The Intoxication of Destruction in Theory, Culture and Media

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A Philosophy of Expenditure after Georges Bataille

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We incomplete one another. x

Preface: The Intoxication of Destruction

> For there to be art, for there to be any kind of aesthetic doing and seeing,
> one physiological precondition is indispensable: *intoxication*.[1]

The intoxication of destruction, and its antithetical twin, the impulse to immortality, are the poles of experience that constitute our aesthetic resistance to the socioeconomically reductive restraint of daily life. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Friedrich Nietzsche positions experiences of culture as expressions (and outcomes) of the desire to expend energy beyond that which is needed for survival. The intoxication of destruction describes an intoxication with being unproductive in the expenditure of energy, using it instead for the pursuit of experiences that transcend the mundane. In this book, I explore 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 media, cultural artifacts and experiences.

This intoxication with destruction in pursuit of 'any kind of aesthetic doing and seeing' was adopted by Georges Bataille in a thinly veiled ambition to take up Nietzsche's mantle, through an idiosyncratic, and later, uniquely apolitical interpretation of the concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty repeats and returns throughout Bataille's writing as a way to express an element of experience that he describes as inexpressible, but that nevertheless remains tangible within positions, orientations and experiences. This later idea of sovereignty, as constitutive of type of experience that lies beyond the mundane, is described as being made possible by the expenditure (and waste) of energy in *The Accursed Share*, which in this book, provides a point of departure for theorizing the possibilities of this intoxication through destruction.

In writing on sovereignty and expenditure, Bataille takes from philosophy, literature, anthropology, art history and theory, sociology,

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1 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 47.

archaeology, classics, physics, politics and economic theory (and potentially other disciplines as well) in order to construct what I would describe as a transdisciplinary[2] approach to these ideas. While I have little interest in faithfully replicating or adhering to Bataille's legacy (or anyone else's), a transdisciplinary approach is one that I have mirrored here, where operations of destruction are found in locations as diverse as state executions, apocalypse and disaster films, eroticism, media archives and digital futures. In doing so, I have situated this book as a beginning, a provocation to the scholarship that has emerged around Bataille's legacy, and particularly to those who would deify his life and work. Emulating such a figure is sickening, so instead, I hope to exploit the potential in the unfinished, sparking corpse that remains. One such point of diversion with Bataille's transdisciplinarity is the underlying assumption of the possibility of mastery, where there remains a suggestion that the contribution of anthropological accounts, for example, constitute an authoritative explanation of the social practices they describe through an unfiltered lens of western colonial objectification.[3] Here, I have tried to interrogate and undermine this perspective, and have instead tried to illuminate how contradictions can be acknowledged and used as a nexus of intensity, left unresolved, or aided to operate through the apparitions of other cultural objects.

This book, as the acknowledgements allude to, was borne from the murky, pressured ferment of academic precarity. Teaching to live, in service of the utilitarian need of the everyday, is resistant to the very possibility of intoxication, but at the same time, the experience has made the possibility of intoxication all the more precious and provocative. When Bataille describes the worker downing a glass of wine, forgetting their troubles in that instant,[4] the sovereign experience provided is intensified by scarcity.

If, as Bataille writes, 'to affirm on the contrary that the universe resembles nothing at all and is only *formless*, amounts to saying that the universe is something akin to a spider or a gob of spittle',[5] I most definitely came here to fuck spiders.[6]

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2   Transdisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary as it traverses and transgresses the boundaries of multiple disciplines, rather than simply interacting or engaging with them.
3   Examples of this can be found throughout Bataille's work, notably including throughout *The Accursed Share Vols. 1-3* and *Erotism*.
4   Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 199.
5   Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acéphalica*, 52.
6   A favourite Australian colloquial phrase is: 'I didn't come here to fuck spiders', usually used as a response to a question about what you're doing, and meaning that you did not come here to mess around, and that your intentions or activities are obvious or apparent.

Introduction: Destruction and Immortality

Abstract

This introduction provides an overview of the book's approach to the creation, reproduction and destruction in and of theory, culture and media. Beginning with the prehistorical establishment of sedentary communities and tracing some relevant cultural undercurrents, it provides a meta-analytical genealogy of the concept of expenditure after Georges Bataille. The destruction of energy in excess of need is shown to be an underlying principle that ensures the paradoxical tension between the desire for immortality and destruction as it is expressed in human culture. The chapter also provides the contextual and theoretical basis for the book, as the intoxication of destruction, and describes the destructive tension-relation at the heart of each subsequent chapter.

Keywords: Georges Bataille, Destruction Culture, Prehistoric Art, Economy of Expenditure, Immortality, Media Destruction

Detail of Assyrian sculptural relief of lion-hunting, housed at the British Museum. Photograph by Erin K Stapleton (March 23, 2014).

> We can ignore or forget the fact that the ground we live on
> is little other than a field of multiple destructions.[1]

In *The Accursed Share*, Georges Bataille details what he understands
to be a universal theory in the general economy of energy, the driving
operation of which is expenditure and waste. Most reflections on this
'general economy' since Bataille have primarily focussed on locating and
describing the experience or object of that expenditure. However, it is
unlocatable in relation to either the individual or the universal, because,
as Bataille argues, sites of expenditure are temporally, materially and
culturally specific, unable to be repeated without differentiation, and
unable to be expressed fully after the fact.[2] The object, experience or
moment of expenditure, therefore, cannot be identified, as it is unique
to each iteration of its occurrence. However, what can be described and
mapped is the constitution and orientation of the operation through which
nonproductive expenditure may be provoked.

The making and reproduction of culture requires novelty, creativity, and
a sense of biological mortality by communicating an idea into an imagined
future. Necessarily, cultural objects and forms also imply destruction, and
the fragile energetic limitations of both humanity and objects created by
it. The desire for an experience free from the utility of survival, through
what Bataille terms 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.[3]
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.[4] As is reflected in Werner Herzog's film

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1   Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 23.
2   Bataille, *The 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.
3   Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity*, 101.
4   Bataille, *Erotism*, 12-13. This section describes the relational dialectic between the individual
experience of discontinuous physical life, and the continuity of life in general.

Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010), this expression of sovereign singularity is 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.

This book examines the desire for, and intoxication with destruction itself, as it appears in our cultural history and present moment, arguing that the paradox of culture is that it fundamentally relies on destruction. The operation through which this 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.[5] The operation of producing the sovereign experience is linked to the sacred, primarily because in social life as it is characterized by organized 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 that 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.[6]

The Origins of Destruction, Immortality

The evolution of static (not only sedentary)[7] communities of people (often referred to in western archaeology as a foundation of cultural development) 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.[8] This development is the next stage in the evolution of the imposition

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5   Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 198.
6   Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 3*, 198.
7   Static communities can also refer to regions that communities of people lived in, and had complex processes for the management of the land and environment.
8   Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey*, 48.

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.[9] The appearance of social order, or 'civilization' 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 early evidence of what we understand as complex civilization, 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.[10] 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.[11] 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 specialized 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 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[12] 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

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9   Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey*, 49.
10   Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey*, 49.
11   Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', 244. In this section of the essay, Benjamin describes how nonviolent collective agreements transition into the imposition of law (and social organization) through the inscription of the law (necessitated by the growth of a large group of people into a social order).
12   Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 334-335.

in doing so, influenced the style and practice of art and architecture (and its location) to reflect these changes.[13]

The ability to read and write remained the privilege of the very few until the invention of the technology of the printing press.[14] The devaluation (reduced exchange value) of books, in time, made them more accessible to more people, and subsequently, a greater number of the population learned to read, until 'a culture based on the printed book' appeared.[15] Through changes and specializations of industry, along with the evolution of mechanization (and automation), education that included literacy became a standardized requirement to function in (western) society, and essential to the performance of the majority of occupations, or as Winterson observed, 'mass literacy was not a campaign to improve the culture […] it was designed to make the masses more useful'.[16] 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 democratization 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 secularization 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 expression again convey the desire for immortality, and immortality, as a desire, is an expression of the knowledge of, and intimacy with death.

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

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13   Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 18.
14   McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 2.
15   McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 2.
16   Winterson, *Art Objects*, 32.

expenditure. The first is described by Bataille's general economy of energy, as actions and activities where the nonproductive expenditure of energy outweighs productivity, and the nonproductive is constituted by the waste of valuable resources, as the mode of expenditure must have a value to be wasted. At each point of the democratization of culture (making it more accessible to more people) modes of expression change 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.[17] Our 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'.

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 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.[18] 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 it 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 presentation afterward will, I hope remedy the mutilation of the film'.[19] 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.[20] In the lecture, Bataille recounts the story of the discovery of the Lascaux caves in 1940.

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17   Bataille, *Erotism*, 14-15.
18   Note by Gallimard (French Edition Publisher), *Cradle of Humanity*, 201.
19   Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 92.
20   Note by Gallimard (French Edition Publisher), *Cradle of Humanity*, 201.

When the caves are discovered, decay accelerated exponentially and they are immediately placed in danger of being destroyed.[21] 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'.[22] The economy of destruction gives value to the experience of media and culture.

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'.[23] 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.[24] 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 men'.[25] 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.[26]

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21 Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 96.
22 Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 97.
23 Lichfield, 'Closed to the Public, but Sarkozy Gains Access to Threatened Cave Art'.
24 Lascaux Caves website.
25 Bataille, *Cradle of Humanity*, 94.
26 Lichfield, 'Closed to the Public, but Sarkozy Gains Access to Threatened Cave Art'.

Expenditure and Destruction in Media Cultures

Bang Bang Bang
The Bigger the Better[27]

The theoretical model for understanding destruction as the primary function of production, experience and conservation of media and cultural representation and communication that I present in this book 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 culture and media. 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, Walter Benjamin 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 use Bataille's general economy 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 media cultures and related phenomena. While the use of Bataille's general economy in relation to operations of destruction and the experience of sovereignty is uncommon, it is not without precedent. It has been often noted that Bataille's work transcends disciplinary structures and limitations, and as his inspiration is collected from diverse range of sources, these ideas carry an aura (and an orientation) of the heterogeneous, the broadly applicable refusal of categorization (and potentially open to the charge of dilettantism).[28]

Despite this, 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*).[29] Many scholars have sought to position Bataille in relation to the context of twentieth-century

27   Yeah Yeah Yeahs, 'Bang', *Yeah Yeah Yeahs*.
28   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'.
29   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*.

French philosophy, particularly in comparison to (variously) Jean-Paul Sartre, André Breton, Simone de Beauvoir and his relationship with excommunicated surrealists.[30] 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.[31] Bataille is additionally contextualized 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.[32]

Other authors 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.[33] 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.[34] 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.[35] Connor also locates Bataille's writing within the context of religious practices, but writes that Bataille's work in other areas is informed by, or through the lens of his experiences of mysticism and meditation.[36] In contrast, Nick Land's notorious *A Thirst for Annihilation* sees fit to position

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30 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*.

31 This contextual positioning also appears in works, including (but not limited to): Michèle Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille* and Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar*.

32 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*.

33 Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*, 3.

34 Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak*, xiv.

35 Hollywood, 'Bataille and Mysticism: A Dazzling Dissolution', 74.

36 Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, 6.

Bataille in the context of a brief history of (philosophically) nearly every-thing, 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 this lineage of theorists, and instead I deploy Bataille's general economy here 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 combines 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.[37] 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.[38] 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 they 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.[39] While, in this book, I am not bound solely to cinematic examples, my writing is influenced by the disciplines of film theory and philosophy, alongside media and cultural studies. I believe it is particularly appropriate to write about media 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.

Here, I explore 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

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37   Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 25.
38   MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, 89.
39   Botting and Wilson, *Bataille*, 10.

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'.[40] 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).[41] 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.[42] 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.[43] Platonic representation 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'.[44] 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.[45]

I have structured and written the chapters that follow 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, hence their groupings as 'destructions':

40 Klossowski, 'The Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication', 148.
41 Klossowski, 'The Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication', 148.
42 Camille, 'Simulacrum', 31.
43 Camille, 'Simulacrum', 31.
44 Smith, *Essays on Deleuze*, 4-5.
45 Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 291.

Destruction I: Energy

In the first Destruction I present a theoretical exploration that establishes my use of Bataille's economy of expenditure, operations of destruction, and their relationship to the experience of sovereignty and the simulacrum. I introduce theoretical structures that motivate the arguments of this book by exploring the relationship between sovereignty and heterogeneity. Bataille's theory of sovereignty is compared to other philosophical, religious and political positions, and then introduced to the possibility of experience through media-based simulacra after Deleuze.

Destruction II: World

The second Destruction considers some ways to end the world, and in Part 1, 'Exploding Monuments' I discuss the cinematic desire for the representation of architectural destruction. I argue that the architectural monument represents the society it has emerged from, as well as inviting its destruction, which is exemplified by a comparison between the role of the Arc de Triomphe in the French Revolution and the World Trade Center and September 11, 2001. This is also reflected in shifts in the representation and narrative of disaster films, which imply September 11 both before and after the event itself, and shift in relation to the simultaneous horror and desire for its spectacular return. Part 2, 'Extinction', inverts this analysis by discussing the concept of human extinction, as represented by the evolution of the 'Last Man' narrative in Modern literature after Mary Shelley, and subsequently in film and screen media (primarily focusing on the example *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* before expanding to more recent versions of the same narrative). The Last Man narrative is characterized first by a character's experience of the absence of others, but also by the oppressive appearance of architectural form that emphasizes that absence of other bodies and reproduces a simulacral myth of fixed identity.

Destruction III: Body

In the third Destruction, the representative order itself is collapsed through a comparison between the cultural significance of execution and sacrifice through the material experience of pain, as a defining feature of the latter that distinguishes it from the former. In the U.S., where executions are designed to appear as though they are intended to be a painless, clinical excision of a heterogenous subject (who the system has constituted as such),

the process of destroying the body of the condemned becomes the work of the media. This absolute definition of the executed subject sees its reversal in the experience of eroticism, that appears in opposition to heterosexual and heteronormative sexuality, with reference to practices that elude the reproductive function of the bodies that perform them (using the example of sexual desire between women).

Destruction IV: Matter

The final Destruction deals first with the destructive effect of bodies, and more broadly, the conditions for human survival have on works of culture. The longevity of cultural objects relies on their preservation from human contact, and the ethics of the archive focuses on controlling and limiting that exposure. The answer to the issue of durability has thus far been digitalization, and therefore the dematerialization of cultural objects. The premise of digital durability is reversed in reference to the non-linear destruction of digital objects (glitches), accelerating obsolescence of digital file formats, and the obscuring accumulation of materials that digital cultures create, making them less stable, inevitably, than their analog counterparts.

As this book takes a transdisciplinary approach to culture and 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 it discusses. Instead, this book 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 book. 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 left out because 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.

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