Bling Ring Q&A with Sofia Coppola.*

their access to the possibility of communication as they are denied the ability to be useful, and to influence the creation of their own identities in assembling themselves. By being denied the opportunity for self-creation and existing only in relation to the commodity culture around them, the Ringers and the Breakers cannot access communication or empathy and become sacred-image objects. In the chapter that follows, I discuss the destruction of the body in service of producing the spectacular from sacrifice, to its inverse in (the American system of) state executions.

CHAPTER 6

Spectacular Expenditure: The Destruction of Bodies

the human being is matter, fragment, excess, clay, filth, nonsense[565]

[Figure 55: The location of execution in Huntsville, Texas, as seen in *Into the Abyss* and *Death Row*.]

To this point, I have approached modes of destruction as they operate within the aesthetics of visual cultures, and in relation to the bodies of those who participate with them, as a catalyst for a potential experience of sovereignty. Thus far, I have argued that the catalysts for a potential experience of sovereignty are to be located in modes of destruction. Each operate within the aesthetics of visual cultures, and in relation to the bodies of those who participate with them. These operations, destructive intensities within the narratives, images and intentions of the films and art discussed have constituted simulacra of destruction, while remaining in the relatively safe confines of screens and galleries. Following the discussion of sovereignty and simulacra Chapter 1, in Chapter 2, I discussed disaster films in relation to the events of September 11 which provide a mediatised example of images of the destruction of spatial relations, and therefore the functioning architectural organisation of

[565] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 117.

populations. In Chapter 3, I argued that the images of extinction provided by apocalypse narratives, and in particular, those that depict a "Last Man" constitute a novel image of the possibility of sovereignty (in being the culmination of human history) in the absence (and interruption) of other people, experienced through the absolute presence of remnant buildings. In Chapter 4, I argued that the destruction of the illusion of the coherent self in Yayoi Kusama's body of work constitutes a simulacral suicide, repeated in Kusama's attempt to experience the sovereignty of self-obliteration (absolute communication). And in Chapter 5, I argued that the position of young women in contemporary culture is akin to that of Bataille's description of the lives of Tibetan monks, as neither are able to affect the culture that uses their bodies as icons, resulting in the destruction of the possibility for communication and radical alienation. In the final two chapters of this thesis, I move from exploring these modes and operations of destruction that remain confined within the narratives and images of visual cultures to those that transgress the material boundary between those images and narratives, and the modes of their production.

This chapter considers the specificity of the destruction of the human body in relation to the communication and production of types of social order through disciplinary and punitive techniques, and how those techniques are recuperated as spectacles in media images. Simulacra appear between the repetition of events punishment (specifically clinical executions in the United States) and the broadcast coverage and images of those events of punishment in the distinction between the ideological punishment of the universal human body, and the specificity of the actual bodies being punished, and the circumstances that have produced their position of absolute heterogeneity in relation to (U.S. capitalist) social order. These simulacra form in the images and recordings of the specificity of each case, undermining the clinical hegemony within execution ideology, and reveal the recuperation of the sacrificial spectacle in the political and religious mythology for a population subject to the American state apparatus. I refer to Klossowski's description of the flattening of representational distance in relation to the religious phenomenon of transubstantiation in order to theorise both the process and transgression of this mythmaking system.[566] In the first chapter of this thesis, I outlined Walter Benjamin's description of the stratification of violence as it is deployed by the state in order to establish and perpetuate power

[566] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 67.

relations. In doing so, discussed Benjamin's distinctions between law-making, law-preserving and divine or sovereign violence. In this chapter, I deal primarily with the relationship between law-preserving violence as a spectre of the everyday experience of social order, and the entropy inherent in its repetition of punitive events.

I discuss how the techniques and rituals of the destruction of (human) bodies are used to produce meaning, and subsequently, modes of social order with reference to the practices of sacrifice and execution, particularly as reflected in Werner Herzog's documentary television series *On Death Row* (2012) and film *Into the Abyss* (2011). In these examples, Herzog attempts to uncover the specificity (through conversation and communication) of those bodies, who, in being death row inmates, inhabit a position of radical heterogeneity in relation to the government. The U.S. articulates power and social control by excising these bodies from that social order, and rather than just removing them from the population, they are removed from existence. The event of execution is constantly repeated, and constitutes an expression of "law-preserving violence" that must be constantly rearticulated and amplified in order to maintain control by re-asserting itself in opposition to non-compliant, and therefore non-utilitarian bodies.[567]

I approach the evolution, relationship and difference between sacrifice and execution as different practices of the destruction of bodies in order to establish modes of community in representation. The body of the victim of sacrifice or execution is produced as a human body within a specific sociopolitical and cultural context and the most obvious distinguishing feature between sacrifice and execution is the demarcation of guilt. In systems of execution, production of meaning is reliant on the appearance of guilt (the physical appearance and social position of the subject as well as the established legal guilt of a particular transgression) and the ability to destroy the body of the victim without the appearance of pain being inflicted. This process adheres to a restricted economy of justice in which the victim is killed for a specific, articulated retributive purpose, and the body is destroyed in order to produce the appearance of a more efficient, utilitarian cultural economy. In the sacrificial system, by contrast, the victim must be unmarked by the appearance of transgression, instead, her body must contain residual potential, or use-value within the social order in which she is

[567] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 241.

sacrificed. The sacrifice of the victim's body is expenditure that also operates within a general economy, where her potentiality becomes symbolic of excess energy that must be communally wasted. The destruction of the sacrificial victim's body demarcates the act as sacred in the gruesome, extended and usual bloody ritual of the process of sacrifice itself. The executed body bears the mark of culpability of a transgression of the laws of the state, whereas those who make or offer the sacrifice bear guilt if a body is sacrificed.

The destruction of bodies designated as heterogeneous to social order through sacrifice and execution contributes to the production of communities. The destruction of bodies is used as representational spectacles in the establishment of both religious communities and the law of the state, which are both "forms of social organisation concerned with the moral conduct of human beings."[568] Bodies as material manifestations of social and political knowledge and power produce and endure destruction in order to establish and maintain social and political order, as well as communications of force and power. As I have discussed in previous chapters, Bataille observed that the production of the sacred (around which communities are formed) requires the destructive consumption of a sacred object.[569] Bataille refers to the Aztec community as a model for the production of the community through human sacrifice and the simulacral representations of bodies of the community through the bodies of slaves. He writes that expressions of justice operate within a restricted economy, where the intended outcome of the structure of justice involves the production of a utilitarian (materially accumulative) society. In this argument, structures of justice constitute the limitations of freedom because they ensure that "existence is subjected to necessities" as is articulated by the process of execution (retributive justice).[570] Bataille writes that justice provides "a guarantee against the risk of servitude, not a will to assume those risks without which there is no freedom" and in so doing, produces citizens who are subject to justice, but who remain servile to the utilitarian (accumulative) capitalist economy that maintains the structure of that justice.[571] One cannot experience justice, and be free, where justice is "a narrowing of the limits to

[568] Goldhammer, *The Headless Republic*, 4.
[569] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 37.
[570] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 38.
[571] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 38.

what is most just."[572] Execution then, becomes the expression of justice to the social order that witnesses the destruction of the (useless) heterogeneous human body. In order to reproduce the mythology of the American state, heterogeneous bodies must be excised with the least amount of pain in order to reduce the sacrificial capacity of the physical surface and to perpetuate the myth of democratic justice.

The establishment of the intimate (religious) community requires an event of sacrificial violence as a mode of communication as mutual trust that must be participated in by all those who form the community. In the transposition from the community of trust, to the community of law (the state), violence is required.[573] The unrestricted, or nonproductive expenditure of sacrifice is replaced by systems of execution as retributive justice. The sacrificial victim then takes on a symbolic function that serves to found the principles of the community established by the sacrifice. This indicates that the sacrificial victim is no longer a body arranged entirely for death (nonproductive expenditure) but a utilitarian component of a restricted economic system of justice. The less useful the body is, the more useful the sacrifice becomes. The simulacrum of sacrifice is contained within execution when it is recuperated by the mediatised spectacle which exceeds the appropriation of the political and cultural mythology that the process of execution serves to regenerate.

In theorising the treatment of the criminal body in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes that through the progression of Modernity, physical punishment has been replaced by restriction and correction, a punishment of the soul, rather than the body.[574] However, as Foucault acknowledges, there remains "a 'trace' of torture" in the contemporary penal system, the representation of which continues to produce images of the body in pain, and therefore, the body destroyed.[575] The spectre of torture and the body in pain haunts the representation of Western contemporary penal systems, and the use of the spectacular in punishment provides the social order with an aspect of horror and nostalgia for the penal system. Herzog's documentaries demonstrate that the body of the criminal continues to be inscribed with the crime for which she is being punished, and that the death penalty, even where it pretends to be a painless extinguishing of life,

[572] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 38.
[573] Benjamin, Walter, "Critique of Violence," 244.
[574] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 16.
[575] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 16.

constitutes a spectacle of torture, particularly in the intimate relationship between U.S. executions and the media. The community produced by the destruction of bodies is undermined when the body to be destroyed refuses to operate within given parameters, where successful communities needs certain kinds of sacrifices.

Spectacular punishment, where punishment is as much a performance for the population who remain subject to it and who witness it, as it is a discipline for the body who endures it, is constituted as the performance of pain inflicted upon the body of the criminal. Spectacular forms of punishment continue to infect the apparently clinical disciplinary processes of Western penal systems (both in the clear example of practices of execution in the United States as well as in a more subtle manner in other penal systems). The body continues to be a surface of spectacle as well a subject of discipline and surveillance by the state. For the (Western media) audience, this spectacle of pain and execution operates as a form of transubstantiation as it appears as a belief in the material power of the state that performs it that perpetuates the experience of being subject to the law for the body of the citizen. For example, in the case of the murder of Meredith Kercher in Italy on November 1, 2007, the American citizen, Amanda Knox faced three trials to determine her involvement in the event.[576] Having previously resided in Italy, she, and her actions during that time remain subject to the Italian penal system, even long after she has left the region. The effect of this judicial process on Knox is a temporally amplified form psycho-physiological stress, but, more importantly, the mediatised event of this process produces the globally judicious subject that by proxy, experiences the Italian judicial system in a certain way. Similarly, the overwhelmingly European fascination with the United States' maintenance of the death penalty as a form of punishment appears in the numerous documentaries produced by Western European filmmakers on the topic. These include, in addition to the already discussed Herzog film *Into The Abyss* and television series, *Death Row* which was originally shown on Channel 4 in April 2012, *Life and Death Row*, directed by Ben Anthony, aired on BBC3 in March 2014, and *The British Woman on Death Row*, directed by Steve Humphries and aired on Channel 4 on November 28, 2011. Such documentaries are positioned as witnesses for the apparently surprising phenomenon

[576] The first trial was held between January and December 2009, then an appeals trial between November 2010 and October 2011, and finally her acquittal was overturned on March 26, 2013 and she was reconvicted of murder following a subsequent trial in absentia on January 30, 2014.

of the death penalty that continues in the US (as it does in many other countries worldwide) but they also function to position witnesses as subject to the possibility of capital punishment as a relationship specifically governed by American global hegemony.

Bataille frequently writes about the witness and representation of pain and torture of human bodies. His critical, theoretical, poetry and prose works are all preoccupied with the decomposition of bodies. Eyes and testicles are separated from bodies in *The Story of the Eye*, and bodies excrete vomit, shit and piss almost constantly in *Blue of Noon*. In Bataille's final book, *The Tears of Eros*, the human body is dismembered most violently by the "ecstatic" image of the "torture of the *Hundred Pieces*" which was a practice carried out in China as a punishment for criminals who had transgressed the law in the most severe and violent ways.[577] Despite the book being filled with reproductions of illustrations of torture and violence, the photographic image of a man's body being slowly dismembered while conscious (with the aid of opiates) as a crowd watches on, is more compelling, and more haunting than any other. Bataille writes:

> Since 1925, I have owned one of these pictures... This photograph led a decisive role in my life. I have never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, at once ecstatic (?) and intolerable.[578]

It is in this statement, and subsequently in this section of *The Tears of Eros* that Bataille reveals the production of the sacred, where the destruction of the body must be "intolerable" in order to produce such a fixation.[579] The transgression of the limit of tolerance (the destruction of a body through prolonged torture, and the reproduction of a photographic image of that process) is the process by which the image (and the concept behind it) collapses the barrier between experience and representation, and produces the material visceral response in the witness in excess of the power relations it implies, an "infinite capacity for reversal."[580]

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[577] Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, 204-205.
[578] Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, 205-206.
[579] Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, 206.
[580] Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, 206.

CONSTITUTING DESTRUCTABLE BODIES

My Body, the Hand Grenade[581]

The universal embodied body (the generalised female body) is then designated as a site of consumption and destruction used to communicate between (male) members of the body politic. As Bataille observes in *The Accursed Share*, women in many cultures are used as an item of exchange, and to confirm communication between two (male) representatives of a community.[582] It is no mistake then, that the victim of (unwilled) sacrifice, particularly in contemporary culture, is overwhelming represented as female (as she is an object of energy-resource, rather than a subject who might consume energy herself) whereas the victim of execution is overwhelmingly constituted as male (threatening, imposing and violent), a body that needs to be destroyed in order that the proper functions of utility and accumulation might continue.

In order to trace the tension between the excision of heterogeneous bodies in general, and the specificity of each execution as an event which is inflicted upon a body, I must first address the erroneous assumption of the universality of the human body. Bodies are culturally constituted surfaces of sensation, force and communication. Given this, the human body, as Elizabeth Grosz writes, is a "peculiar" object.[583] It is an object that is also more than simply an object, or alternatively, it is "an object able to take itself and others as subjects" through which the negotiation of society and culture is formed.[584] The body of a human being is the surface by which they communicate with the physical world, as well as the container through which fleshy sensations and affects pass. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault locates the body as a site for the transmission of forces, a vessel through which knowledge-power relations are conveyed.[585] This is a "political economy of the body," which Foucault later designates as a "body-politic" that functions in relation to the social order that has produced it.[586] The body, and the actions of that body is the target for influence and control for by the penal system of the state (regardless of how that penal system is constituted) as well as the

[581] Title of a compilation album by Hole, released in 1997.
[582] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 2*, 123.
[583] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xi.
[584] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xi.
[585] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.
[586] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25.

organisation of the state apparatus as a whole, and therefore, even without physical or apparent violence, "physical order" is reproduced with the trace or threat of force and containment in political actions of control.[587] The "body-politic... as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge."[588] The body-politic contains the differences of bodies within categories and deviations in knowledge, and in doing so, limits the capacities and potentialities (both real and perceived) of those bodies it incorporates. Therefore, when a body is executed, that body is limited to its past capacity for transgression, while preventing or limiting its capacity to do anything else. When a body is sacrificed, where sacrifice is the inverse of execution, the object-relation is built on a similar body of knowledge about the capacities and limitations of that body. When that body exceeds those limitations, the process by which the body is destroyed or consumed by sacrifice is undermined and redirected into a capacity that exceeds it.

Contrary to the hegemony of the body-politic might suggest, there is no way to depict the a universal body, as "they are concerned with representations of the human body, which, contrary to popular opinion, is unrepresentable."[589] The work of Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens and other writers is prefigured by Irigaray where "Irigaray's work and also more recent feminist theory has claimed to have shown, there is no such as either 'the human subject' or 'the human body.'"[590] The unity into humanity of the body politic (the universality of the human body) results in a subsumption of women, (as well as other deviations from Cartesian universality) in to the incorporative control of the experience of politics as a privileged, white, masculine heteronormative, wealthy and physically able domain (to which other bodies must conform, or be separated from). Bodies are consumed, and "neither visible or acknowledged" and the universal speech, logic and order that produces politics and representation is overwhelmingly masculine, "one body, one reason and *one ethic*."[591] The body politic then, becomes the assumption that the universal, or default position of the body, or the political citizen is

[587] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.
[588] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28.
[589] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, vii.
[590] Orr, Introduction to *Belief, Bodies and Being*, 7.
[591] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 23.

a white, heterosexual, able-bodied man, and all other positions are deviations from that normality.

Gatens identifies the commonality between people who are excluded from the body politic as being those who for whatever reason, have been designated as being incapable of the sacrifice needed for membership.[592] The body politic represents those "human" bodies who are allowed to be citizens, and the constitution of that allowance is that they are "deemed capable of reason and sacrifice can be admitted."[593] Physical sacrifice, writes Gatens, "has been a constant feature of the compact. Even the Amazons, the only female body politic that we 'know' of, practised ritual mastectomy."[594] In particular, women's bodies are considered to be "deviations" from the neutral (masculine) human form in political legislation. "Special" or exceptional legislative acts have to be provided to accommodate the particular deviations that the female body might possess, and in turn, "the modern body politic is based on an image of a masculine body which reflects fantasies about the value and capacities of that body."[595] As such, women who participate in contemporary politics are obliged to conform to that fantasy image of masculinity, and to mimic those values in order to be recognised as a participant in an assumed-masculine domain.[596] (This mimicry is also required of other non-citizens in order to participate in the body politic.) Gatens argues that rather than there be a "compact" between bodies, where the body is consumed by the political mass, there should be the representation of multiple bodies that constitute the politic through a "treaty," where the multiplicity of distinct types of bodies (rather than the fantasy of neutrality) are recognised.[597]

Elizabeth Grosz presents a similar argument to Gatens, in that the neutral, universal body is assumed to be masculine. Grosz writes that bodies are produce and are produced by cultural encoding and assumptions about their capacities and activities, where "corporeality is a framework" by which we engage with the material context in which we find ourselves.[598] While retaining the philosophical "terrain" of materialist

[592] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 23.
[593] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 23.
[594] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 23.
[595] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 25.
[596] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 25.
[597] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 27.
[598] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, vii.

theory (identifying Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari as her key proponents) Grosz presents a challenge to their terrain, through the critique of corporeal specificity – that is to produce a subjectivity through the context of a body without privilege (a non-masculine, non-heterosexual, non-white, etc) body necessarily affects the production of that subjectivity in relation to others, and in relation to culture more broadly. This is a position that, as Grosz observes, these philosophers had not considered.[599]

Power inscribes the body with meaning through a network of knowledge and culturally specific semiotics. Grosz discusses the use of the body as an object through which knowledge and power is communicated. In *Volatile Bodies*, she begins by demonstrating that the sensational body of the community, produced through pain and sacrifice by individuals in order to become part of that community, relies on the effect of the pain on the surface of the body, as demonstrated by lingering remainders such as tattooing, piercing and scarification, which mark a map of membership and endurance on the body who bears them.[600] In larger (or after what she identifies as Lingis' questionable distinction "civilised" and particularly Western) communities, where informal accords regarding behavioural agreement are replaced by the rule of law, there is little communicative capital to be gained by the visible markers of pain and sacrifice borne on the surface of the body.[601] Instead, the social body is obliged to communicate what Grosz terms "depth" which is conveyed by a complex set of dynamic, but socially predetermined markers including sex, gender, class, race and sexuality that constitute a behavioural language of the body.[602] In a more nuanced approach to the function of tattoos and other body modifications in contemporary (Western) culture, Patricia MacCormack writes that the visible tattoo as a modification of the surface of the skin, inhabits the space between "signification... and asignification" disrupting the signification the body is obliged to and complicating the designation of position and identity within social order.[603] Here, the distinction (which MacCormack designates not in historical terms, but in comparison to other contemporary practices) lies between the practice of body modification as an experience (which may or may not

[599] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, viii-ix.
[600] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 138-139.
[601] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 141.
[602] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 140.
[603] MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, 19.

produce enduring physical effects as a byproduct) and modification used specifically to produce an enduring mark.[604] In the latter instance, the modification of the body does not appear simply to designate a particular experience in terms of a restricted economy of signification (where the marked body is demonstrably homogeneous to the community that the mark implies), but instead, has the potential to function as a general economy of semiotic relations that effect how that body is observed and constructed in relation to other bodies.[605]

Foucault provides the historical and theoretical background for how the body is constituted by relations between knowledge and power, and then describes how in a disciplinary society, this arrangement can be used to maximise the use-value of each body as it labours.[606] Grosz determines that Foucault's theory of the material body differs from that of Nietzsche in that Foucault's body is characterised as "resistant yet fundamentally passive inertia whose internal features and forces are of little interest of the functioning of power."[607] In contrast, Grosz writes that Nietzsche characterises the material body as "an intensely energetic locus for all cultural production" that continues to resist and influence social forces that impose upon it.[608] Therefore, for Nietzsche, the body is affected by outside forces and knowledge-power relations, but has the potentiality for forces (a push-back) that can also come from within.

In demonstrating the articulation of meaning and language on the surface of bodies, Klossowski begins "The Mass of Georges Bataille" with a comparison between speech and silence, and the assumption of "purity" that silence holds.[609] He underlines Bataille's reliance on God and Catholicism in creating a system of transgression, and the rage of Bataille as "an impure silence that corrects a pure language."[610] Klossowski uses aspect of Bataille's work to develop a theory of pornography as a spiritual transgression, and where it is a "spiritual event" that occurs in the "carnal act," but also as a "transgression of language by the flesh and the flesh by language."[611] In Klossowski's estimation, pornography is a "reiterated description" of a "language by

[604] MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, 19.
[605] MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, 21.
[606] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 152.
[607] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146.
[608] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146-147.
[609] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 67.
[610] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 67.
[611] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 67.

language" transgression in that it uses the language of sexuality to transgress the language of social acceptability, where undressing a person is a violent desubjectivisation, and the making of a direct object out of language (the language that constructs the subject, the symbols that construct personhood - clothes) which Klossowski describes as the "abolition of the person one strips."[612] This argument, which is also addressed by Deleuze in writing on Klossowski in *Logic of Sense*, approaches the body as an object capable of communal inscription through linguistic reduction.[613] It is the demonstration that the destruction of the body (through sexual objectification and through violence) produces a mode of communication through the performance of this kind of language. Both pornography and execution, then, constitute the body as a destructible surface, able to be dismembered in a process based on repetition and iteration – events of a language relation.[614] [615]

Cultural determination of the capacities of the body is the formation of how we decide what a body can do, through processes of sacrifice, ritual and cultural inscription (language). If the body is deemed to have the capacity to sacrifice itself (that does not affect its ability to continue to function) then it is allowed to participate in political and social spheres as a citizen.[616] In defining the body politic as the representation of the human "artifice" (a simulation of a collective idea of what it should mean to operate as human) for politically motivated reasons, Moira Gatens demonstrates that the body politic is, in fact, a simulacrum of a body in representative media.[617] The "political body" as a representative of the creation of an agreement, in this sense, a politically sovereign body, is a position held, rather than the specific presence of the body of any single individual where The sovereign body is a simulacrum of the political body (which is the repetition of the position of the people, en masse) that the sovereign body is chosen to represent. The political organisation of the state is a function that produces the body politic, and the sovereign head of that state is the "artificial man" who was imagined to create stability and security to produce the illusion of social order.[618]

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[612] Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, 67, 70.
[613] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 322.
[614] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 330.
[615] The relation between pornography and systems of punishment (and execution) is further established in that Klossowski (and Deleuze) develop this point in relation to the Marquis de Sade.
[616] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 26.
[617] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 21.
[618] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 22.

The usefulness of the body is cultivated through education, healthcare and working conditions that make it amendable to continue to produce in systems incorporated by Foucault's use of the term "biopolitics."[619] However, when a body commits a criminal act, it must be removed from society, not only in order to retrain the "soul" of the criminal (rehabilitate and redirect criminal proclivities) as Foucault says, but also to ensure that bodies that have not been designated as criminal can labour without anxiety about lingering criminality, because a damaged body is less useful.[620] In this sense, the disciplinary system of punishment removes focus on the body of the criminal to establish a society where criminality does not exist so that society can be more productive. In cases where the criminal body refuses to be useful, whether by the magnitude of the criminal act, or the refusal to be rehabilitated, then that body can be excised permanently from society without impacting the labour-function of society itself. This removal can be achieved either through imprisonment until the criminal body is too old to damage other bodies or to labour, permanent imprisonment, or in the case of many countries around the world, the death penalty.

THE EVOLUTION TO EXECUTION
(THE STATE APPARATUS)

> A body effaced, reduced to dust and thrown to the winds, a body destroyed piece by piece by the infinite power of the sovereign constituted not only the ideal, but the real limit of punishment.[621]

In the documentary series *Death Row*, as well as in the film *Into the Abyss*, Herzog uses a predominantly confessional mode in order to relate the stories of people who are currently waiting to be executed in the US (he interviews people in Texas, Florida and California). Herzog, who narrates the series (and interviews the people waiting to be executed, along with victims, families of the death row inmates, prosecutors and defense lawyers) begins each episode with an unsteady tracking shot of the corridor people pass through on their way to execution in Huntsville, Texas. The phantasmic, dream-like sterility of the corridor (with its shining concrete, fluorescent hum and off-white table-clothed presentation of flowers and religious paraphernalia) is overlaid with subtle, cinematic music, which culminates in the introduction of Herzog's voice,

[619] Foucault, *Ethics*, 73.
[620] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 16.
[621] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 50.

which interjects as the camera reaches the doorway which frames the view of the execution table. Each episode of the four-part series begins with the same monologue:

> The death penalty exists in 34 states of the United States of America. Currently, only 16 states actually perform executions. Executions are carried out by lethal injection. Utah is the only state that until recently allowed the option of a firing squad. As a German, coming from a different historical background, and being a guest in the United States, I respectfully disagree with the practice of capital punishment.[622]

While Herzog's documentaries primarily appeal to the curiosity of a mass (predominantly Western European) audience about how and why someone can find themselves on death row, and how they might feel about it – they, like the multitude of death row documentaries available also function to create a spectacle out of the phenomenon of execution and corporal punishment itself. The novelty of which, in contemporary Western experience, is confined its apparently clinical practice in America.

The evolution from sacrifice to its inversion in execution traces the reversal of the focus of social life from mysticism to labour. When writing on the Aztec practice of sacrifice, Bataille notes that "they were just as concerned about *sacrificing* as we are about *working*" as sacrificial rites were experienced as the primary operation through which their society was perpetuated.[623] This reversal, or inversion, the progression of which can be traced alongside various developments in human history (as outlined in the introduction to this thesis) culminates in the current practice of execution as it appears in the United States.[624] This practice, as discussed above, approaches the human body as a universal phenomenon, which in turn, reproduces hierarchical stratification and inequities that are present in American society, with the majority of those executed being identified having non-white, undereducated and underprivileged histories and often with impaired cognitive function and in poor mental health, all of which contribute to their designation of heterogeneity.[625] [626] Where sacrifice is

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[622] Herzog, *Death Row*, 2012.
[623] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 46.
[624] There are a number of alternative, novel versions in a variety of mainstream science fiction texts and films, including *Logan's Run* (novel written by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson in 1967, film directed by Michael Anderson in 1976), *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973) and *The Purge* (James McTeigue, 2013) all of which depict contained methods by which a productive social order might excise the heterogeneous population in the most clinical, efficient manner. However, within the limited scope of this chapter, I refer only to documentaries which depict the current system of execution in the U.S.
[625] American Civil Liberties Union, "Racial Justice."

characterised by the destruction of the (economic, political or social) use-value of the human body, animal or object to be sacrificed, the function of execution operates to destroy the already excluded from inhibiting the function of the society they have been removed from, thereby increasing accumulation without expenditure. Images, like those shown in Herzog's film and series that return the body to be executed to its specificity outside the system of universal exclusion of heterogeneity undermines the operation of the system of execution itself.

[Figure 56: Graves of those who have been executed in *Into the Abyss*.]

Foucault outlines systems of corporal punishment in the pre-Modern era in Europe in *Discipline and Punish*. Where the severity of the crime is judged by how it affects another individual, but by how overtly the law, as the word of the sovereign and state has been transgressed. The heterogeneous bodies of suspected criminals (heterogeneous to the homogeneity of a social construct from which they are now excluded) are then subjected to a process of torture, as an infliction of pain designed to produce a confession from them, "in the 'excesses' of torture, a whole economy of power is invested."[627] Torture is a system by which pain is applied to the body, and the experience of pain "is calculated, compared and hierarchised."[628] There are two types of torture within the judicial systems Foucault describes; the interrogative torture

[626] Death Penalty Information Center, "Mental Illness and the Death Penalty."
[627] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 35.
[628] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 33.

applied to the suspect, and the torture of the punishment or execution. The first manifests as a test of endurance, where the body that can withstand each pain modulation in the system of interrogation has the possibility that they will no longer be prosecuted for the crime, and the system of torture applied is contingent upon the type of body to be questioned. Their withstanding the infliction of pain without confessing to the crime amounts to innocence and release.[629] The second type of torture is equally modulated and calculated by systems of justice, but is the public performance of the infliction of pain and degradation on the body of the convicted criminal. This practice, which is simultaneous to the private and "opaque" nature of the trial and justice system itself, where "the establishment of truth was the absolute right and exclusive power of the sovereign and his judges."[630] The ritual of punishment included the performance of some aspect of the crime, in which the condemned was forced to participate, in order to convey to the public the nature and severity of the transgression. The criminal was then tortured in a variety of creative, but predetermined ways that were designed to prolong the pain the body should suffer before death. The inefficiency of the execution by the executioner could cause public disturbance, as could the inability for the public to see the execution (a concession the sovereign made to his people when punishing transgressive subjects).

Foucault identifies the relationship between the bodies of the "king" (sovereign) and the condemned.[631] The sovereign-king (as Bataille also wrote in *The Accursed Share* and as has been discussed in various guises throughout this thesis) is a position that remains, while the bodies that fill the position are born, change, regenerate and die. Similarly, criminals, and particularly those who are to be executed, are interchangeable, and fulfill a position within a political ritual. Both the king and the criminal attract ceremony, anointment (naming, conviction) and both attract a "discourse" to demonstrate either political power, or an absolute lack thereof.[632] The king and the criminal (or the sovereign and the impoverished outcast in Bataille's "The Psychological Structure of Fascism") bear a relation through the inscription of power relations communicated through their bodies, in that they are the inverse of one

[629] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 41.
[630] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 35.
[631] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28.
[632] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 29.

another and hold the dual exception status (of most and least).[633] [634] Foucault argues that all systems of knowledge are underwritten by the currents of power that have give rise to those systems, so that religious power engenders religious knowledge in the same way that the ideological power of rationality underpins empiricism and science. As Grosz writes, "bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively."[635] The excision of evil by execution in the past becomes the excision of the heterogeneous by execution in the (American) present.

In *Discipline and Punish*, the evolution of the punishment of criminals in Europe from the seventeenth century is recounted. Central to Foucault's argument is the change from public torture, pain and humiliation as a spectacle to the incarceration of prisoners, depriving them of freedom of movement (and occasionally of life) but with the minimum amount of physical discomfort. This transition from material, painful and performative to private, clinical and temporal punishment underpins the broadening of the state apparatus to dictate standards of education, healthcare and punishment to the population it controls (a system that Foucault designates as biopolitical). The veiling of the execution process (and reduction in the spectacle it attracted) was also temporally and historically associated with the development of public education and cultural sites such as museums and galleries.[636]

Torture is a system by which pain is applied to the body and the experience of that pain is "calculated, compared and hierarchised."[637] Foucault describes in some detail the system of torture used to both investigate and punish criminal activity is a communicative system where the body is destroyed (by pain and injury) to express the power of the state and sovereign over the body of the criminal in pre-Industrial society. The use of torture in investigative processes was primarily used to elicit a confession from the accused, who might then be executed. If a suspect maintained silence or innocence throughout the stages of the system of torture as it was applied, Foucault writes, they would most likely be acquitted of the crime.[638] This was a

[633] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 148.
[634] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 29.
[635] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xi.
[636] Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 64.
[637] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 33.
[638] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 41.

physical and sensate manner by which to produce a truth from an event in order that the publicly perceived crime might be resolved.

The public execution was an extension of the process of torture and continued the ritual whereby the sovereign power is reproduced and re-established in a spectacular fashion. As the sovereign (king) bears the "right to punish" or the right to pardon, the communication between these two outcomes (and the power they imply) is facilitated by the body of the condemned subject and witnessed by sovereign's subjects.[639] Despite the relegation (by Foucault) of torture and execution to past systems and pre-Industrial societies, executions continue to be routinely performed as a way to punish criminal behaviour in 58 countries worldwide.[640] Of the countries Amnesty International lists as "Retentionist" (a term used to describe a country that maintains capital punishment for "ordinary crimes," where ordinary crimes refer to those transgressions that do not incorporate treason) the US attracts the most media attention for this continued practice. While the US no longer carries out public executions, the execution process nevertheless echoes aspects of the execution spectacle as described by Foucault.

In demonstrating the transition from the use of spectacular punishment to forms of disciplinary articulated on the body of prisoners, Foucault compares the publicly performed (and apparently botched) torture and execution of Damiens in front of St Pauls on March 2, 1757 with the schedule of a day in prison written "eighty years later."[641] The difference between these two examples serves to illustrate that in a relatively short period, the focus of the judicial system had changed from the public infliction of pain on the criminal, to the private deprivation of liberty for a criminal population. The reason for this, Foucault writes, is that in the first instance, the state becomes publicly complicit in the violent (physical) punishment of criminals, and in doing so, becomes criminal itself. By shifting to a model where the public focus is on the legal imposition of status (by conviction) of the guilty party, this displaces the complicity of the state in the brutal reality of execution and "punishment-as-spectacle" becomes publicity of "the conviction itself."[642]

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[639] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 48.
[640] Amnesty International website, "Abolitionist and Retentionist Countries."
[641] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 6.
[642] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 9.

However, while Foucault writes "the disappearance of public executions marks therefore the decline of the spectacle, but it also marks a slackening of the hold on the body" (by the state).[643] This decline of the torturous public execution coincides with the establishment of public museums (at the same time as the French Revolution) and, as Bataille writes, "the origin of the modern museum would thus be linked to the development of the guillotine."[644] The public execution of the French Aristocracy is also a demonstration of the reversal of power relations that had oppressed the lower classes in France. Where the sovereign used public performances of torture and execution to remind the public of his power, the public, in turn, destroyed the power relations that bound them to the French Aristocracy in their trials and executions.

The process and performance of the public execution always contained within it the danger for transgression. As an enactment of the sovereign power of the king, any deviation from the ordinary process (as Foucault notes, if the execution was not carried out deftly enough, or if the condemned were convicted of relatively minor crimes and were of lower social class) the spectacle of the execution could be overturned and the resistant, heterogeneous sovereignty of the public could be expressed.[645] Then, as now, the ineptitude of the executioner can inspire sympathy, or leniency in the will of the broader populace. The reduction of pain in executions corresponds to the public and transparency of the modern trial process. The public requires a spectacle, but that spectacle resides in the production of justice by the court, rather than the production of an event of retribution by the act of execution. On April 30, 2014, an execution in Oklahoma was stopped after the drugs used to execute the prisoner did not work correctly and then the prisoner appeared to be in pain. He died of a heart attack about 10 minutes after the execution was stopped. As a result of this event, there is now the possibility of an indefinite stay of execution for all inmates that remain on death row in the state.[646] Ongoing issues surrounding execution by lethal injection are currently unfolding in the U.S. as a result of a refusal

[643] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 10.
[644] Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 64.
[645] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 52-53.
[646] BBC News, "Inmate's groin injected in botched Oklahoma execution."

by western European pharmaceutical companies to supply the required drugs to perform them.[647]

The aspect of spectacular performance, particularly in relation to the crime of the victim, is not entirely diminished either. Foucault describes the speeches given by criminals to be executed in France (and some of which remain attributed to those victims who may or may not have given them) as "gallows speeches" the details of which were (in more recent instances) distributed via media, and most of which were designed to express contrition."[648] This tradition continues in contemporary US executions, where part of the ritual gives the victim the opportunity to give a speech as their "last words" the details of which are available on the websites of various governmental agencies.[649] This statement, made by the prisoner, which can be constituted as written, verbal or both is released to all major press agencies, and read to the waiting media outside the institution where the execution has taken place (as shown in the documentary *Life and Death Row* (2014)). In Texas, the state that executes the most prisoners in the US, all executions occur in Huntsville, a town that has constructed an entire industry around the practice of these clinical, yet meditised executions.[650] For each execution, there is also a "media witness list" which contains representatives from media outlets allowed to be present and witness each execution, which they are then obliged to report on (detailing the execution in media publications).[651]

[647] Pilkington, "European boycott of death penalty drugs lowers rate of US executions."
[648] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 65.
[649] For example, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, "Index."
[650] Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, "Index."
[651] Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, "Media Witness List."

[Figure 57: the switch that mediates the witnessing of executions in *Into the Abyss*.]

The economy of physical destruction that operates in the representation of executions as clinical, bloodless practices that excise transgressive or excessive (criminal) bodies from the world produces a social structure dominated by accumulation and utility. Practices of execution do not include the destruction of useful bodies, but perform the operation of retributive justice on bodies without social function. Where the bodies of the executed are limited to the past in both physical capacities and deeds, the bodies of the sacrificed function solely in the future. The primary distinction between the practices of execution and human sacrifice is therefore, anticipatory and temporal.

REPETITION AND THE SPECTACLE OF TRANSUBSTATIATION

It is not sacrifice, or execution but the repetition of these events that perpetuate the religious or political control. Walter Benjamin, writing on the death penalty as a form of "legitimate" (not transgressive) violence, argues that the death penalty inhabits a unique position in relation to establishment of the law, as it appears to operate as both law-making and law-preserving violence:

> Its purpose is not to punish the infringement of law but to establish new law. For in the exercise of violence over life and death more than any other legal act, law reaffirms itself.[652]

[652] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 242.

However, this position on the operation of the death penalty relies on residual sacrifice as it remains in the act of execution, where the body being destroyed might still have the potential to operate within the social order it is being excluded from. In the case of contemporary U.S. executions, the potential for social homogeneity is as far removed by the approach to execution as it could possibly be. The positioning of the body to be executed as universally and absolutely heterogeneous to any function of society, alongside the clinical, medicalised approach of the execution process itself ensures this. Despite this rigorous exclusion of the death row prisoner from the possibility of social function, the residue of this possibility that appears as remnant in Herzog's documentaries (as well as in other death row documentaries) is a disruptive fragment to the system.

The repetition of the event of execution in the U.S. renders the specificity of each individual execution mundane, and in doing so, engages in the entropic process of law-preservation as Benjamin has defined it. In deploying a testimonial style, Herzog's documentaries give a specific, localisable account of the experiences of both the victims of crime and the criminals who are to be executed in a manner that disrupts the mythology of the universality of justice in the United States. Herzog exploits the fragility and affect of memory in order to uncover the fragility of the distinction between orderly, productive, useful bodies, and those heterogeneous bodies that have been demarcated for execution. Often, at least in the accounts of the condemned, a momentary decision, or lapse, or impulse, marks the distinction between living amongst the social herd, and being permanently excluded from it, between life and execution. The repetition of these accounts in Herzog's documentaries replicates the repetition of the law-preserving violence that they respond to a simulacra – the repetition of the execution event becomes the repetition of the specificity of each execution event, undermining the use-value of the execution event in the process of re-establishing the myth of American justice.

The simulacrum of the spectacle of execution, as it appears in Herzog's and other documentaries that approach the death penalty in America, constitutes a transubstantiation where the mode of the image exceeds the linguistic understanding of the representation. This simulacral experience of transubstantiation is a mode of privately, viscerally felt production of meaning that relies upon expressions of the body

that are heterogeneous to language. The process of transubstantiation occurs when the representative object (image) produces an intervention experienced physically by a participant, and for the cinematic audience, the experience of a film can operate in a similar way. While the audience is aware that the film can be manipulated, that the sound is recorded separately and that special effects are employed and so forth, the film can nevertheless be a physical experience. Using the theory of transubstantiation, the materiality of witnessing physical violence bypasses the symbolic language of cinema, as it cannot account for, and is in excess of it.

A model for the production of mythology through the repetition of sacrifice can also be found in the Christian model of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the belief that the consumed sacrament (the bread and wine) of the communion is transformed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ. Klossowski, in describing Bataille's debt to Catholicism, draws upon this central idea around which the Catholic religion is built. While non-believers can observe the ritual of Mass, and dismiss transubstantiation as an illusory gesture of faith, the true (Catholic) believes that the bread and wine are actually transformed through the ritual of transubstantiation into the literal flesh and body of Christ, the true believer *experiences* those symbols as actual, material events of God's flesh. These substances are then consumed (and therefore destroyed) in order to reproduce their sacred meaning, and to assimilate the sacrifice of Christ into the physiological presence of the body of the faithful. The process transubstantiation of the sacrament is the point at which it is eaten, as it is in this gesture that it becomes sacred through destruction.

In defining modes of expenditure that constitute both wastefulness and the production of the sacred, Bataille designates the first (through William Blake's Tiger) as the impulse to eat flesh as the consumption of life.[653] The need for energy to sustain life can be sated in the consumption of vegetable matter, and the consumption of meat is a luxurious expenditure, where the calorific outcome does not justify the energy needed to produce the animal it came from:

> The eating of one species by another is the simplest form of luxury... If one cultivates potatoes or wheat, the land's yield in consumable calories is much greater that that of livestock in milk and meat for an equivalent acreage.[654]

[653] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 33.
[654] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 33.

Therefore, it must not be for nutritional, but for motivations of sovereign expenditure (sensual experience) that people desire to eat meat beyond utility.[655] The consumption of the flesh of another human, and even more transgressive, the flesh of Christ, then, constitutes the production of the sacred community through violent, luxurious expenditure. Apparition of certainty in belief that produces the material belief of transubstantiation (which allows for the exuberance of the sacrament transgression) is not limited to the rituals of Christianity. The experience of the "true" Catholic is, at least to an extent, replicated in the experience of witnessing the photographic series of the torture of *Hundred Pieces* for Bataille.

The centrality of the consumption of food in relation to other modes of expenditure (sex and death) is made apparent by the novella *Patriotism* by Yukio Mishima (1961). The book describes the ritual suicide (sepukku) of a Japanese soldier and his wife, following the rebellion held by the soldier's friends in his regiment. Rather than betraying his country and joining them, or being sent out to kill them, the soldier chooses to disembowel himself with his sword in a ritual process. Mishima takes care to describe the physicality of the relationship between the soldier and his wife alongside the intricacies of their preparations for death (all of which is to ensure they will each have a good "death face").[656] Mishima also describes the heightened experience of sensation they both feel (and particularly the solider's wife, Reiko) at the knowledge of their impending demise, which undermines the formal performance of a ritual death to which they feel obligated. The nexus between formality and the materiality of a "healthy physical craving" for food and sex that exceeds the ritual of death is the point at which the social order is exceeded by the sovereignty of experience.[657] The fact of the couple's death can't recuperate the unsystematisable aspect of their physical appetites for luxurious expenditure.

Where in this chapter, I have argued that the event of physical destruction provides the material for both mythmaking and disruptive media images, in the following chapter, I offer a final reversal in the physical presence of bodies as they accelerate the

[655] Connole and Wilson, *Mouth*.
[656] Mishima, *Patriotism*, 24.
[657] Mishima, *Patriotism*, 23.

destruction of visual cultures. Bataille describes the ecstasy and horror he feels at the image and concept contained in the photograph, the viewing of the sacred object is a process of consumption by which he achieves transubstantiation. Despite the image being a photographic representation of an event, with all the unreliability that the production of photographs as images implies, for Bataille, who, in this sense, fulfills the role of the true believer, this image is affecting because it depicts the experience of the tortured man, writhing in the ecstasy of death as his body is dissected.

CHAPTER 7

Becoming Immortal:

The Destruction of Material

> In the case of the cinematograph, the duration of exposure... lasts as long as 2/45 of a second, 15 images being exposed every second, each of them appearing for 2/3 of 15th of a second... by virtue of the jerky movement to which the strip of film is subjected, it can survive its passage through the apparatus scarcely more than 300 times. One knows, a priori, that a piece of fireworks is ephemeral. It has, even so, an effective life incomparably longer than a projectile fired by a mechanical weapon or the cinematographe's projected photograph, because it lasts several seconds. However paradoxical it may seem, this conclusion is quite rigorous; it can be confirmed by a simple bit of arithmetic, and is yet another instance of how dangerous it is to trust appearances.[658]

Until very recently, the media and materials used to create cultural objects and images has become increasingly fragile. Where one might reasonably expect a statue or building to last for a thousand years before it crumbles, as the epigraph of this chapter demonstrates, analog film and photographic images are far less durable. Where in the previous chapter, I approached the vulnerability and destruction of the individual human body in service of the production of culture in practices of both religious sacrifice and state execution, in this chapter, I approach the vulnerability of material culture as it is assaulted by the conditions of the human gaze, and its extended death in the form of the archive. The collapse of the material duration of cultural objects has progressed along with industrialisation and with the introduction of (chemical) film and photographic techniques that appeared to faithfully record the living index, while simultaneously failing to outlive it. This mechanical decay of the material object of culture has given the appearance of being reversed with the introduction of digital technology, and in particular, the ability to copy and disperse files through the internet, which makes images appear immaterial, while paradoxically making them appear permanent, or immortal.

In response to the difficulty of preservation of objects of visual culture (as well as other cultural and commercial pressures and demands) processes and techniques of copying significant works of visual cultures appeared. In the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin notes that Ancient Greek artists "had

[658] Anonymous, quoted by Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 5.

only two processes for reproducing works of art technologically: casting and embossing" and that these processes used primarily "to make money."[659] However, the process of copying Greek statues and designs (particularly by private commission within the Roman Empire) was also used to appropriate carefully chosen examples of the artistic height of Greek culture into a Roman cultural context.[660] [661] Benjamin briefly traces the history of technologised productions of copies of artwork, and after Karl Marx, attributes the mass reproduction of famous work to the growing infection of industrialisation in (Western capitalist) culture. He laments the loss of what he designates to be the "aura" of authentic works of art, to the mechanised, or "mass" reproduction of the art image as novel to industrialisation.[662] For Benjamin, photography and film are the media that destroy the authenticity of art, as both produce images in response to the reflective light of object referents without manual interference: "the process of pictorial reproduction the hand was for the first time relieved of the principal artistic responsibilities, which henceforth lay with the eye alone as it peered into the lens" giving the appearance of a faithful reproduction of the index.[663] Once this is established, Benjamin argues that this technological distanciation affects the communicative potency and gravity of the art object, and therefore that it can no longer appear as a purely aesthetic object. The value of experiencing the presence of a singular work of art is destroyed by film and photography, and therefore, Benjamin argues, film and photography should operate only as an explicitly ideological, or political tool, rather than operating in the realm of aesthetics.[664]

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[659] Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, 3.
[660] Metropolitan Museum of Art website, "Roman Copies of Greek Statues."
[661] The reproduction of cultural objects for cultural imposition or appropriation has a historical lineage not limited to the copying of paintings and sculptures. The University of Sydney boasts a reproduction of a building from Cambridge, and both Cambridge and Oxford Universities have a "Bridge of Sighs" named after the bridge in Venice (even though they are not architectural replicas). While the architectural landscape of Las Vegas is almost entirely populated by replicas of monuments from elsewhere around the world.
[662] Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, 4.
[663] Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, 4.
[664] There are several contentious aspects to Benjamin's position on technologised art, including the dialectical differentiation between industrial art practices and pre-industrial ones, the notion that any art object could be purely aesthetic and apolitical (particularly in relation to Classical or Renaissance cultures) and also the assertion that (film and photographic) art should only serve an explicit political purpose without aesthetic considerations. However, these issues cannot be addressed within the limited scope of this thesis.

[Figure 58: Photograph of a marble portrait of Alexander the Great, housed at the British Museum, London (unknown artist, reportedly found in Alexandria, created between 200-100BCE).][665]

Both the making of, and the reproduction of works of art of all kinds, implies novelty, creativity and the ability to transcend human mortality, but also destruction, and the energetic limitations of both the human form and the fragility of the material art object. Benjamin wrote that the experience of an original work of art is robbed of its sense of spatial and temporal gravity, or aura by the mechanical reproductions made by the technologies of photography and film. He argues that the technology of film, in particular, is a "liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage."[666] He suggests that art, freed from its obligation to reproduce images of the physical world, and no longer marked by an aura of value or tradition, should become explicitly political and abandon any concern for aesthetics. In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro elaborates on Benjamin's argument, and extends it, in writing that film in particular is not only excluded from aura, but destroys (sacrifices) "the sacred (auratic) object" of art.[667] The technology of mechanical reproduction of images that is attached to the filmic and photographic image indicates that contrary to Benjamin's argument, the

[665] Details of the provenance of this piece are unclear. For further details, see the listing on the British Museum website, "Marble Portrait of Alexander the Great."
[666] Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, 7-8.
[667] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 46.

effect mechanical reproducibility of the image had on artistic practices was liberation from the previously held obligation of visual cultures to faithfully reproduce reflections of the natural or physical world. In other words, the mechanisation of the image gave the image the possibility of liberation from the singularity of the living index and the aura of art, and therefore, the possibility of abstraction.

Where the industrial mechanisation of mass production characterised the lives and experiences of thinkers like Nietzsche, Benjamin, Bataille and, to a certain extent, Klossowski and Deleuze, our lives and experiences are characterised by digital or machinic reproducibility as an electronic or digital industry. Just as Nietzsche's work reversed the project of philosophy from reduction to truth to the creation of thought, the mechanised production of images (photography and film) reversed the project of producing images from the representation of nature to the creation of novelty.[668] In *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Shaviro designates digital technologies as a "different media regime" which offers "new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience."[669] In reference to Benjamin after Shaviro, here I argue for an understanding of the destruction of the value of art in the age of digital, or machinic reproduction, where an image can be repeated without the energetic and representational loss of difference. Out of mechanical reproducibility, art was freed from obligation to its physical (indexical) referent, which gave the image this possibility of abstraction. Within this context, this chapter investigates the consequences of the machinic reproducibility of works of art, and specifically, the effect that reproducibility has on the formerly mechanical media of film and photography.[670]

ACCELERATION OF DESTRUCTION: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

There is an illusion of permanence produced by the habitual practices of consumption through which we relate to film and photographic images as recordings. Colloquially, one takes a photograph to be the recording of a particular moment, an image to dwell

[668] Nietzsche's effect on the project of philosophy has been observed by Deleuze (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, xii) as well as more recently by Brusseau as the "sacrifice of truth for thought" (*Decadence of the French Nietzsche*, 31).
[669] Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 2.
[670] It would also be appropriate to consider the fledgling technology of 3D printing but it is not within the limited scope of this thesis to do so here.

upon as a reminder of that temporal location as a form of personal narrativised history. Analog film images appear to record the indexical objects that compose the experience of a moment in time (mechanically, as Benjamin argues) and appear to preserve it to be viewed over and over again. However exposure to light and moisture decays the photochemical composition of a photograph so that often it fades before the memory does, and in the case of the polaroid photograph in particular, certainly neither the memory, nor the image will exist within a century from the moment they were created. The analog or photochemical film image is even more elusive and volatile than the analog photograph. As the quote used for the epigraph of this chapter demonstrates, the useful life of a nitrate-based film image is less than that of a firework, and yet since its invention, it has been considered and used as a viable technology through which to record historical events and works of art. Photochemical film and photography gives the illusion of producing a record through the apparently mechanical (and therefore, stable and repeatable) mechanism, however, the photochemical image marks the acceleration of the destruction of culture through the process of consumption.

The destruction of the analog film image is such a fast process that an appreciable difference in the image is seen with each viewing of each reel. In *The Death of Cinema* Paolo Cherchi Usai writes that film stock, far from being a stable, temporal recording of life in movement is, in fact, a vulnerable, permeable medium, and that both the acts of making and watching a film is the act of destroying it, as "cinema is the art of destroying moving images."[671] [672] This same observation can also be made about photochemical photography, where the production of each photographic image requires exposing, editing, manipulating and discarding significant amounts of photochemical stock and related resources. Photochemical photographic techniques in film, slide and printed form are equally susceptible to light, and degrade over time. As mentioned above, the polaroid degrades more quickly than other printing techniques, and the images created on film stock not yet processed and printed are instantaneously erased when it is exposed to even the smallest amount of natural (white) light. Cherchi Usai's position resonates with Bataille's economy of expenditure as an operation of destruction through consumptive practices, and he argues that the

[671] In solidarity, Cherchi Usai offers the reader the option of destroying the book, but only once it is read. Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 2.
[672] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 7.

film archive is shaped by destruction and waste.

Writing on the destruction of the filmic archive, which is presented as a series of aphorisms with accompanying images, and bears more than a passing resemblance to Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*, Cherchi Usai describes the degradation of the photochemical cinematic image with reference to what he terms the "Model-Image."[673] In this discussion, the Model-Image is an unattainable image of the film that exists before it has been shown and therefore degraded, and given what Cherchi Usai considers to be ideal viewing conditions (which include parameters concerning the projection process and apparatus, function and anatomy of the viewer's eye, and levels of distraction in the cinematic venue).[674] Naturally, this Model-Image is an unachievable imagined ideal of photochemical cinematic images, "in their intended state, in an intention visible in every part of them before their actual consumption."[675] It is this image, Cherchi Usai argues, that archivists who preserve film (either by transfer from nitrate or acetate to more durable polyester film stock, or from photochemical stock to digital data file) use as a reference point for how the cinematic image should look, before the effects of consumption impose themselves upon it.[676] It is (as the impassioned anonymous reader's report, published at the back of the 2001 edition of the book writes) an observation given by Cherchi Usai without a clear solution other than a resolve to prolong the inevitable destruction of the cinematic archive for as long as possible.[677] This should be achieved, writes Cherchi Usai, through the use of better storage facilities for surviving film reels, not converting or "restoring" existing films to more stable formats (ie. from nitrate to vinyl, or to digital), and most importantly, restricting the screening of films and when they are screened, making the audience aware of the destruction they are causing by viewing the film as "preservation is a necessary mistake" made by archivists (like himself) in prolonging the inevitable.[678] He argues that the preservation of the film image should not attempt to restore it, but rather, to keep it in a useable state for as long as possible, with the knowledge that it will eventually be destroyed.

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[673] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 11.
[674] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 47-49.
[675] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 21.
[676] Anonymous (Reader's Report), *The Death of Cinema*, 112.
[677] Anonymous (Reader's Report), *The Death of Cinema*,
[678] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 67, 105.

A photochemical film differs as it deteriorates, which occurs every time it is watched (or as it is left in an archive) and in this way, differs from digital recordings. As such, a material analysis of film must include the conditions within which that material is produced, stored and displayed and must address the site-specific "factors" that influence it.[679] Cherchi Usai, who is a film archivist and senior curator at the George Eastman House (museum of photography and film) condemns digital recording of the film archive, as well as the (at the time of writing *The Death of Cinema*) relatively new appearance of digital film in mainstream cinema releases. He argues that the destruction of the film archive is what produces meaning and value in the film as it is created, and influences how that film is experienced.[680] The experience of watching digital film, for Cherchi Usai, is devalued by its machinic reproducibility or repeatability, apparently without loss. He writes that primarily, the filmic treasures that remain preserved account for what has been designated as the best of cinema, while the destruction and loss of other films are necessary to create this ideologically-weighted canon. In support of this assertion, he refers not to a kind of nostalgic analog trace that cannot be replicated in digital but to the unreliability of the record of cinema as the aspiration to the Model-Image to which all film archivists aspire.[681] The spectator, for Cherchi Usai, is an "impotent witness to the extinction of moving images that nobody cares to preserve."[682] Film history is shaped by the absence of masses of lost film archives (both during the production of film in the discarding of unused reels and in the decay of films as part of the viewing and archiving process) the presence of which would completely overwhelm it. The boom of the cinematic image, as it dies, draws in the audience who are absolutely complicit in the operation of its destruction, the expenditure of which produces the potential for sovereign experience.

The volatility of the material used to create film and photography, along with the degradability of the photochemical film product makes the images films hold precious and fleeting. The photochemical material holds its form (the form of the reproduced image) for a brief term of useful duration and that image can only be communicated to a limited number of witnesses. The act of watching a film, or viewing a photographic image (with enough light to actually see it) is an act of destruction, both of the form of

[679] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 15.
[680] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 77-79.
[681] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 12.
[682] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 17.

the photochemical material and the potential it has for affecting a future audience. By witnessing the image the filmic material contains, the energy that binds the material to its form is depleted and expended. It is the knowledge and operation of this depletion that produces the possibility for a sovereign experience in the sacred destruction of the image of film and photography.

Destruction of the material basis of cinema, and the end of the consumptive process of the cinematic experience means that the consumption experience of the cinematic object is displaced. Cherchi Usai and the anonymous reader's report confine their theory of destruction to film, suggesting that the photochemical filmic image occupies a unique position as a material form of culture that is its own destruction. However, as I have argued above, all cultural objects are undergoing destruction, whether they are preserved or not. The "mistake of preservation" is not an error limited to film archivists, but to all archivists of culture.[683] The degradation of cultural objects, the process of which accelerates when they are viewed or otherwise used for their designed purpose, is caused by the economy of consumption and destruction they exist within. In other words, the destruction of culture can only be arrested by the total prevention of its contact with both people and the material conditions in the world.

The consumptive process of watching a film degrades each reel as it is projected, sacrificing the material to produce the screen as a sacred experiential site. However, when we view, use or share a copy of a film that has been recorded digitally, there is no original version of the object of the film that can be affected by this use. Theoretically, and unlike any analog recording, the film could be reproduced, copied and replayed an infinite number of times in the digital format and remain unchanged. In transitioning to digital formats, the digital photographic and cinematic images exceed this economy of consumption, displacing the destruction of the film as a condition of its appearance. The displacement of filmic destruction implies a digital dematerialisation of the image itself. Both Cherchi Usai and the anonymous reader refer to the increased use of digital restoration of the archive, but writing in 2001, do not yet consider the projection of digital film in a cinema a potential, mainstream alternative. When they wrote, digital film appeared to remain limited to viewing at home on

[683] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 67.

personal computer systems. The anonymous reader's report, in particular, is concerned with the screening of photochemical films in museum-like settings, and films otherwise being viewed digitally on home computer systems.

In comparison to the transitory nature of film and photographic media, and what we perceive to be material culture in general, the digital archive exudes the appearance of an inescapable permanence (although one which is heavily criticised by Cherchi Usai and the anonymous reader's report). At the time of publication of *The Death of Cinema*, sharing of audio and video data files through the internet was beginning to emerge as an "illegal" activity.[684] Since that time, both legal and illegal (as well as some which inhabit the murky, transitory position in between) modes of accessing data through the internet have become commonplace everyday gestures readily available not only on home computer systems and laptops, but on tablets, mobile phones, televisions and gaming consoles. Systems of mirroring and "cloud" data storage and sharing have created machinic processes by which data can be made, stored, accessed, and most importantly, copied without affecting any original source. Where one might carefully duplicate or replicate the photochemical production of film reels, digital data is spread via mirroring (duplicates made of data files on other systems by copying the data bit by bit) virally and without variation (and therefore, without apparently without the possibility of loss, destruction and simulacra produced by variation). A link to a data file of a television programme might be uploaded to a data sharing website the morning after it has aired, and by lunchtime, upwards of 30,000 copies have been made on a variety of computer systems around the world, and therefore, the trace of that cultural object is unable to ever be entirely erased.

Similarly, social media websites have demonstrated the possibility the permanence of the file sharing capacity of the Internet. Once an image or video is uploaded to social media site, as with a file-sharing site, it remains, lingering on anonymous servers in the vast global, and seemingly ethereal network. Traces of digital past lives haunt names and bodies. Every status update, relationship, photograph and video of every drunk body is able to be unveiled by any semi-skilled news media outlet in the event that that body appears in media and public consciousness.[685] A difference between analog and

[684] Anonymous (reader's report), *The Death of Cinema*, 126.
[685] The Guardian, "How easy is it to delete yourself from the web – your experiences."

digital film and photography, particularly with the intervention of the internet, is a temporal difference, between the preservation of the volatile material image, and the conceptual immortality of the apparently immaterial digital image.

PHOTOGRAPHY IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE.

There's no more cibachrome... you have to make a scan... I don't even know what a scan is.[686]

The photochemical practice of photography has been almost entirely usurped by digital images. Technological advancements of the mechanical and photochemical processes of the photographic image continued throughout the twentieth century, until finally, digital photography both for amateur photographers and professionals became normalised, particularly with the advent of the DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) cameras.[687] These cameras mimic the controls found on analog cameras so that the photographer is able to manipulate variables such as shutter speed, aperture, exposure, and so on, whilst producing the data file of a digital image. The ease with which images are now produced is also reflected in post-production, which has evolved from the manual manipulation of the negative, through the professional incarnations of computer programs such as Photoshop, to the present ability to manipulate a digital image through an application on a mobile phone or tablet. This evolution of the photographic image, from careful capture by a technician, to the enthusiast, to the phone camera not only has the effect of making-digital the photographic image (and destroying the use-value of the photochemical photographic image) but also destroying the ritualised aesthetic of a variety of artistic photographic practices (which can now be replicated by applications like Instagram).

The sovereign value of the singularity of the photographic image has been most clearly undermined by the digitalisation of photography in the example of the "snapshot" aesthetic of Nan Goldin's photography. Goldin's photographic practice, which she began in the late 1970s, is characterised by the attempt or appearance of the communication of intimacy and vulnerability through apparently candidate snapshots of friends and encounters, which she produces as slides, and which are then sometimes printed as large-scale works through the process of cibachrome. Cibachrome (also

[686] Nan Goldin, *Tate Shots: Nan Goldin*.
[687] Frey, "Digital Photography," 357.

known as Ilfachrome) was a photochemical printing process which was manufactured by the photographic company Ilford, and which has now consigned the product to its product archive as of September 26, 2011.[688] The process was unique because it did not require film negatives (images could be printed directly from slides, by hand) and it involved colour-rich paper, from which the image was bleached out which creates the effect of a saturated depth of colour (as can be seen in the photographs produced by Nan Goldin).[689]

Nan Goldin describes herself as trying to "make a record that couldn't be revised" a kind of local documentary photography.[690] However, analog photography is precisely revised when it is processed, reproduced and viewed. It has only a tenuous referent to authenticity, while it decays with each moment of light exchange between its surface and the eyes of the audience (the destroyers). The communication of the photographic image in Goldin's work serves to make the private and intimate public and visible. She speaks about growing up in a world where, you "don't let the neighbours know" whereas, she says, "I wanted to let the neighbours know... it was about making an anti-revisionist record of my life."[691] These precious glimpses of the private moments she shares with her subjects have the effect of destroying the privacy of the moment, in the making of a photograph that is widely publicly displayed and shared. Goldin's work, she says, refuses formalism, and instead considers the content, the subject and affectivity of the photograph over its structure. She makes "portraits of people living their lives" having sex and eating food with an "emotional intensity" and in doing so, seeks to produce a creative memory, recording history, "keeping the personal alive" while intending "no intellectual premise of art photography."[692] [693]

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[688] Douglas Vincent Photography website, "The History of Ilfochrome."
[689] Schellenberg, Riolo and Blaue, "Silver Dye-Bleach Photography," 709.
[690] Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: In My Life.*
[691] Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: In My Life.*
[692] Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: In My Life.*
[693] Marvin Heiferman, *Nan Goldin: In My Life*

[Figures 59 & 60: Two examples of Nan Goldin's snapshot aesthetic, "Suzanne on the Train" (1984) and "Millie with the cheeseburger radio at home" (1980). Both included in the published version of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.]

However, when the photographic image has infected everyday life to the point where the photography of life events (however mundane) are commonplace, captured,

filtered and posted to Instagram. Goldin's work consumes the affective intensity of her subjects, she makes sacred the apparently instantaneous moment of "emotional need, rather than aesthetic choice."[694] Goldin's process of editing is separate from her photos, which is where she concedes she makes aesthetic judgements about which photographs "work as a framed image."[695] Goldin considers herself to be a "diarist" and "portraitist" as she is more interested in the narrativisation of her photographs, and her recording of her friends' lives, rather than a photographer per se. However, it is clear that in her more recent work, she is frustrated by the change that technology has imposed upon how her images are seen, can be constructed about the practice itself. The digitalisation of photography, alongside the ubiquity of social media has, in this sense, made us all Nan Goldin, and this has destroyed the intensity of her work in the process. Goldin's work is an attempt to describe a community through the production of sacred images. In the 1980s, she held slideshow events for friends (the most famous being the collection of photographs titled *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986)) which involved presenting the "the accumulation of images" set to music in the slideshows:[696]

> *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* also exists as a live multimedia presentation and as a videotape. Including seven hundred images and a sound track, the forty-five minute slide show functions like a film. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* constantly reedited and updated, began its life on the club circuit in New York City.[697]

However, this economy of destruction, where the private is consumed by the production of publicly shown images derives less and less value from that destruction of privacy (it becomes less sacred) as social media transforms private lives into a habitual public performance. This devaluing of the destruction of the private operates tangentially to the destruction of the material object of representation in the photograph. This is largely because Nan Goldin's "snapshot aesthetic" operates in relation to the experience of authenticity and singular identity, the appearance of which has subsequently become a simulacral affectation able to be easily reproduced by the right filter on smartphone applications such as Instagram. Accessibility and ease

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[694] Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: In My Life.*
[695] Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: In My Life.*
[696] Nan Goldin, *Nan Goldin: In My Life.*
[697] Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, inner back cover. (I have viewed a version of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as a slide show at the Heide Gallery in Victoria, Australia, and the presentation of the images in this (cinematic) way has a more visceral and hypnotic effect than either seeing Goldin's images individually at galleries, or reproduced in catalogues.)

have degraded the value of Goldin's work, to the extent that her painstakingly produced cibachrome prints have been subsumed by the ubiquity of digital instantaneity. The photograph is no longer a material, mechanical process, but has instead become a machinic recording through the phenomenon of digitalisation (computerisation). Where a photograph was once the effect of light on the chemically composed surface of film stock, it is now a computerised capture of that light. The photograph is whatever the computer's zeros and ones understand the subject to be. The effect of computerised, or digitalised photography means that images captured can be instantly scrutinised, deleted or approved and sent. This collapses the distance between taking photographs and seeing the results. The expanded capacity of the camera to take hundreds of photographs without affecting a limited and expensive supply of film also devalues the photographic image as one of material destruction.

FILM IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE MOVING IMAGE.

The end is extremely fucking nigh[698]

The film industry has resisted the pull of digitalisation only slightly longer than photography. Many filmmakers continue to use analog film stock to produce moving images. However, the mainstream Hollywood production system has become almost fully digital in an extremely short space of time. In the 1990s, as Felicity Colman writes, early adopters of digital film technology included the IntDigEnt (US based production company that made small-release films) and Lars Von Trier's Zentropa films, which, as part of Dogme '95, produced film using Digital DV technology, which was then (reverse) converted back to 35MM film, in keeping with the manifesto.[699] From that point, one of the early films to have a mainstream release that was made almost exclusively on a Canon XL-1S camera (a digital camera now widely available for use in film schools) was Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*. This film was also one of the first feature length digital films with a global release in 2002. Several years earlier, Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998) featured some scenes produced with a digital camera that showed a marked difference in image and colour quality when compared so directly with standard 35MM film, and it appeared as though digital film technologies would need to develop much further before they would be accepted into commercial

[698] Painted message in a church, *28 Days Later*, 2002.
[699] Colman, *Film Theory*, 45.

film production. Digital film technology has accelerated to the point where in 2013, Paramount productions released their last film that would be distributed in 35MM reels, and will in future, only distribute films in digital formats.[700] [701] Martin Scorsese, who wrote in 2000 (in the Preface to *The Death of Cinema*) that the "digital technology is certainly not a substitute for motion picture stock when it comes to the preservation of the original cinematic experience" has since abandoned this sense of preservation, and embraced digital cinematic technologies, having directed several films made entirely digitally including *Hugo* (2011) and *Shutter Island* (2010).[702] Most recently, Paramount's first entirely digital release (not distributed on 35MM film at all) was Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street*.[703]

Technological advancement facilitates the mediation of culture and the event that it communicates, and "different technologies enable different connections to be made."[704] Until the digitalisation of the image, however, cultural artifacts were limited in the number of people who could share in the information they offer, in that the form of those products of culture would dissipate over time and through use. The use of film as a mechanical, photochemical process has been characterised by "film strips are made of an unstable substance, celluloid, which record through chemical and light interface, whereas digital processes involve recording data" and translating it into binary code.[705] Reflecting Cherchi Usai's fear that the film archive concentrates primarily on preserving certain films and not others, Colman refers to Mekas and the "Anthology Film Archives" which seek to preserve the "masterworks" of cinema, "rather than disposable entertainment."[706] Colman writes that the key distinction between the photochemical, or analog film process and the digital production of film is the severing of the indexical referent from the image production. In using electronic apparatus to produce film, we rely upon the computational capacity for image recording and translation, rather than a direct photochemical effect made by the refraction of light from the object to the film in the camera.

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[700] Verrier, "Paramount stops releasing major movies on film."
[701] Colman, *Film Theory*, 48.
[702] Scorsese, "Preface," viii.
[703] Colman, *Film Theory*, 48.
[704] Colman, *Film Theory*, 45.
[705] Colman, *Film Theory*, 46.
[706] Colman, *Film Theory*, 50.

The future capacity to access the digital archive for the audience of digital film is also a concern. In the Anonymous reader's report in *The Death of Cinema*, the digitalisation of the cinematic image is critiqued in the following way:

> Computer programmes become hieroglyphs within a short time, but you'll always be able to build a projector and make a screen. All you need is alight source, a lens and da shutter plus a large white surface.[707]

The irony of this statement is of course, that hieroglyphs are, relatively speaking, easy to translate, whereas the complex semiotic processes of the cinematic apparatus are arguably, not, particularly without the experience of living in a moving-image saturated (western capitalist) context. That said, the intention behind this observation remains, the material of digital film may outlast its mechanical counterpart, but with a disturbance to the energetic equilibrium of the earth, those moving images recording digitally, along with all other digital data can be made inaccessible to us.[708] [709]

The digitalisation of the film (and photographic) archive has the effect of democratisation of access to the cinematic image. Where once, as Cherchi Usai explains, the cinematic image must be preserved, and any audience for the image must be alerted to the damage they cause in viewing it, the digital archive allows people to access images and footage that they would never ordinarily come in contact with. However, this accessible, democratic digital archive has the consequence of devaluation of the cinematic image. Without the economy of destruction, the consumption of film can no longer maintain the burden of precious rareity.

THE MATERIAL OF THE DIGITAL

> Everybody has to stick to the proper point of being a human being. And the proper point is always to remember.[710]

The rapid shift in the everyday material used to record filmic and photographic images has occurred. Instead of the volatile medium of photochemical film, with its reliance on the correct composition of chemicals and light, images are collected by the apparently stable system of computation, or digital photography. Each image, (moving or still) is

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[707] Anonymous (Reader's Report), *The Death of Cinema*, 123.
[708] Solar storms, which occur regularly on the surface of the sun have the potential to disrupt electronics and networks (temporarily, or potentially permanently). BBC News, "Met Office to offer daily space weather forecasts."
[709] Ferris, "Sun Struck."
[710] Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 200.

filed as a binary collection on the memory card inserted into a digital camera, and then on a computer, to be edited, reproduced and distributed with a level of ease that far exceeds that of the reproduction of analog media.[711] This shift appears to have reproduced the cinematic and photographic image as ironically both permanent (as digital data is unaffected by exposure and environmental considerations, even if the computational devices that contain it are) and intangible, or immaterial, as data stored on a computer contains the mass of the electrons used to record and store the charge (zero or one).

While issues surrounding intellectual property and the ownership (and commercialisaton) of data have been broadly discussed and legislated for sometime, the implications of the undeletable nature of data distributed through the internet have only recently started to be addressed. On May 13, 2014 it was reported that the European Union Court of Justice has made a ruling that the company Google was obliged to erase "irrelevant" or "old" links to data that could be found in searches performed with people's names upon request.[712] It is important to note, however, that this does not remove the data from public access, or from storage on multiple servers around the world, it simply makes it slightly more difficult to find by ensuring that links to the offending data do not appear on Google-based data searches. The implication of this ruling is that people have the right to control ordinary or everyday access to data recalling past events in their lives, but this is far from being an absolute deletion, it is simply a complication of access.

Once data is transferred via the internet, it remains mirrored in the quiet recesses of servers, and is the first kind of recording of culture that humans have managed to create that is potentially, and certainly theoretically permanent. An article compiling personal accounts of efforts to delete data from previous online activity, published in The Guardian in 2013, reflects that individuals are unable to control access to personal information about them, or access old social media and other profiles in order to restrict public access to them.[713] However, what this article does not address is that even when the files appear to have been deleted, they still exist and are recorded on

[711] Frey, "Digital Photography," 358.
[712] BBC News, "EU backs 'right to be forgotten' in Google privacy case," Travis and Arthur, "'Right to be forgotten': EU court rules Google must amend results on request."
[713] The Guardian, "How easy is it to delete yourself from the web – your experiences."

the (multiple) servers of the companies who host the sites that contained the data in question. Therefore, even in the event that information is deleted from apparent and easy access, any and all data that has echoed across the internet is permanently recorded, somewhere, and therefore, unavoidably immortal.

It is conceivable that archaeologists of the future will dig through this accumulative mass of data, and from it, form theories about our lives. As technological advances develop, the practice of digital, or machinic archaeology will become more rigourous, conceivably with the most determined archaeologists finding artifacts such as private browsing histories deleted files and hidden connections in the distant, digital past in a manner that will reconstruct inane details about our lives. This apparently immaterial mode of digital archaeology will have the additional consequence of its practitioners having more intimate insight into our lives than those we share with others in the present. This communicative concept of digital archaeology is also distinct from the current scholarship in "media archaeology" as defined by Jussi Parikka as a disciplinary shift in looking at the material objects of media and the way the evolution of those objects have informed the media present.[714] Where Parikka argues for an archaeology of media and its objects as they appear now, I am presenting a spectral notion of digital archaeology that has more in common with a particularly sinister episode of the series *Black Mirror*, entitled "Be Right Back," in which a woman orders a reconstructed simulacral consciousness of her dead husband, compiled by amassing his social media and messaging data. However in the closing remarks of *What is Media Archaeology?*, Parikka describes the emerging potential for "the world itself becomes a storage space – an archive, a database" the consequence of which would be, as above, the conceivable ability to reconstruct a simulacral apparition of past life from digital traces.[715]

However, this speculative practice of digital archaeology may be overturned by the volatility of digital data, which is not as immaterial as it might appear. The appearance of the digital as immaterial is associated with the appearance of computer systems, and the internet, along with data files that computer systems produce and the internet disperses as immaterial. However, data files have a mass (constituted by the electrons

[714] Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?*, 2.
[715] Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?*, 159.

that hold the charge for one or zero) and however small that mass is, it still exists.[716] This indicates that the digital realm is not intangible and separate from the biological, physical or material world, but is another part of it. This also indicates that the accumulation of data files is a material accumulation. This appearance of immateriality of machinic data is predicated on the physical understanding of material itself as substantial and inert. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, writing on what they consider to be a new kind of materialist thought note that materialist traditions from pre-Socratic philosophy to Newtonian physics to the materialism of Marx are all predicated on the assumption that matter is inert, stable and irreducible beyond the subatomic.[717] As twentieth century developments in physics suggest that matter is unstable and far less "substantial" than previously imagined, the notion of materialism appears to be obsolete. John Horgan writes that scientific theories of matter are unable to account for many phenomena found in the physical world, and that physicist John Wheeler has suggested the potential for relational influence on material space; "quantum mechanics implies that our observations of reality influence its unfolding."[718] In another populist scientific publication, *The Matter Myth*, Paul Davies and John Gribbin criticise scientific reliance on mechanistic assumptions about how matter operates in space as a "founding myth" of modern science.[719] While their motivation for this criticism appears to be (at least in part) a conceited reinscription of the notion of the importance of (the Cartesian conception of) "the human body and the brain" in the context of the material experience and observations of the universe, they demonstrate that theories of mechanised matter only account for the inertia and gravity of substance, but not for the behaviour of matter itself, including the appearance of mass without apparent substance.[720] While the "myth" of "matter" is most often critiqued by quasi-scientific publications in order to argue that philosophy is no longer required, or as proof that divinity exists, the activity present in previously inert matter is worth closer consideration.[721]

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[716] Marks, *Touch*, 169. In the chapter "How Electrons Remember," Laura U Marks discusses the function (and connectivity via considerations of materiality) of electrons in computing systems.
[717] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 5.
[718] Horgan, "Is Scientific Materialism "Almost Certainly False"?"
[719] Joseph Ford, quoted by Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, 8.
[720] Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, 8.
[721] Horgan, "Is Scientific Materialism "Almost Certainly False"?"

Common to a number of descriptions new materialist theory relates to the reconceptualisation of matter away from the "inertia" of Newtonian physics, and toward an energetic and dynamic theory of material itself.[722] This notion, while underpinned by the theoretical understanding of material as active and energetic is largely attributed to a nexus of thought around Quantum physics, which demonstrates that matter is energetic and infected with both space and the mysterious "dark matter" that exceeds every constitutional theory.[723] Georges Bataille proposed a theory of active materialism that he insisted should precede ontologies as a process by which theory might exceed both Idealism and Dialectical Materialism, instead conceiving of "matter (as) the thing-in-itself."[724]

Coole and Frost argue for a "new materialist" philosophy that takes into account the active aspect of matter, that matter that contains energy and space, which is a position influenced by developments in both modern physics and twentieth century philosophy. This multiplicity of new materialist thought must consider the physical, biological and biopolitical implications of an active materialism that emphasizes the productivity of material itself. Earlier incarnations of material thought, they say, are either mechanised descriptions of the development and operations of objects, the mystical activation of material or the "existential phenomenology" of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others that considered the activation of inert material through the malleability of perception.[725] Coole and Frost also acknowledge "the advances in natural sciences" as informing new positions on how to consider material as active and self-producing.[726] They arrive at the position that they are arguing for "an orientation that is posthumanist in the sense that it conceives of matter itself as lively and exhibiting agency" and most importantly, they "emphasise the productivity and resilience of matter."[727] The idea of "resilience" and positivist productivity in the theorisation of matter, is where their position is in danger of recreating idealism within material theory. Coole reveals that theories of material have relied upon a Cartesian separation between matter and thought, or reason, where matter was made subordinate to the rationality of the human mind,

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[722] This is common to several essays in *New Materialisms*, including those by Bennett, Cheah, Connolly, Coole and Coole and Frost.
[723] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 12.
[724] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 49.
[725] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 3.
[726] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 5.
[727] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 7.

matter is "essentially passive stuff, set in motion by human agents who... impose subjective meanings on it."[728]

Bataille's writing on materialism contains a curiously similar stance to that of the above new materialists. He argues for "the conception of matter as an *active* principle" (a phrase that is repeated, verbatim, by Jane Bennett in her essay "A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism" without reference to Bataille) but unlike the new materialist theorists collected in the edition edited by Coole and Frost, Bataille's materialism does not just incorporate the activity of matter, but also its volatility, and its capacity for unpredictable destruction as well as (and before) production.[729] [730] In containing the capacity for change, and therefore destruction, the conception of matter is not at all "resilient" as it is active, it is volatile, decaying and unreliable. It is matter infected with space, energy, force and most importantly, "dark matter."[731]

Bataille argues for the inclusion of what he designates as "base material" in the development of materialist thought, which, at the time of his writing, was dominated by materialist Idealism. While Bataille conceived of base material as socially and politically unacceptable or unpleasant matter encountered and produced by bodies, his idea could be reconceived of in reference to contemporary theoretical Physics, in which base matter, persists as "dark matter." In theorising "dark matter" which, as Coole and Frost report, constitutes a large percentage of the material we encounter as base material, this matter can be considered in relation to Bataille's sovereign heterogeneity, where the heterogeneous or outcast position cannot be reconstituted by structures of language or known forms. It is also this dark matter that reserves and produces the energy that allows matter, in general, to be active.

Coole and Frost write that "dark matter" (so designated by Quantum mechanics because of its resistance to classification) is the most common substance of the constitution of matter itself in the universe. It is necessary for the experience of mass and the phenomenon of gravity, and yet its existence remains only negatively defined

[728] Coole, "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of the Flesh," 92.
[729] Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," 47.
[730] Bennett, "A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism," 47.
[731] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 12.

(in that it must exist in order for these physical laws to operate).[732] As Coole and Frost summarise:

> recent astronomical research suggests that as little as 3 or 4 percent of the universe may be composed of ordinary matter, while something called "dark energy" or "quintessence" is invoked to explain an expanding universe.[733]

Which demonstrates that while matter may not be inert or passive, nor is it, as Coole and Frost appear to argue, always positive, productive and useful substance of a cheerful self-motivated epigenesis. Rather, through this invocation of "dark matter" or "dark energy," matter becomes a somewhat malevolent, unreliable substance with the potential to overturn the framework of physical existence with a single, intensive bifurcation. It is the unpredictability of dark matter, arising from within matter itself, that makes matter, in general, active. Dark matter is the active in active materialist thought, and is therefore, the simulacrum of inert material, and the heterogeneous element that undermines the stability of matter, particularly on a subatomic level, which in turn, undermines the stability of all cultural material, including digital data.

The acknowledgement of dark matter as an aspect of the constitution of matter, and indeed the majority of the constitution of matter resonates with Bataille's active materialism, which is reliant upon the contribution of what he designates as the previously excluded "base matter."[734] Base matter, for Bataille, is matter that is excluded from "ideal human aspirations."[735] It is material that cannot be recuperated by the structure of language, social order or human requirement, but that "refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines" and lies in excess of them.[736] While Bataille then refers to the appearances of matter that he understands to be base, including fecal matter, unwanted arachnids and "spittle," base material can also be understood as somewhat analogous to the dark material of contemporary physics.[737] Bataille's base materialist theory is not, as it may appear, simply an attempt to reverse the hierarchy of materialist theory. Nor is it a dialectical system, with ordinary or acceptable material on the one hand, and base material on the other, but

[732] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 12.
[733] Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 12.
[734] Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," 51.
[735] Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," 51.
[736] Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," 51.
[737] Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 51-52.

rather it is in an "unstable position" (prone to paradox and change) "it is a force of disruption rather than a dialectical operator."[738]

The previously unaccounted for "dark matter" or untheorisable "base matter" that lies within the material of the universe, through the volatility that it brings to matter in general, generates both production and destruction from within matter itself. In relation to film and photographic practices, the appearance of base material lies in the massive volume of unusable, damaged or unviewable stock that makes necessary the destruction of film and photographic material in order to recuperate the possibility that films and photographs can be consumed and made sacred. The first process of destruction that film stock undergoes in order to produce film and photographic images is the photochemical process catalysed by the exposure of the film material to the light of the image with the intention to capture it. By exposing these volatile chemicals to the light, they are irrevocably damaged, and their potentiality is reduced to the single image they bear. The second destruction of film and photographic production is the process of editing, by selection and arrangement, a curatorial mass of film and photography that, by its very nature, must exclude most of the material in order to be produced. This is the first destruction undertaken in the practice of filmmaking, as "the art of destroying moving images."[739] The third destruction that produces the sacred experience of filmic and photographic images is in viewing and screening. In order for film or photographs to be viewed, they must be put at risk of destruction. For analog film and photography, as discussed above, each reel or printed image has a limit of exposure before it is degraded. The material it is made with is volatile, and as easily as film and photographic images are imposed upon its surface, they can be removed and destroyed, returning the film stock to a state of pre-image potentiality. So in viewing film and photographs, the material is put at risk of change and degradation. The witness consumes a portion of the temporal limitation of the exposure of the material, and in doing so, consumes it, an experience that is then constituted as both sovereign and sacred.

Bataille writes that "death signifies not only our decease and disappearance, but the unbearable process by which we disappear *despite ourselves*" and it is in this "leap" that

[738] Noys, "Georges Bataille's Base Materialism," 501-502.
[739] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 7.

pleasure is found.[740] When we see film, we are consuming the limited use-life of the stock that film is recorded on. Viewing a film, therefore, is participatory consumptive process that materially degrades each cinematic reel as it is projected before us and the sacrifice of the filmic material produces the screen image as a sacred object. The medium is effectively destroyed in the process. However, when we view, use or share a copy of a film that has been recorded digitally, the recording of the film is not affected. Theoretically, and unlike any material recording, the film could be replayed an infinite number of times, in the digital format and remain unchanged. Previously, the sacrifice of the filmic material produces the sacred image on screen. However, the act of sacrifice is displaced when viewing a digital film, as the digital file remains unaffected by the projection process. The deferral of filmic destruction implies a digital dematerialisation of the cinema itself. The digitalisation of cinema has the effect of accelerating the consumptive process. Through both legal and illegal file sharing systems, viewers gain instant access to a digitalised version of the cinematic archive, producing an amplified appetite for more and novel material to appear, and devaluing (both economically and culturally) the filmic material consumed. The temporality of anticipation, for a film to be released, to be accessed, to be seen, is compressed into nonexistence. However, when the consideration of the activity of dark matter, specifically in digital matter, it is conceivable that modes of destruction, disappearance and volatility may appear that will produce news kinds of values and meanings from within the massive accumulation of digital film material. The machinic reproducibility of the image is as seismic a shift as the mechanical reproducibility of the image as described by Walter Benjamin, and where mechanical reproducibility produced the possibility for abstraction, the machinic reproducibility of the image must offer the possibility for new forms of art that are similarly radical.

The schema of destruction around which the production of film and photographic material is arranged is a necessity in the production of meaning. In the same way in which Bataille describes life as being defined by the spectre of death, photographic images and their intensity are defined in relation to their vulnerability to decay.[741] Without the threat of decay, the film image ceases to carry with it the sacred intensity of impermanence. Therefore, the digital intervention into the photographic and

[740] Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, 225.
[741] Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, 225.

cinematic creates an impasse where the apparent stability of digital recording undermines the transient attraction of the cinematic and photographic image. In order to maintain the sacred intensity of cinematic and photographic images, new ways of destroying them must be found.

Amongst the possibilities for destruction machinic images, the "glitch" appears to have potency. Defined by Goriunova and Shulgin as "an unpredictable change in a system's behaviour" it appears to be far more radical than the decay of objects of material culture through prolonged exposure to use and atmosphere (oxidation).[742] [743] Goriunova and Shulgin write that the glitch has become an integral aspect of digital culture, providing aspects of games and operating platforms that may not have been intended in the design, but in some cases, provide more enjoyment for the user and in this way, glitches have become an integral aspect of what they designate as an "machine aesthetics."[744] But the unpredictability (material decay is not so much unpredictable as inevitable) and reversibility of the glitch (it can be repaired through reprogramming) mark it as a different kind of destruction altogether. It is the absence of the simulacrum, appearing from the regressing repetition of the cultural object that prevents meaning and value to appear from machinic images.

If the destruction of film stock is the necessity of the film archive, digital immortality and instantaneity appears to displace the consumptive economy of the "ephemeral" film material.[745] The digitalisation of film implies the unlimited accumulation of the digital moving image. The implications of consumptive cinema without material destruction are then apparent. If, when we watch a film, we are not depleting or affecting it in any way, this must have an effect on the manner in which films are produced, distributed and consumed. This is an economy that exists between the volatile, fragile bodies of the audience, and the volatile, fragile material of the cinematic and photographic images. If the digital image is not susceptible to our destructive viewing, and its image ostensibly permanent, what opportunity to do we have to affect

[742] Goriunova and Shulgin, "Glitch," 110.
[743] The prospect of "sudden image destruction" is also offered by Julian Kilker as a similar phenomenon that undermines the storage of images. It occurs when the data of the image is corrupted and has consequences ranging from minor changes to the annihilation of the image. Kilker, "Digital Dirt and the Entropic Artifact," 50.
[744] Goriunova and Shulgin, "Glitch," 112, 114.
[745] Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, 61.

the culture we experience, and how do we negotiate the imposing edifice of cultural permanence, when by comparison, we are so destructible?

[Figure 61: Detail of "The Blinding of Sampson" stained glass window in the Musée du Cluny, Paris. March 21, 2014.]

When the 2001 edition of *The Death of Cinema*, was published, Cherchi Usai included a damning reader's report (along with his own response) at the end, which I referred to throughout this chapter. Both Cherchi Usai and the anonymous reader wished to avoid relying on digitalisation to preserve the cinematic image, but both considered photochemical film stock to be far more vulnerable than other cultural artifacts with a longer duration. Amongst his various condemnations, the anonymous reader wrote:

> Has anyone ever been naïve enough to believe that cinema could be preserved like the cave paintings of Lascaux? Did we really fool ourselves into thinking that *Citizen Kane* could be saved for future generations just as we claim to save the Sistine Chapel, Mozart's Jupiter Symphony, the Taj Mahal and Nefertari's jewels? Well, it's not possible, and it never was.[746]

The digitalisation of culture has presented us with this unique impasse; how to negotiate operate and communicate in a world in which *Sharknado* 2 (2014) will most likely outlive the images painted on the walls in the caves of Chauvet.

[746] Anonymous (Reader's Report), *The Death of Cinema*, 113.

CONCLUSION

The Destroyers:
Death and Art as Self-Preservation

The main thing is always the same: Sovereignty is NOTHING[747]

[Figure 62: Bone fragments, remainders, June 21, 2014.]

Culture, and the material objects that express it, are organised around an economy of exchange between preservation and destruction. The volatility of all material media that humans desire and evolve into cultural forms for representing, recording and communicating experiences between one another, work to extend communication beyond the temporal and physical limitations of the life of the human body. The materials used to form objects of culture are volatile and resistant to the forms into which they are molded. The objects we choose to represent our culture degrade easily into the formlessness of material anonymity. This degradation is accelerated by exposure to the variable context of the Earth's light and climate and in particular when viewed by humans (as human viewing requires light, and introduces moisture and

[747] Bataille, *Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 430.

bacteria to the climate around the object) and both of these exposures primarily degrade the cultural object through oxidation (the combining of minerals with oxygen). From cave paintings like those of Chauvet and Lascaux, to architecture, paintings and sculptures and photography and film, all forms of material visual culture (with the exception of digital materials) are affected by the light and environment they are kept in, and are thus particularly susceptible to the environments in which humans view them. Therefore, the best preservation of cultural objects is achieved when those objects are kept in an artificially induced state of stable equilibrium with as little light as possible and constant temperature and humidity levels, which requires them to be away from human bodies, whereas experiencing, viewing or participating in a discourse with art objects contributes to and accelerates their destruction.[748]

As this thesis has examined, the ironic foundation of the production of art and cultural objects, which is the pursuit of immortality through cultural expression, is destruction. These objects created in order to communicate experience of life in excess of the discontinuity of a singular experience of embodied existence is punctuated both by the destruction of the body it came from, and the destruction of the form the material object took. In one of Bataille's lectures on the caves of Lascaux, he argues that humanity is distinct from animality in the ability to distinguish life from death.[749] While numerous animals appear to be able to distinguish between living and dead animals, the recognition of the fact of imminent death as life's contingent partner appears to remain solely a human trait. As Patricia MacCormack notes, "any ascription of any quality to any nonhuman is a human compulsion" and therefore, the observation of the distinction between life and death remains in the all-too-human realm.[750] Bataille observation is used in his talk to distinguish Neanderthals as human, but Homo Sapiens as separate because unlike Neanderthals, Homo Sapiens produced art (an archaeologically disputed assertion, particularly in relation to the burial rituals of Neanderthals, and the speculated assertion of their "love of beauty").[751] [752] However,

[748] This observation was, in part, inspired by the novel *The Goldfinch* (Donna Tartt, 2013), the narrative of which revolves around the attempted destruction, theft, preservation and eventual recovery of the Carel Fabritius painting of the same name. In this novel, the painting operates as a metaphor for life and breath. Like the finch, our breath and our bodies are bound to a material and physical existence made cruel by its brevity, but attempting to preserve life, as to preserve art is a doomed endeavour.
[749] Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 89.
[750] MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, 59.
[751] Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 89. Since Bataille wrote this, archaeological studies regarding the possibility of art as well as burial rituals in Neanderthal communities.

the importance of the relationship between the recognition of the inevitability of death and the creation of art remains. More broadly, culture is motivated by the immortality that cultural production appears to lend its human creators to communicate beyond their own bodies. The intention to continue to exist in cultural memory beyond physical death is the motivation for artistic production, as well as language, and other forms of communication.[753]

The development of the mechanical reproducibility of images has had a profound effect on this phantom of sovereignty in artistic expression, its connection with death, and the sacred expenditure of art. As I have argued in Chapter 7 of this thesis, the apparent mechanical reproduction of an index as an image (by photography and film) frees visual cultures from the obligation to the attempt to reproduce the index itself, thereby producing the possibility of abstraction. The effect of the machinic (digital) reproducibility of the image remains to be seen.

An image of this primary impulse for communicative self-preservation exists in the Chauvet caves, and can be seen in detail in the film *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams* to which I now return. The film is used by Herzog to document the rarely accessible caves, which contain some of the earliest known cave paintings (at the time of production, they were the oldest known paintings).[754] One of the examples shown of these paintings is the impression of a palm-print, made by a single artist, over a sizeable surface near the cave entrance. Herzog focuses on the idiosyncrasy of the hand that made the imprints (the slightly crooked little finger, as shown by the archaeologist who studies them) but it also serves to identify this person as the artist, and single author of the palm-prints, which have continued to communicate this sovereign assertion for more than 30,000 years. The older cave art found at the site in El Castillo is primarily similar images of stencils, or negative handprints. This is a representational manifestation of the economy of art as self-preservation.

As was also referred to in the introduction, the limitation of access to the Chauvet caves, similar to the controlled access to the Lascaux caves that Bataille describes in

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[752] Sommer, "The Shanidar IV 'Flower Burial': a Revaluation of Neanderthal Burial Ritual," 127.
[753] Bataille, *Erotism*, 13.
[754] Than, "World's Oldest Cave Art Found." This article reports the findings from "subterranean sites" in Spain, including one named El Castillo where hand stencils painted over 40,000 years ago have been found.

The Cradle of Humanity is simply an amplified version of the economy of the gallery or cinematic experience. This is system, as noted above, mirrors the systems of access produced for people to experience films and works of art. As the forces that keep material in a particular (human-made) form are so fragile, we meter out human contact with film and art objects to extend the time we have before destruction and to allow the experience of visual cultures to be limited to particular spatial and temporal contexts. You cannot, for example, ordinarily go to the Tate at 3AM, no matter how strongly you feel the need to commune with a Rothko. Through systems of authority, humans dictate to one another these parameters for the purposes of preservation (temporal extension prior to destruction), but also to control and limit the potential for sovereign experiences the art object might inspire within a manageable, nominal (gallery) space.

THE DESTROYERS

To think is the link between life and death,
enter this body of sound and escape the mesh[755]

The title of this thesis, "The Intoxication of Destruction," was, as I noted in the introduction, drawn from a passage in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche writes that intoxication (in various forms) is the "physiological precondition" of art.[756] In making this assertion, Nietzsche positions art as the sovereign outcome of desire and consumption (of energy and experience). The intoxication of nonproductive expenditure, which is the operation of destructions without potential for profitable return, is subsequently designated by Georges Bataille as the field of sovereign experience.

Beginning with Bataille's general economy, the operation of which is focussed on nonproductive expenditure, this thesis has argued how a range operations of destruction can be located in various intensities of visual cultures, in the way they produce the possibility for sovereign experience. I have approached the experience of sovereignty as a potential outcome of viewing or participating in a film or art object and end with the assertion that operations of destruction are inextricably bound up with visual cultures, and that these operations weave the experience of sovereignty

[755] Kode9 + The Space Ape, "Portal," *Memories of the Future*.
[756] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 47.

into the fabric of culture itself. I have sought to designate operations of destruction as the founding operation of cultural expression, through which the sovereignty of the artist, religion and the state apparatus is expressed. The appearance of sovereignty, as it bears a relation with simulacra, undermines the homogeneity and inanity of everyday existence, allowing those who access it a glimpse into the void that contains equally ecstasy and death. This thesis has been structured in a form of regressive, entropic collapse, that begins with an exploration of the historical and theoretical context of sovereignty in relation to simulacra and operations of destruction, and ends with the destruction of material culture itself.

The first chapter explored the relationship between the experience of sovereignty and the simulacrum with reference to Bataille's general economy of expenditure, providing the theoretical grounding for the remainder of the thesis. The second chapter approached the explosive implication inherent in architectural structures, the appearance of which undermines the rigour of the physical experience of spatial relations as a simulacrum of political and social control, as such a collapse appears in disaster film. In the third chapter, the thought of human extinction produces the conceptual experiment of the Last Man, whose sovereign existence can only operate as nonproductive expenditure. This experience is shaped by the remainder of architectural and consumer objects in the absolute absence of fellow human beings.

Future research questions arise from the potentialities for feminist theory that the critique and deployment of sovereign destruction produces are explored through Chapters 3-7 of this thesis: Chapter 3, in a critique of the ubiquity of the Last Man; Chapter 4 in the experience of the absolute alterity of Yayoi Kusama producing an experience of fractured identity.; Chapter 5 in the critique of mass culture, produced around the bodies of young women, while prohibiting their ability to engage with it was addressed; Chapter 6, in the critique of the universal concept of the body; and in chapter 7, where the relationship between Bataille's base materialism and new materialist theory is formed.

In the fourth chapter, I argued that Yayoi Kusama's self-obliteration in the performative dismantling of the illusion of her identity constituted a destruction that operates to reveal the potential for the experience of sovereignty as an absolute

communication in a return to the void of nonbeing, a simulacral effect heterogeneous to the delineation of productive identity in relation to tradition and social order, the gesture of which finally results in an aggressive return to commericalisation and fame. The refusal of communication in *The Bling Ring* and *Spring Breakers* in the fifth chapter produces an alienated community, as the simulacrum of Bataille's description of Tibetan monks. The Breakers and the Ringers are excluded from participation in society to the extent that they cannot seek pleasure, and instead operate in a form of nonproductive, sovereign expenditure tempered only by the lucrative marketability of their bodies, and the use-value they represent for the commercial industry that they both symbolise and are excluded from participating in. The inverse relationship between the oeuvre of Yayoi Kusama and the Breakers and the Ringers appears in this mode of excessive consumption, the differentiation between the two positions lies in the opportunity to be complicit in the commodification of these operations of destruction.

At this point in the thesis, the collapse continues further into the destruction of bodies in the sixth chapter, in which the spectacle of the sacrificial tradition is recuperated in even the most apparently clinical forms of execution. The simulacral phenomenon of transubstantiation operates to undermine the distinction, in this instance of an operation of destruction between the image of death, and the practice of execution for the purpose of homogeneous social productivity. In the final regression, in Chapter 7, the fabric of culture itself is twice undermined, first in relation to the apparent dematerialisation of the image in the digital evolution of screen media, and second, in the disruptive persistence of operations of destruction and the simulacra they produce even in the subatomic composition of electronic data through dark matter.

As I have argued throughout the thesis, operations that offer access to fields of sovereign experience are volatile, violent and absolutely integral to the operation of culture. Destructions are, therefore, the founding operations of culture. The materials that objects of culture are made of, and indeed all materials, are prone to deterioration from the form (either as it appears, or the form we impose upon it) to formlessness and the intensive moments that we use to produce memory and ideas are memorable and intensive because they function as destructions of uninterrupted experiences of agency. Identity, which we experience as a form of structured self-

delusion formed around a nexus of competing impulses, is comprised of a complex multiplicity of ideas about what we and others think we should be, and it is when we are momentarily freed from the duty of containing and performing these ideas into a narrative form of selfhood that we experience sovereignty. Illusions of identity disintegrate into the intensities, singularities and peculiarities of sovereign experience. Communication, either in total self-loss (eroticism) or in its absence (isolation) is a catalyst for the sovereign experience, as any experience of communication, or its total absence, calls into question the integrity of the structure of identity, experience and the self.

Throughout Bataille's writing, he returns to sovereignty as a term to express an element of experience that he describes as inexpressible, but that nevertheless remains tangible within positions, orientations and experiences. This phantasmic fixation on sovereignty, for Bataille, leads to a disintegrative mode of writing (not dissimilar to Nietzsche's phantasm, the eternal return) where complex theoretical language and thought degrades into and is interspersed by wild pronouncements and romantic, literary or poetic rebellions. As I noted in the introduction, the title of this thesis, "The Intoxication of Destruction," is drawn from a passage in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche writes that intoxication (in various forms) is the "physiological precondition" of art.[757] In making this assertion, Nietzsche positions art as the sovereign outcome of desire and consumption (of energy and experience). The intoxication of nonproductive expenditure, which is the operation of destructions without potential for profitable return, is the field of sovereign experience.

Nietzsche's designation of the intoxication of destruction in visual cultures, and Bataille's adoption of that intoxication in the development of his designation of the experience of sovereignty as having mystical origins is an avenue of research I have addressed elsewhere, particularly as it may occur in discussion with theories of quantum mechanics and thermodynamics as models alternative processes for the consumption, or destruction of energy.[758] In this essay, I argue, after Bataille, that (religious) sacrifice, as a communicative tool, gives structure to both social and belief

[757] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 47.
[758] While I have not addressed religiosity and mysticism in this thesis, I have written about the possibility of Bataille's mysticism in relation to the instability of materiality in Stapleton, "The Corpse is the Territory," 178.

systems, and that it was these exchanges that evolved into contemporary religious structures and practices. The production of concepts of morality, following the delineation of "good" and "evil" comes from the evolution and repetition of these practices. Mysticism without religious structure, as can be observed in Bataille's work, is misunderstood when conflated with nostalgia for hierarchies of morality – distinctions between "good" and "evil" perpetuated by structures of religion and first critiqued by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*. However, I also argue that instead of understanding darkness and light – loosely analogous to heterogeneity and homogeneity in both social structure and in the physical world, as the moral poles of good and evil – this mystical exchange could instead be conceptualised as a thermodynamic relationality. This means that the unpredictable properties of material, including the potentiality for its radical destruction, is produced by the thermodynamic exchange between life and death where dark matter is the heterogeneous, unstable majority of the composition of material itself.[759]

The species of sovereignty, after Bataille, is a transgression marked by an overflow of the limits and boundaries we impose upon our experiences in order to function in a useful or utilitarian manner in homogeneous social order. Identity and language are aspects of the composition of this utilitarian surface that humans have constructed to order and regulate their lives. The composition of memory, communication and imagination are a resistance to this socioeconomically reductive restraint of life. Bataille takes from philosophy, literature, anthropology, art history and theory, sociology, archaeology, classics, politics and economic theory to construct ontological and anti-ontological positions in thought. Contradictions can be acknowledged and used as a nexus of intensity, left unresolved, or aided to operate through the apparitions of other cultural objects. I have explored the multifaceted variations of the idea that destruction is paradoxically *the* foundational operation of culture, as it produces, elicits and inspires the experience of sovereignty in the artist, viewer, audience, participant and witness to a variety of visual cultures.

[759] This point is also inspired by Deleuze's description of thermodynamics, in relation to Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of the physical sciences of his era, and how that understanding informs the operation of the eternal return in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 42-43.

Many contemporary theorists who specialise in Bataille's work (including Allan Stoekl, Nick Land, Benjamin Noys, Andrew J Mitchell, Jason Scott Winfree and others) state an affinity for Bataille's idiosyncratic project (in a manner not dissimilar from the affinity that Bataille states for Nietzsche's oeuvre) as a form of personal sympathy, while simultaneously counseling caution to the reader to take heed of the inconsistencies of the work they refer to. They collectively advise that Bataille's ambitions, while grand, have been hampered by shortcomings, including unsystematic ideas, paradoxes, contradictions and failures (to finish an idea, an essay, or to consider all potential contradictions within an idea as it is presented). Indeed, most scholars who describe their admiration and personal attachment to Bataille's project as though it, like the Acephale, is the membership of a secret society of rebellious failure.

This thesis offers a theoretical approach to the operation of destruction by which the experience of sovereignty can be accessed. I have not sought to theorise the nature or particularity of sovereign experiences because, as I have reasserted throughout, sovereign experience is peculiar to each instance, as well as being, by definition, beyond the reach of linguistic delineation and systematisation. Instead, I have asked how the positions, orientations, narratives, situations, processes, interventions and experiences that comprise both film and visual art offer access to an experience beyond language to the field of sovereign experience, with the answer, operations of destruction. Through the operations of destruction inherent in representation, and the simulacra disintegration produces. The Deleuzian simulacrum illuminates, and therefore destroys the hierarchical rivalry of relations in the Platonic delineation between representation and experience, allowing for the possibility of access to experiences of sovereignty in these locations and intensities in visual cultures. Sovereignty can only be theorised through the operations that produce the possibility of it, the activity and action – which, as Bataille writes – precludes the position of sovereignty as authority, as any position of authority relies upon the system below it to maintain it. The active sovereign exists beyond political authority entirely.[760] The destruction of points of reference to habitual, ordered pathways of subjectivity and activity produces new modes of communication, and we are the destroyers, who destroy the form of material and the structure of ourselves in pursuit of the experience of sovereign destruction.

[760] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 140.

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