Thinking excess: the radical sociology of Bataille and Baudrillard

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THINKING EXCESS: THE RADICAL SOCIOLOGY OF BATAILLE AND BAUDRILLARD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard in relation to the problem of extreme violence. The particular events of concern are the death of James Bulger, the Dunblane massacre and the 'serial killers' Frederick and Rosemary West. The thesis argues that dominant traditions in the social sciences are unable to engage with the horror of such events with anything approaching adequate terminology and that alternatives are urgently required.

The study is theoretical not empirical and these cases act as crucial reference points throughout the theoretical discussions. Such events seem to disable reason and are frequently referred to as 'inexplicable' or 'evil'. They appear to be 'in excess' of the established explanatory paradigms. The thesis investigates the possibility of 'thinking excess' in new and alternative ways, more commensurate with the intensity of such events.

The importance of Bataille notions of the sacred, sacrificial expenditure and non-dialectical negativity in approaching changing forms of extreme violence are emphasised. Bataille specifies a fundamental 'need' for violent expenditure or sacrifice that persists in a contemporary age no longer equipped to recognise these principles. Baudrillard's approach is related but departs from Bataille's thought. Baudrillard's emphasis on symbolic exchange, seduction and the fatal denies the existence of fundamental 'needs' yet also emphasises the cultural and ritual nature of extreme violence. These themes are developed into a detailed reading of 'death-events'. They are theorised as distinctively contemporary, occupying a post-dialectical cultural space characterised by the elimination of sacred and symbolic principles, which nevertheless endure in fragmentary, displaced and deracinated form. These are conditions in which new forms of 'evil' may emerge.

In emphasising the theoretical differences between the readings of violence offered by Bataille, and by Baudrillard, the thesis reveals shifts in the nature of radical theory from the middle to the late twentieth century. The notions of utility, limit and excess are central to this shift and to alternative ways of thinking the excessive nature of contemporary violence.

Key Words – Excess, Utility, Limit, Death, Sacrifice, Seduction, Evil
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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This thesis draws upon certain marginalised themes of social theory in order to think through the notion of excess. These themes, derived from subterranean channels of social theory, are developed in the thought of Nietzsche, Bataille, the College of Sociology, and Baudrillard. The principal focal points of this thesis are the theoretical proximities, similarities and differences of the closely related approaches of Bataille and Baudrillard.

A case will be made that themes drawn from these thinkers offer, potentially, a reading of excessive events which is superior to any yet available in dominant sociological lineages. The 'excessive events' this study will address are contemporary cases of extreme violence. I will argue that these events involve distinctive features, which elude the grasp of mainstream social thought. A key example and constant reference point of such an event is the death of James Bulger in 1993. Other events, referred to in this thesis, include the Dunblane massacre in 1996 and the crimes of Frederick and Rosemary West.

Empirically based accounts of such events, both popular and academic have appeared but, I will argue, are inadequate. They present empirical background material, the 'facts of the cases' as if these are sufficient for 'understanding', as if the 'facts' can speak for themselves. As a result such studies seriously under-theorise the events and are sociologically and philosophically unsatisfactory. Further they offer analyses which are simply incommensurate with the intensity or horror of the events addressed. This thesis offers the 'facts' of the principal cases as appendices and instead is concerned to establish an alternative methodological and theoretical nexus that might better approach events of an extreme nature. The aim is not to establish the 'truth' of the Bulger case; the events of Dunblane or 25 Cromwell Street but to reach for alternative theoretical resources that are better equipped, more commensurate with the excessiveness of such events.
These events are argued to be excessive in three related ways. Firstly they are excessive in terms of the acts of extreme violence involved. These acts transgress the most basic and broadly established norms, values and laws of human society. They are transgressive in the most extreme and shocking forms, in ways that exceed the claims of strong or 'total' cultural relativism. That is, such events horrify and terrorise beyond the particularities of cultural environment. I do not claim they are therefore 'absolutes', beyond all cultural difference. This is not a sustainable position; rather, methodologically I will be guided by what can be termed cultural 'relationism', not extreme cultural relativism. Secondly these events are excessive in the degree of cultural trauma and panic they provoke. They generate intense media speculation, sometimes global interest much of it prurient and unhelpful. The events listed above also brought about intense, and sometimes collective mourning. Thirdly, and most importantly for the present purposes, these events are excessive in their intractability, their irreducibility to the codes and formulations of rationalising procedures. In short these events seem to elude all attempts at comprehension, they are close to the status of 'cultural indecipherability'. Accounts of such events, juridical, popular and academic encounter an unbridgeable void between the contextualisation of social and environmental 'contributing' or 'triggering' factors and the sheer horror of the event. The focus of this study is the horror of such events, horror in excess of rationalising processes.

The theories of Bataille and Baudrillard are argued to possess themes and resonances which rather than attempting, unsuccessfully, to bridge this void do at least confront and affirm it. Their concepts, or more often intuitions and speculations depart, radically, from the codes of mainstream social thought. Of course this is the case with a number of contemporary thinkers. The Post-structuralist movement in general has interrogated the relations between limits and excesses, insides and outsides, identity and difference. Bataille and Baudrillard are both part of this tradition yet are marginal figures even here and are irreducible to Post-structuralism as intellectual movement.¹

I have chosen to focus on the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard for a number of related reasons. Firstly because they are specifically concerned with excess in their writings. Excess takes different forms in their theories, however it is
true that both are fascinated by limits and the remainders that lay beyond them.

Further, for both Bataille and Baudrillard these remainders are not merely residual; passively awaiting annexation by reason, rather they express crucial forms and forces that cannot be obliterated that are irreducible. In this sense then Bataille and Baudrillard think excesses, not mere remainders. They think excess by exceeding the boundaries of dominant social thought.

Secondly and closely related to the above is the specific role of death and evil as excess in the writings of Bataille and Baudrillard. Here their readings of excess display a distinctive 'social' dimension; death and evil are thought on the terrain of the social, or in Baudrillard's case the death of the social. These phenomena are situated as absolutely fundamental to social structures, organisations and relations. They are accorded especially prominent roles in the trajectories of their thought and their evaluations of modernity. Death, the horrifying nature of particular deaths and reactions to it are, of course, central to the excessive events I have listed, making their theories a highly appropriate starting point. Further while other modern thinkers have theorised death, Bataille and Baudrillard are largely unique in the particular ways they approach death, as cultural, excessive and related to forms of social organisation and modes of thought which seem forgotten, surpassed or no longer relevant to 'contemporary life'.

The thinking of evil is a major dimension of both the theories and methods of Bataille and Baudrillard and notions of 'evil' are absolutely fundamental to this thesis. Excessive events, such as the death of James Bulger, provoke widespread popular use of the term 'evil'. The judge in the Bulger case called the murder "an act of unparalleled evil and barbarity". 'Evil' was used, widely, to designate the excessiveness or horror of this event, an event so 'bad' it was 'evil'. For many 'evil' was an appropriate term because it expresses horror beyond the bounds of 'reason', an event that seemed to hark back to a 'primitive state' of savagery, something excluded from modernity but not forgotten or obliterated. By contrast academic accounts of this event argued notions of 'evil' must be jettisoned from any responsible attempt to comprehend this event. For such writers appeals to 'evil' were backward and served only to obscure the 'reality' of the event, facilitating the abdication of compassion and allowing crude moral condemnations. In both cases 'evil' was central to
interpretation of and responses to, this event, either as ultimate 'explanation' or ultimate distortion. The theories of Bataille and Baudrillard were chosen for this study because of their strong emphasis on 'evil'. For both, the existence of evil expresses the impossibility of the enlightenment project and declares the actively excessive nature of remainders rational thought is unable either to obliterates or incorporate. Yet their approaches to evil depart from theological and moral conceptualisations in significant ways which are crucial for a contemporary thinking on evil.

Thirdly, the trajectories of their theories as distinctly social can counter the individualist and medico-psychological modes of thought, which usually monopolise thinking on deviance, violence and crime. Both Bataille and Baudrillard are methodologically anti-individualist, and are culturalist, or culturally materialist rather than textualist or discursively oriented. Of course these distinctions are not hard and fast and are always problematic. These methodological issues are explored in this chapter. Both theorists approach excess through sociological and philosophical methodologies, which minimise the role of individualism, consciousness and agency. I will argue excessive events of the kind specified demand an approach that is not limited to an individualist or psychologistic register. Yet the events of concern seem in excess of both social structural 'explanatory' factors and social action paradigms, indeed sheer horror undermines both with a devastating force.

Further it seems to be modern, or better, contemporary culture in particular that suffers events of this kind. For this reason Baudrillard's texts, many of which attempt to locate the distinctive excessiveness of contemporary life, were felt to be highly appropriate to any study of this kind. I do not claim that Baudrillard merely 'updates' themes drawn from Bataille. I aim to show the important differences as well as similarities between their theoretical trajectories. This approach enables reflection on how the character of marginal social thought has shifted during the 20th century particularly in its approach to excesses, limits and remainders.

Finally these writers have been chosen in conjunction because the major themes of their texts are very closely related, sometimes overlapping, though more often distinct. Baudrillard's theory, I will argue, is often poorly understood precisely because the significance of Bataille as an influence is minimised or overlooked.
Further Bataille's material is frequently interpreted on a primarily literary level whereby his urgent relevance for social thought is obscured. By reading Bataille and Baudrillard in conjunction both of these failings are avoided and it is hoped a greater appreciation of their sociological importance can be attained. In short, it was felt there was a powerful complimentary aspect to studying the two thinkers together. These are the principal reasons why the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard were chosen for this thesis.

The Bulger case is invoked as a powerful example of contemporary horror, as excess seemingly beyond rational comprehension. This thesis does not offer a detailed reconstruction of all aspects of this case. Its concern is not with implications for social policy, the education or treatment of children, nor aspects of judicial process, policing or social work. These issues have been addressed elsewhere, for example by Sereny (1995/1998), Morrison (1997). Such issues are, in my opinion, far less difficult and demanding than a confrontation with the death-event itself, which the latter attempt but with little success. This thesis is concerned, particularly, with the seeming intractability or inexplicability of such death-events. There is nothing to suggest the murderers of James Bulger were 'mad' nor even that they had themselves suffered child abuse, which they then in some way 'mirrored'. Thomas Hamilton and Michael Ryan seemed to suffer from nothing more severe than 'poor communication skills', and 'inadequacy'. Frederick and Rosemary West were popular, enjoying the trust of many, including the local police; again there was no suggestion of mental illness or impairment. All of the above may, or may not, have watched violent films, yet psychologists remain divided as to whether this would have any impact whatsoever on their behaviours. The 'normality' of such individuals disables any discourse of abnormality offered by psychiatry or psychology, indicating the profound intractability of such cases, a near total resistance to rationalising procedures. The poverty of conventional social scientific perspectives is exposed with alarming clarity.

Existing accounts of events of extreme violence are, of course, varied. Here I will try to specify, in brief, what I consider inadequate in such theories. Many
popular accounts of excessive behaviours are, essentially, individualist or psychologistic. They make only scant and inadequate reference to wider social and cultural factors. Popularised readings of Freudian psychoanalytic themes often play a role in such work, for example Wilson and Seaman (1983, 1992). Some popular accounts of extreme violence or ‘evil’ begin to combine individual and cultural factors but fail to theorise either sufficiently, making each the supplement of the other, see Masters (1996).

Academic studies of violence that are rooted in psychoanalytic thought are also compromised by their individualist assumptions, failing to explore the social or cultural context of their objects of analysis. Further such work makes appeals to an instinctive or compulsive basis for aggression and violence. This is argued to be unsatisfactory and is criticised through readings of both Bataille and Baudrillard.

Academic accounts of violence or ‘evil’, often influenced by Holocaust studies, have generated more detailed socio-cultural or ‘contextual’ factors. For example in Staub (1989) these range from the socio-economic (the existence of poverty, competition) to the ideological (racism, propaganda). These are then coupled with psychological-individual ‘triggering’ factors, such as stress, anxiety or fear. Structural and individual, or contextual and triggering factors are combined in order to achieve greater scope and persuasiveness. The result may be no more than an abstract typology of factors lacking incisive purchase on any particular event.

Existing sociological and criminological accounts of violence fail to confront the excessiveness or extremity of certain cases with anything resembling commensurate terminology. The sociology of crime, deviance and delinquency tends to offer relatively simplistic environmental, sub-cultural and structural factors to ‘explain’ why some individuals or groups should behave in ‘deviant’ ways. These studies range from the crude to the imaginative but a major contention of this thesis is that ‘structural factors’; class, income, subculture, simply cannot ‘explain’ the excessiveness of violence involved in the contemporary death-events I have specified. Or, more pointedly, these factors do not operate significantly in the cases cited.

Contemporary criminological studies of extreme violence (Newburn & Stanko 1994, Collier 1998) invoke, repeatedly, the vague category ‘masculinity’ as
explanation for aggressive, confrontation behaviour. However the precise nature or status of masculine subjectivity is never probed sufficiently and functions as a convenient ‘ready-made’ explanatory apparatus. The changing nature and meanings attached to individuality and subjectivity must be theorised in a more sophisticated manner, and the reading of Bataille and Baudrillard that follows aims for precisely this.

Feminist accounts of extreme violence; for example, Cameron and Fraser (1987) and Cameron (1996) do focus on the intensity of violence and have theorised cultural factors, such as the role of the media, with some success. However, some feminist studies, such as the above, are restricted by their programmatic nature. The attempt to perceive events through established feminist concepts such as ‘patriarchy’, ‘masculinity’ and aggression can be reductive and indiscriminate, in some cases actually limiting or ‘containing’ the intensity of violence in stereotypical terminology.

A small number of detailed biographical and empirical studies of traumatic murder cases have appeared in recent years and there is a growing body of popular and academic literature on serial killers. Many of these provide useful background details but again are not sufficiently theoretical to grasp the intensity of the cases incisively. Sereny’s (1995, 1998) accounts of the case of Mary Bell and the murder of James Bulger are able and informative but hinge, ultimately, on the uncritical replication of standard binary themes of modern rationality. Particularly prominent in Sereny’s studies are the innocence/guilt, mad/sane and adult/child oppositions, all are treated as fixed, stable and consistent either/or categories. Much the same is true of Morrison’s (1997) study of the Bulger case. Both Sereny and Morrison accept, far too uncritically, the validity of modern rationality seeking to use it to ‘improve’ or refocus its own direction. In this way they keep violence and rationality, horror and reason, safely apart, uncontaminated by each other. Further they fail to appreciate how radically horror disables or diverts rationality.

Precisely these weaknesses are addressed by the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard. Reason and excess are not separate, they cannot be kept apart, and in fact reason generates excesses, blindspots, remainders that are crucial to its survival but cannot be thought within it. Simplistic binary oppositions slide and merge into
each other, each drawing upon the exclusion of its 'opposite' to secure its own identity. Stereotypical terms and vague appeals to 'unreason' serve to deflect and forestall more radical engagements with excess. The following reading of Bataille and Baudrillard unpicks the vague notions of 'unreason' 'irrationality' excess and utility in relation to extreme violence. It seeks to move beyond the fixity of binary oppositions, of reason and its exclusions, in order to think through the intensity and horror of extreme violence.
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

'We need a thinking that does not fall apart in the face of horror, a self-consciousness that does not steal away when it is time to explore possibility to the limit' (Bataille 1976/1991: 14).

'Every stake is symbolic. There have only ever been symbolic stakes' (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 39).

'At present we are witnessing the slow and simultaneous erosion of all the polar structures, and the movement towards a universe that is losing the very dimension of meaning. Disinvested, disenchanted, and disaffected - the end of the world as will and representation' (Baudrillard 1979/1990: 104).

A girl, aged 16, fell from favour with fellow members of her ‘gang’ after misplacing the gang leader’s coat. They decided she should be ‘taught a lesson’. The girl was kidnapped; all her body hair was cut off, including her eyebrows and pubic hair. She was tied up, blindfolded, kicked and beaten. She was imprisoned in a cupboard all night. The next day she was moved to another house, tied to an upturned bed and beaten again. She was injected with amphetamines and forced to listen to music at maximum volume through headphones for hours. After several days of laying in her own excrement she was doused with undiluted disinfectant and scrubbed until her skin was broken. Her front teeth were torn out with pliers and cigarettes were extinguished on her face. Finally she was driven to a secluded area, thrown into a thorn bush, doused with petrol and then set alight. The gang was apparently elated by these events and was heard laughing and singing. Their victim survived, raised the alarm and described what had happened. She died after four days, of 70% burns. Her ‘friends’; two men and two women, were convicted of murder.3

This section introduces Bataille's notion of the sacred, its relations to death, eroticism and sacrificial practices and Baudrillard’s notion of symbolic exchange. Baudrillard's central theoretical terms; symbolic exchange, simulation, seduction and evil are contextualised through Bataille's reading of the sacred and sacrificial. The
aim is to introduce the manner in which this thesis will, in later sections address contemporary death-events.

Events, such as that described above, seem to resist or, in fact, defeat all existing attempts at scientific, sociological or even 'rational' explanation. They expose terrifying dimensions of 'human nature' and 'contemporary life'. They demand a thinking of the excessive, a notion of excess, an abandonment of the established modes of thought that have no purchase or relevance when faced with such horror. Central to this thesis then is a new reading of excess, in particular excess in the form of extreme or 'inexplicable' violence.

The theories of Bataille and Baudrillard have been much maligned but are generally poorly understood. At the same time their texts are plundered and misrepresented, often ruthlessly, by a wide variety of thinkers. Some have claimed a bogus or superficial affinity with one or other, though it is Bataille in particular, in common with his greatest influence Nietzsche, who has suffered this fate. Baudrillard, by contrast, has certainly suffered from the mistaken subsuming of his work within the nebulous and ill-defined notion of 'postmodernism'. His somewhat polemical yet justified assaults on the orthodoxies of Foucauldianism and structural humanist feminism damaged his reputation and these relatively peripheral aspects of his work are frequently misrepresented in order to facilitate a cursory dismissal of the whole.

Baudrillard’s work has proved particularly unpopular with most proponents of Marxism and neo-Marxist structuralism (Callinicos 1989, Kellner 1989), as well as many feminists, particularly those of a socialist or humanist persuasion (Chapman and Rutherford 1988). Bataille's fate has perhaps been more complex. (Still) widely ignored in sociology, philosophy and economics where his work is highly pertinent, Bataille’s material is better known in literary and artistic circles particularly where his work on surrealism is a reference point. Until recently the fragments of work by Foucault and Derrida, dealing with Bataille, operated almost hegemonic control over its reception and contextualisation. Now however, as more and more of Bataille's writings become available to English speakers his work has undergone something of a renaissance in which the influence or constraints of Foucault and Derrida are being increasingly loosened.
There are a striking number of intersections, overlaps and similarities of formulation and intent between the thought of Bataille and that of Baudrillard. At the level of basic disposition and theoretical outlook both occupy a position of self-defined radicality. They operate strenuous assaults, diversions, subversions, even annihilations of competing theoretical formulations and constructions, drawing on a shared affinity for the philosophy of Nietzsche. The same could, of course, be said of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard and others. My contention here is that the theories of Baudrillard and Bataille offer concepts or more often insights, speculations and suggestions, that mark out a distinctiveness in relation to other strands of Post-structuralist thought, and offer a theoretical nexus, as yet unappreciated, for exploring contemporary phenomena of extreme violence and excess.

Methodologically, Baudrillard has sought in his theoretical engagements with others, 'a detournement by excess' (in Gane 1993:59). This is a diverting or hijacking of the concepts of others and the acceleration or implosion of these concepts by their being driven into excess, that is, pushed beyond their useful limits as they are normally conceived. Similarly, in the theory of Bataille, there is a marked resistance to any accumulative tendency; for example he reads Marx, Durkheim and Nietzsche against each other refusing to 'accumulate' an enhanced theoretical 'whole' from these sources. Rather Bataille insists on expenditure, loss, and the impossibility of profitable accumulation. Baudrillard's methods too, can often be seen as a potlatching of other theorists. A failure to understand these methods condemns the reader to immediate bewilderment and probable misunderstanding, particularly if they are expecting conformity to the norms of mainstream sociology. Bataille is perhaps still best known as the author of 'pornographic' novels, such as Story of the Eye (1928/1982). This fact has certainly influenced some of his more hostile critics, such as Dworkin (1981). While Baudrillard seems to have set out, deliberately, to provoke feminists, particularly in his work Seduction (1979/1990). However the only obvious effect of this strategy has been the undermining, in the eyes of radical feminists, of his reputation as a serious thinker, with Seduction becoming something of an embarrassment to Baudrillard enthusiasts. This thesis will re-appraise Baudrillard’s Seduction.
Such methods represent a clear contrast to the 'accumulative tendencies' of other contemporary theorists, for example Deleuze's accumulation of the concepts of Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson (Hardt 1993, Goodchild 1996) precisely in terms of their use-value, or Foucault and Derrida's shifting and ambivalent relationships to Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Further, contemporary university-based knowledge-production operates in precisely such an accumulative way, boasting of an 'interdisciplinary' approach whereby theories and concepts are simplified and reduced in order to form part of a smooth, homogenised stock of knowledge. Moreover, it is usually only established material, work that is of the canon that is blended with established work from other 'disciplines' to form an endless system of supplementarity. In this manner the 'margins' of thought suffer a compounded neglect, a double movement of restriction and erasure.

Baudrillard has been blatant and personal in his theoretical assaults. Baudrillard published Forget Foucault in 1977 at the height of the latter's fame and influence. Baudrillard's attitude towards Foucault was certainly not softened by the death of his rival in 1984 as Baudrillard's Cool Memories (1987/1990) made clear. Baudrillard has been even more scathing of what he has called 'feminisme merdique' (in Gane 1991a: 61) and has been deeply critical of such intellectual luminaries as Saussure, Freud, Lyotard, Deleuze, and even Bataille as we shall see. Bataille rarely used his published work as an outlet for personal and specific attacks on other thinkers though he did engage in a protracted dispute with Andre Breton, the Surrealist grandee. Bataille's writing strategy, particularly with the long theoretical work The Accursed Share (orig. 1949, 1967/1988 & 1976/1991) was to situate his concerns, somewhat immodestly, beyond those of established theoretical discourse. That is, he claimed a sort of prima facie distance or otherness, something that has not escaped his critics' notice.

Here then is a basic similarity between the two thinkers. A subversive and oppositional attitude to the personalities and institutions of formal academic debate, a determination not to contribute to the accumulation of official knowledge but rather to undermine and subvert it, even to consume it, destroy it.

Another significant bond, related to the above concerns political allegiances and commitments. Both Bataille and Baudrillard spent periods of their lives as
committed supporters of communist and socialist causes. Both abandoned such beliefs in the wake of political upheavals, Bataille after the failure of revolution in 1930's Europe followed by the rise of fascism, and Baudrillard after the failure of revolution in the late 1960's, particularly the events of May 1968. Both then followed dissident paths abandoning political affiliations. Bataille pursued the solitary and mystical, producing the important work *Inner Experience* (1954/1988) while Baudrillard traced a new metaphysics or perhaps anti-metaphysics of images, objects and 'things', a favourite noun. More conventionally minded thinkers of the Left have forgiven neither for their abandonment of political praxis and systematic anti-capitalist critique. The irony is that it is hard to imagine two thinkers more fundamentally opposed to Capital than Bataille and Baudrillard. To the extent that political formulations matter to their respective bodies of work, both must be seen as resolutely of the ultra-left. This is despite frequent criticisms, particularly concerning Baudrillard of 'aristocratic disdain' (Kellner 1989), of complicity with the aims and ideology of Capital, or of being right wing and reactionary by dint of supposed misogyny or political incorrectness.

More specifically the thought of Bataille and Baudrillard converges around their markedly similar convictions concerning the nature and consequences of the process of human civilisation from 'pre-history' to the present age. In particular both became convinced of the aberrant nature of modernity and of the continued irruption of former social forms, forces and beliefs into the present. Of course such guiding assumptions are not without difficulties and these have attracted considerable critical commentary. For both Bataille and Baudrillard make strong claims regarding social or cultural organisation, and the nature of certain historical eras. In particular it can appear that both adopt variations of the 'return of the repressed' or 'noble savage' theses: by focusing on certain, inevitable, pathologies in late modernity, and reading these through the prism of an anthropology, they can seem to idealise or over-value the distant past. It has also been suggested that they fantasise a certain notion of 'pre-capitalist' organisation. These difficult issues will receive detailed attention below.

Finally, before turning to a detailed exploration of these many and varied intersections, it is important to emphasis a general shared fascination with excess, the excessive, that which is in excess of any particular system, any particular rationality.
be it moral, religious, cultural, textual, biological, technological. This is both a fascination with excessive phenomena and the adoption of 'excessive' modes of thought, which 'exceed' the boundaries of dominant thought, in approaching excess.

By considering Bataille and Baudrillard in conjunction it is possible to go some considerable way towards a new sociological thinking that can better come to terms with the contemporary world, and specifically the extreme phenomena that will be explored below. We will seek the beginnings of an approach that does not 'fall apart in the face of horror' (1976/1991:14) as Bataille declares of established modes of enquiry, that is not characterised by the contemporary malaise Baudrillard terms “operational whitewash” (Baudrillard 1990/1993:44).

BATAILLE

"Writing this book in which I was saying that energy finally can only be wasted, I myself was using my energy, my time, working... Should I say that under these conditions I sometimes could only respond to the truth of my book and could not go on writing it?" (Bataille 1967/1988: 11)

Georges Bataille was born in 1897 at Billon in the central region of France, close to Clermont-Ferrand. While Bataille was still a child his father was blinded and half-paralysed, probably by syphilis and his mother is said to have suffered bouts of insanity. For these reasons biographical and personal details have been argued to be more pertinent, in the case of Bataille, to any consideration of intellectual development than may be the case with other thinkers. Indeed Bataille's best-known fiction, *Story of the Eye* (1928/1982), and the collection of early theoretical and fictional writings, collected and translated as *Visions of Excess* (1985), make numerous references to his past and to the influence of his parents. *Story of the Eye* includes autobiographical fragments both within the main text itself and in supporting fragments published alongside it. His witnessing of a bullfight in Madrid in 1922 while working at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Hispaniques*, in which the matador was killed after losing an eye, forms one of the central vignettes of his first novel. While the less well known novel *My Mother* (1966/1989) frequently veers uncomfortably close to autobiography. Similarly, certain of the events of *Blue of Noon* (1957/1979) parallel Bataille's own political experiences. In his fictional works
Bataille frequently adopted pseudonyms for the publication of works which have been regarded as obscene or pornographic. Lechte has noted that Bataille's writings in some sense occupy the paradoxical middle ground between "fiction and biography" (1994:97). To this distinction we must immediately add 'theory' some of it highly experimental, some close to conventional analysis. Later in life, becoming disillusioned with organised politics Bataille retired from his post of librarian at the Bibliothèque National, and presided over a number of secret societies devoted to the pursuit and enactment of excess, particularly animal and human sacrifice. It is thought the latter was never fulfilled despite a number of offers for the role of sacrificial victim because a willing 'sacrificer' or executioner could not be found. During the Nazi occupation of France, Bataille, deeply affected, pursued a solitary and mystical path, culminating in the difficult Summa Theologica texts. In fact this collection was never completed.9 Towards the end of his life Bataille turned to a reassessment of the dominant themes of his work and produced more accessible, systematic accounts of his major ideas.

It becomes clear when considering Bataille's life, that where for example Foucault and Derrida have been content to remain more or less respectable career academics professing an interest in excess, the remainder or the unthought, Bataille actively sought out these phenomena both in writing and in life. Here then is a powerful sense of materiality in Bataille's approach, one which contrasts with Derrida's minute analyses of 'textual excess', and with 'genealogical-discursive' method as it appears in some of Foucault's work.

Bataille's influence has been restricted by the tardiness of the translation of his texts and more recently from accounts of his work which tend to de-radicalise it, to over-emphasise the literary and textual dimensions at the expense of the social. Some of these tendencies can be traced to Foucault's A Preface to Transgression (Foucault 1963/1977) and to Derrida's essay From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve (Derrida 1967/1978). Bataille and Baudrillard are part of a tradition, apparent in the careers of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, of the intellectual outsider; hostile to the aims of institutional knowledge and inhabiting the outer edges or remainders of theory and reflection.
Bataille's thought should be contextualised as operating in the rift opened, unwittingly, by the drive of modern secular rationality, a void expressed in Nietzsche's death of God and the failure of reason to provide a solid and universal ground for human knowledge and social organisation. Kant and Hegel tried to annex this territory, tried to bridge this void, yet they encountered insurmountable, insuperable limits to the scope of human reason, permanent barriers to its much vaunted completion. This is the space of the Kantian noumena, of 'things-in-themselves', of the object and the limited or fragmented subject. For Kant the dream of a fixed 'moral' identity was ravaged by 'will', by radical evil, drives, energies, and intensities beyond the competence of reason or morality. This is the realm of untameable 'infinity', non-dialectical negativity, of inescapable 'biological' death, of indeterminacy, disproportion and radical uncertainty. These are in excess of utility, calculation, classification, even 'theorisation'; they are 'non' 'anti' 'in' or at least not classically 'human'. Bataille probes such territory through his notion of profitless expenditure. The importance of depense will be emphasised in the discussion of death-events below.

In mobilising their assault against modern rationality both Bataille and Baudrillard have drawn on principles that pre-date the inception of modern secular rationality. For Bataille a theorisation of the ancient and widespread practice of ritual sacrifice and more generally of the sacred and its relationship to profitless expenditure provide the basis for his assault. The crucial formulations, developed by Bataille, include above all the notion of excess dwelling within all systems. Locked onto this theoretical centerpiece are a whole range of conceptual oppositions; sacred and profane, heterogeneous and homogeneous, continuity and discontinuity, utility and inutility, verticality and horizontality. Bataille's notion of the sacred-social domain, constructed through his radicalisation of Durkheim and Mauss, performs a central role in this thesis as both a 'critique' of, or better, a 'distancing' from dominant sociological thought and as the basis of an alternative thinking, applied to contemporary death-events.

Bataille was particularly fascinated by the potlatch ceremony, an extreme form of gift exchange which was, until recently, practised by tribes of the American Northwest before being outlawed by the US government. Bataille examines this
system in the first volume of *The Accursed Share* dedicated to consumption. There has been some suggestion (Richardson 1994, Baudrillard 1976/1987) that Bataille distorts or misinterprets ethnographic data, particularly concerning Aztec sacrifice and native American potlatch, exaggerating the importance of destruction in order to provide support for his notion of the Accursed share. It is not necessary to rehearse the intricacies of this argument here since it is clear that Bataille's purpose was not to make a contribution to existing bodies of anthropological material. Rather he aimed to explode the boundaries and limitations separating various disciplines and in their place affirm a General Theory of Economics. In the preface to *The Accursed Share* Bataille introduces his work in this way. Bataille speaks of the 'frigid research of the sciences...the slumber of conventional knowledge' (1967/1988: 10-11). In their place he proposes a General or solar economics, an approach that takes into account the movement of energy across the surface of the globe without imposing any artificial limitations and restrictions. He claims this approach:

...may hold the key to all the problems posed by every discipline concerned with the movement of energy on the earth - from geophysics to political economy, by way of sociology, history and biology. Moreover, neither psychology nor, in general, philosophy can be considered free of this primary question of economy. Even what may be said of art, of literature, of poetry has an essential connection with the movement I study: that of *excess energy* (Bataille 1967/1988: 10).

Central to Bataille's notion of the Accursed share is a theory of impulsion, or better of 'effervescence', rather than Freudian 'drives', inherent within human and indeed all life in the universe. Bataille reverses the assumptions of prior economic and political theory stating, 'it is not necessity but rather its contrary, 'luxury', that presents living matter and mankind with their fundamental problems' (1967/1988: 12). This is Bataille's *General economy* the analysis of energy as it moves through all life in the universe, Bataille's asserts a "basic fact" even "law" (ibid.):

The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of
the system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically (Bataille 1967/1988: 21).

Excess energy is the accursed share, the damned or diabolical portion of energy that cannot be put to profitable use. The choice, according to Bataille, is stark and clear, it is between glory or catastrophe, and since contemporary Western societies have eliminated their rituals of non-productive expenditure and instead devote themselves to amassing wealth, we are, in Bataille's terms 'damned' to a fate of catastrophe. Excess energy must be expended and if there are no 'legitimate' means available for this to occur, 'illegitimate' ones will emerge. Bataille presents this as a political dilemma, as a fundamental choice, even suggesting socio-economic policies in the latter stages of this work, to avert the dangers of accumulation taken as an end in itself.  

BAUDRILLARD

'[I have] no background' (Baudrillard, in Gane 1993:19).

There are two animal species of intellectual: those who like fresh meat and those who prefer dead flesh. Those who prefer to tear live concepts to pieces and those who would rather enjoy the leftovers (Baudrillard 1995/1996: 71).

Baudrillard, writing some 25 years after Bataille's death, takes the catastrophe as fait accompli. Western culture has damned itself; catastrophe is now built into its destiny because 'excesses' cannot be expended. Bataille completed The Accursed Share in 1949, a time of optimism, re-structuring and belief in an improved future; Baudrillard writing at the present time has none of this optimism. Baudrillard's powerful opposition to all notions of accumulation, utility and individuality (progress, liberation and equality) forms the crucial distinction between his theory and that of the theoretical, specifically sociological mainstream. In fact catastrophe is one of the major terms in Baudrillard's later texts. Bataille's influence
here is crucial and this recognition militates against the tendency to subsume his thought within contemporary Post-structuralism in a simplified founding role.  

Though there is a remarkable degree of similarity and even complimentarity between Bataille and Baudrillard in this respect it cannot be claimed that Baudrillard is merely applying the notion of the Accursed share to the contemporary age. There is some suggestion of this, particularly in The Transparency of Evil (1990/1993:100-110) and elsewhere (Baudrillard 1987/1988:11-27). This leads us to what is possibly the most important theoretical and methodological distinction between Bataille and Baudrillard. They both oppose what might be termed a dominant order; for Baudrillard the orders of simulacra, for Bataille the order of discontinuity, against another order that in some sense is more crucial, dynamic or intense. The crucial distinction though is that for Bataille this 'other' is expressed in terms of 'real' and essential biochemical drives. Bataille's thermo-energetics of energy excess cannot be affirmed or incorporated within the modern social system. Accursed or heterological elements appear 'alien', as excesses 'outside' of or 'beyond' the systems comprehension. Baudrillard is, as we shall see, critical of this dimension of Bataille's work and presents his own vision of the symbolic as a form which is irreducible to and subversive of any notion of biochemically based drives or sacrificial 'needs'. Indeed Baudrillard attempts to show in Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976/1993) that what other theorists, Bataille amongst them, have interpreted as drives are in fact unrecognised manifestations of what he terms the symbolic.

There is little suggestion that Bataille is speaking metaphorically in his theory of General economy and the Accursed share, indeed Bataille's later writings declare a "hatred" of the metaphoric/poetic which he aligns with the metaphysics of transcendentalism in contrast to his continued privileging of immanence. In fact a markedly similar disposition regarding the poetics of metaphor is revealed in Baudrillard's later work. For Baudrillard the symbolic, the fatal and seduction are the annihilation of the possibility of metaphor which he, in a similar manner to Bataille, aligns with the fallacies of metaphysical, transcendental, and representational thought. For the purposes of this thesis then it must be assumed that Bataille's 'thermo-dynamics' is meant literally or rather materially, that is, as immanence:
Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy - wealth - without any return...solar radiation results in a superabundance of energy on the surface of the globe. (Bataille 1967/1988: 28-9).

Baudrillard reproaches Bataille for his 'solar' speculation (1978/1976) regarding this assumption as characteristic of an earlier epistemological order, though often the actual differences in theoretical and analytical trajectory are not clearly marked. An example of just how close the two theorists sometimes are is expressed in the suggestion made by Bataille in the first section of The Accursed Share that the movement of excess energy has passed into the realm of technology and the service sector economy (1967/1988: 24). This is precisely where Baudrillard locates excess within what he terms the "3rd order of simulacra". The following chapters will consider in detail the similarities and differences between the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard. I will try to indicate how and why they differ in approach and address the sources and results of these differences.

A central contention here is that the writings of Bataille and Baudrillard cannot be subsumed adequately within the general trends of contemporary sociological and philosophical work as they are currently configured. Contemporary sociology has tried to sustain an accumulation of concepts from many sources including those from the post-structuralist movement. This attempt at subsumption, at synthesis without remainder, in order to attempt to rejuvenate established approaches is entirely alien to post-structuralist thought in general and fails to appreciate the distinctiveness of Bataille and Baudrillard in particular. In fact these thinkers can be seen as the remainder, irreducible to the organising themes of modern and contemporary thought. Their formulations, speculations and strategies cannot act as a mere supplement to conventional theoretical paradigms without serious reductionism and artificial containment. Such calculative approaches to theoretical 'profits' are rendered impossible by the approaches of Bataille and Baudrillard.

Baudrillard was born in Reims in 1929 into humble circumstances. His parents were the first of their generation to experience the shift from an exclusively
rural existence to town dwelling. Baudrillard describes his parents as civil servants and his grandparents as "peasants" (in Gane (ed.) 1993:19). He was the first member of his family to do any "studying". Here, in Baudrillard's rural background we can perhaps perceive a source of oppositional thinking, of being an outsider. Unlike the vast majority of prime movers in French intellectual life Baudrillard was not a product of the highly elitist academic system. Where Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida all gained the patronage of the elite École Normale Supérieure, Baudrillard was destined to remain the outsider. Taking up the story of his intellectual development he says:

I didn't get into the École Normale Supérieure. I took the agregation but I didn't succeed. So I didn't become an agège either. I got into the university in the 1960's but by an indirect route. In short, as far as the normal stages of a career are concerned, I've always missed them, including the fact I was never a professor (in Gane (ed.) 1993:19).

Initially Baudrillard worked in a department of German literature and became a successful translator, and then he taught sociology at Nanterre University, Paris, for about ten years before finally abandoning the university system altogether. Baudrillard's literary and Germanist background is one of the most seriously overlooked influences on his intellectual development as Gane (1991a) has argued. The influence of Durkheim and Mauss has received more attention though little detailed analysis, and the influence of Bataille has been scarcely touched upon. Most frequently amongst English-speaking critics Baudrillard is treated as if his work were created ex nihilo - or rather out of his own personal prejudices. Of course this view facilitates cursory dismissal, the suppression or reductio ad absurdum of his more threatening assertions and more generally his imprisonment within the poorly defined concept of 'Postmodernism' such that his work can then be embraced or rejected according to the writer's specific attitude towards this notion. Baudrillard is in fact a leading anti-postmodernist, something that still goes largely unrecognised. It is supremely ironic that as supposedly neo-Marxist theorists slip further and further into the quagmire of Postmodernism in order to rejuvenate their decrepit worldview,
Baudrillard himself remains resolutely opposed to those phenomena of contemporary culture indicative of a 'Postmodern condition'.

Bataille's startling and immensely suggestive notion of *la part maudite*, the accursed share, has had a crucial and continuing impact on Baudrillard's thought. The thesis aims to express the radical nature of Bataille's thought while drawing it into the sphere of Baudrillard's vision where it may be allowed a space to develop contemporary insights. The principal notions developed by Baudrillard that concern us here are, first and most importantly, *symbolic exchange*. This, I will argue, is the basis of Baudrillard's antagonistic approach. The terms and concepts he develops later; seduction, fatal strategies, and the principle of evil will be seen as successive refinements, reiterations and mutations within the notion of the symbolic and its changing relations to the semiotic, the orders of the sign.

I shall address, briefly, commonplace rejections of Baudrillard's thought in Anglo-American sociology, in feminism and in some Post-structuralist thought, in particular the critique levelled by Lyotard. Many criticisms of Baudrillard are ill founded. Specifically that what has been termed his 'postmodernist nihilism', even fascism, or "aristocratic disdain", and equally charges of misogyny and anti-feminism are more accurately components of an anti-humanist method of thought, also found in the philosophy of Nietzsche, Bataille and others. These well justified attacks on the dominant philosophical traditions of humanism; idealism and anthropocentrism are, in turn developed in a highly idiosyncratic manner by Baudrillard.

According to Baudrillard the systems of reason: the balances, ratios, laws and limitations that have operated since the enlightenment are now breaking down under their own enormous weight, through self-exhaustion. Further Baudrillard specifies an ineradicable principle of disobedience, antagonism, irony or reversibility which, he reads as fundamentally characteristic of the relations between human reason and "the world". Reason then has become excessive, uncontrolled, over-reaching any plausible definition through utilitarian, moral or even rational categories.

For Baudrillard the fundamental stakes, of theory and of society, have never concerned 'the real' (the subject's production of capital, desire, or technology) but are
symbolic; rooted in the illusion, enchantment and 'evil' of the object. As far as a
'critique' of capital is concerned, according to Baudrillard capital only ever 'played' at
production, its domination, fundamentally, was through a manipulation of the
symbolic. The symbolic then is not 'outside' the system as such but exists in a
"double spiral" (Baudrillard in Gane (ed.) 1993: 201) with the semiotic orders.
Excess for Baudrillard, particularly in his later thought, dwells within the system, in
its antagonisms, its catastrophic development, and its sudden reversals.

SACRED AND SYMBOLIC ORDERS

'In an entirely profane world nothing would be left but the animal mechanism' (Bataille

"The real" is merely an effect brought about by the ordered disjunction between the two
key terms, in the first instance the separation of life and death and then the succeeding separations
given above, the 'reality principle', with its normative and repressive implications, is only a
generalisation of this disjunctive code to all levels' (Baudrillard 1976/1993:130).

A common aspect of Bataille and Baudrillard's stance towards modernity
and the theoretical structures developed for its self-analysis, is the way both thinkers,
undoubtedly influenced by Nietzsche, adopt a theoretical time-scale that reaches far
beyond the parochial concerns of Western capitalism. Each attempts a radical
reading of the 'pre-modern', the 'primitive' or 'pre-historic',\(^{14}\) for Bataille this is
encapsulated in the notion of the **sacred** and for Baudrillard in the principle of the
symbolic. Such theoretical manoeuvres, though certainly not without difficulties,
facilitate a powerful suspension of commonplace assumptions concerning the nature
of human and social progress. The time-scale constructed by modern thought,
counting down to the birth of Christ and then adding the years after this anchoring
point not only divides ancient from modern civilisation, for the West, but also
domesticates and makes manageable the enormous geological time-scales involved
in life on earth. Most philosophical thought takes Athenian society as its
foundational point, the inception of its history, while sociology, as a product of
modernity, rarely ventures outside the zone of its self-creation. Both Bataille and
Baudrillard seek to explode these heuristic boundary markers. Their shared 'anthropology' derives from a common familiarity with the socio-anthropology of Durkheim, Mauss and Weber, and in Bataille's case owes much to the College of Sociology project, particularly work by Caillois and Leiris. Neither Bataille nor Baudrillard aimed at a comprehensive survey of ethnographic data but exploit a general familiarity in order to expound their own particular concerns. Such material and the use it is put can, of course, be contested.

Bataille's published work demonstrates a profound fascination with the earliest 'social' experience. In 1955 he produced Lascaux or the Birth of Art a finely crafted and richly illustrated exploration of the prehistoric caves at Lascaux, and in his final years he published The Tears of Eros, another highly illustrated piece on the manifestations of excess from pre-history to modernity. Similar concerns were also explicit in many of the papers completed under the banner of the College of Sociology in the late 1930's and in his central theoretical text The Accursed Share. According to Bataille the modern world:

...cannot be loved to the point of death, in the same way that a man loves a woman, [and] represents only self-interest and the obligation to work. If it is compared to worlds gone by, it is hideous, and appears as the most failed of all (Bataille 1995:14).

This point is fundamental to Bataille's thinking as it relates to contemporary sociological issues. Bataille's pursues a mode of oppositional thinking that is bold and sustained but not unproblematic.

Bataille draws on the Kojevean reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind which was highly influential to a whole generation of French intellectuals in the 1930's including Bataille, Sartre, Lacan, Barthes, Althusser and others. According to the Hegelian/Kojevian anthropology the human is torn from nature and separated from others of its kind, it dwells in a world of objects which it must order and utilise in order to compete against other creatures and opposing groups of its own kind. The human becomes bound into a logic of increasing rational calculation, a world of causality, duration and exteriority.
Bataille's proximity to this Hegelian anthropology, and to the Kantian focus on the nature of the limit is both dangerous and inevitable, threatening to contain his thought within enlightenment structures yet also providing the tensions that provoke Bataille's oppositional thinking. It has been asserted that Bataille owes too much to the Hegelian system of dialectics and is 'imprisoned' within it. Others contend his central notions, the sacred, radical negativity and inner (or limit) experience operate by failing to allow the dialectic to do its work. Such readings aim to restrict the scope of Bataille's importance for contemporary thought. This is the attitude expressed by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1984:4), yet it is clear that Deleuze and Guattari also make large claims about the nature of 'savage' society in relation to contemporary life (1972/1984:139-271). It may well be that all contemporary thought must take up a relation of some kind to Hegelian dialectics, if only to show something of its inadequacies.\textsuperscript{15}

Bataille's deployment of the notion of the sacred is not merely historicist. The sacred is not presented as a fixed structure or functional principle of 'primitive' or 'savage' society. The sacred is not said to be the 'reality' of early social organisation, a 'reality' subsequently forgotten or repressed. For Bataille, the sacred constitutes a permanent and ineffable feature of the human relation to mortality, collectivity and intimacy. It is manifest in changing forms; its lines are drawn, erased or reconstituted; yet it is as fundamental to the human condition as life and death. This thesis will argue that Bataille's thinking on the sacred and death, and their relation to subjectivity and individuality, is highly pertinent to an alternative reading of contemporary violence. Bataille insists on the fundamental 'need' for sacrificial violence, destruction and expenditure, a need rooted in the superabundance of energy excess.

For Bataille the human is not a creature of discipline, order and proportion but fundamentally, a being of pure, burning energy, alienated and impoverished by a world of rational calculation. Philosophical constructs such as the Cartesian \textit{Cogito}, Kant's \textit{Transcendental Ego}, Hegel's \textit{Geist} are seen as artefacts of the processes of the rationalisation and restriction of energies. These constructs deny and efface Bataille's fundamental assertion: all life exists in excess of its utilisable energy requirements, the "superabundance of biochemical energy" (1967/1988:27)
perpetuating the human and animal worlds. This ‘superabundance’ must be expended, wasted, and this occurs either “gloriously” in collective ceremony, in religious monuments, in sumptuary rituals, or catastrophically in war, death and extreme violence.

For Bataille being is ravaged to its very core by a compulsion towards eroticism, violence, sacrifice and death; this is the nature of depense, profitless expenditure. The tumult of sexuality, particularly the moment of orgasm, is for Bataille, the ultimate model, as well as 'real' instance of the expenditure of excess energy. He draws out this conviction in two later theoretical works, The Tears of Eros (1961/1982) and Eroticism (1957/1986), as well as The Accursed Share, and fictional pieces. It is crucial to emphasise that although eroticism as a model of 'excess' is central to Bataille's approach it is always thought in relation to the sacred, transgression and (a)theology; the radical absence of God. Bataille is not merely a 'philosopher of the erotic' but a systematic sociological and historical thinker.

For Bataille the sacred is created by the movement from the lost order of continuity to discontinuity, here death occurs in isolation from 'nature'. Rituals and practices emerge to regulate the new order, particularly to inscribe death as a social form. Death must be managed, 'humanised', this occurs through funeral and mourning rites. Death is brought within the codes and practices of human society but can never again be part of the natural "immanence" of all life as in the order of continuity. For Bataille the sacred demands designated processes where the lost sense of continuity can be briefly restored, in collective social rituals which represent the most intense and exalted moments of community life. Only later the sacred is reduced and enervated, transformed into spiritualised and transcendent religious systems.

One of the remarkable methodological features of Bataille's engagements with death, eroticism and violence, is that his studies span the literary and autobiographical, the sociological and even the scientific. There is a vast difference in style, intent and methodology separating early works of erotic fiction and, for example, the late study [The Tears of Eros], which presents a chronological reading of excess from pre-history to modernity. The common theme is that depense demands violence, destructiveness, the breaking of structures that govern productive,
utilitarian life. Sacrifice had been the social mechanism of violence, but modernity lacks such ritual forms. However, eroticism between individuals, according to Bataille, still bears a trace of the sacrificial form, resulting in the dissolution of self-identity and reason. An indelible mark of violence characterises all human individuals, and the ‘inevitability’ of violence is crucial to the following discussion of contemporary death-events.

Bataille argues in Guilty (1961/1988) that the exercise of rational thought enables the experience of its limit point, of its ultimate futility. In this way thought offers up ‘the brief possibility of a leap beyond those limits’ (1988:72). Just as the anguish of the foreboding of death facilitates the ‘impossible’ plunge beyond subjectivity into excess (nothingness, sovereignty, horror, madness, and ecstasy). Bataille then should not be read as a naive celebrant of irrationalism or nihilism, denying all meaning:

The ultimate development of knowledge is questioning. We can't endlessly defer to answers...to knowledge...and knowledge finally opens a void. At the summit of knowledge, knowledge stops. I yield, and everything's vertigo...Questioning is a feature of isolated being. Lucidity - and a radiance that shines through - are features of isolated being. But in the radiant shining through, in glory - this isolated being denies itself as isolated being (Bataille 1988:89&104).

Methodologically then Bataille uses, or exploits ‘reason’, ‘project’ ‘accumulation’, not as ends in themselves, but as tools to subvert, radicalise and suspend rational thought. This is, of course, a difficult and paradoxical method, one which lacks all certainty and closure, but which affirms these features as crucial to thinking itself. Rationality then is a containment of thought, a restricted operation of thinking, a necessary and unavoidable tool but emphatically not the ‘highest’ form of thought. Bataille, drawing on the imagery developed by Nietzsche, sought a “summit” of lucidity beyond the contours of “servile” thought. A “sovereign” thinking of the limit, a limit-experience.16

Bataille’s theoretical positions, particularly as they impact upon sociology, are of course, far from straightforward or unproblematic. While his fictional works and the inward-reflections of the Summa Athelogica collection offer powerful

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literary experiences, it is also clear Bataille aimed to produce rigorous and original sociological studies. Often commentaries on Bataille ignore or minimise the latter in order to celebrate a certain 'purity' or singularity of vision; a passion or nihilism that has surpassed the bounds of all conventional academic enquiry (Shaviro 1990, Land 1992). In fact Bataille's theoretical manoeuvres are far more interesting than these readings would suggest. Bataille's approach is certainly transgressive of academic boundaries and conventions, but transgression does not imply either surpassing or critique, both of which remain forms of dialectical negation. Transgression explores the limit, both requiring its presence and exploiting that presence in order to 'shake' or, in sociological language, problematize it. Transgression probes limits, breaks them and sets them aside yet it does this in order to return from the limit, to animate, bring to life, or rejuvenate what lies this side of the limit, through a confrontation with what lay beyond it, yet is fundamental to its survival. Bataille's evident admiration for religious heretics, for saints and other 'extremists' (Bataille 1957/1986:221-251), for the victims of torture and dismemberment (Bataille 1961/1989) should be read in this context, and is clearly central to his approach to the sacred.

A further area of difficulty resides in Bataille's abundant use of dualisms or polar oppositions; sacred and profane, continuity and discontinuity, and general and restricted economy being the most important. These pairings can suggest absolutist divisions and hence abstraction, limitation and localisation even where Bataille clearly aims to undo such boundaries, to explode such limitations. Baudrillard has, in fact, drawn attention to these methodological issues (Baudrillard 1976/1993:154-158), and these are discussed in detail in chapter two.

Bataille then did not seek to destroy, or even deny the relevance of sociology, history, anthropology or economics. His approach was to cross their boundaries, running one into another, stretching and expanding their restricted economies, confronting them with the principle of General economy. Bataille's conception of General economy dependent as it is on solar or bio-chemical foundations must be taken seriously, that is as possessing a literal and material force. Bataille developed the notion of solar economics in conjunction with the nuclear physicist Georges Ambrosino, but the question of whether it is satisfactory to
contemporary physicists is of only marginal interest and cannot be pursued here. What is at stake is how and to what extent Bataille's theories offer, provoke or demand a re-thinking of contemporary death-events, which appear at present beyond the scope of sociological, psychological or criminological discourse.

THE GENEALOGY OF THE SYMBOLIC

'The symbolic is neither a concept, an agency, a category, nor a 'structure', but an act of exchange and a social relation which puts an end to the real, which resolves the real, and, at the same time, puts an end to the opposition between the real and the imaginary' (Baudrillard 1976/1993:133).

Baudrillard's thought offers a sustained reading of the relations between symbolic orders of the past and simulational orders of the modern period. The symbolic order, for Baudrillard, preceded the introduction of utility or use-value as dominant principle or guiding cultural imperative. Within the symbolic order utility was restricted, strictly, to what was necessary for daily subsistence. The notion of 'use', such as it existed at all, was demarcated, sharply, from symbolic rituals and ceremonies, which comprised the most exalted and truly 'social' occasions. Such cultures were defined by ritual practices, by ceremonial splendour, by luxuries, not the demands of economic behaviour. Bataille terms these forms "sovereign" expenditure: architectural grandeur, military might, ceremonial excesses.

Clearly vestigial forms of ceremonial and ritual expenditure are apparent in contemporary life, for example in occasions of over-indulgence and wastage, in seasonal gift giving, in residual monarchic structures and ceremonial rites of passage, such as graduation. Baudrillard's contention is not merely that vestiges of the symbolic are able to endure in modernity but rather that the principle of the symbolic takes on new, displaced, sometimes virulent forms. For Baudrillard symbolic exchange cannot be erased or obliterated, and returns to undermine contemporary cultural systems which, by these failed exclusions become highly vulnerable to the re-emergence of symbolic principles in forms it cannot manage or comprehend. This point relates specifically to contemporary death-events since these can be read as eruptions of the symbolic in displaced, de-ritualised and radically individualised forms. This line of argument is developed below.
Baudrillard began to develop the notion of symbolic exchange in his third major work *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972/1981), which also marked his departure from structural (neo) Marxism. He sought a new principle of radical contestation to counter modern capitalist social and political organisation. In common with a number of French intellectuals; Foucault, Deleuze and Lyotard, Baudrillard no longer believed that any form of dialectical critique, internal to the historical order of capitalism, could be sufficiently distanced and radical to comprehend its logic, let alone to displace or overcome it.

Before expanding on Baudrillard's theme of the symbolic it is worth noting the rejection of it delivered by Lyotard in his *Libidinal Economy* (1974/1993). Lyotard claims to be at once 'very close and very far from what Baudrillard is doing' (Lyotard 1974/1993:104). While the two thinkers share the goal to 'destroy the bastions of alleged economic rationality', Lyotard argues Baudrillard is still caught up in the use of theory and critique to obtain 'the true':

...he [Baudrillard] does not see that the whole problematic of the gift, of symbolic exchange, such as he receives it from Mauss, with or without the additions and diversions of Bataille, Caillois, Lacan, belongs in its entirety to Western racism and imperialism - that it is still ethnology's good savage, slightly libidinized, which he inherits with the concept? (Lyotard 1974/1993:106).

By contrast Lyotard argues there is not, and can never be, a "subversive region", a privileged place accessible by "hypothesis, theory or critique", that can be re-introduced into capital in order to destroy it. Here he argues Baudrillard is too close to Marx, whom he critiques in order to surpass, while Lyotard aims to refuse the very form 'critique':

...we do not want to fall into the trap set by this rationality at the same moment that it is vanquished. This trap consists quite simply in responding to the demand of the vanquished theory, and this demand is: put something in my place. The important thing is this place, however, not the contents of the theory. It is the place of theory that must be vanquished...It makes little difference to say: there is no universal political economy, if we add: the truth of the social relation is the ambivalence of symbolic exchange, this
alone gives rights to the erotic and lethal force of desire (Lyonard 1974/1993:105-6).

Lyonard insists 'desire underlies capitalism too', this point, he indicates, is recognised by Baudrillard but not pursued to its full extent. Baudrillard's problems, according to Lyonard, stem from his failure to read political economy as itself libidinal, while the symbolic is the 'phantasy of an externalized region where desire would be sheltered from every treacherous transcription into production, labour and the law of value. The phantasy of a non-alienated region' (1974/1993:107).

Lyonard's appraisal is perspicacious though somewhat overstated. Generally speaking it is a sound and instructive reading of Baudrillard's earliest and least developed presentation of the symbolic. Baudrillard, in his haste to condemn economic rationality, was incautious in his affirmation of the symbolic, which at this stage was closely identified with a historical 'place', a 'truth', a "subversive region", as Lyonard calls it, a delimited theoretical space occupied by the 'truth' of primitive societies. While traces of the 'noble savage' thesis linger in Baudrillard's work, right up to the present, this is also the case with many other radical thinkers, including Bataille, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and even Lyonard himself in his celebrations of paganism. It could well be that a certain 'idealisation' is an unavoidable parameter of genealogical critique since no 'materiality' can be said to exist outside of discursive formations, yet all discursive formations contain traces of instability, incompleteness or 'excess'. For this reason any attempt to think these excesses or aporias must encounter idealism of some kind. Idealism may well be an unavoidable dimension of all thought and systems. However theories which attempt to deny or efface their own idealism will be less satisfactory than those which admit or affirm them. Further thought which aims to be neither genealogical nor 'critique' encounters grave difficulties. Psychoanalytic thought is certainly a case in point. Here the space of 'truth' is replaced by claims concerning innate drives, desires or phantasies and their fundamental determining influence on human and social events. Resulting arguments often appear crude, partial and above all rather indiscriminate or indistinct. This thesis will not offer a thorough evaluation of psychoanalysis, these
are already available, but will pursue the arguments of certain figures, namely Lyotard and Zizek, as their work intersects with the present concerns.

Lyotard's piece on Baudrillard is interesting since despite repeatedly denouncing critique as an intellectual tool, he nevertheless admits resorting to a critique of Baudrillard, and for that matter of Marx. Again this suggests the inevitability of producing 'critique' of some kind. Moreover Lyotard's emphasis on libidinal economy seems to move dangerously close to a foundationalism of drives or desires, much the same point as he makes against Baudrillard's use of the symbolic. Since some gesture of this kind is exceptionally hard to avoid, if only as strategic device rather than 'fixed' principle, what is more interesting here are some of the wider implications of Lyotard's approach. Referring to Baudrillard's symbolic, Lyotard emphasises, repeatedly, that 'desire underlies capitalism too', that 'every political economy is libidinal', that capitalism is also a primitive society, or: the primitive society is also capitalism.' (Lyotard 1974/1993:107-9, emphasis in orig.). However this point does not reveal a flaw in Baudrillard's thinking, actually it points to crucial, yet rarely explored, aspects of his thought. In fact Baudrillard affirms Lyotard's point, the mechanisms and flows of desire are indeed central to capitalism, not only as social form, but also to the theoretical attempts at self-understanding which it produces.

While 'intensities' are indeed characteristic of all human gatherings; 'primitive', 'archaic', 'modern', it is crucial to be able to offer some means of differentiating between forms or manifestations of 'intensity'. To merely affirm intensity in general is to leave too much silent. Ultimately Lyotard is forced to make just such differentiations, as is Deleuze in Anti-Oedipus (1972/1984). In Deleuze's thought these differentiations take the form of the twin notions, active and reactive, which more or less correspond to the terms general (unrestricted) and restricted and by implication positive and negative or even 'good' and 'bad'.

According to Baudrillard, Lyotard is insufficiently discriminating here, his thought is too embedded within the wider structures and assumptions naturalised by capitalism to distinguish different manifestations of intensity. As a result Lyotard replicates the modern capitalist notion of desire in his own work. Baudrillard responds, indirectly, to Lyotard's appraisal in Symbolic Exchange and Death.
(1976/1993) and in *Seduction* (1979/1990). He argues it is vital to distinguish between 'intensities' unfolding within the symbolic: ceremonial, enchanted or mythic forms, and those 'intensities' occurring within the largely disenchanted, demythologized, 'real' of modern capitalism. Nor are the distinctions between symbolic and semiotic confined to claims concerning the 'truth' of particular historical epochs. Baudrillard regards 'history' as a discursive technique characteristic of the modern, disenchanted period, as such it can have no objective mastery over that which lay outside its zone of self-construction. The main terms that Baudrillard deploys to denote this shifting and paradoxical relation began with the symbolic and the economic. Later the 'economic' sphere was defined through the sign, as semiotic (or simulational), but these terms have now, largely, been superseded. The symbolic was, indeed, too closely associated with the structures of pre-capitalist societies in contrast with the semiotic systems of modernity. While this historical relation is itself extremely important, recently Baudrillard has distanced himself, increasingly, from its use arguing that it has become bound up in nostalgia; both for the idea of the 'primitive' social group and, amongst his readers, for the more explicitly sociological dimensions of his earlier works.

*Fatal Strategies* (Baudrillard 1983/1990) reformulates this antagonistic relation less socio-historically yet more metaphysically through the terms banal, ironic and fatal. At this stage Baudrillard departs from the genealogical method as established by Foucault. For Baudrillard such methods remain too rationalist and subjectivist, unable to account for the "singularity" of extreme events. The conditions of modern, rational thought are traced in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and related to the erosion of symbolic ritual and the construction of disenchanted relations of referentiality that characterise the modern sign-form. However the acceleration of the sign in contemporary simulation and virtual technologies render the Foucauldian method inadequate (Baudrillard 1983/1990:181-191, 1987/1988:11-27&97-104).

*Fatal Strategies* specifies something of the acceleration of the semiotic and technological beyond the bounds of subjective reason into objective irony, and through the notion of the fatal he challenges thought and theory to respond in kind by transgressing its own limits. At this stage Baudrillard begins to approach the
principle of a primeval antagonism in terms of evil. This is not 'moral' evil fixed in relation to the (subjective) good but a principle of objective or 'objectal' disobedience, exceeding any duality with the good and operating through the reversal or involution of those very systems of the (attempted) technological and scientific mastery of the object. Evil for Baudrillard is manifest in and through transparency, evil resides in the "transparition" of objects. This aspect of Baudrillard's is central to my reading of seduction and contemporary death-events developed below.

Baudrillard opposes "fatal theory", the only true fatal strategy, to banal theory. Banal theory, encompassing the enlightenment tradition and much contemporary thought, assumes the mastery of the object by the subject. Fatal theory, the theory of Baudrillard, on the contrary, never assumes the inertia, accessibility or complicity of the object but stresses the objects ironic, seductive superiority over the subject. The object is what drives events, what provokes and fascinates.

After Baudrillard's formal rejection of academic Marxist analysis he returned to address the symbolic as a principle irreducible to theories of libidinal desire emerging in the work of Lyotard and Deleuze. Baudrillard's most important text Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976/1993, hereafter S. E. D.) greatly expanded the theorisation of the symbolic and wrested it from some of the justified critical points made by Lyotard. In the preface to this work Baudrillard presents a powerful vision of symbolic exchange, once the very organising principle of society, now suppressed but never obliterated by modern social organisation:

...this radical utopia is slowly beginning to intrude at every level of contemporary society; this intoxicating revolt no longer has anything to do with the laws of history, nor even...with the liberation of desire...This form [the Symbolic] is equally dismissive of political and libidinal economy, outlining instead a beyond of value, a beyond of the law, a beyond of repression and a beyond of the Unconscious. (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 1).

Baudrillard's contends that other theorists have ignored, effaced or failed to appreciate the radicality of the symbolic. He suggests Mauss, Freud, Saussure and also Bataille do, to varying degrees, provide possible glimpses of this world if their thought is sufficiently radicalised, or "turned against itself". For Baudrillard the
symbolic is not conceived as mystical or even sacred, but is rather the "primal illusion" of "the world". It is not a 'reality' that can be comprehended in scientific or orthodox theoretical terms, not the 'real' but, for Baudrillard, the simulacrum, illusion - the changing systems of images and signs that mask the fact that there is no fundamental or base 'reality'. Here, in particular, the influence of Manichaeism can be detected in Baudrillard, something he makes explicit (in Gane (ed.) 1993: 139-140, 1997/1998: 46). For Baudrillard there is no essential final 'real', no deep or hidden 'reality' anterior to the symbolic; rather the illusions and enchantments of the symbolic order are, for Baudrillard, the fundamental relations of sociality. The symbolic is not a structure or social institution, nor is it reducible to any recognisable system of exchange. The symbolic is neither the fundamental 'order of things' nor the fundamental disorder of things (the level he takes Foucault and Deleuze to be operating on), rather it is the seduction of the order of things. It is fate and destiny, the roll of the dice, and it is manifest most particularly, for Baudrillard, in the principle of reversibility. Reversibility is presented as the 'radical other' of rationalist thought it infects, threatens and undermines all rational systems, structures and organisations:

...reversibility, cyclical reversal and annullment put an end to the linearity of time, language, economic exchange, accumulation and power. Hence the reversibility of the gift in the counter-gift, the reversibility of exchange in the sacrifice, the reversibility of time in the cycle, the reversibility of production in destruction, the reversibility of life in death, and the reversibility of every term and value of the langue in the anagram (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 2).

The theorisation of the symbolic marks Baudrillard's thought, of this period especially, as distinctively social. The principles of the symbolic; reversibility, reciprocity are principles of social, collective existence and the effervescence generated therein. There is no mystical, religious or otherworldly dimension here, no reliance on Taoist or Zen philosophy. In modernity the cyclical movements of the symbolic are ruptured, separated or re-articulated along economic lines and Baudrillard develops terminology to think through these new relations.
At this point we begin to appreciate the complimentary and partly analogous approaches of Bataille and Baudrillard. Baudrillard's continued references to the Accursed share (Baudrillard 1990/1993:106-110,1997/1998:26-28) demands recognition of Bataille's influence. This enables an approach better equipped to confront instances of extreme violence and horror, suspending enlightenment and rationalist assumptions and focusing attention on *excesses* that cannot be assimilated by progressive or "servile" thought. I will approach contemporary death-events as excess, 'inexplicabilities' beyond the competence of rational thought as it is usually conceived. Bataille's sacred and Baudrillard's symbolic are notions which seek to express distinctive forms and forces that should not be reduced to the general category 'unreason', as if they represented merely the absence of reason. The sacred and the symbolic are crucial features generated by collective existence but, in modernity, [tend to be marginalised or excluded] appearing residual and 'irrational'. However these principles remain, they are necessary for the security and maintenance of modern rationality which, lacking its own foundations, must be able to draw upon 'other' forms to maintain its appearance of legitimacy. In fact modern power, Baudrillard contends, is actually achieved through symbolic strategies — or rather the imposition of an order where symbolic reversibility is rendered impossible (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 6-49). Further the principles of the sacred and the symbolic, though quite distinct in the theorisations of Bataille and Baudrillard, both insist on the centrality of death, violence, and sacrificial expenditure. This is why these formulations are particularly suggestive for a reading of contemporary death-events.

It would be mistaken to claim any identity or synonymity between Bataille's sacred and Baudrillard's symbolic, or their thought more generally conceived. Baudrillard is not interested in any originary state of animality, anything analogous to Bataille's "continuity" or "intimacy" indeed he would probably reproach Bataille for such speculations concerning ultimate origins, despite moving dangerously close to this himself. Baudrillard has stated explicitly that his notion of the symbolic is not identical with the sacred as such (Baudrillard 1987:94). The key point, for Baudrillard, is that there is no continuity, no fusion with or absolute immersion in nature, and if there ever was it can be of little interest today, there is no gateway to
"continuity", provided by the sacred. For Baudrillard 'the sacred' was perhaps one
form or expression of the symbolic that has now eroded and been replaced by other
cultural forms in a Western world devoid of any but the most residual understanding
of the sacred. Further, for both Bataille and Baudrillard this 'condition' represents a
catastrophic danger for modern social systems.

The sacred and the symbolic bear a strikingly similar relationship to
language, self-identity and the metaphysics of rationality, individuality, utility and
accumulation. They occupy positions of radical antagonism to these forms, they
cannot be comprehended by them, rather they irrupt, subvert and terrorise rationality
with all the force of the unknown. Both the sacred and the symbolic are in a sense
non-linguistic, non-discursive and asemiotic; they express "sensual awareness"
(Bataille 1990:21) dissolving subjective identity, and moral agency, rendering
'mastery' impossible. For Bataille human consciousness, language and discursivity
are bound to a logic of the debasement of sovereignty and the ever-increasing
enslavement of the human spirit. Human intellect (discursive thought) 'developed as
functions of servile labour' (Bataille 1990:25) from the moment the positing of the
first objects, tools, broke continuity. For Bataille sacred or ritualistic words resonate
with something of this 'lost' sensibility, a realm before or beyond Hegelian dialectics.
Sacrifice was sovereign while it remained "uninformed by meaningful discourse"
(ibid.). In time sacrifice was transformed into a mechanism to facilitate crop growth
or the general wellbeing of the community that is subordinated to rational ends. For
Bataille the "absolute dismemberment" with which Hegel identifies 'truth' can only
be a rupture in the fabric of discourse. Baudrillard too, in his work on Saussure's
anagrams (Baudrillard 1976/1993:195-242) sought a mythic or enchanted modality
of language that is irreducible to the conventions of linguistic rationality in general
and structuralism in particular. While the symbolic itself appears, in modernity, as
an "effraction" or rupture of the discursive order, the third and fourth orders of
simulacra.

In a simple sense both Bataille's sacred and Baudrillard's symbolic are
forged around self-consciousness, or consciousness of death. The terrifying, yet for
Bataille simultaneously joyous, reality of death is central to the operation of the
sacred. According to Bataille natural phenomena and processes intimating mortality
evoke a sense of dread and horror, and must be controlled and regulated by taboo. Taboos mediate all human contact with death and related phenomena that disgust and terrify. Yet Bataille also makes clear that individuals are drawn, irrevocably, to what is taboo in a fundamental relation of attraction and repulsion. On certain occasions the violation or transgression of taboo is demanded offering a glimpse of what lies beyond - continuity, intimacy, death. The fatal repulsion/attraction of death, specified by Bataille, will be central to the following reading of contemporary death-events.

Baudrillard's reading of death is perhaps more complex. For him contemporary social theories based around immanence and materialism derive from this same primary disjunction of life and death. For Baudrillard the 'real' derives solely from the "disjunction of life and death" which comes about as symbolic exchange with the dead is ruptured and lost. The symbolic operates outside and in subversion of all such disjunctive codes and binary oppositions, 'In the symbolic operation, the two terms lose their reality'. At this point Baudrillard departs most sharply from forms of well-intentioned, left/humanist Western anthropology. For Baudrillard it is mistaken to assume 'primitive' peoples 'conjured up' symbolic exchange rituals in order to cover over or mask the terrifying reality of biological death. Such assertions allow Western thinkers to claim, in however a subtle or qualified manner, modern societies possess an intellectual sophistication that is objectively valid, which has penetrated through myths and superstitions however charming, comforting or 'useful' these may be. For Baudrillard the 'biological reality' of birth and death are not absolutes, 'our idealism converges on the illusion of a biological materiality' (1976/1993:131), this supposed 'reality' is only an effect of the erosion and denial of the symbolic. As Baudrillard puts it:

...our conception of biological life and death is not the real rather it is our imaginary and it is purchased at the cost of biological irreversibility, this absurd physical destiny, life has then been lost in advance, since it is condemned to decline with the body (1976/1993:132).

Particularly important for the purpose of this thesis is the process, specified by Baudrillard, whereby death loses meaning, loses pathos, passion, and value,
becoming ridiculous or merely embarrassing. Death is tamed but only at the cost of its disarticulation from life. As a result, according to Baudrillard, the remaining fascination with death devolves onto catastrophic, accidental, suicidal or "willed" death. These deaths mark an intense symbolic challenge to the system; they are deaths that cannot be controlled, processed, concealed. They challenge the fundamental basis of power by wresting the right to manage death from the state and fixing it around the individual, around subjectivity and desire, in extreme cases violence and murder. For this reason 'responsibility' for death must be quickly and decisively apportioned. The issue of moral responsibility and extreme violence is addressed in detail in the chapters on seduction and evil.

Baudrillard's interest is, primarily, terrorist and hostage deaths and road accidents since these are "undeserved" and make the domestication of death harder to accomplish. The suicide pact or cult-death is another example of such symbolic challenges to the dominant order. Baudrillard does not dwell on murder in general. The vast majority of murders are successfully contained within the rationalising procedures of police investigation, legal inquest and, sometimes, criminal trial. Even murder can, like hospitalised death, be managed to the point of banality. However the contemporary death-events specified in the appendix to this study are irreducible to manageable forms of death. This quality distinguishes them, accounts for their notoriety, for the trauma and horror that surround them. These are catastrophic events, they undermine the claims of 'rational' economic social organisation, they mock the postures of state-sanctioned moralism, they tear apart the categories and concepts of institutional knowledge of crime, 'deviance' and violence. Rendering impossible the modern devices of death-management such events demand symbolic ritual and so a thinking on the symbolic level. Certain death events, such as the murder of James Bulger, provoke mourning that is no longer restricted to individual affectivity and becomes collective, national even global. Here death retains the intensity of sacred repulsion. Such events involve a temporary suspension of rationality. In order to maintain notions of moral responsibility and 'guilt' where actions themselves seem to suggest an absence or suspension of identity and excesses beyond the subsumption within a stable self, social institutions are pushed to the limit. Such events prompt legal authorities to abandon 'reason' and speak of...
'inexplicable' evil; the media scavenge for scraps of intelligibility situating 'blame' in any available quarter. More considered opinion is drawn to 'clues' secreted in early childhood experience, social background, peer pressure. None of these accounts has the power to convince or persuade they are unable to close the breach of 'reason' torn open by such events.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has introduced the thought of both Bataille and Baudrillard, focusing specifically on the social dimensions of their theory. The earliest, most fundamental relations of society and collective being are addressed through Bataille's notion of the sacred and Baudrillard's symbolic. These terms are not synonymous, nor can comparisons between them establish their ultimate meaning or value. Bataille's theory does not hold the 'key' to a definitive interpretation of Baudrillard's ideas. Indeed Baudrillard himself refuses to play the role of ultimate pedagogic source of his own thought as Genosko (1998:12-22) has argued. Similarly it is not possible to claim that Baudrillard draws out the 'truth' of Bataille's thought nor offers a definitive 'updating' of its characteristic themes. The chapters which follow will draw upon Bataille's and Baudrillard's thought which, though conflicting offer alternative possibilities for thinking the 'excess' of extreme violence.

This chapter has reviewed some critical appraisals their thought has attracted. Much criticism has been dismissed as of little value though Lyotard's more pertinent remarks have been addressed and more developed feminist evaluations will be considered below.

Most importantly I have begun to indicate how the notions of the sacred, death, violence and sacrificial expenditure, the symbolic, the object and reversibility, can offer a radical and incisive reading of contemporary death-events, events which elude the grasp of more conventional or established modes of thought.

This chapter has considered a number of theoretical and methodological issues that have a direct bearing upon how persuasive an account of such events that draw on Bataille and Baudrillard may be. These issues are neither 'resolved' as such, nor are they finally 'resolvable', but must remain as instabilities that will inform and
direct the following readings. Perhaps the principal theoretical assumption here is
that the contemporary order seems to have generated a new form or style of event, or
rather that new events have undermined existing explanatory systems, relocating the
meanings of excess, in relation to violence and death. This demands a re-thinking of
theory and excess in order that a more commensurate approach might be attained.
The following reading does not strive for a closed or sealed 'account' of these
events.\textsuperscript{22} It aims for a thinking which 'does not fall apart in the face of horror',
which does not shrink away from this task but which must be willing to constantly
re-examine its own assertions, recognising that the event disables thought, thought
does not 'capture' the event. Anything less would be a failure to follow through the
implications of Bataille and Baudrillard's thinking. What follows then will not be the
'true explanation' of the 'inexplicable' event, but a new and alternative means of
confronting excess, thinking horror.
NOTES

1) There are a number of published studies on Bataille that overlook or seriously underplay his sociological investigations. For example Libertson (1984) focuses primarily on the literary dimensions of Bataille's writings as does Shaviro (1990) clearly influenced by Libertson. Such material not only overlooks sociological elements, which can cause severe difficulties when attempting to come to terms with concepts like power and exchange, and the sacred, but also tends to suggest that Bataille opposed all systematic and rational thought. The implication is that Bataille could not even have contemplated producing such studies. For Land's (1992) radical interpretation of Bataille, the fact that Bataille did produce a large amount of systematic sociology becomes almost a matter of embarrassment. In reading such works whatever their other merits which are considerable, it becomes difficult to acknowledge that Bataille could have been greatly influenced by relatively mainstream sociological writers such as Durkheim, Mauss and Weber, though this was undoubtedly the case.

2) The work of Foucault will be drawn upon on occasions but is not central to this thesis. It was felt that Foucault's work had less to offer for the following reasons. Firstly, Foucault's investigations tend to be focused on the classical and modern periods, and do not consider the contemporary age as such. This is an important factor since the distinctiveness of the contemporary period is central to this thesis. Here it was felt that Baudrillard's approach had more to offer, especially as it is informed, partially, by a similar genealogical thinking. In fact it seems that Baudrillard's intention in the mid-1970's was to take up Foucauldian themes and expand or radicalise them by theorising the social exclusion of death as prior to and more essential than the exclusions treated by Foucault's studies of madness and sexuality. Baudrillard's theory seems to provide precisely what this thesis requires, a reflection on excess that is aware of Foucault's importance but which attempts to extend its scope into the contemporary age. Secondly, Foucault's own reading of Bataille, discussed below, seems to limit Bataille's thinking on excess in an unsatisfactory way. Other readings of Bataille's texts are certainly possible and the thesis aims to provide precisely this, emphasising aspects of Bataille's thinking which
are minimised by Foucault. Both Bataille and Baudrillard's irreducibility to the genealogical-discursive method will be emphasised. Specifically we aim to move beyond a sketch of the 'conditions of possibility' of contemporary excess because such approaches, even those as sophisticated as Foucault's, remain 'incommensurate' with the intensity of horror provoked by such events. See, for example, Foucault (1973/1978:199-212), see also Pawlett (1997a) for a discussion of Foucault's reading of Bataille.

3) This is a description of the murder of Suzanne Capper in Manchester in 1993. The details are taken from The Times, Saturday December 18th 1993. I would term this a contemporary death-event however the case is not discussed at length in this study since it never generated the interest, nor achieved the notoriety of the other cases. Nevertheless its horror remains absolutely excessive, almost unspeakable.

4) The term potlatch is taken, primarily, from Mauss' influential study The Gift, which will be discussed below. For Mauss' discussions of the potlatch ceremony see Mauss (1950/1990:6-7,12-13).


6) For Bataille's writings on surrealism and attitude to Breton, see Bataille (1994) The Absence of Myth - writing on surrealism, in particular the essay entitled 'The Castrated Lion'.


8) It is not the intention here to map out, in any detail, biographical or personal information. It will be sufficient to sketch, very briefly, the basic historical and political context and intellectual influences operating on both Bataille and Baudrillard. For biographical matter on Bataille see Surya (1987), Hollier (1974/1992) and Richardson (1994). On Baudrillard see Gane 1991b and 1993 (ed.).

9) This collection was to include Inner Experience, Guilty and On Nietzsche with the addition of shorter fictional pieces, in a clear reference to the vast and highly systematic Summa Theologia of St. Aquinas.


11) The difficulties involved in these assumptions are discussed in Richman (1988) and Stoekl (1985).

13) Kellner (1989,1994) and Norris (1992) make these charges. Norris' critique of Baudrillard is riddled with flaws, some of which are exposed by Merrin (1994).

14) 'It is insofar as we are human that the object exists in time, where its duration is perceptible. But the animal eaten by another exists this side of duration; it is consumed, destroyed, and this is only a disappearance in a world where nothing is posited beyond the present' (Bataille 1973/1989:18). It should be noted that this order is not 'prehistorical' in the popular sense that there is little or no reliable data of its forms and practices but rather in the philosophical sense that history, or historicity begins with Modernity and its drive to produce history (Baudrillard 1993).

15) These themes are discussed in Hardt (1993) and in Butler (1987).

16) See in particular the *Summa Theologica* collection of texts including *Inner Experience, Guilty* and *On Nietzsche* (in fact this project was never completed but was clearly intended as a collection). See also Blanchot “Affirmation and the Passion of Negative Thought” in Botting and Wilson (Eds.) (1998b: 41-58).

17) This theme re-appears, briefly, even in recent publications such as *The Perfect Crime* (1995/1996) and *Art and Artefact* (1997), however it is not, or need not be, a fundamental axis of Baudrillard's thought.


19) A crucial distinction between the approaches of Bataille and Baudrillard, and Lyotard and Deleuze is that for the latter 'unrestricted' libidinal flows are more intense, more vital. For Bataille, and even more so Baudrillard, a degree of 'restriction' actually facilitates greater intensity. This is the case with Bataille's notion of transgression and with Baudrillard's themes of the game and the rule. Further, as I will argue below, neither Bataille's eroticism nor Baudrillard's seduction is reducible to theories of 'drive' or 'libido'.

20) In fact Freud claimed that 'the aim of all life is death' influenced by Schopenhauer's earlier assertion that death is the 'true result and to that extent the purpose of life', see Freud (1991b: 311). Baudrillard's discussion of these themes is
developed below. It is important to note Baudrillard's proximity to Durkheim and Mauss concerning the primacy of 'the social' and his distanced from Freud and also Bataille in his avoidance of any conception of innate drives. The fundamental issue is not of internal drives or energies but rather of the 'social repression of death'. Baudrillard defines the unconscious, as a 'huge litigation, involving all the obligations and reciprocities that we have denounced... The unconscious is social in the sense that it is made up of all that could not be exchanged socially or symbolically' (1976/1993: 134). In Lacanian psychoanalysis the 'Father-God-Ancestor' is said to be the Law, it is absolute authority and it cannot be exchanged or reciprocated with. This assumption leads to the whole problematic of repression and liberation which for Baudrillard is a false concern. Further, Baudrillard argues the Law of the Father is a concept inextricably bonded to language, speech and subject; it is and can only be individualist. The symbolic by contrast is social and collective, and psychoanalytic concepts are, for Baudrillard, the artefact of its denial. To what extent Lyotard and Deleuze break with Freudian psychoanalysis is an important question, but is too large to pursue here.

21) For example the work of Levi-Strauss, for Baudrillard’s attitude to Levi-Strauss see Baudrillard 1976/1993:188,n 10).

22) This would be to recreate a pseudo-stable restricted economy as 'replacement' for those that have been rejected. Here, in fact, we rejoin the terrain of Lyotard's dismissal of Baudrillard. However, barring the occasional lapse, Baudrillard's thought has moved beyond that zone which Lyotard specified as restriction, limitation and closure. In fact Baudrillard's responses to this critique involve important manoeuvres which problematise Lyotard's own thinking, as well as that of other thinkers including Bataille.
CHAPTER TWO

EXCESS: UTILITY AND EXCESS

INTRODUCTION

'there are periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active...men become different. Under the influence of the general exaltation, we see the most mediocre and inoffensive bourgeois become either a hero or a butcher' (Durkheim 1912/1961:241).

This chapter examines the operations of utility and excess within, broadly speaking, the 'enlightenment tradition'. This is the current of thought from Descartes, through to Kant and Hegel, into 19th and 20th century political and social theory, and the influence it continues to exert on contemporary sociological thought. It is important to acknowledge the multiplicity of differences contained within what is loosely referred to as the 'enlightenment tradition'. Particularly important is the distance the founders of modern sociology; Marx, Durkheim and Weber sought to establish between the abstractions and idealisms of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy and their own analyses of social systems and institutions. Similarly, each of the above sought to distance themselves, to varying degrees, from explicitly Utilitarian and Social Darwinist philosophies of the latter 19th century. This chapter contends that the crucial importance within dominant philosophical and sociological traditions of the notions of utility, utilitarianism and use-value can be established as a very broadly based set of common assumptions. Further the presence of utility and utilitarianism as structuring principles of social thought undermines its ability to think events not based on calculations of utility. Inutile events, actions and processes yielding no 'profit' or gain can only appear as excess or residue. An event such as the death of James Bulger is an inutile crime of the most shocking kind; it is in excess of conventional sociological explanation. This chapter aims to locate the deficiencies in the sociological tradition and to begin to draw upon certain marginal themes which may be better able to approach excesses of this kind.
The centrality of utilitarian assumption has not been diminished, significantly, by the widespread, though partial, criticisms of explicit forms of Utilitarianism (as developed by Bentham or Mill). The specifically Benthamite doctrine of Utilitarianism itself quickly became unfashionable but as Deleuze (1962/1983:143) has remarked of Utilitarianism, dominant belief-systems of this kind only allow themselves to be apparently 'superseded' once so firmly entrenched they are able to mediate and adapt succeeding systems of thought. The persistence of the central importance of the principle of utility within dominant thought, and concomitant impoverishment and restriction of human and social potential, fuelled much of Nietzsche's critique of modern culture and, I shall argue, this motif structures a great deal of the work of Bataille and Baudrillard.

A restricted economy of useful faculties and categorical divisions forms both the ultimate foundation of morality and reason in Kantian Philosophy, while it is the very motive force of the Hegelian Aufhebung. The impact of these founding systems of enlightenment reason has of course been profound in structuring contemporary thought and life. It is often asserted that the primary or definitional focus of Post-structuralist and Postmodernist thought has been the attempted overturning of these philosophical systems while others have argued that any attempt at 'escape' from enlightenment thought is always and necessarily partial such is the scope and depth of its influence.

In the natural sciences the principle of utility received powerful, controversial and enduring expression in Darwin's Origin of Species. Marx was particularly enthusiastic about Darwinian evolutionism; which argued that physiological 'survival utilities' were the fundamental principal of all species evolution, indeed all matter. That Marx should greet Darwin's work in such a way, even requesting that he might dedicate the English edition of Das Kapital to Darwin, reveals that Marx's critique of Benthamite Utilitarianism did not in any way amount to a critique of the principle of utility, only its more individualist guises. Utility is of particular importance in the first volume of Marx's Capital where it appears as the central foundation of all human activity, potentiality and creativity, here Marx actually converts or absorbs a notion of 'expenditure' into one of use-value since useful labour is claimed as the raison d'être of human existence. This
'essentialising' or 'naturalisation' of use-value, as contrasted with the alienative Capitalist 'exchange-value', is central to Marxist sociology and has been criticised, vigorously, by both Bataille and Baudrillard as we shall examine below. The principle of utility also plays a considerable role in Durkheim's *Division of Labour in Society*, and Weber's theses regarding the proliferation of rationalisation in modern society. From these sources the concept of utility filters into many strands of contemporary sociology.

In 1824 Bentham coalesced a diversity of liberal and radicalist views current in British society into a manifesto of the principle of utility. By utility Bentham intended 'that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness...or (what comes to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered' (in Mill & Bentham 1987; Ch1: 2-3). There are many problems associated with the philosophy of Utilitarianism which cannot be addressed here, but what is immediately clear is that Bentham had no adequate means of addressing possible clashes of interest between conflictual 'parties' nor an appreciation of constraining political power in social or community collectivities. Bentham declares 'The community is a fictitious body...the community then is, what? - the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it' (1987; Ch1: 4). Durkheim and Mauss aimed to refute the liberal notion of the isolate rational ego by insisting, in a remarkable project, on the irreducibility of the social and collective to the sum of individual action. It is also worth noting here that the strict opposition or mutual-exclusivity of the concepts of pleasure and pain becomes untenable in the writings of Freud and later Bataille. Clearly the pleasure, good or 'happiness' to which Bentham and later Mill refer was, and can only be 'usual, temperate and moderate', never excessive, a notion Bentham and Mill associate with brute animality or avoid altogether.

While Marx, Durkheim and Weber, the founders of modern sociology, formed, in part, a critique of liberal, free-market and Utilitarian theory they remained, to varying degrees, bound up with the objective, or in the case of Weber the inevitability, of ever greater rationality and efficiency in human affairs. They differed, essentially, only on whether these 'forces of utility' should be owned
privately, communally or by the State (in the case of Marx). Durkheim, particularly in his anthropological writings as we shall examine below, provided a means of addressing, sociologically, the poverty or inadequacy of the principle of utility within the (General) economy of any social system.

The dominant trends of contemporary sociology display a widespread tendency to treat the principle of utility as unproblematic even unquestioned assumption, and not only within work that still aims to serve the cause of Enlightenment rationality as it is classically conceived. The corollary is that the notion of 'the excessive' is often treated as something to be reduced, contained or 'secured'. Recently, excessive phenomena have been treated in terms of the calculation of security and risk (Beck, 1992) or relatedly, as an affliction more or less peculiar to the technological and knowledge practices of Modernity (Bauman, 1989; 1991). The merit of such work is undermined by, at times, an ahistorical supposition. The important and influential sociological system of Anthony Giddens manages to elide the notion of excess altogether. By insisting on the centrality of rational meaning-creating actors in dual relationship with 'enabling' social structures, Giddens effects a prima facie expulsion of all that cannot be accorded rational meaning or purpose, that is all that could be regarded as excessive. In modern Feminism there is a division or tension between work which pursues the 'goal' of a full equalisation of human rights and which decries, far too simplistically and to the detriment of its own argument, any material that does not serve this purpose, and that which, often drawing on psychoanalytic sources, does attempt to comprehend forms of excess; violence, "evil" and death.

Some recent sociological work has viewed forms of excess as a field of potentiality that may disrupt dominant power hierarchies, this is especially true of material that is influenced by Foucault, for example Boyne (1990) and Connolly (1993). However such work tends to focus on that which is in excess of any particular framework of rationality; medico-legal, theological or patriarchal, as if these forces were merely textual, not material. Such a move tends to pre-structure and contain excess by removing it from the social world and containing it within the Idealist and transcendental realm of text often facilitating progressivist or humanist prescriptions, benefits or 'profits'. There are tensions and inconsistencies, in this
respect, both in Foucault's own work and more particularly in interpretations and applications of his thought. Some writers such as Blanchot (1990) and Erebon (1992) emphasise the passion and excess of Foucault's thought, a thinking from the 'outside' or from 'infinity'. Others, such as Rose (1990) and Ramazanoglu (1992) restrict Foucault's thought to manageable or useful chunks, seriously underestimating its shifting, open and excessive style. Finally, the currently fashionable work of Deleuze is divided along similar lines, with some writers overplaying the Deleuzian emphasis on utility, production and operationality creating, oddly, an indiscriminate or homogenised vision, flattening epistemological nuance for the sake of ontological principles. These approaches stand in contrast with both Bataille and Baudrillard's thought. Bataille refuses materialism for 'base-materialism'; Baudrillard rejects 'anti-humanist' theory and method as Idealist, both insist on expenditure, loss and radical uncertainty.

Utility must be regarded as the historical, political and economic 'reality principle' of the Western capitalist nations, conditioning or pre-structuring practically all knowledge and truth-claims, theoretical speculation and methodological design. A great deal of academic thought and university-based knowledge is little other than the search, discovery or creation of useful thought, knowledge that may be applied, developed, circulated; utilised for greater human productivity, potentiality or, increasingly, security. Governmental and private institutions provide funding for useful, balanced and ordered research proposals, while 'useless', unbalanced or disordered proposals are systematically rejected. The principle of utility is so widespread, so firmly entrenched, so taken-for-granted that it becomes almost imperceptible, invisible against the canvas of late Modern society.

The notion of Excess is much harder to explicate. Dictionary definitions offer a preliminary insight with the following, 'going beyond what is usual, proper or right; intemperance; something which exceeds...immoderate; extreme' (Chambers 1995). However Utility and Excess must not be conceived as binary oppositions, as mutually exclusive. Clearly what might be in excess of the usual, right or proper in one age may be deemed perfectly acceptable in an earlier or later one. For example, in early 20th Century Europe to have more than one sexual partner in a lifetime may have been regarded as excessive while today to restrict oneself to one partner may
seem like excessive fastidiousness. Although what is regarded as excessive is generally, implicitly or explicitly, coded negatively, the distinction between Utility and Excess cannot be seen as merely analogous to that residing between what is prescribed by behavioural norms, and what is proscribed, though this can be seen as a sub-component of the above. Excess does not merely lay beyond the commonplace, residing in territory that might be annexed or incorporated, nor is it that which is represented by political pressure groups or institutionalised oppositional organisations vying for a degree of policy change. Rather excess refers to that which is dirty, pointless, terrifying, sickening, evil, even non-existent yet still somehow palpable outside the categories and concepts of mainstream society and thought. Throughout the course of modernity it has been believed or at least hoped that ever-increasing moral and educational guidance, coupled latterly with enhanced lifestyle opportunities will in time eradicate or greatly curtail human excesses, particularly extreme violence, which is often conceived as in some sense instinctive or archaic in origin.

However in more recent years this belief-system has become increasingly fragile for an enormous diversity of reasons. It has been fractured by a number of catastrophic events, global wars, the Nazi holocaust, environmental disasters, and recent occurrences of 'inexplicable' violence and death like the murder of James Bulger and massacre in Dunblane, Scotland. As the 20th Century comes to an end, excess, rather than appearing as the marginalised or confined 'other' of rational utility and progress as it had seemed to Foucault in his study of madness, is increasingly manifest within the mainstream. It appears as cataclysm and disaster, as 'inhuman' event and paradoxically, as a means of serving supposedly rational ends, that is in machine technology; for example military defence technologies, and in the realm of scientific and medical research programmes. At times it has appeared that excess, rather than utility, has become the dynamic of contemporary social transformation, that the endless pursuit of utility has driven society into excess. To such phenomena Baudrillard is particularly attuned.
FROM RESTRICTED TO GENERAL ECONOMY - TOWARDS A
SOCIOLOGY WITHOUT RESERVE

The radical implications of the philosophies of Nietzsche and Bataille have, on numerous occasions, been drawn out in a variety of ways in disciplines as diverse as Literary and Gender theory, Theology, and Political Ethics, however specifically sociological treatments are rare. This is surprising since both employed distinctly sociological terminology to draw specifically sociological conclusions. Of particular concern here is the common ground shared by Nietzsche and Bataille in methodological disposition.

Nietzsche began the critical assault on the dominant tendencies of thought in his earliest engagements with Socratic philosophy. Unlike the founders of sociology, particularly Marx, Nietzsche was scathing of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. He opposed "Life"; the active and dynamic play of human emotion, passion and Will, to mere "Knowledge" denoting the 'reactive' that which limits, measures, serves and then judges life. It was the latter level he took Darwinian, biological and natural sciences to be operating on. Knowledge becomes the ultimate end of thought rather than being a means to facilitate human creativity. Thought and knowledge are the servants of humanity, yet in this process they restrict its diversity, then in the service of this restricted configuration of Humanity they wall it up within their image. Thought is made to 'serve' human interests, it must be utile, and its potential to volatilise political and cultural orthodoxies must be contained. For Nietzsche, 'Life' could still be seen as existing in excess of knowledge practices, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887/1994) describes the process by which the excess; passions, creativity and Will are calcified into the material from which the suppositions, concepts and metaphors of rational thought are shaped. Rationality and utility appear as selective deformations of creative Will, or as myths that have lost their binding power (Nietzsche 1887/1994: 12-13&91-92). The emergent scientific worldview views bodily excesses and instinctive impulses (lust, violence, death) as increasingly opposed to all that is deemed rational, reasonable, moderate and useful. In scientific discourse these things are the essence of error and confusion while in religion and
morality, analogously, they are related to sin and evil. The result for Nietzsche is a reactive, resentful and nihilistic culture:

Science today is a hiding place for every kind of discontent, disbelief, gnawing worm, despectio sui [contempt of self], bad conscience (1994:117).

However it would be a grave error to conclude that Nietzsche was opposed to all science, that he was the enemy of rigorous thought. Thought, he argued, must aspire once more to the sensibilities of art, poetry and above all tragedy in order that tragic fullness and "eternal suffering" are once more affirmed in human awareness. Precisely these experiences are absent from the restricted economies of 'Christian-moral' culture and can only be expressed within the fullness of a General economy. In this respect Nietzsche and Bataille were very close, as Bataille fully acknowledged. The Nietzschean notion of "grosse Okonomie", that is 'great' or 'grand' economy (Nietzsche: 1964:291:164) is remarkably similar to Bataille's notion of General economy both etymologically and in content though they should not be seen as entirely coterminous. Plotnitsky (1993) has explored the multiplicities involved in the term General economy as they occur in the writings of Nietzsche, Bataille and latterly, Derrida. Plotnitsky, rightly, situates the notion of General economy in relation to Bohr's principle of complementarity and Hiesenberg's Indeterminacy as well as the philosophical, historical and literary sources of this powerful notion. General and restricted economies are necessarily woven together and take differing forms both within the texts of Nietzsche and Bataille and of course between the two thinkers. The restricted economies Nietzsche and Bataille took issue with are those of the enlightenment tradition, especially Kant and Hegel and the political and sociological systems of the 19th century particularly Utilitarianism and Marxism. The crucial insight of the General economic approach is that any restricted economy will necessarily be forced to draw upon a matrix of assumption, speculations and conditions to which it has no right or competence within the terms, limits and constructions of that restricted economy. That is, there will always be partially or unacknowledged excesses or indeterminacies operating upon and throughout a particular system. My contention here is, the explanatory economies of
classical and modern sociology are clearly restricted economies, some far more restricted than others.

In order to appreciate Bataille's application of a Nietzschean General economy of excess to the specific field of sociological enquiry it is crucial to grasp the influence of the anthropological work of Durkheim and Mauss. Such a reading can reveal the manner in which Nietzsche's aspirational "grosse Okonomie" of the 'overman' (Übermensch) became, in Bataille an economy of expenditure, disablement, evil, and death.

THE INFLUENCE OF DURKHEIM AND MAUSS

It is common within the sociological canon to view Durkheim's sociology as an influential but flawed system of structural-functionalism. More recently it has been viewed as compromised by a positivist view of human subjectivity that takes little account of intention and desire, meaning and interpretation, and vastly over-estimates the determining power of social structure (Giddens 1971,1993). Such accounts tend to minimise the importance of Durkheim's treatments of the sacred and of "profitless expenditure". Pickering (1984) has noted the profound sense of confusion; hostility and misunderstanding that attended the publication of Durkheim's monumental work on archaic religion Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912/1961). It is not my aim to erect a defence of Durkheimian sociology but merely to indicate its importance for Bataille and the important but largely neglected College of Sociology, and for any contemporary sociological treatment of the concepts of sacrifice, expenditure, death; that is excess.

In 1895 Durkheim's Rules of Sociological Method, (translated into English 1938 and 1982), had established the irreducible primacy of the social fact, over and above, the behaviour of individuals. A social fact can and must be explained only by other social facts. In this assertion Durkheim had delineated in rigorous scientific fashion, a realm of irreducible externality or otherness in the life of all human individuals, and a certain passivity and vulnerability in the human subject. The Social, its rituals and processes greater than and so in excess of the individual, towers over the subject which is argued to comprise self and other, an otherness that cannot
be viewed as the mere sum of component individuals. This insistence on an irreducibly 'other' social field of forces became the methodological and theoretical crux of work in Bataille's *College Of Sociology*, some members, notably Roger Caillois, remained bonded to it, while Bataille himself strove to surpass or exceed it (a move can be traced, in part to his readings of Mauss).  

In the closing years of the 19th century Mauss, with Henri Hubert, published a brief study of the practice of sacrifice in *L'Année Sociologique*. The geographically widespread, indeed virtually universal practice of sacrifice in pre-Modern societies had already received detailed attention from Western anthropology. It was taken to be evidence of the steady but irrepressible progress or evolution of the human from a state of 'savagery' to one of modern civilisation and responsibility. Yet we shall see that for Durkheim and Mauss, then Bataille, and finally Baudrillard, the crucial vitality of social processes becomes central to accounts of the pathologies of modernity and the destiny of the social. A society practising ritual sacrifice is already an economy of loss, though not of Bataillean expenditure or 'depense'. It had been assumed that the purpose of ancient sacrifice was merely to appease ferocious gods who might otherwise turn their wrath on that society and destroy it. The offering of sacrificial gifts was intended to procure certain favours, protection, stability, good fortune, the motive being profit or gain. Mauss, by closer examination of the sacrificial mechanism argued that its most general observable purpose was to create or mark the sacred quality of the sacrificer often in order to manage an occurrence that demanded calling upon sacred forces. However the quality of 'sacredness' is no ordinary commodity, its accretion no simple profit. The sacred is an intensely ambivalent force, as Durkheim argued, a deadly contagion that could equally aid or devastate a society, threatening the entire social structure. Prior to the inception of Western monotheism the sacred was regarded as both malefic and benevolent. Mauss described sacrifice as facilitating productive and utilitarian purposes, in particular by allowing the lifting of prohibitions on the use of sacred land; however in more general social and economic terms sacrifice cannot be regarded as a tool in the service of production. In fact all productive and utile actions were felt as a potentially catastrophic profanation of sacred objects and land. Sacrifice was the
social means by which profane productive activities were rendered temporarily permissible. Hubert and Mauss spoke of sacrifice in terms of the division of 'shares' of energy. The dangerous and threatening 'excess' share is devoted to the god or sacred object so that the remainder might then become useful for the community (1964:71). In other cases the sacrificed object or victim, after immolation, is 'desacralised' in order that it might be consumed by the society. In each case the god or religious force absorbs the malefic excess share. Hubert and Mauss conclude:

[Sacrifice] consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds through the mediation of a victim, that is, of a thing that in the course of the ceremony is destroyed...In order that the sacred may subsist its share must be given to it, and it is from the share of the profane that this apportionment is made (1964:97-100).

In another early study, Essai sur les variations saisonnieres des societes Eskimos (1904-5, English trans. 1979), Mauss and Beuchat aimed to demonstrate the immensely powerful social energy of rituals of expenditure and transgression. While Durkheim, in a lecture at the International Congress of Philosophy in 1911 had already explicated the sociological phenomena of profitless luxury, inutility:

By definition what is superfluous is not useful or is less useful than what is necessary...luxuries are by nature costly and cost more than they return. We find doctrine spirits who despise them and who try to reduce them to a more congruous position, but in fact there is nothing that has more value in the eyes of man...the highest virtue consists not in the strict and regular performance of those acts immediately necessary to the well-being of the social order, but rather in those free and spontaneous movements and sacrifices which are not demanded and are sometimes even contrary to the principles of a sound economy (Durkheim 1974:85-6).

Clearly many of the most important themes of Bataille's work were already present in the French sociological tradition. Mauss' later study Essai sur le Don (1950) - translated as The Gift (1990) had a profound and fully acknowledged influence on Bataille, Caillois and later, Baudrillard. In his exploration of the gift Mauss had attempted to show that where exchange rituals might appear as the
individual(ist) pursuit of wealth, they were in fact powerfully constrained social and collective activities. A great deal of the distinctiveness of Bataille's contribution to the College of Sociology derives from his idiosyncratic reading of The Gift which emphasised the agonistic and unilaterally destructive nature of the Potlatch contrast to Mauss' concern with cycles of reciprocity and equilibrium. For Bataille the custom of Potlatch was a social and material expression of the deep human impulse to profitlessly expend its wealth and resources to the extent that self, survival and order where threatened. Bataille's emphasis on Potlatch should be seen as the locus of his General economic disruption of the Maussian economy, a theoretical move which re-introduces death, violence and destruction as the central principle of the social order.

BATAILLE AND THE COLLEGE OF SOCIOLOGY

'The social nucleus [the sacred] is, in fact, taboo, that is to say, untouchable and unspeakable; from the outset it partakes of the nature of corpses, menstrual blood, or pariahs...Everything leads us to believe that early human beings were brought together by disgust and by common terror, by an insurmountable horror focused precisely on what originally was the central attraction of their union' (Bataille in Hollier (ed.) 1988: 106).

'Certainly, it is dangerous, in extending the frigid research of the sciences, to come to a point where one's object no longer leaves one unaffected, where, on the contrary, it is what inflames. Indeed, the ebullition I consider, which animates the globe, is also my ebullition. Thus, the object of my research cannot be distinguished from the subject at its boiling point' (Bataille, 1967/1988: 10).

Bataille's first sociological and political articles articulated a very particular combination of Nietzschean philosophy, Marxist economics and French sociology. These early works appeared mostly in La Critique Sociale, “La notion de Depense” prefigured many of Bataille's later concerns, seeking to establish the primary social, and therefore sociological, importance of unproductive or profitless expenditure (depense); that is, the crucial relationship between utility and excess. Bataille operated in a distinctly Nietzschean register, declaring that any thought, concept or analysis dependent 'on the fundamental value of the word useful', must necessarily be 'warped' presenting only a 'flat and untenable conception of existence' whereby
the fundamental questions and ‘needs of society’ are ignored (Bataille 1985:116-7). Although Bataille had come into contact with the Surrealists from the mid-1920’s he had quickly distanced himself from its dominant orthodoxy under Breton. During this period Bataille also read Freud with considerable interest (Hollier 1989:104-112) however in his development of the notion of General economy and of depense specifically, Bataille’s interests diverged sharply from Surrealist and psychoanalytical modes of addressing the ‘irrational’. For Bataille contemporary manifestations of violence, cruelty and excess where not ‘irrational’ but inevitable, given the failure of modern societies to stage rituals of destructive expenditure. The dominant political and knowledge practices of modernity systematically exclude or deny the social and material centrality of unproductive expenditure, the most catastrophic and ruinous form being death, in their operation of restricted economies. Bataille’s notion of heterogeneity describes those objects; events and activities society excludes in an attempt to secure its restricted economies. However the exclusionary practices of modern society cannot be viewed merely as ‘repression’, as in the Freudian tradition, which might then be liberated, for example within the successfully analysed subject or by the liberalising of certain social regimes and practices. For Bataille, prefiguring many of the concerns of Post-structuralism, the subject, its language and society as a whole only become possible as the heterogeneous is expelled beyond the limits of productive society. These expulsions posit both the shameful and obscene and, as Bataille makes clear, that which is ascribed transcendent or absolute meaning. Bataille’s concept of the sacred must be understood in this context. Any exclusionary practice is, then, necessarily incomplete, for two related reasons. Firstly, for Bataille as for Durkheim, it is precisely those objects and events of profitless expenditure that represent the most exalted, most passionately desired, and most quintessentially or inevitably human dimensions of individual and social existence. Bataille’s examples include the pursuit of:

...luxury, mourning, war, sacrificial cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e. deflected from genital finality) - all these activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves (Bataille 1985:117).
Secondly, and of a more direct concern with what Bataille termed "postsacred" society or modernity; the very stability and legitimacy of the political order depends on the channelling and manipulation of these forces by (re)configuring them as 'relative' means which may then serve the 'greater good' of political stability. Examples described by the College include the relationships of mutual dependence between outwardly secular and rationalist democracies and institutions like the church, the army and the monarchy. Such bodies offer an engagement with, in varying yet tightly connected ways, the heterogeneous materials of death, decay, war and destruction; those phenomena that utilitarian or productive society lack the ability to comprehend, process and manage.

The College of Sociology came together in the Autumn of 1937 during a time of increasing political upheaval in Western Europe. The purpose of the College was to scrutinise, in the most rigorous manner yet unbounded by the limits of academic convention, the conditions arising from modern societies almost total absence of ritual, enchantment, myth and magic. For Bataille this lack was concomitant with the inability of modern society to express, encompass or even comprehend the wholeness of human being ('l'homme integral'). Modernity failed to offer human being an adequate means for the expression of its full diversity, of 'excesses' beyond the yoke of utility. For the College modern society had not closed-up or eradicated the space once occupied by the sacred through its secular morality and rational science. Rather it had proved unable to provide the communifying energy offered by the sacred and had left a knawing absence, a terrible incompleteness and moreover a whole field of human experience, desire and longing that was no longer comprehensible within the restricted economies of secular rationality. Where Roger Caillois, and in particular, Alexander Kojeve sought a properly scientific diagnoses of this social pathology, wishing to operate along the theoretical and methodological axes established by Durkheim and Mauss, Bataille aimed to play 'scorcerer's apprentice' in order to actively create new myths, new structures of community.

Caillois presented the foundational principles of the College of Sociology, its first publication, in Nouvelle Revue Francais in July 1938. Firstly, the human
and social sciences were criticised for being locked, methodologically, within individualism and Idealism, for being 'timid and incomplete' in their choice of phenomena for investigation and for failing to modify its evolutionist and eurocentric assumptions despite recent anthropological studies, principally of Durkheim and Mauss. Secondly the College spoke of the importance of forging an open and interdisciplinary academic collective or 'moral community', that is a community that might be bound in spirit to the diverse and extreme ('virulent') nature of the phenomena to be studied. Thirdly Caillois sketched out the manner in which the sacred would be addressed, the principle topics under consideration and the ultimate aims of the group. The project was termed 'sacred sociology', not the sociology of religion, whereby the conventional methods of social science are applied in a reductive, idealist and 'timid' way, for the College it was no longer adequate to approach those:

...rare, fleeting, and violent moments of his intimate experience on which man places extreme value' [as] simply a matter of information and exegesis; it is necessary beyond that, to embrace the persons total activity (Bataille et al. in Hollier (ed.) 1988:11).

Bataille's first lecture for the College The Scourcerer's Apprentice was a characteristic intersection of Nietzschean sensibility, Marxist theory and French sociology. The Nietzschean desire for an elevated sense of the (trans)human represented by the 'overman' (ubermensch) is coupled with Marxist class economics in Bataille's assertion 'Perhaps the worst of all the ills afflicting human beings is the reduction of their existence to the condition of slavish instrument' (in Hollier 1988:13). For Bataille (as for Nietzsche), modern Sciences, both Human and Natural, far from occupying a neutral position that might diagnose or even correct this condition, are actually leading institutions in the continuing fragmentation and enslaving of human potentiality. In order that the totality of human experience might be addressed Bataille aimed to combine this already diverse theoretical matrix with a Kojève-inspired reading of Hegel's phenomenology. Bataille sought deliberately to transgress the conceptual boundaries of each framework, however such explosive and paradoxical theoretical juxtapositions offered no obvious form of
methodological application. Bataille asserted that the sacred or heterogeneous, that is excess, are not and cannot become the object of scientific discourse, properly speaking, because such a discourse is wholly dependent on the prior reduction of phenomena to homogeneity; to order, series and system. Where scientific method creates or encounters that which cannot be easily reduced to homogeneity, Bataille's examples here are infinity, absence and nothingness, it merely jettisons such problems to the disciplines of philosophy and theology where, traditionally at least, they could be more easily managed. For Bataille excess is encountered not as object but as affect. Affectivity tears open the structure of subjectivity, so the subject as such is unable to assemble a stable comprehension of the heterological as object since the very condition of existence of subjectivity is that it remains immersed in homogeneity. During the period when the College of Sociology was active Bataille aimed to chart the movements of human affectivity, emerging in French sociology, with the aid of the Hegelian phenomenology of desire and death. This was attempted largely by unbounding the principle of negativity from the possibility of dialectical (re)assimililation. Something of Bataille's stance toward the structures and concepts of rational thought is revealed in the following:

Reason alone has the power to undo its work, to hurl down what it has built up...Without the support of reason, we don't reach dark incandescence (Bataille, quoted in Boldt-Irons 1995:6).

The basic premise of the College was that historical and anthropological studies reveal archaic cultural engagements with the sacred were able to foster a far fuller sense of human experience, one that admitted, indeed insisted upon and so expressed excess beyond the calculation of utility. Caillois and Leiris tended to regard contemporary manifestations of the sacred; Christian Churches, secret societies, recollections of childhood beliefs, as enervated vestigial remainders of what had been. However Bataille's approach would increasingly transgress such limitations of method and rationality, he appealed for the 'return to mankind's old dwelling' (in Hollier 1988:23) and sought an active role in this process attempting to perform the ritual human sacrifice of a real (and willing) victim, in order to
consecrate new myths. Moreover Bataille used the College sessions to create a rigorous sociology of attraction and repulsion, drawing on Freud (and contemporary physics and biology), that was able to discern the operations of sacred processes persisting into modern life with a new vigour. For Bataille, as for Durkheim, the sacred had formed the very social nucleus, it had managed all human engagements with the threatening, terrifying and destructive: excess, eroticism, violence, horror and death. The sacred had been the principle of social gravitation, of meaning and order. In Bataille's reading this general exchange economy, of life and death, blood, semen, work and waste, became increasingly restricted as the forces of the sacred where fixed to a transcendent deity representing their limit-point. Within the notion of a single, omnipotent deity excess was contained, limited and finally allowed to wither away in favour of a secular utilitarian market economy. In a market economy, vestiges of a sacred or symbolic order, tyrannised by the forces of homogeneous rationality, appear as 'irrational', mystical and useless. Similarly, the realm of eroticism is divided and re-drawn in terms of what can be utilised within market economies and what must be expelled as 'perversion' or 'sadism'.

The College of Sociology was dissolved after two years due, largely, to internal divisions, its failure to perform a human sacrifice, and because of the onset of the second world war. Bataille's interests had become increasingly mystical during the early 1940's, reflected by the publication of Inner Experience in 1943 and Guilty the following year. In these works, Richman (1982:128,1988: 92) argues, Bataille aimed to draw the reader into the realm of sacrificial anguish, loss of self, and profitless expenditure, since the only modern space for the (legal) exploration of such themes is that of literary production; writing. As a result Bataille's specifically sociological focus was temporarily submerged. However, in 1949 Bataille completed his central theoretical work, the three-volume The Accursed Share. The first volume entitled 'Consumption' explicates the principles of Bataille's General economy, its scientific tone jars, in places, against Bataille's other work which is greatly critical of scientific method. This work, it seems, was intended to be highly systematic summary of Bataille's thought, in contrast to his more fragmentary pieces, indeed the adoption of different voices and styles within and between works is a fundamental aspect of Bataille's method. Bataille's later efforts to pursue this form of
analysis into contemporary life appear, at least in sociological terms, disappointing. He attempted to apply the theorem of the accursed share to Soviet industrialisation and the Marshall Plan (Bataille 1988:147-190) but this work appears strained and distant from his earlier concerns, the belated embrace with Communism particularly incongruous.

The College of Sociology has received little critical attention, particularly in Anglo-American sociological thought. Hollier (1992:125) and Besnier (in Bailey-Gill 1995:12-25) have noted how the historical and mythological proximity of the College to the Fascist movements of the period, and in particular its refusal to adopt the language of peace, has greatly damaged its credibility. Richman (1982,1988) attempted to unravel the merits of the College but in general even works dedicated to Bataille devote little space to the College of Sociology. A recently published collection of essays on Bataille however does include attempts to draw out the radical implications of Bataille's theoretical and methodological positions expounded within the College. Lionel Abel (in Boldt-Irons 1995:52-59) suggests that given the impossibility of grasping the excessive as if it were an inert object in Cartesian fashion, the only-adequate methodological approach is one of becoming-excessive. Abel attempts to show how Bataille, particularly in later works sought not to 'understand' or 'grasp' Nietzsche but rather to become Nietzsche. Similarly in Bataille's attempts to stage ritual human sacrifice, we see Bataille becoming-sacrificial, becoming excessive. Only in such a manner could the affectivity of excess be rendered into human experience. Yet according to Bataille all life on earth is in any case, as its condition of existence, in a state of excess, as such we all have intimate experience of becoming excessive, most particularly in our violent and erotic exertions. Given this premise an adequate methodological disposition towards the study of the excessive might involve, for example, the pursuit of a relationship, that could never be fully consummated, between the excesses of the experiential world and the excesses of human inner experience. Bataille undertook such a voyage and the results, fragmentary, elusive, and elliptical were largely inimicable to formal sociological knowledge, as is attested by the break-up of the College and by Bataille's repeated returns to more conventional forms of academic enquiry. However it should not be concluded that an exploration of excess within discursive
or scientific language must necessarily result in failure or meaninglessness. The notion of affectivity is central to the contemporary scientific terminology of complementarity and indeterminacy, which is, in turn being deployed across social and cultural analysis. The work of Baudrillard is one example of this. Further, for Bataille and the College the anthropological investigations of Durkheim and Mauss demonstrated that, for archaic societies with a strong sense of ceremony and festival, the integration of depense within social meaning and practice had been accomplished. It is not the case that excess or depense must always remain the beyond or 'other' of human society and culture, rather it is the pathology of modernity that such integration no longer occurs. For Bataille the creation of new myths and communities was crucial, however the College of Sociology ultimately failed to achieve this. I will conclude with an exploration of Baudrillard's theories of excess in order to address the contemporary situation. Here the utilitarian impetus of modern capitalism has not only destroyed many vestigial forms of symbolic ritual but has fully colonised and driven into excess a vast array of human possibilities, including those symbolic forms that do persist. Further these processes are crucial for a radical approach to contemporary death-events.

BAUDRILLARD AND THE EXTREME PHENOMENA OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Since the world is on a delusional course, we must adopt a delusional standpoint towards the world. (Baudrillard 1990/1993:1)

Baudrillard's approach to the extreme phenomena of the contemporary age is, perhaps, best approached through the problematic of utility and excess. By relating Baudrillard's highly speculative fatal sociology to this problematic within the context of subterranean channels of sociological thought, represented by Nietzsche, Bataille and certain of the work of Durkheim and Mauss, it is possible to avoid many of the misplaced criticisms levelled at Baudrillard's theory. His work will be situated, not, as is often the case within some vague category of 'Postmodernism' where it can be subject to cursory dismissal, rather by reading Baudrillard both alongside, and against, Bataille in particular, we are better placed to
appreciate the explicitly social and material radicality of their respective bodies of work. This radicality is central to how contemporary death-events will be addressed below. Within the confines of this chapter it will be possible only to address the basic continuities between the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard, and then to show Baudrillard's development of certain of Bataille's notions. Lastly I will attempt to indicate how this lineage of thought opens onto a genuinely radical field of sociological enquiry, unavailable within the dominant sociological tradition, which can approach the horror of contemporary death-events.

An interest in Mauss, Bataille and the notions of gift exchange and sacrificial expenditure are most evident in Baudrillard's work of the early to mid 1970's and fully developed in Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976/1993 hereafter SED). In these studies Baudrillard shifts his focus from the neo-Marxist register of his early work on The System of Objects (1968/1996) and Consumer Society (1970/1997) to a concern with all forms of symbolic exchange dealing at some length with Mauss, Freud and Bataille. Hamilton-Grant (in Lyotard 1993:i) has described this work as one of the founding moments of Post-structuralism, alongside Derrida's Writing and Difference and Foucault's The Order of Things. It is clearly a crucial work that is yet to receive serious and detailed attention by English-speaking academics. A consideration of Baudrillard's post-Marxist writings, from SED onwards reveals only scant and intermittent interest in the notion of Postmodernism. The crucial theoretical division in Baudrillard's thought is not between the orders of utility and economic (classical) exchange on the one hand, and the spiralling acceleration of sign value on the other, a misreading still made by a number of critics including Kellner (1989,1994:1-23). Rather it is between the semiotic or simulational orders which, in different forms or phases, extend from the Renaissance to the present day, and the symbolic orders that dominated before this era. In modernity these have mutated and interpenetrated into ever more destructive and inhuman forms (the fatal, viral, terroristic and fractal).

In SED a whole range of theoretical and conceptual intersections between the works of Baudrillard and Bataille become explicit. These range from shared methodological assumptions; a radical antipathy to the entire Western Enlightenment project, a rejection of Liberal, Utilitarian and individualist philosophies, and a deep-
felt conviction that all variants of dialectical reason, evolutionary or progressivist ideology and classical economy are fundamentally mistaken. There is a shared belief that the natural world, indeed the cosmological order, exists in excess of, and hostile to, or at the very least indifferent to, all Enlightenment attempts to order, secure, control and progress. However in both the writings of Baudrillard and Bataille there is little of the joy, evident in Nietzsche, in observing the collapse or twilight of these Enlightenment institutions. In addition to these broad similarities in method, style and content, the work of Bataille and Baudrillard is at times remarkably similar in its treatments of the specific manifestations or ramifications of excess. Excess is located in the realm of Bataille's sacred and of Baudrillard's symbolic, within the agonistic exchange of eroticism, sexuality and seduction and of the violence, cruelty and death which break through the profane order of rationalised utility, calculation, profit and accumulation. Baudrillard's thought is clearly and deeply influenced by Bataille, Caillois and The College of Sociology. This is especially evident in their ways of addressing the sacred; gift, potlatch, and the movements of attraction and repulsion within a generalised (economic) account of the social field, emphasising the rupture of the restricted precepts of classical economics and dominant social thought. However Baudrillard's theory cannot be seen as a simple continuation of Bataillean problematics, in fact Baudrillard's development of the notion of symbolic exchange involves a critique of Bataille's concept of General economy and supplants Bataille's emphasis on the sacred, divesting it of more explicitly religious and anthropological overtones. Further, Baudrillard has distanced himself, increasingly, from any reliance on Marxist economics and revolutionary theory which are prominent in Bataille's work of the 1930's, both prior to and within The College of Sociology and which continued until the late 1940's culminating with the publication of The Accursed Share. Baudrillard's re-reads Bataille's notion of General economy in terms of a General economy of the symbolic (Excess) opposed to a restricted economy of utility:

...the logic of the commodity extends itself indifferently to men and things and makes men appear only as exchange value - thus the restricted finality of utility imposes itself on men as surely as on the world of objects. It is illogical and naive to hope that, through objects conceived in terms of
exchange value, that is, in his needs, man can fulfil himself otherwise than as use value (1972/1981:136, emphasis in original).

The importance and originality of Baudrillard's development of Bataille resides in the analytical description and interpretation of the ways the order of utility and production multiply at such an exorbitant rate that through the (simulational) logic of exchange and sign values are driven into excess. No longer then, can utility and excess be treated as opposites, mutually exclusive and pitted against each other, rather they interpenetrate and fuse in the most perverse and eccentric ways. Baudrillard's 'The Order of Simulacra' (SED 1976/1993:50-86), explicates the theory of three successive orders of simulacra. These extend from the Renaissance, through industrial society to the third order which, is governed by a code of generalised equivalence whereby value and meaning become signs fully exchangeable between themselves without direct reference to the 'real'. The notion of excess, as it relates to the gift, sacrifice and death in Mauss, Freud and Bataille is radically problematized by Baudrillard since excess no longer can be seen as existing in a simple opposition to utility. The generalised exchange of sign-values in contemporary Capitalist society has brought about a condition where the location of pure use-value or utility becomes impossible.52

In SED (1976/1993:125-194) Baudrillard engages specifically with Bataille and the notion of excess when he undertakes a genealogical investigation of the changing social meanings of death, from the 'primitive' distant past to modern consumer societies governed by the 'structural law of value' and the operations of the code. He argues that where death had once been socially exchanged and circulated through rituals of symbolic reciprocity with the living, in modern societies this is no longer possible and death becomes an irreversible biological fact. However death when violent, sudden, or "undeserved" expresses excess that ruins the carefully managed restricted economies of utility and accumulation. Catastrophic death, like sudden effusions of 'inexplicable' violence (e.g. Dunblane) cannot, when denuded of symbolic exchange rituals, have any meaning for modern societies. Further, for Baudrillard the continual erosion of symbolic exchange, which had provided social equilibrium by preventing accumulation of power and goods, allows the modern
order to accelerate into exorbitant (over)production and (over)accumulation in which

even the principle of utility is eventually submerged:

Protestantism, by individualising conscience before God and divesting 
collective ceremonials, brought about the progress of the individual's 
anguish of death. It also gave rise to the intense modern enterprise of 
staving off death; the ethics of accumulation and material production...the 
labour of profit collectively called the "spirit of Capitalism" (1976/1993: 
145).

However Baudrillard does not conceptualise death as the 'repressed 
meaning' or purpose of life, as in the Freudian death drive (SED 1976/1993:148-154) 
and he is highly critical of Bataille's tendency to present death as the final and 
irreversible profitless expenditure of life within a naturalised cosmological system of 
General economy. Here Baudrillard claims to read 'Bataille against Bataille', 
privileging the latter's view of the reciprocal play of eroticism over that of his Bio-
solar General economy:

...this biological functionalism is annihilated in eroticism. To look for the 
secret of sacrifice, sacrificial destruction, play and expenditure in the law of 
the species, is to reduce it all to a functionalism (1976/1993: 158).

Baudrillard's critique of Bataille was further developed in a review article of 
La Part Maudite entitled 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principal of 
Economy' (1976/1987). Here Bataille's General economy of expenditure is criticised 
as still too restricted, in particular unable to comprehend the contemporary structural 
law of value:

...his (Bataille's) concept of expenditure would have permitted only a 
limited analysis; it is still too economic, too much the flip side of 
accumulation...in an order which is no longer that of utility, but an aleatory 
order of value, pure expenditure is no longer sufficient for radical defiance 
Even Bataille is viewed, ultimately, as operating within the confines of the Western traditions appropriation of death, with Bataille it became the final, rending loss of individual existence. Yet, according to Baudrillard, within the symbolic order death was not a finality, a biological termination; through the exchange of gift and counter-gift between living and dead all members of the community remain within the social field. Bataille's reading of Mauss on the principle of gift exchange is faulted by Baudrillard for reifying the notions of destruction, expenditure and loss, into a cosmology, and for denying the principle of symbolic reciprocity, 'the unilateral gift does not exist' (ibid.). The importance of Bataille and Baudrillard's theorisation of death is drawn out, in relation to contemporary death-events, in the following chapter.

Further Baudrillard rejects the Marxist elements of Bataille's approach. Marxist critique for Baudrillard is merely the simulation of critique, generated by the Code underlying modernity. It is in fact useful to capital, the economic form which dominates modernity, since it creates an illusory sense of real difference, real choice, while actually repeating the essential productivist and utilitarian assumptions of capital. For Baudrillard much the same applies to Freudianism, even as re-interpreted by Lacan, Lacanian feminism, Lyotard and Deleuze. These theoretical constructs share, at a fundamental level, the assumption of a real production of forces, drives, energies, pleasures and urge their liberation. In each production serves as unquestioned reality principle, for Baudrillard the problem is not that such assumptions are simply false or mistaken, but that production was the 'reality principle' of the second, industrial, and now surpassed, order of simulacra:

Up to this point we have considered production and labour as potential, as force and historical process, as a generic activity: an energetic-economic myth proper to modernity. We must ask ourselves whether production is not rather an intervention, a particular phase in the order of signs - whether it is basically only one episode in the line of simulacra (Baudrillard 1976/1993:55).

There is an important relation here between the work of McLuhan and that of Baudrillard. McLuhan's emphasis on the notion of a medium, 'the medium is the
message' is often cited by Baudrillard during his work of the 1970's and is a decisive influence on Baudrillard's critique of the 'reality' of production. For Baudrillard, as McLuhan, technology should be thought as medium, not as productive force. Technology qualitatively transforms the nature of modernity in a manner such that the whole logic of production is rendered obsolete. The influence of McLuhan and media technologies is fundamental to the distinctions in theoretical trajectory between Bataille and Baudrillard. The importance of differences between the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard will be emphasised throughout the following chapters.

Baudrillard's next sustained engagement with the problematics of General economy and the accursed share is made in The Transparency of Evil (1990/1993). In Bataille's later work, after the dissolution of the College of Sociology, evil was presented as a radical and instinctive force or pulsion expressed in passion, violence and cruelty.53 Evil, for Bataille, is a complex notion and his emphasis is far more social and historical than an appeal to instinctive (cosmological) drives might suggest. Bataille's Theory of Religion (1973/1989) draws on the work of Durkheim and Mauss, and also Georges Dumezil, Simone Petrement54 and others, to provide a greatly condensed account of the transformations in the meaning of sacred and profane from the prehistoric and symbolic orders through to pagan and Christian religions. In order that the world of work, production and utility could be established, and endlessly expanded, the sacred comprising both malefic and benevolent characteristics had to be re-defined into a simplified dualism whereby the malefic elements where expelled from the sacred. This operation secured a stark and almost total opposition between good and evil. For Bataille this 'weakening' in the conception of the sacred brought about a slumber or 'sleep of Reason', an'inevitable sleep that...reintroduces evil as a major force' (1973/1989:79). Evil becomes sovereign, existing beyond the confines of the dominant order, drawing the seductive power of the forbidden from its exclusion:

...the forces of evil never lost their divine value except within the limits of a developed reflection, and their apparently inferior status cannot prevent ordinary humanity from continuing to live under their power...this involves
Similarly for Bataille, violence becomes an inevitable and irrepressible force since it alone is able to break through the order of utility and production and restore a sense, fleeting and vertiginous, of beings lost intimacy with nature, community and the passage of life and death. Baudrillard (1990/1993) develops Bataille's emphasis on the accursed and evil in order to draw out the form it assumes in the modern technological world of which Bataille could not be aware. Baudrillard presents the 'excess' of the contemporary order as the result of the 'cancerous' proliferation of notions of utility, functionality, and latterly, liberationisms.

Ours is a society founded on proliferation, on growth which continues even though it cannot be measured against any clear goals...where development is uncontrollable...where the accumulation of effects goes hand in hand with the disappearance of causes. The upshot is gross systemic congestion and malfunction caused by... an excess of functional imperatives, by a sort of saturation (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 31).

Excess has been, according to Baudrillard, absorbed or "co-opted" within the code of the dominant order and is manifest in the fractures, technological breakdowns, 'immuno-deficient' pathologies that haunt contemporary life. Symbolic principles characterised primarily, by the principal of reversibility, continue to circulate beyond the Western world and are deployed by Ayatollah Khomeini or Saddam Hussein to attack the weakened and 'whitewashed' West (1990/1993: 81-88). Indeed for the West such people come to be seen as the very embodiment of evil. In a specific engagement with Bataille's, Baudrillard's 'Theorem of the Accursed Share' (1990/1993: 106-110), situates in a more fully socio-historical manner that which in Bataille had remained an awkward and unsatisfactory cosmological principle. For Baudrillard the project of modernity has unleashed too much energy; more objects, ideas, rights and demands than can ever be used, appropriated or satisfied. This excess of energy production within the system is uncontrollable and, 'overtaken by its own impetus, assumes the dimensions of a
global catastrophe' (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 101). This 'impetus' is far beyond human subjective control, indeed the massive proliferation of productive energies both precede and exceed the realm of human control. The forces of technological perfection and operationality, rooted in utility but now far beyond their frame, attempt the 'whitewashing' or 'purging' of the accursed share; defined, for Baudrillard and Bataille as the 'inseparability of Good and Evil' (1990/1993: 105). For both thinkers:

Anything that purges the accursed share in itself signs its own death warrant...[T]he energy of the accursed share, and its violence, are expressions of the principle of evil (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 106).

In a recent interview (1995c) Baudrillard distances himself, increasingly, from both the anthropology of Durkheim and Mauss and the General economics of Bataille. In common with Derrida (1992) he appears to regard the focus upon symbolic, especially gift exchange as increasingly problematic, being tainted by Western eurocentric assumptions and in regard to general economy 'still too economic'. However while Baudrillard has been critical of Bataille's tendency to 'naturalise' or make cosmological his principles of General economy it is by no means certain that Baudrillard himself does not resort to similar practices. Baudrillard's The Perfect Crime (1995/1996) does not shrink from making claims of a cosmological nature, 'Excess is the world's excess, not ours. It is the world that is excessive, the world that is sovereign' (1995/1996: 14). Rather than rejecting, out of hand, such assertions, I think it is important to ask how notions of excess and excessiveness are treated within the mainstream of social science in such an unsatisfactory way, and why it is widely assumed that sociological and philosophical thought are not, or are no longer, able to deal with issues of this kind. Baudrillard does not treat symbolic as 'reality principle', to be evaluated according to its truth-value as a descriptive representation of non-western society. Rather, he argues, the modern Western 'reality principle' - a Bio-technological pseudo-materialism, only becomes possible as the symbolic and its excesses; death, cruelty, eroticism and violence are denied, effaced or re-channelled. Baudrillard's important collection The
Transparency of Evil (1990/1993) should be read in light of these earlier assertions, in this way the radical nature of Baudrillard’s thought may be appreciated. His recent essay ‘The Material Illusion’ (1995/1996: 60-69) expands this line of thought. It draws together themes from scientific indeterminacy to argue that the whole field or ‘mass’ of phenomena classical thought perceived as ‘reality’ has always been ‘illusion’ and this illusion itself is now under threat from the ‘technical universe of information’ (1995/1996: 62). However ‘the perfect crime’ that would forever shatter this illusion can never finally occur because of the radical, reversible energy of illusion,

...made up of this magic portion, this accursed share which creates a kind of absolute surplus-value by subtraction of causes or by distortion of effects and causes (1995/1996: 68-9).

In these latter works Baudrillard moves away from a Bataillean General economic, (base) materialist methodology, though this remains, clearly, one of his most important influences. Baudrillard’s latest methodological gestures are complex and beyond the scope of this chapter, however Baudrillard, perhaps uniquely within the social sciences, appears willing to shift the register of his work between the poles of idealism and materialism, remaining hostile to both. Baudrillard’s refusal of the self-imposed restrictions of dominant sociological method deserves serious future attention.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

‘In nature itself...everything will remain vague, composite, and rich enough in its potential for different forms to doom human intelligence to endless humiliation.’ (Bataille, in Hollier 1988: 78).

‘If the world is without reference and without ultimate reason, why do you expect thought to have these things?’ (Baudrillard 1995/1996: 69).

I have attempted to show how the notions of General economy and specifically excess, as they occur throughout certain of the texts of Nietzsche, Bataille and Baudrillard open up a potential field of Sociology that is not available...
within the limits of the mainstream sociological traditions. The failure of modern sociology to think through excess and excessive phenomena in a sufficiently radical manner makes for sociological work that appears as ‘timid and incomplete’ today as it did when the College of Sociology was formed. However I do not pretend that the claims of this chapter are unproblematic. I do not mean to suggest that ‘pure’ excess, nor ‘pure’ utility are meaningful notions, despite Bataille’s occasional willingness to speak in these terms. Similarly a ‘General economy’, as I have sketched it, could never be made fixed, total and present, indeed this point is central to the importance of the application of General economic thinking to sociological issues. Further it should not be assumed that the symbolic or excessive comes into conflictual relations with the order of utility exclusively within some form of historical framework of evolution. Rather, they must be thought together in an immanently unstable form. The relationship is perhaps one of mutation, with excess clashing against utility, haunting its margins or being recuperated only to reappear along new fault-lines. Perhaps this occurs in any and all cultures and societies in various forms and modes, perhaps it is a distinctly Western concern, like much else this question must be left open.

There are, of course, considerable differences in style, content and purpose between such important thinkers as Nietzsche, Bataille and Baudrillard; here the continuities have been emphasised at the possible expense of the differences. Where the terminology of Derrida, for example, avoid to a large extent, metaphysical and cosmological intonations, this cannot be said of the lineage of thought dealt with here, constituting a range of difficulties, doubtless explaining in part why these thinkers remain marginal. Yet the consequences of excluding such thinkers from the canon of the social sciences are grave since then a whole range of phenomena, of increasing contemporary prominence, must then also be excluded. Some of these phenomena I have termed contemporary death-events. They include terrorism, genocidal destruction, catastrophic events and the proliferation of sudden ‘inexplicable’ and deracinated forms of violence such as the Dunblane massacre and the murder of James Bulger. The failure of sociology and related disciplines to engage, in a sufficiently radical way, with such phenomena, can only have a catastrophic effect on the credibility of the social sciences.
What might a new sociology look like? The *College of Sociology* brought together a range of intellectuals from very different areas bound by a fascination with excess. Yet they were not 'interdisciplinary', they formed a community. They did not 'serve the cause' of a 'grand unification' of restricted explanatory accounts, a much-vaunted concern of the natural sciences and clearly marked in human and social science. Rather these thinkers sought a sovereign engagement with excess, the production and dissemination of knowledge that was not servile to any particular discipline or worldview, thought which was its own master. The *College of Sociology* ultimately failed, disbanding on the eve of the Second World War. The excessiveness of social and political events had 'potlatched' its own concerns, which were destined to remain forever theoretical. Yet it was the attempt to somehow bridge, methodologically, the void between theory and practice that made the College so distinctive. Would a College of Sociology be possible today and how might it operate? Apart from the utilitarian criteria of funding allocation and institutional research guidelines there seems no *prima facie* intellectual reason why there cannot be a rigorous sociology of the excessive.

This chapter argues that the theory of Baudrillard opens sociological thought onto the plane of excessive contemporary phenomena, in part by re-working many of the concerns of the *College of Sociology*. However Baudrillard's texts are highly selective in their deployment of empirical material and, in general he appears uninterested in working through a concrete analysis of excessive events. Consequently it is far from clear how Baudrillard might address those events specified here, for example the Dunblane massacre. Nevertheless the events of Dunblane could certainly be addressed from the viewpoint of potlatch and gift-exchange as they are radicalised by Bataille and Baudrillard. I will not offer an analysis of such events here; the purpose was to sketch out the possibility of alternative forms of interpretation, deriving from an awareness of the Durkheim, Mauss, Bataille and Baudrillard lineage of thought. However future work might, for example, approach events like Dunblane in terms of a fatal and irreversible exchange, in this particular case between childhood innocence and adult sexuality, exclusion and resentment.
In a society possessing only a residual sense of the sacred, that has displaced its myths of transcendence and fusion, there is no obvious mechanism that might offer a foundational social or communifying principle. Instrumental rationality, market economics and technological sophistication have proved to be incapable of fostering any sufficiently powerful sense of social cohesion since their operation is wholly dependent upon the expulsion of those forces, sacred and symbolic, that once bound the social order. For Durkheim, Mauss and later Bataille, the social nucleus was founded in blood, its bonds periodically revivified by violent ritual inscribing the excessive, repulsive and destructive within the social realm. The expenditure of sacrificial death, divested of ceremonial meaning, of transcendental myth, of watchful deity becomes inexplicable, senseless murder, 'the kula and the potlatch have disappeared but not their principle' (Baudrillard 1972/1981:30-1). Since modernity lacks ceremonial and ritual forms of the symbolic, the most fundamental human exchanges; of life and death, attraction and repulsion, eroticism and horror, can only be manifest as final, irreversible and fatal. Further a radical psychosociological account of lust, frenzy and rage, drawing from Bataille's work The Accursed Share and Eroticism could greatly enhance sociological approaches to cruelty and violence. In contrast to the assumptions of some readers of Bataille, notably Richman (1982:128 &1988:92) and Boldt-Irons (in Bailey-Gill 1995:91-104), writing or the space of literature cannot be asserted as the only realm of the expression of excess, of sacrificial violence and depense. Rather the corporeal or base materiality of excess is expressed, to catastrophic effect, in the contemporary world of 'unprovoked' and 'inexplicable' death-events. The crushing self-consciousness of death, for Bataille, forming the crux of human immersion in life, subjectivity and erotic and violent exchange must be affirmed within the mainstream of sociological analysis. While the principle of evil, at once seductive and repulsive cannot continue to go unrecognised in contemporary society. The following chapters begin this difficult process. Academic theorising, seeking to operate in this terrain, would not, in the least, condone, celebrate or glamorise such excesses, in fact, as Bataille argued, it is from their exclusions and repression that evil and excess draw their seductive power. Excessive phenomena do indeed take us to the limit point of knowledge but this is a challenge that Bataille, the College of Sociology, and latterly,
Baudrillard have had the courage to face. The recent direction of Baudrillard’s thought has been, increasingly, to deploy contemporary scientific notions throughout work of a (loosely) sociological kind. The resonance of indeterminacy and chaos are drawn within the cultural and sociological domain where they are unbound of the structures of natural science methodology and theorised within and against the most radical work available in social science. Such an approach is close indeed to that established by Bataille and the *College of Sociology*. It is here, within a rigorous sociology of the excessive, that we may encounter new realms of thought and experience, affirming sociological theory its place in the 21st Century.
NOTES

1) Quoted in Richman (1982:59).

2) Marx appeared to have entertained a considerable affinity with Darwinian evolutionism (see note 7 below) and while Durkheim was more critical, his numerous references to Darwin are ambiguous. At one point Durkheim's *Division of Labour in Society* rejects the *Origin of Species*, and the forms of individualist or 'egoistic' theory to which it is related, as a-social, a-historical and highly dubious. Durkheim states, 'to show...that there is in our past nothing to regret, they believe we ought to make it dreary and belittle it systematically. Nothing is less scientific than this prejudice' (1964:197). This is an apposite criticism of an array of 'Modern' thought too vast to be specified here. In the same work however, Durkheim acknowledges Darwin as a model of successful science (1964:266). For an (unsatisfactory) account of how the dominant sociological tradition has sought to 'absolve' the founders of sociology from the charge of utilitarianism see Giddens (1971) and note 8 below.


4) The Hegelian term *Aufhebung* is notoriously difficult to translate and is often left in the original German, (the term ‘Sublation’ is sometimes used in English). It connotes a progressive raising or elevation in an idea, as it accommodates other, apparently contradictory ideas. Further no cancellation or loss is supposed to occur, rather a fully expanded new sense without contradiction. A concept of this kind can be seen as representing the far limits of humanist-progressivist utility thinking, since what is useful for human development, towards the state of absolute knowledge, is always accumulated and preserved, while what is contradictory, mistaken, counter-productive is absorbed, resolved. Such a concept occupies a paradoxical territory between General and restricted economy, between the limit and the limitless. For Bataille's own ambivalent attitude towards Hegel see Bataille, 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice', (1990) *Yale French Studies*.

5) Hardt, M. (1993) has described the manifold difficulties in any notion of an 'escape' from Hegelianism since the *Aufhebung* possesses the ability to incorporate
an immense field of critical gestures, (see in particular pp.2-10). Foucault also addressed the problem of an escape or overcoming of Hegelianism in 'Orders of Discourse' in Social Science Information 10 (1971): 28. Plotnitsky (1993:3-61) situates Hegelian philosophy as a (potential) source of contemporary General economies - such as those of Bataille and Derrida, while Hollier (1992:3-13) views Hegelianism as an edifice that Bataille sought only to oppose.

6) See Darwin (1968) The Origin of Species. It would be hard to over-estimate the importance of this work in forging the modern identity of the natural sciences.

7) In addition to Nietzsche's challenge to Darwinian science (Nietzsche 1990:44-5, n.14), see also Ansell-Pearson (1997:85-122). Further, Bataille's colleague and fellow member of the College of Sociology, Roger Caillios published an important paper on these themes, see Caillois (1984).

8) There are of course many intersections between Darwinian evolutionism, liberal Utilitarianism, Marxism, and 19th century sociological systems, such as that of Herbert Spencer, that came to be termed 'Social Darwinism'. Indeed it has been noted that the 11th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, published in 1911, devoted half of the space allotted for 'Sociology' to the theories of Darwin as if the two could not reasonably be separated (See Darwin, The Origin of Species, Penguin (1968:46); Editors Introduction). It is thought that Spencer arrived at the phrase 'survival of the fittest' independently of Darwin, yet Darwin himself adopted this phrase in time, to the evident chagrin of the modern scientific community (ibid.). Today Darwinianism has a popular scientific champion in the person of Richard Dawkins whose publications provide a perfect resource for those in the human and social sciences who might wish to deconstruct the claims of the natural sciences, see Dawkins (1995).

9) Giddens (1971:pp1-64, and 214-223) takes the view that Marx's critique of Bentham was sufficient to absolve him from any taint of utilitarianism, evidently Giddens is using this term in a very narrow sense. This should be contrasted with Baudrillard's reading of Marx which shows Marx to be bound within the logic of utility albeit in terms of (class) collectivity rather than individuality. Baudrillard's reading of Marx is most fully developed in The Mirror of Production and For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. See also the essay 'The End of


12) See Weber, M. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, particularly the emphasis on legal and rational bureaucracy. Weber did have a sense of the conflictual relations between rational bureaucracy and the 'symbolic' forms of magic, fate and destiny, and charisma that is largely absent in both Marx and Durkheim, see for example, Weber (1905/1992:323-359).

13) It is a general contention of this chapter that a great deal of contemporary sociology can be shown to be operating restricted (explanatory) economies. Their accounts of modern phenomena erect conceptual and methodological boundaries and limitations which not only can be shown to be selective, partial and necessarily incomplete, but more seriously involve unstable boundary zones which can and must be broken and transgressed, even within the terms presented by that explanatory economy. The restricted economy of utility is, I will argue, one of the essential motifs of contemporary social life and thought. By utility I intend a far larger range of phenomena than that understood by 'rationality'; this might be seen as a sub-component of utility. A restricted economy of utility operationalises any set of resources or conditions so long as they possess some utility, that is that they might serve a particular purpose. Conditions or possibilities that fail to yield obvious applications, or that threaten the validity, stability or viability of utilitarian considerations would be overlooked, marginalised or repressed.

This is especially true of sociological accounts of phenomena that could be regarded as excessive, destructive, abhorrent or inhuman; mainstream sociology is not able to approach or deal with such phenomena adequately. The subjects of sexuality, intimacy and eroticism are one example; a work like Giddens, A. (1992) The Transformation of Intimacy or Weeks, J. (1985) Sexuality and its Discontents, appear domesticated and unconvincing. Reading such texts it is hard to comprehend that they purport to be dealing with matters that human beings prize as their most challenging, problematic, precious and exalted, that they frequently kill and die for.
For Bataille they mark the dissolution of being and self and the fleeting manifestation of a nature that all respectable culture has sought to deny (see in particular Bataille's entry 'Mouth' in Encyclopedia Acephalica. Similarly recent sociological attempts to comprehend the enormity of genocidal slaughter have appeared rather pale and empty, unable to begin to deal with these phenomena on adequate terms, (see Bauman 1989; Galtung 1990). Most frequently however contemporary sociological accounts of human life treat the dangers of, for example, violent death, as an abstract form of risk calculation, analogous to the risks involved in taking a train or driving a car, for instance Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991). Note in particular Giddens account of the experience of walking through the streets of a city (1991:35-69). There are notable examples of recent sociological work where the authors clearly intend to present a critique of the totalising and reductionist tendencies of the social sciences by referring to a broader more radical or dynamic range of phenomena. This is the case with Ann Game's Undoing the Social (1991) and W. Connelly's The Augustinian Imperative (1993). In such work the notion of excess is drawn upon to criticise other explanatory economies, to break through their conceptual limitations. However what occurs in both the above is a slippage in the manner that excess is approached from a materialist to a textualist register, this is presented as a radical gesture, however it is often concomitant with a containment, logicisation and utilisation of those excesses.

Derrida has clearly been influenced by Bataille's General economy to a very considerable degree, the influence is most discernible in Derrida's essay 'From General to restricted economy: A Hegelianism without reserve' in Writing and Difference (1978), and in the essay 'Differance' in Margins of Philosophy (1982). However there are very great differences in approach between Bataille and Derrida, most obviously concerning the role and nature of text in human experience. For a powerful account of how Bataille and Derrida must be regarded as very different, even opposed thinkers see Land, N. The Thirst for Annihilation - Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (1992:1-26). The notion of restricted economy, in particular derived from Bataille, could provide a powerful and revealing point of entry for the analysis of many fields of contemporary life, from government policy decision-making processes to academic theorising. In the realm of social thought specifically
It is commonplace to operate a restricted explanatory economy, indeed it is practically impossible not to, particularly for a student, given the legitimated forms of social science methodology. There have, however, been some interesting recent attempts to offer very different sets of theoretical propositions in social thought. In addition to Baudrillard and Bataille, see in particular, Milbank (1990) whose emphasis is on the sacred and religion, and Taussig (1993) whose anthropological investigations undermine Structuralist orthodoxies in the social sciences. Taussig elucidates the 'mimetic faculty', the 'magical power of replication' (1993:20) consisting of physiognomic, tactile and optical functions all of which play major roles in the perception of objects, symbolic, real and imaginary.


18) An account of the ahistorical tendencies of contemporary sociology is well beyond the scope of this paper but for example see Beck (1992:21). This work is particularly weak on the nature of risk in pre-Modern societies, failing to address the concept of the soul and the risk of eternal damnation. Also Bauman (1993:4) who, in a similar way, is very superficial in his consideration of the nature of morality and
ethics in pre-Modernity, as he is on the nature of pre-Modern violence in earlier work on the holocaust, Bauman (1989).

19) I do not wish to equate rationality with utility and irrationality with excess, rather in restricted economies of modernity excess is excluded, ignored or in some way related to the category 'irrationality'. An appeal to irrationality is already a domestication of excess since the phenomena it is configured to encompass are already defined as negatives or deficiencies of the privileged category 'rationality' in a binary relationship. The comprehension of excess in Bataille, centring around the notion of the sacred, and in Baudrillard's work the symbolic, must be distinguished sharply from the concept of irrationality as it was understood in the psychoanalytic and Surrealist traditions. Bataille regarded Surrealism as tainted by romanticism and idealism, (see Bataille 1994:28-9). Baudrillard (1976/1993:237-8) focuses on the narrow and eurocentric nature of Freudian psychoanalysis arguing that the unconscious appears only when the general exchange economy of the symbolic is eroded by the utilitarian and instrumental demand of the state. On the inadequacies of Freudian and Lacanian theories of the unconscious see Deleuze and Guattari (1977 & 1988) Anti-Oedipus, and A Thousand Plateaus, New York: Athlone Press, in the latter see especially pp. 26-38.

20) For examples of the former tendency see Dworkin (1981) and more recently Sulieman, S. R. "Bataille in the Street: The search for virility in the 1930's" in Bailey-Gill Ed. (1995:26-45). Sulieman operates in terms of rendering Bataille "useful" for the Feminist cause, and then faults him for possessing too little utility. For examples of the latter tendency in feminist thought, where an attempt is made to read excess, see Carter (1979), Gallop (1981) and Dean (1992). Similarly various sociologies of Postmodernism struggle to adapt Lyotard or Baudrillard to their 'instrumental' purposes. Such projects meet with various degrees of failure, often because of adherence to a form of neo-Kantian rational subjectivism and a related attempt to accumulate, order and profit from concepts which insist on profitless expenditure and that cannot be contained within the unstable restricted economies of rational utility. The absurdity of such projects is revealed when the inherent instabilities, or failures to reduce such thought to serviceable chunks, are, by the rhetoric of critique, then argued to be the very shortcomings, weaknesses and flaws
of radical theories of excess. David Harvey (1990) operates in this way, in an attempt to rejuvenate Marxist concepts and analyses. This is an abyss into which French Poststructuralist Feminism and Sociology are often able to avoid plunging because they do not insist on restricted economies of utility, accumulation profit and closure. In addition to the work of Bataille, Baudrillard and Derrida see also Irigaray, L. *This Sex Which is not One*, (1985) Ithaca: Cornell University Press and *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, (1991) New York: Columbia.

21) The Foucauldian canon is too vast to be reviewed here, however there do appear to be a number of fundamental shifts in his thought. One occurs from the publication of *Madness and Civilisation* (1961/1967) which strays close of a 'truth of madness/madness as truth' hypothesis, to his works of the 1970's and 1980's which do not make such claims. He seems to have taken Derrida's (1967) critique very seriously.

22) See in particular 'On the Postulates of Linguistics' in Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 75-110) for a powerful account of the idealism implicit in many variants of linguistic, textual and discursive studies.

23) See Bataille (1985:45-52) 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism'.

24) There are rare exceptions, for example celebrations of aristocratic idleness in Deleuze (1989) and similarly in the work of Bertrand Russell.

25) See E. S. R. C. guidelines. There has recently been a debate in the natural Sciences concerning the relatively low level of funding for 'pure' research in comparison to that for 'applied' research, see *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, Feb. 1996.

26) What became known as Structuralism provides a good example of a highly logical and reductive method, which however failed to grasp the drama, intensity and irreducibility to logic, reason and knowledge of 'excess'. Bataille, in particular stressed the importance of 'non-knowledge' and 'communication' over rational thought and knowledge, see Bataille (1967/1988:93-98;1992:181). See also Baudrillard (1976/1993:188) where he refers to the 'idealist misinterpretation of Levi-Strauss' and the tendency of Structuralism whereby 'the symbolic is reduced to the imaginary' (ibid.). On Levi-Strauss and 'sociological' Structuralism in general see Merquior (1986).
27) See Foucault (1967) and also Boyne (1990) for a discussion of the debate over madness as excess between Foucault and Derrida.

28) For an application of Nietzsche's thought to femininity and gender, see Derrida (1979) Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. On implications for theology, see Land (1992) and on political and ethical thought see Connelly (1993) and Strong (1975).


30) However Plotnitsky does little to draw sociological enquiry specifically into the realm of General economy, overlooking the College of Sociology in his reading of Bataille. See also Pefanis (1991) who makes many of these connections and to whom I am indebted.

31) See Parsons who deals with this interpretation of Durkheim at some length (1937:301-450).


33) This study first appeared in L'Annee Sociologique (1898:29-138) as 'Essai sur la Nature et la Fonction du Sacrifice'.

34) For an overview of the approach of a number of early anthropologists, including Robertson-Smith and Frazer, see Milbank (1995). Milbank reviewed a number of recent anthropological studies which cast doubt upon many of the key suppositions that Durkheim, Mauss and to some extent even Bataille and Baudrillard appear to be reliant on. Milbank describes recent studies by Detienne, de Heusch and others who claim that in many societies including areas of Africa and ancient Greece did not practice a distinct form of sacrifice, centred around violence, destructiveness and excess. Rather Milbank argues, to the extent that it is possible to speak of a phenomena of 'sacrifice' as distinct 'from culture in general' (1995:15) at
all, the practice should be seen in terms of its culinary purposes. Milbank then continues with a critique of several influential 'stories of sacrifice', including the study by Mauss and Hubert, drawing out their mistaken assumptions, the biases attendant upon their methodological approach and theoretical sources. Clearly Milbank makes a number of valid points in relation to a range of Anthropologists including Welhausen, Robertson Smith, Fraser and Girard. However he appears to misread Durkheim and Mauss on a number of key issues while as far as he touches on Bataille and Baudrillard he seems unfamiliar with the range and trajectory of their work and his criticisms do not always apply in the manner he suggests. Concerning the basic criticism of separating the notion of sacrifice from the 'social whole' or culture, it should be apparent that the primary concern of Durkheim, Mauss and The College of Sociology was to think in terms of a social totality. That is they dealt with 'total social facts' and conceive of the social as a field of collective forces and energies, which resonate on and throughout the multiplicity of human experience. Rather than abstracting sacrificial events from the continuity of the social whole, as Milbank charges, Durkheim and Mauss and later Bataille were concerned to demonstrate the continuity of the social totality. They emphasise communifying ritual and ceremony such as sacrifice, without which a society may not be able to express its wholeness. In my reading of this tradition the focus on sacrifice is made precisely in order that the importance of considering society and culture as collective may be appreciated. Milbank fails to address the social in this way, which at the very least shows many of his implicit criticisms of Mauss and Bataille are inappropriate. Milbank makes valid points on the generalising and evolutionist tendencies in the changing conceptions of the sacred but this becomes highly problematic when extended as a critique of Bataille and Baudrillard. The latter make no such assumptions concerning evolutionary humanism and in fact strive to oppose such reading rather more vigorously than Milbank. Baudrillard's work actually reveals that he does not regard the anthropological assumptions made by Durkheim, Mauss or Bataille to be adequate to elucidating contemporary life. Bataille, with The College of Sociology, and later Baudrillard draw out the possible effects of the loss of Sacred or Symbolic forces, at least at a level of sufficient potency to communify a social or cultural totality.
35) See Bataille's 'La notion du Depense' in La Critique Sociale, translated in *Visions of Excess* (Bataille: 1985) as 'The notion of Expenditure' pp. 116-129. Most of Bataille's prolific output has now been translated into English and is accompanied by an ever-increasing volume of secondary literature. The thought of Bataille covers a vast area; from Mediaeval studies through to politics, art history, social science and mysticism. In keeping with this diversity a range of quite different readings of Bataille have appeared in recent years. Libertson (1984) and Shaviro (1990) emphasise literary dimensions at the expense of the specifically sociological. Land's (1992) commentary focused on Bataille as 'atheologian', stresses the importance of Nietzsche in the formation of Bataillean themes. Richardson (1994) relates to Bataille primarily through Surrealism. Dworkin (1979) dismisses Bataille as pornographer, reading his work through that of Sade, Gallop (1985) and Dean (1992) also approach Bataille through Sade though in a much more positive and rigorous manner. Sociological readings of Bataille are still rare, though they are beginning to appear (Pefanis, 1991; Richman in Bailey-Gill 1995). This paper is intended as a continuation of this latter tendency.

36) Rene Girard theorises the relationship between the sacred and violence in a similar way, see Girard (1977). See also the discussion of Bataille's understanding of sacrifice by Annette Michelson 'Heterology and the Critique of Instrumental Reason' in *October* 36. (1985-6) pp. 111-127.

37) See Clastres (1977:19-37) for an account of the cultural safeguards and political ramifications of the refusal of certain peoples to allow wealth to be accumulated and concentrated within a hierarchical power structure.

38) The practice of potlatch is defined by Richman (1982:17) as follows, 'practised among the American Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest, potlatch ceremonies consist in the sacrifice of vast quantities of amassed goods, usually blankets and copper blazons, where one individual representing a clan or phratry must crush a rival by his superior ability to dispose of precious objects'.

39) Bataille’s notion of excess owes much more to French sociology and anthropology than to Surrealism or Psychoanalysis, which he found limited and unsatisfactory. The formation of the College of Sociology attests to this. Bataille viewed the manifestations of excess through a (base) materialist methodology,
demonstrating the impact of concrete historical and political factors. He was not content to represent the excessive as emanating from purely innate creative or destructive impulses. Hollier (1992:104-112) presents Bataille as engaged, in part, in a base materialist radicalisation of psychoanalysis. Lechte (in Bailey-Gill 1995:117-132) draws out something of the relationship between Bataille and Surrealism concerning the notion of the excessive, viewing the Surrealists as far more conservative than Bataille.

40) The revolutionary movements inspired by Marxism and Communism were already appearing compromised to a wide range of dissident intellectuals. The (capitalist) system of Western Europe had been all but paralysed by the Great Depression yet still could not be unseated by the revolutionary movements forged in the 19th Century. Rather, in Germany and Italy particularly it was Fascism not Communism that was proving to be the only political force capable of imbuing Capitalist society with the lost sense of myth, collectivity and sacred meaning, though at a terrible cost. Bataille addressed precisely this issue in his earlier sociological essay 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', in Visions of Excess (Bataille 1985:137-160). Simultaneously, he had set up the short-lived group 'Contre-Attaque', dedicated to seizing the strategies and tactics of Fascism and turning them against it. Bataille was accused of being a Fascist himself and the group fell apart. It was succeeded by 'Acephale', a radically anti-statist, anti-hierarchical and anti-Fascist movement, and then by the College of Sociology. For a discussion of Bataille's relationship with political engagement and his stance towards Fascism see J. M. Besnier and S. R. Sulieman in Bailey-Gill (ed.) (1995:12-45).


44) See Hollier (1988: viii-xxix) for an account of the rise and fall of The College of Sociology.

46) There are, of course, considerable difficulties in sketching out what be taken as the founding moments of 'Post-Structuralism', however Hamilton-Grant in Lyotard (1993: preface) draws together the following key texts; Derrida, Writing and Difference (orig. 1967); Foucault, The Order of Things (orig. 1970); Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus (orig. 1972); Irigaray, This Sex which is not One (orig. 1974) and Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death (orig. 1976). For a discussion of Bataille's place in such typologies see Richman, M. "Post-structuralism before its Time" in Stanford French Review 12 (Spring 1988), pp79-95).


48) If Baudrillard has spelt out an opinion on Postmodernism it is one of hostility, and not merely when it is used as a label for his works. Baudrillard reveals a preference for Modernist art and cinema (Gane 1993:21-35), and Rojek (in Rojek and Turner 1993:107-123) concludes than in the field of politics Baudrillard should be seen as 'modernist'. More importantly, to claim that Baudrillard is a Postmodernist is to miss the central importance and operations of the notion of the symbolic. Baudrillard's writings actually refer to a series of other thinkers, none of whom could unproblematically be termed 'Postmodernist'; Nietzsche, Saussure, Mauss, Freud, Bataille, Caillois, Jarry, Monod, Borges, Canetti. All of these theorised or created pathways or insights into hidden or submerged symbolic, agonistic or enchanted worlds; their focus is on the ancient, primitive, prehistoric or timeless and on the reverberation of these forces upon the contemporary.

49) See Baudrillard, (1990/1993) 'The Transparency of Evil', in particular the essays 'Prophylaxis and Virulence' and 'Operational Whitewash'.

50) The whole issue of 'cosmology' is highly problematic, Bataille clearly felt able to make claims of a cosmological nature and founds his theory of General economics in this way (Bataille 1988a:9-41), speaking in terms of the 'Laws of General Economy', however during his time with the College of Sociology, and during the 1940's, Bataille had worked closely with Nuclear Physicist, Georges Ambrosino, one of the original signatories of The College's opening declaration. In his notes to The Accursed Share Vol. 1, Bataille records 'this book is also in a large
part the work of Ambrosino' (1988:191). Baudrillard (1987) and Derrida (1978) take Bataille's laws of General economy literally, or rather materially, as does Land (1992). Other readers however have sought to treat Bataille's cosmology as metaphor or literary device (Libertson 1984; Habermas 1987:211-237; Shaviro 1990), or have suppressed its importance in order to make the claim that Bataille created the 'ur-text of deconstruction' (Stoekl, in Dean 1992:2). Bataille intended, clearly, that the principle of General Economy be taken as a scientific and sociological reality, though not of the same order as the 'realities' these disciplines are commonly given to describing. Baudrillard (1995/1996) reads Bataille's General economy in this way and constructs his critique accordingly, on a social and material plane, while Derrida tends to domesticate Bataille somewhat by his textual approach (Derrida 1978:251-277). Bennington (1995: 46-57, in Bailey-Gill ed.) detects logical and rational flaws in Bataille's General economy, but this misses the point of General economy and specifically of the emphasis on excess and 'Non-Knowledge'.

51) See in particular Nietzsche (1889/1990:31-121) 'Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer'.

52) Baudrillard (1976/1993) describes the nature and genealogy of the 'Orders of Simulacra' pp.50-86, and places particular emphasis on the contemporary 'Structural Law of Value', also pp.6-9. 'the structural law of value signifies the indeterminacy of every sphere in relation to every other, and to their proper content...the passage from the determinant sphere of signs to the indeterminacy of the code' (p.8).

53) See Bataille (1973/1985) esp. pp.ix-xi, 15-31, 105-129). Both Bataille and Baudrillard are fascinated by Evil and attempt to trace its changing nature as well as advocating the cultural importance of retaining Evil. They argue an understanding and acceptance of Evil strengthens and maintains the cultural system, see Bataille (1973/1985) and Baudrillard (1983/1990:181-191; 1993:81-88). The potential importance of this topic for the social sciences was opened up by Durkheim's Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.


56) Thought of a cosmological nature was, of course, very much the concern of Philosophy for many centuries, until perhaps, the inception of the industrial order.

57) In my interpretation of Baudrillard here I am indebted to Mike Gane, see in particular Gane (1995) for a recent discussion of Baudrillard's methodology.

58) The major exception here is Baudrillard’s lengthy analysis of the Gulf War (1996, orig. 1992). In addition *Fatal Strategies* (1983/1990) offers an examination of the abduction of Italian politician Aldo Moro through the concepts of gift and counter-gift. Baudrillard has approached industrial action, pay claims and tourism through these concepts however his treatments tend to be polemical and are presented as examples or illustrations rather than as substantial analyses.

59) The cycle of gift exchange and potlatch can be traced through the events at Dunblane. In addition to the extreme destructiveness of Hamilton’s actions, the deluge of flowers and toys sent to the school by members of the public are examples of symbolic gift exchange, contained within a nominally Christian form. Here the gifts are circulated to those who have lost children in the massacre, in order than the deaths are not fixed as the final symbolic moment of the fatal exchange.
CHAPTER THREE

DEATH - CONTEMPORARY DEATH-EVENTS

'But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by
devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in
absolute disembemterit, it finds itself. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that
converts it into being' (Hegel 1807/1931:93).

'All passion then takes refuge in violent death, which is the sole manifestation of something
like the sacrifice, that is to say, like a real transmutation through the will of the group. And in this
sense, it matters little whether death is accidental, criminal or catastrophic: from the moment it
escapes 'natural' reason, and becomes a challenge to nature, it once again becomes the business of the
group, demanding a collective and symbolic response...it arouses the passion for the artificial, which
is at the same time sacrificial passion' (Baudrillard 1976/1993:165, emp. in original).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will define and explore what I have termed contemporary
death-events. The discussion will emphasise the importance of the concepts of
negativity, the negative and negation as they appear in some strands of modern and
contemporary theory. These themes are related to excess and extremity. Of
particular concern here is the thought of Hegel, Kojève, Bataille, and Baudrillard and
the assumptions, effects and ramifications of their different strategies and approaches
to the negative. I will develop a discussion of death as radical negativity, as threat to
both the individual and society. Bataille's understanding of sacrifice, and his notions
of expenditure and the sacred are argued to be the central themes of his thought
which prevent or undermine the operations of negativity within the framework of
Hegelian dialectics. Baudrillard's thinking on contemporary negativity is contrasted
with Hegelian thought, but also diverges from Bataille's on the thinking of death and
radical negativity.

The "radical negativity" of death in Bataille's thought is addressed, and
challenged, through a reading of Baudrillard's symbolic. I will argue that
Baudrillard's theory retains a sense of expenditure, of loss, incompleteness and uncertainty but this is located within the orders of simulacra, in a fatal/genealogical reading. In Baudrillard's symbolic order expenditure occurs as cyclical exchange not as irreversible loss. These fundamental distinctions between Bataille and Baudrillard are drawn out below.

For Hegel the ontological nature of "living substance", the real or actual, is constituted by, is itself, "pure and simple negativity". Its operation is characterised, fundamentally, by its self-positing, self-mediation, its immanent transition "from one state or position to the opposite":

...a process of splitting up what is simple and undifferentiated, a process of duplicating and setting factors in opposition, which [process] in turn is the negation of this indifferent diversity and of the oppositional factors it entails. True reality is merely this process of reinstating self-identity, of reflecting into its own self and from its other...It is the process of its own becoming (Hegel 1807/1931:80).

The self then is a state of unrest, of constant division, opposition, conflict, synthesis and re-division. Two topics; the infamous master-slave dialectic as the socio-historic form of this unrest and the focus on the centrality of death and finitude, formed the basis of the mid-20th century renewal of interest in Hegel. However for Hegel this unrest, even dismemberment, is always secondary to the fundamentally self-sufficient or self-contained nature of Spirit. The other of the self, and the otherness of self is always transcended, for Hegel, this process is immanent with Spirit. Spirit has no outside as such, no excess that cannot be incorporated, managed and transcended, subject/object, self/other, inside/inside are never outside their own fundamental unity. Both Bataille and Baudrillard, as well as other contemporary thinkers challenge this view, radically. For Bataille 'the subject' is excessive, ravaged by affect, drawn to extreme violence. For Baudrillard 'the subject' is not in or of excess, it is not split or divided, it is fragmentary, illusory, drained of passion or affect and in a state of dissolution. Both Bataille and Baudrillard challenge, in different ways, the basis of modern conceptions of rational subjectivity, of identity and unity, and of moral responsibility. These can only be partial formations;
....it was mind, reason, consciousness, "pure" thought that...was supposed to constitute the autonomy of the subject, the essential freedom of man. Here was the sphere of negation, of contradiction to the established order, of protest, of dissociation, of criticism (Marcuse 1968: xii).

While the historical forces of 'Protestantism and the bourgeois revolutions' (ibid.) had introduced the freedom of thought to negate tradition, it was, for Marcuse and many others, now necessary to radicalise critique against a liberal capitalist order that itself
proclaimed the 'end of ideology'. Post-war consumer society was able to re-construct or 'prestructure' the modern individual as a passive subject of consumer gratification, rather than the active agent of critique. The self of consumer society is pacified and contented but is no longer characterised by the "unity" or integrity of the Hegelian subject, it is no longer an agent of historical change.

A common assertion of much contemporary theory then is that classical forms of the dialectic, represented by Hegelian idealism and Marxist materialism have broken down, are no longer meaningful, and fail to describe adequately historical, social or psychological events. For many thinkers, though certainly not all,^2 the necessary causal linkage of thesis-antithesis-synthesis,^3 or coupling of positivity with negativity, is no longer tenable. Catastrophic events of the 20th century have all but destroyed any sense of cumulative human progress. It is hard to imagine an event such as the holocaust serving any purpose in the development of humanity, even 'negatively' since it questions, radically, the meaning of the term 'humanity' itself. The technological 'achievements' of the human race were put to the service of genocide and accelerated the capacity for destruction beyond 'human' imagination.

More recently, with the collapse of communism and the triumph of quasi-global capitalism 'history' has been argued to have come to an end.^4 The productive energy of the negative, of dialectical negation seems to have been exhausted both in consumer society and in social theoretical reflection upon it. A largely homogenised and globalised system of Western market values has become established.^5 Capitalism appears as a system without alternatives, seeming to have no 'outsides'. 'Excesses' cease to be figured outside the system, where they might be drawn upon to transform or revolutionise it, rather 'excess' appears as internal to the system, as its growth or acceleration. 'Excess' then is no longer negative in the dialectical sense, no longer serving any 'productive' purpose. Yet the 'negative' certainly has not ceased to exist, giving way to a stable perfection. Rather the form of the 'negative' is altered, it looms ever larger, more threatening and unmanageable. The 'negative' exists uncoupled from the positive, in forms apparently, both 'inhuman' (genocide, ethnic cleansing, serial murder) and also non- or trans-human, in the spectres of environmental collapse, viral contamination and genetic mutation.
While Marcuse and others, notably Habermas, continued to hope for a more humane and rationally ordered society many contemporary theorists have understood reason, 'humanity' and the movement of dialectics, as a fundamentally constitutive problem rather than the solution to social ills. Further, contemporary theory has mounted a thorough attack on notions of the rational autonomy and moral responsibility of the subject as constitutive of a distinctive human freedom. Freudian psychoanalysis has been central to the undermining of the Kantian moral subject by positing unconscious desires as the fundamental determinants of human subjectivity. The notion of the unconscious and of instinctual drives and desires is of importance in the present analysis, and Baudrillard's reading of "Freud against Freud" will be emphasised later. For the Poststructuralist movement, as it is generally understood, modern technological, bureaucratic and disciplinary regimes effectively foreclose any authentic freedoms by operating on the most fundamental levels of subjectivity, discourse and rationality. However Bataille and Baudrillard do not rest comfortably in the category 'Poststructuralism'. Their original and idiosyncratic approaches to negativity and its relations to excessive events will form the basis of this chapter. This discussion of negativity and negative events will enable a more precise location of ways in which death, danger and catastrophe have been understood in various philosophical and sociological traditions. This reading contextualises and informs the discussion of contemporary death-events. These are argued to be irreducible to dialectical forms of negativity as they appear in Hegel and Kojeve. More specifically can what I have termed contemporary death-events be read as non-dialectical excess, and how might such forms be traced in contemporary life?
BATAILLE, DEATH AND SACRIFICE

No, man does not exhaust his negativity in action; no, he does not transform into power all the nothingness that he is. Perhaps he can reach the absolute by making himself equal to the whole and by becoming conscious of the whole. But then more extreme than this absolute is the passion of negative thought; for faced with this response, negative thought is still capable of introducing the question that suspends it, and, faced with the accomplishment of the whole, still capable of maintaining the other exigency that again raises the issue of the infinite in the form of contestation' (Blanchot, in Botting and Wilson, 1998b:44).

'There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image (Sade, quoted by Bataille 1957/1986:11).

Bataille's reading of Hegelian negativity is most fully developed in the 1955 essay Hegel, Death and Sacrifice. Bataille, like Kojève before him, understood Hegelianism as a 'philosophy of death'. Yet Bataille's reading probes, expands and radicalises the meaning of negativity, and of death, beyond the limit where it might be contained within Spirit, unity, progress, utility, the unfolding of human mastery over nature - in short Hegelian dialectics. For Bataille the essence of negativity is not the quotidian or biologically necessary, as in Kojève's example of negation as eating; the conversion of organic material into calorific energy. Bataille emphasises that distinctively social action is "given in death" because 'death is essentially voluntary (resulting from risks assumed without necessity, without biological reasons' (Bataille 1990:10). Here, already, death is expressed as pure expenditure, as radical negation beyond any recuperation by the positive, as luxury, as excess.

For Bataille death is not the singular event of the negation of life, rather, radical negativity infuses all subjectivity, all experience, all 'positives' with 'death', with finitude. 'Death' cannot be contained by abstract 'knowledge', but, for Bataille is the mark of an economy of excess energy, making all stability and closure, both social and theoretical, impossible. Radical negativity cannot be 'set aside', resolved or exhausted in productive use. For Bataille death expresses radical negativity, erasing or unmasking all apparent 'positives', death 'reveals that the real order was lying' (Bataille 1973/1989:14). This is a fundamentally different conception of death
from that of either Kojeve or Hegel; it is closer to the Freudian death-drive except that Bataille, uniquely, insists upon the inevitably collective and sacred dimensions of human death, emphasising "luxury" over Freud's individualist pleasure/unpleasure dualism.6

Hegelian subjectivity is an interior nothingness, known only through the movements of desire whereby negativity is exteriorised, transforming nature, building culture.7 Bataille however, strictly speaking, does not theorise 'desire' rather his concerns are negativity, death and the sacred. Where these fuse with sexuality Bataille's preferred term is 'eroticism'. The notion of eroticism, far more than 'desire' expresses the loss of individual identity, bodily boundary and subjective integrity. For Bataille eroticism always invokes violence and sacrifice, always witnesses the profitless destruction of energy, security and stability.

According to Bataille both Hegel and Kojeve miss something crucial of the relation between human, nature and death; the centrality of expenditure or depense. Hegel's concern, according to Bataille, is ultimately with the subject's "Understanding" and the negativity immanent to it, while for Bataille the movement from the animal state to human 'knowledge' is far more problematic and is achieved only at great cost. Subjectivity is produced as always, already torn, not merely 'limited' but rendered into the anguish and discontinuity of self-consciousness and forever imprisoned by the inadequacies of discursive representation. Subjectivity does not 'cause' or experience a splitting or deformation as in much psychoanalytic and social thought. For Bataille 'subjectivity' is itself the tear or loss, and the loss of continuity with animal nature never ceases to haunt and terrorise human subjectivity since it is rooted in the self-consciousness of death's inescapability. This notion of subjectivity is not merely ontological but also phylogenetic, in fact the theorem of the accursed share makes death a cosmological event. Death as radical negation, as terrifying foreboding and pure expenditure, as total loss, are the source of the sacred and the movements of interdiction and transgression inherent in all sacrificial religion.

For Bataille the sacred is the fundamental dimension of human existence and it is not erased, surpassed or overcome in the emergent democratic states that for Hegel mark the end of history. In fact the codes and regulations of democratic
society further restrict the legitimate expression of Bataillean negativity, that is human action where death is fundamentally at stake. Indeed it is the practice of democratic modernity to restrict, to 'normalise', in the terminology of Foucault, and to ensure the 'security' of its citizens. This is, in itself, a process that necessarily involves the use of violence and its ideological or discursive legitimisation. In an important sense then there is a displacement of violence; a transformation or re-ordering of meanings attached to the radical negativity of death. Industrial democracy demands work but claims to minimise risk and danger; except where it is structured as legitimate, for example in imperialist or nationalist conflict. Violent desires, such as the annihilation of the enemy may well be said to be discursively produced and maintained through state ideological machinery, however such violence is not created ex nihilo it is a cultural deployment of an always existing and fundamental condition, the relation of subjectivity and death.

According to Bataille then, the essential interior core of negativity has no place in industrial modernity, it is without use or employment. The crux of Bataille's disagreement with Kojeve is expressed on a number of occasions where Bataille sketches the "impossible" project of re-engaging the force of negativity through a planned and deliberate mysticism centred on sacrifice and death. It is important to emphasise that Bataille did not envisage the 'utilisation' of a forgotten or repressed dimension of human existence. Radical negativity, fused with the sacred, cannot be put to a higher purpose, cannot be transposed into the presence of being by a mystical re-integration. Rather this radical negativity is sought out, actively pursued, in order that the human being can be aware of its fundamental ambiguity, maintaining it in a state of "absolute dismemberment" (Hegel 1807/1931: 93) where death and life are affirmed together. This state is beyond reason and language, beyond the regulatory fictions of 'discontinuous' being and subjectivity. However what Bataille describes is emphatically not a re-captured unity or a state of higher transcendence. There is no resolution, dialectical or otherwise and though there are clear parallels with the meditative practices of Hinduism and Buddhism, Bataille's refusal of the idealising beliefs in re-integration or benevolent fusion express his distance from these religions.
The fundamental distance between the Hegelian understanding of death and Bataille's notion of it is developed through a discussion of sacrifice. For Bataille sacrifice is the instance, par excellence, where 'subjectivity' encounters "absolute dismemberment", where the individual becomes, most spectacularly, "death which lives a human life" (Hegel). Further, the "practically universal" existence of sacrifice, before its regulation by state religion, demonstrates, for Bataille, the universal apprehension of the radical negativity, without use or recuperation, of human death. Death alone cannot fulfill the dialectical purpose assigned it by Hegel. Individual corporeal death reveals nothing to the human since, when the body dies, all conscious awareness ceases. This is why the Master-Slave contest must not result in death. The dialectical process leaves radical negativity unresolved. For Bataille the practice of human sacrifice, before 'history' is at the heart of this impasse since:

In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living - watching himself cease to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-) consciousness at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being...[I]n the sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies himself with the animal that is struck down dead. And so he dies in seeing himself die, and even, in a certain way, by his own will, one in spirit with the sacrificial weapon (Bataille 1990:19).

The intensely, essentially 'human' problem of apprehending death, sensing its odour, distinguishes 'humanity' and necessitates a "subterfuge" - a play of spectacle, ritual, myth and tragedy, 'to seize what death both gave and took away' (Bataille 1990:21). Bataille specifies the differences between the Hegelian anthropology of death and his own as follows. Hegel's concern was discursive knowledge, Bataille's "sensuous experience". The practice of sacrifice both precedes and exceeds the limitations of discursive knowledge, it invokes:

...sacred horror: the richest and the most agonising experience, which does not limit itself to dismemberment but which, on the contrary, opens itself, like a theatre curtain, onto a realm, beyond this world, where the rising light of day transfigures all things and destroys their literal meaning (ibid.).
Hegel identified sacrifice with naive, "under-developed" religious sentiment, in contrast to the maturity of discursive reasoning, yet according to Bataille, Hegel did not see 'that sacrifice in itself bore witness to the entire movement of death' (Bataille 1990:21). Similarly, for Bataille, Kojeve's reading over-privileges desire for recognition at the expense of the experience of 'absolute dismemberment', failing to explore the fusion of attraction, repulsion and violent death expressed in the sacrifice. For Bataille there is a fundamental disjunction between the transgressive experience and the order of discourse, language and reason:

Man's intelligence, his discursive thought, developed as functions of servile labour. Only sacred, poetic words, limited to the level of impotent beauty, have retained the power to manifest full sovereignty. Sacrifice, consequently, is a sovereign, autonomous manner of being only to the extent that it is uninformed by meaningful discourse (Bataille 1990: 25).

The experience of sovereign autonomy cannot be achieved within "meaningful discourse" which is necessarily pragmatic, servile and utilitarian. Scientific studies are for Bataille "vulgar" and "self-serving". Hegel's accounts of the history of religion, which attempt to raise discursive knowledge to the absolute, must always fail since the conscious deployment of discursive knowledge is restricted by serving certain external ends. For Bataille the truth of human sovereignty can only be sensed through the rupture of discourse, yet the rupture itself is not 'sovereign'. Consciousness is already ruptured and discontinuous. Sovereign awareness is impossible since in the state of 'animality' (immanence with nature) consciousness of life/death has not been attained yet the attainment of this awareness is the very condition of the rupture from immanence, the denial of animality and the development of the discontinuous human. However without consciousness of mortality, 'sovereign' existence is meaningless. Death cannot be conceived without discursive or representational thought, yet thought cannot capture it. At best thought can reach towards its object and suspend itself at the brink of death, as Bataille put it 'without reason we cannot attain dark incandescence' (Bataille in Boldt-Irons 1995:6). The sacred, and the sacrificial in particular mark the suspension of discontinuity, invoking in vicarious form the slide from 'animality' to 'humanity',

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from continuity to discontinuity, creating a realm where these are immanently reversible. The use of such dualisms signals Bataille's Hegelianism and he does not attempt to mask this. Bataille emphasises the impossibility of Hegelianism, the failure of systems to transcend themselves without losses, excesses, blindspots (Bataille 1985:105-129). This is the affirmation of dépense, of profitless expenditure.

Bataille did, in fact, produce a study of extreme violence, of a killer whose actions are 'inexplicable' to the progressive mind. *The Trial of Gilles de Rais* (Bataille 1965/1991) is a collection of documents relating to the trial and execution of a French aristocrat in 1440, for the torture and murder of as many as 200 children, mostly male. Bataille's discussion of the life of de Rais immediately draws upon the notion of the sacred and its relation to violence and death. Bataille refers to de Rais as a "sacred monster", whose life was representative of the 'tragic' nature of nobility or sovereignty that could not be subsumed within the Hegelian dialectic. De Rais 'sacrificed' these children to summon satanic forces that might bring him power. 9

Despite documentary evidence (Bataille 1965/1991:14) of sexual molestation Bataille stresses de Rais' actions were not motivated, primarily by sexual gratification but rather by a fascination with death. For De Rais sexual gratification came at the moment of witnessing the death of his victims, of watching death's work being done. Here, again there is a sense of the radical negativity of death, of the experiencing and witnessing of the horror of death - of the sacrifice, that is irreducible to the Hegelian dialectic. 10

The Hegelian system purports to offer completion, the surpassing of all limits - the absolute, however it cannot incorporate those excesses which were Bataille's obsession, it does not have a place for chance, paradox, ecstasy, laughter, sacrifice. Further for Bataille the only sense of the sacred in this system is the compromised God of reason and language, since this God is used to both embody and absorb, safely, the limits of the universe of rational utility, however, 'God isn't humanity's limit-point, though humanity's limit-point is divine. Or put it this way - humanity is divine when experiencing limits' (Bataille 1988:105).

Here we encounter the limit of subjectivity, of 'humanity' when God no longer contains it. The limit is unknowable and without meaning, it is stark and
unyielding, dangerous and paradoxical, yet de-sacralised. Bataille's 1937 letter to Kojeve, re-printed in *Guilty*, develops the theme of an excess of negativity, unusable negativity. Bataille questions what happens to negativity when it has no object, no prescribed purpose, and no outlet. If it is no longer deployed in meaningful action, in political or historical transformations, what becomes of subjectivity? In framing his inquiry in these terms Bataille is certainly close to a Freudian or at least psychoanalytic position, but in no sense does he present an orthodox Freudian account of the subject. The subject, as Bataille has describes it, labours under the 'excess of death', driven by negativity that cannot be satisfied. Yet in modern society there is no longer even the 'subterfuge' of the spectacle of sacrifice to sacred forces, there is no longer the widespread risking of death in political upheaval. Further contemporary consumer culture operates precisely through the deployment of desire, the incorporation and structured manipulation of what had seemed to an earlier age to be dark, repressed libidinal impulses with no place in respectable everyday life. What are the ramifications of the new mass technologies of information and entertainment? In an age where global capital operates beyond 'good and evil' what excesses can be argued to be 'outside' the system and 'unusable'? In a culture of instant gratification and permanent amnesia, what becomes of negativity without employ, negativity beyond death's work, death's utility?

CONTEMPORARY DEATH-EVENTS

Bataille's thoughts on death, sacrifice and the movements of negativity are, of course, exceptionally suggestive in relation to contemporary death-events. Bataille specifies precisely what is so crucial about sacrifice. It is not merely that sacrificial community represents the only alternative to the economic management of society, though this is important. Sacrifice is crucial because death is crucial, 'for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die but he would have to do it while living - watching himself cease to be' (Bataille 1990:19).

For Bataille the truth of being is only attained in "utter dismemberment" ('in' or facing death) yet utter dismemberment is impossible in life (Bataille 1990:18). Sacrifice then is the archetypal subterfuge, the stage, whereby the experience of utter
dismemberment is, fleetingly, materialised. Yet this is achieved, for Bataille, only within the mythic or sacred community where 'the sacrifier identifies himself with the animal that is struck down. And so he dies in seeing himself die, and even, in a certain way, by his own will, one in spirit with the sacrificial weapon' (Bataille 1990:19). Such 'fusion' or total identification is meaningful only within a mythic, sacred system. Where myths of transcendence, of totality and community become untenable in modernity, replaced by very different myths (complete scientific knowledge, technological mastery) this most fundamental experience, of the realisation of 'being' through death is no longer available.

Yet death, the ultimate negation of life, remains decisive, indeed why would it be otherwise? In fact death becomes all the more decisive in a culture unknowing of transcendence. The horror of death is magnified immeasurably by the absence of affirmatory myth. What becomes of 'being', of experience at its limits, choked by the somnambulism and banality of everyday life? Death, terror, and madness shatter this fragile 'reality' since its order is based on their expulsion and erasure, making 'reality' exceptionally vulnerable to dissolution. For Bataille, 'being' is expressed fully only in death, in grasping death, feeling death, watching death; in watching the self dying, in death and having ceased to be. The absence, in modernity, of a sacred or mythic foundation enabling a collective encounter with death through sacrificial ritual would, then, appear to have the most serious ramifications for modern society. Being, in this sense can no longer be expressed, no longer experienced in entirety; the nature of 'being' must alter or be displaced. Subjectivity, in the modern sense, is forged as the isolate, rational ego. This entails the individualisation or even technologicalisation of 'being', and here there is a partial convergence between Bataille and the philosophy of Heidegger. The destruction of sacred and mythic forms by the emergence of profane, utilitarian and individualised life was traced in chapter two. Here I want to draw out the ramifications of this deep cultural transformation in relation to death and contemporary death-events.

With the breaking down of the mythic by scientific rationality and the restriction of the sacred by the holy, and then the secular, the abstract and deracinated modern sense of 'self' appears (Bataille 1957/1986:117-128). The 'subject' here stands in stark opposition to the 'lifeworld', in a relation characterised
by Cartesian dualist philosophy. Where the Cartesian subject retained a sense of certainty, made possible ultimately through a slippage from reason back to God, the subjectivity of Hegelianism seeks an absolute self-sufficiency which can never be attained. As the self is uprooted from any sense of community; individualised and abstracted, the self's experience of death is drained of mythic expression and collective meaning (Aries 1974/1976:85-107). Yet death retains, and even magnifies its power of fascination since it expresses the now 'absolute' limit point of individual existence (Bataille 1957/1986:89-93). Personal mortality becomes increasingly traumatic. Reciprocally, the death of others, other individuals, becomes the locus of increased fascination, of speculation, even eroticisation. Death radiates a profound and fatal fascination that grows as sacred and religious myth fade. Further as new mythologies emerge, fantasies of security and technological mastery, the meaning of the other and the experience of the death of the other are transformed. As Foucault argued, in modernity, the 'other' is conceived as a site of potential danger, a threat to individual safety and social order. The 'dangerous individual' emerges in the 18th century (Foucault 1988). This point is important, providing a sense of cultural and epistemological context, but it is crucial to go further than Foucault allows. To probe life/death, violence and danger as symbolic operations is one possible means of attempting this.

The act of murder, particularly the class of 'pre-meditated', serialised or 'inexplicable' killing that is the concern here, represents an excessive fascination with death, an attraction that has been disarticulated from any reciprocal (symbolic) sense of repulsion. This disarticulation expresses the excess, or excessiveness of some contemporary death-events. With the emergence of the 'myth' of the individual the repulsion of death is fixed to the self-consciousness of mortality as ultimate threat to individual security. The fear of death devolves, almost exclusively, onto the self; this renders the death of the other 'fascinating' but not repulsive as such. Baudrillard emphasises this breaking of symbolic relations but perhaps does not draw out the impact on subjectivity and individuality sufficiently. A fascination with the spectacle of death, in desacralised form, has new characteristics. The 'bio-mechanics' of life/death, the meaning/lessness of death in modernity transform this fascination. Contemporary death-events may be read as radically individualised forms of
watching death and of ceasing to be, a desacralised 'identification' with death, as 'sacrifice' after the sacred. Here is a fascination with death that fascinates since death ought, because it is the fundamental limit-experience of life, to have meaning, yet it does not. Here is a fascination with absence, with loss, with the disappearance of life. The brute biological 'fact' of death suspends reality and reveals the absence, or voiding of 'human' subjectivity into silence (Bataille 1973/1989).

Death's profound seduction is not limited to the death of the 'other', in certain cases self-injury, suicide and death may become a source of profound personal pleasure. Drawing on the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard, I want to suggest the energy of the repulsion of death has, with the emergence of deracinated individuality, been radically destabilised and tends to devolve, irreversibly, onto the individual's self-concept. The death of the other is banalised by cinema, TV and news programmes. Indeed the distinctions between 'real' mediated death and 'fictional' mediated death are blurred in the recent emergence of the 'docu-soap', 'info-tainment and extended news reporting of 'humanitarian disasters' from around the world (Seltzer 1998).

The death of the other is left, unprotected, bleached like the bones of a skeleton. The body of the other, the victim, carries no socially generated sense of the sacred, no ultimate value, except perhaps that which it promises to reveal in death. The body becomes a desacralised, corporeal, mechanical tool for the individualised pleasures of the irradiated, weightless, subject (Foucault 1963/1977). This has not, as yet, become the general condition of society, this condition has not 'taken place', this 'cultural condition' is not realised, nor 'realisable' except perhaps in those still rare cases cited here.

In modernity the murder of a human being is far more tolerable where it can be said to involve no individual, social or religious 'meaning' or satisfaction. At one extreme, in armed combat or warfare human death signifies no more than the abstract calculation of efficiency and strategic deployment. Death caused by accident, particularly on roads and motorways are regarded as of minimal importance, a small disturbance to busy working lives (see also Baudrillard 1976/1993:166). In such cases the trauma of death is contained, in part, by its 'neutrality', its lack of explicit meaning. At the level of the inter-personal relations
murder in the form of *crime passionel*, though highly personalised in motive and meaning, is contained within a notion of temporary 'unreason', a unpremeditated and passionate response to a situation that can be said to be (rationally) intolerable. Here the categories of reason/unreason act in unison, forming a more or less coherent but unstable 'whole'. Deaths resulting from fights or brawls, particularly amongst antagonists of approximately equal size, strength or age, while usually pursued by the forces of law and order are generally regarded as readily explicable (concerning alcohol and rivalry) and tend not to trouble the public imagination unduly (Newburn and Stanko 1994). Only deaths neither accidental, rationally motivated, nor the result of temporary 'irrationality', provoke large-scale public outrage.

The death of James Bulger was certainly one such event. The sheer fact of death is clearly crucial. Had the victim merely been injured; even seriously, the case would not have attracted anything approaching the same notoriety. Death fascinates; it attracts and repels in a paradoxical relation. For Bataille the apprehension of mortality compels violence, transgression and eroticism; not death's work but death's luxury (Bataille 1957/1986). Death has been expelled from the community, hidden from view since it now represents the hideous absence of meaning, the termination of the 'real' order (Bataille 1973/1989). Hospitalised death is not only hidden from family and community but as far as possible from the dying subject as well. As a result 'Being' can only encounter death in abreactive, displaced, disproportionate form. Here then is an alternative means of thinking contemporary death-events.

What then of the two children who killed James Bulger? In this act were they suffused by a fascination with violence and death? Accounts of the event (see appendix) suggest a sudden acceleration into extreme violence after the slow procession of kidnapping. It has been suggested (Smith 1994, Morrison 1997) that the boys simply wanted to 'get rid' of the toddler who had become a nuisance. However the sustained violence of the murder, the sheer number of separate injuries inflicted, far exceed any recognisable form of 'rational' 'goal-directed' action. James Bulger could simply have been abandoned or knocked unconscious allowing the boys to 'escape'. After the murder a 'ritualistic' burial seemed to have taken place (see appendix). A fascination with violence and death seem to be the most salient features of this case, a fact that has not drawn comment from other
commentators. Of course this 'fascination' with life/death would not, in this reading, distinguish these boys from any others, nor from adults. We may supplement this point by arguing; as does Sereny (1994) and Morrison (1997) that the crucial fact was these were children not adults. They did not possess an adult worldview or sense of right and wrong, life and death. Indeed in a fascinating comment, one of the convicted boys inquired of the police, 'have they put the baby back together again' (quoted in Smith 1994: 87-135). Perhaps the boys did not understand 'death' as final termination; perhaps they did not possess the 'correct' adult view of death. What must be emphasised is the difference or excess of childhood, its resistance to adult rationality. Both Sereny and Morrison refer to a distinctiveness of childhood but term this 'innocence' or 'natural goodness'. They tend to think the child/adult relationship as a privative/substantive one, denying childhood any sense of substantive difference or 'otherness'.

The case of Michael Ryan in 1987 also provoked widespread interest because as well as murderous, his acts seemed to be unprovoked, random and brought Ryan no possible benefits or gains. Here is another crime that can properly be called excessive in the sense of extremity linked to non-utility. The non-utility of these events must be emphasised here, since many extreme, dangerous or even murderous acts may serve some utility, some rational purpose being regarded as morally and legally defensible, as necessary and possibly even rewarded. Many examples could be cited here, from military campaigns to political upheavals, the pursuit of scientific or medical knowledge and of profit in capital ventures. No such 'rational' end was served in the case of Michael Ryan and in similar cases of 'going berserk' or 'running amok'. Much the same can be said of the Dunblane massacre, except here the events were rendered more shocking by the attack being directed at a primary school and the victims being young children. The limited amount of academic study devoted to such events reveals severe or intractable difficulties in applying rational categories of thought in a diagnostic manner (Staub 1985, Prins 1987). Prins (1987) readily admits these difficulties and suspends accepted forms of medical, psychiatric and psychological discourse, though is unable to provide an alternative. These two particular cases, chosen for their public notoriety as well as specific nature, also present severe difficulties for those who favour sociological or
cultural accounts of the nature of (male) sexuality or masculinity as explanatory mechanisms. Cameron and Fraser's (1987) feminist study culminates with an account of male serial killers, in particular the 'Yorkshire Ripper'. However in the cases of both Michael Ryan and Thomas Hamilton there is little to suggest any form of sexual or misogynistic motive, the victims were by no means only female (even if they were this would not be 'proof' of a sexual motive). Eyewitness accounts tend to suggest a blankness or absence in the expression of the perpetrators, not frenzy or excitement but a 'void' of subjectivity (Scott & Watson-Brown 1997/8, Seltzer 1998).

The spectacle of violent death forms the crux of a great deal of entertainment and leisure products, not merely the staple of adult video 'nasties' but a commonplace of terrestrial evening television, obligatory in any 'serious' or 'hard-hitting' drama. Yet what occurs here is not the 'liberation' from repressive or outdated conventions where death was 'tabooed'. Such televisual spectacles, while submerged in the depiction of criminality, violence and the techniques of police detection, systematically exclude any thinking of death other than as an effect, caused by criminality, in a simple plot device. In fact the excessiveness of death, its horror beyond meaning is effaced, death is domesticated and controlled beyond any possible previous level in the banality of the 'whodunit' and the 'shoot-em-up'. Just as society does not 'repress' but rather positively encourages pornography so long as it does not involve serious enquiry into the meanings and limits of human eroticism, so too serious thinking about death is obliterated in the empty routines of television drama, video game and cinematic thriller. The cases of torture and murder which I have evoked may be seen as the ascent or descent; the movement toward the limit-experience of contemporary (de-racinat ed, de-socialised) individual gratification. Cases such as those of Michael Ryan in 1987 and Thomas Hamilton in 1996 seemed to involve a definitive rejection of the community to the extreme extent of being murderous assaults upon it. In this sense they were highly individualised acts, running 'amok' yet without myth or meaning. Where Bataille sought a sacrificial community, Ryan and Hamilton enacted sacrifices without employment, beyond use or meaning, they, unlike de Rais, were no longer sacred monsters, merely 'monsters'. This feature is profoundly expressive of the contemporary nature of these events. While in taking their own lives they too became the final sacrificial objects,
paradoxically serving to re-bind their communities in a communion of pain, suffering and mourning. Ryan and Hamilton died beyond the limit, or in experiencing the impossible limit, lost forever beyond the grasp of discursive reason, in actions therefore inexplicable.

Recent studies of serial killing encounter similar intractability, irreducibility to conventional explanatory categories such as environment, subculture or sexuality. Research into the case of Jeffrey Dahmer of Milwaukee, USA, who killed and cannibalised a number of young men, has focused on his conception of the body as mechanical system. Rather than being fuelled by lust or 'perverted' desire Dahmer, according to Seltzer (1998) was motivated by a fascination with the internal workings of bodies (and other objects, clocks, toys etc.) which he would take apart in order to "understand". A number of survivors of his attacks report that he would listen to their stomachs for blood and internal organ sounds. When asked to explain his atrocities Dahmer replied, 'I wanted to see what someone looked like inside...I like to see how things work' (in Seltzer 1998:191). Some victims were physically abused but not sexually violated. Dahmer seemed to understand the body as biochemical 'real', reducible to rational principles such as chemical constitution, biomechanical function, as quanta of energy and productive resource. In fact the conception of the body in modern science and economics, the body radically desacralised, stripped of all enchantment and seduction.

According to Bataille such events express "sacred horror" and so are indeed, in a sense, 'inexplicable' to modern, secular, rational thought (Bataille 1965/1991). Sacred horror is the horror of dying, death, blood and putrefaction, those things that cannot be 'thought' but in relation to the sacred (Bataille 1949/1991:79-86). These things can be hidden, repressed, ignored by modernity, but cannot be 'thought' by it. Sacred horror represents a negativity so radical that it cannot be thought in rational terms, that always opens onto something which can only be called 'archaic', 'primitive' or 'sacred'. But what happens to such horrors when sacred values, myths and rituals have all but disappeared? In the contemporary age perhaps death alone invokes a sense of the sacred but without the binding myths of sacrificial fusion, of transcendence, trans-substanciation or salvation, this is certainly suggested by Bataille (1965/1991:13-66). The cultural means whereby the
potentially destructive, fatal effects of the sacred could be warded off, guaranteeing
topitious results for the community, have been eroded.

For the modern, secular mind it is of great benefit for society to be able to
view death in a detached, 'rational' way, devoid of mythology and superstition.
Rather than resorting to the outmoded language of sacred and profane, of sacrifice
and evil the modern mind can create balanced and rational accounts of such
phenomena that would only be clouded by unscientific ideas. Medical science offers
therapeutic and counselling procedures for bereavement, presenting death as natural
process, popular science going so far as to argue that religious and superstitious
notions surrounding death have submerged a sense of the naturalness of death,
creating undue anguish (De Hennezel 1997). However it might, more plausibly, be
argued that medical science has stripped death of meaning, has uprooted it from its
place in the family and community and has assumed control over it within the
confines of the hospital. Death is confined, hidden and limited in modernity,
subjected to scientific discipline yet the moment of (the patient's) death is regarded
as the failure of medico-scientific control or perhaps its temporary interruption
before the corpse is processed (Kearl 1989). Death is separated or abstracted from
life, it is 'liberated' from sacred and mythic principles and in this modern situation the
watching, the witnessing of the moments of death become a restricted, specialised
and professionalised activity. Any sense of community surrounding death, a
community of death is severely curtailed by modern medical-legal practices (De
and Baudrillard is that radical negativity cannot be separated out, neutralised and
controlled in this way. Rather their attempted separation 'frees' the negative and
since it is disarticulated from any principle of the positive or good, only serves to
enhance the power of negativity beyond limits. Though neither Bataille nor
Baudrillard make this point explicitly, it is surely the case that, in late modernity, the
watching, the living of death, if real rather than virtual, is no longer sacrificial but
appears as 'evil', as 'sadism', murder, 'inexplicable' depravity.

If 'inexplicable' death-events can be seen as negativity without use,
destruction without meaning, sacrifice after the sacred, irreversible negativity, it is
important to build upon Bataille's approach, to examine the contemporary order,
dominated as it is by mass technologies. The subject is not merely left alone to ponder the absence of limit-experiences, of meaningful events, for 'global' capital aims to suffuse subjectivity with fantasies of desire and gratification. Here the meaning of desire and its relation to subjectivities shifts significantly. We encounter the mass-individual, identities and lifestyles constructed and guarded jealously yet based on no more than differential regimes of consumption, themselves drawn from the pre-existing codes of mass-marketing. Baudrillard's reading of contemporary culture examines precisely this 'excessiveness' of mass-technologies while remaining focused on the fundamental importance of death, desire and negativity.

BAUDRILLARD - NEGATIVITY, TECHNOLOGY AND DEATH

'Slow or violent, immediate or deferred, the scansion of death is decisive: it is what radically distinguishes two types of organisation, the economic and the sacrificial' (Baudrillard 1976/1993:114).

'...for death is perhaps the only thing that has no use-value, which can never be referred back to need [it is] rupture, contagious dissolution and negation' (Baudrillard 1976/1993:176)

Baudrillard's engagement with these themes is particularly acute and far-reaching for a number of related reasons. Firstly Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976/1993) makes death, the excessiveness of death beyond cultural inscription, the foundation of his genealogical project, specifying the exclusion of death as a cultural gesture more fundamental and wide-ranging than the confinement of madness or the deployment of sexuality. Baudrillard is perhaps the contemporary theorist par excellence of the depletion of meaning, of the disappearance of 'the real' in both its enlightenment mode (the Hegelian equation of the real and the rational) and in post-enlightenment thought. In the latter the 'real' appears as a deep resource of 'base' realities, libidinal drives, and desires (Lyotard 1974/1993, Deleuze & Guattari 1972/1984, Land 1992). Theories asserting a 'more real' or deeper real level of instinctual or libidinal desire here are seen to make a last appeal to truth or authenticity that is empty and desperate. These are attempts to rejuvenate a lost 'reality principle' now as inadequate as the Hegelian dialectic, or Kantian morality.¹⁶ Rather than the 'real' Baudrillard theorises [the hyperreal] a homogenised
technological culture based on simulation and virtual technologies. Baudrillard's later work engages specifically with time, technology and the 'end of history' thesis, postulating the disappearance of the human race in the theoretical figures of the void, the mass and singularity (Baudrillard 1978/1983, 1997/1998). These concepts are central, I will argue, to an alternative approach to contemporary death-events.

*S.E.D.* and the important collection of essays *Simulations and Simulacra*, offer systematic accounts of the successive stages of the simulacra and their relation to 'the real'. Baudrillard's orders of simulacra are less histories of the subject than genealogies of the object or sign.

In feudal or archaic caste societies, in cruel societies, signs are limited in number and their circulation is restricted. Each retains its full value as a prohibition, and each carries with it a reciprocal obligation between castes, clans or persons, so signs are not arbitrary. The arbitrariness of the sign begins when instead of bonding two persons in an inescapable reciprocity, the signifier starts to refer to the disenchanted universe of the signified (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 50).

In Baudrillard's "third order" of simulacra these disenchanted, arbitrary signs reproduce, replicate and expand without contradiction or limitation in what Baudrillard refers to as an "orgy" of "promiscuity" (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 3-13). Signs and simulations become the dominant form of social organisation and simulation operates through and is governed by "the Code". The Code does not control or restrict signs rather it is the very principle of their infinite reproducibility, the source of their radical acceleration. For Baudrillard 'the Code' is modernity itself, its "generative core" which aims at "political and mental hegemony" (1976/1993: 53). In the third order the crucial distinctions, oppositions and structures that constitute the 'reality principle' of the second or industrial order are absorbed into simational form. That is, where they continue to operate it is as simulation, generated through signs and exchanged against and meaningful only in relation to other signs, no longer against anything which could convincingly be termed 'the real'.

Within the third order of simulacra, the era of limitless reproduction and circulation of signs in accordance with the generative core of the code, the negative, or negativity ceases to operate dialectically (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 50-86). Rather
the simulational field generated by the Code thrives upon the re-absorption, recycling and re-presentation of the negative as a fundamental feature of its operation. This is not the assimilation, raising and resolution of the Hegelian dialectic, negativity as the motor of linear history, but the circularity or regressivity of a perpetual present, the abandonment of the future, the erasure of linearity and the 'reality' of history. This in turn has a radical impact on the nature of culture, subjectivity and the ability of theory to reflect upon them.

After the loss of sacred and symbolic principles a fundamentally different regime of signs is generated. In terms of subjectivity Baudrillard posits not the 'splitting' of the subject as in psychoanalytic theory but a transmutation in the nature of 'reality', in the way signs constitute reality. Baudrillard resists any phenomenological discourse on subjectivity through a mapping of the sign, the object. Hyperreality occurs as modern or industrial conceptions of 'reality' are undermined from within, that is from within the logic of the sign (See Genosko 1994). Subjectivity is reduced to the level of the copy or clone, or a terminal on a network (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 51-59). It will be necessary then to dwell further on the question of subjectivity for the purposes of this analysis. Hyperreality, for Baudrillard, is a generalised phenomenon; it dominates not only social institutions such as the media, but also contemporary theoretical and philosophical reflection. Theory itself is no longer able to draw upon the negative as a useful resource of critique and evaluation.

Baudrillard identifies the beginning of dialectics with the severing of symbolic reversibility as the governing principle of social organisation (Baudrillard 1976/1993:50-86). Baudrillard declares that the whole notion of Hegelian Master-slave dialectics is a principle belonging to the second order of simulacra, and which has no purchase or meaning either before the industrial period or after it. In the third order of simulacra, governed by the code of generalised equivalence, capital becomes a complete, unchallenged system eliminating the possibility of sovereignty, producing a generalised system of slavery based on deferred death. This system though is haunted by the possibility of sudden, violent, excessive or sacrificial death, of which the system can only dream, 'it is because we are living with slow death that we dream of a violent death. Even this dream is unbearable to power' (1976/1993:
Affluent, post-dialectical society breeds, according to Baudrillard, a particular kind of extreme or anomalous violence, which seeks to breakthrough the 'artificial paradise' of an overly 'secure' social order (Baudrillard 1970/1998).

As we observed in the work of Bataille, here in Baudrillard's thought there is repeated a fundamental concern with a sense of death which has no place within the modern system, yet which continues to challenge it. Again violent, sacrificial or excessive death is argued to be crucial to cultural organisation, and there is an intuition that violent death becomes, even more compelling, more haunting, and more essential in modernity (Baudrillard 1976/1993:125-194). The analysis here will again suggest that contemporary death-events can be thought as the unleashing of a radical negativity that serves no useful purpose, no cause or meaning, that transgress some of the most basic and widely accepted expectations of modern life.

The violent spectacle, the artifice of signs of death can appear only in 'abberational' form; as "automobile death" or in the acts of what Baudrillard calls "great murderers" in deaths that are "totally undeserved" (Baudrillard 1976/1993:173-175). Such events, Baudrillard argues, confront us with the symbolic, revealing its latent presence or provoking its sudden return. The effraction of the symbolic into the contemporary order is a fundamental challenge to the system. The symbolic challenge of contemporary death-events occurs through the radical disablement of rational thought and its systems for managing violence and death. Baudrillard continues with the example of death-events which, for moderns, causes a particular repulsion, the historical practice of the trial and execution of animals for 'crimes' committed against humans. Such execution is obscene not merely because it is cruel or barbaric but because it represents, 'the application of a symbolic ritual to a situation which prohibits the possibility of a symbolic response' (1976/1993:167). Here then Baudrillard insists on the centrality of symbolic processes in all death, all death-events, 'primitive' and contemporary.

Baudrillard's idiosyncratic approach to the theme of the passing of the dialectic and 'useful' or "rational" negativity is developed in his later work. In The Transparency of Evil (1990/1993) draws directly on Bataille's notions of the sacred and unemployed negativity, in order to develop an analysis of the positions of positive and negative in the contemporary world:
The uninterrupted production of positivity has a terrifying consequence. Whereas negativity engenders crisis and critique, hyperbolic positivity...engenders catastrophe, for it is incapable of distilling crisis and criticism in homeopathic doses. Any structure that hunts down, expels or exorcises its negative elements risks a catastrophe caused by a thoroughgoing backlash...it is threatened by a voracious positivity of its own cells, or, in the viral context, by the prospect of being devoured by its own - now unemployed - antibodies (1990/1993: 106).

Bataille's "unemployed negativity" leads, according to Baudrillard, to the condition of viral hyper-positivity infecting and ravaging the corpse of the social. Baudrillard had developed this theme in the important essay In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities (1978/1983) where the 'death' of the social and its categories for self-understanding is theorised as the emergence of the 'mass'. The 'mass' is an impenetrable 'object' that absorbs the energy of the social without any dialectical movements, resulting in a "black hole" without direction or 'rational' purpose. The masses refuse the social not for any political reasoning, not by drawing on some useful negativity that might serve as critique and re-assimilation, but through hyper-conformity, apathy and inertia in the face of all social and political manoeuvres to incorporate, 'socialise' or entertain them. The trajectory of Baudrillard's thought here addresses violence in a way that departs from Bataille's approach:

How is such barbarity possible in the late twentieth century? This is a false question. There is no atavistic resurgence of some archaic type of violence. The violence of old was both more enthusiastic and more sacrificial than ours. Today's violence, the violence produced by our hypermodernity, is terror. A simulacrum of violence, emerging less from passion than from the screen: a violence in the nature of the image. Violence exists potentially in the emptiness of the screen, in a hole the screen opens in the mental universe (Baudrillard 1990/1993:75).

The irradiation of self-identity through hyper-positivity, hyper-conformity and the mass media of screens and networks are of particular importance here because it maps onto Seltzer's (1998) definition of the serial killer in contemporary
America. Seltzer's work draws upon Baudrillard's early thoughts on fetishism and sign-value but fails to appreciate the wider relevance and development of his position through the principle of the symbolic and theorisation of the mass, seduction and the object. Seltzer defines the contemporary serial killer as the "mass-in-person", the "devoid", the "abnormally normal" (1998:18-19), terms which mirror Baudrillard's formulations of the mass and hyper-conformity. Here then the expulsion of negativity creates the 'artificial' system of hyper-positivity, the system of globalised capital that has, or rather admits of, no outsides, no alternatives, and no means of dialectical transfiguration. Hyper-positivity encompasses both generalised cultural condition and, more particularly, the viral irradiation of self-identity and moral responsibility (Baudrillard 1978/1983, 1997/1998:65-69; Seltzer 1998).

Here is a potential means of thinking contemporary death-events from a new perspective, serial killers are not anomalies, but rather hyper-nomalies, the more-normal-than-the-normal, the mass. The 'mass-in-person' is transparent in the sense that they merely mirror or mimic the codes of mediatized/technologised culture, offering no 'resistance' or 'depth' through a 'pre-existing' identity, but suffused by mass media culture. They seem to be, according to Seltzer, "depthless" figures, pure mimetic surfaces, the transparent self as an object irradiated of all depth, all symbolic exchange, all seduction, an unknowable condition, the "statistical person" (Seltzer 1998:4). Such people may mimic not only ultra-violent televisual spectacles, which are a commonplace, but the codes and typologies of the serial killer as defined in medical, psychiatric, criminological and popular literature, understanding such codes as the core of their identities. Seltzer, in particular, emphasises this process (Seltzer 1998:48-52) but in fact Baudrillard goes further in specifying something of the manner in which such events may occur or be practised, through the principles of symbolic exchange and seduction, while Seltzer is content to sketch out what might be termed 'enabling conditions'. These themes will be examined and developed further in the next chapter.

For Baudrillard the dialectic dissolves, in this stage, into multiple and undecidable ironic effects. Where the negative was alive in the Eastern countries, containing 'excesses' such as Stalinism and the denial of human rights, the West had long since passed beyond all dialectical negativity into a state of virtual (not 'real')
perfection. However since this drive for perfection can never complete its pre-
will, according to Baudrillard, always be ravaged by a viral form of nega-
'unemployable', chaotic, undecidable and catastrophic (Baudrillard 1990/1993:60-
70). It was only the interlinkage of positive and negative, of good and evil that
seemed to guarantee the progress of humanity, where they are disengaged it can only
be, for Baudrillard, to the advantage of a negative or chaotic beyond the scope of
dialectical re-assimilation.

Baudrillard's position on the relationship between collective and individual,
and subject and object is developed considerably in this work of the mid-1990's. The
revenge of the crystalline, impenetrable object erodes the position of the subject,
which becomes peripheral, governing itself according to the principles of 'the good';
democracy, universalisation, human rights, political correctness (Baudrillard
1990/1993:44-50). Contemporary culture attempts to deny the negative, even as it
was understood in the Hegelian dialectic, it attempts a universalisation of the positive
in the form of global markets and liberal democracies. Yet for Baudrillard, uniquely,
this expulsion actually results in the negative becoming raised to a higher power, to
accelerate its effects in a virulent and disproportionate form while the 'whitewashed'
positive too becomes destructive and catastrophic by being disarticulated from any

Baudrillard's most recent writings collected in Art and Artefact (1997) and
interviews in Paroxysm (1997/1998) develop these themes and culminate in the
delineation of an important new theoretical term - 'singularity'. Singularity for
Baudrillard refers to cultural forms, events and practices that do not conform to the
dominant order of positivity, transparency and plurality. It expresses another
"game", a different set of rules, "another, antagonistic world"

A singularity...is no longer individual, nor the doing of a determinate
subject, but the product of an irruption, an effraction. It can come from a
person, a group, an accident in the system itself. It is an anomaly which
acquires force within the indistinct ensemble of the system (Baudrillard
Singularity is related to other crucial terms in Baudrillard's theoretical vocabulary, in particular destiny and reversibility. The term singularity then is bound up with a notion of time, history and the end. In astronomy singularity refers to a point in space-time at which matter or mass is compressed to the extent that its density is infinite. It is a point of strangeness, uncertainty and incalculability, sometimes referred to as a black hole. It represents then a limit point of scientific or rational understanding. Infinity, like God, is a term that is invoked when meaning fails, or reaches its limit, when calculation is no longer, strictly, possible. Beyond this limit is the absence of meaning so the limit or boundary points must be erected to safeguard meaning and knowledge and prevent them sliding into meaninglessness (Bataille in Hollier 1974/1992:94-98).

Baudrillard's use of the term singularity is sociological, anthropological and cosmological. Singularities are events so strange, alien or unique that they defy rational explanation, as rationality is commonly understood. Chapter two noted how modern forms of rational and scientific thought are limited by pragmatic, utilitarian and ideological considerations and are less representative of reason as such, than of what might be termed instrumental rationality. Singularities then are not necessarily beyond the scope of all forms of thinking, beyond all logic or patterning but they do require a willingness to stretch and push at the limits of what might be thought 'rational'. It is crucial, methodologically, to speculate without closure or subordination made in deference to instrumental thought or utilitarian calculation. Singularities, in this sense defy or undermine classical sociological explanations made in terms of social structure or social action. Indeed Baudrillard argues that the emergence of the 'mass'; the black whole of the masses marked the passing of 'the social', properly speaking (1978/1983). The mass is a paradoxical body that exists beyond the bounds of sociological reason, yet it possesses its own immanent logic; of silence, apathy, disengagement.

The notion of the singularity provides a way of thinking the 'excess' event, thinking the contemporary death-event, beyond the determinist mode of specifying certain cultural conditions in which such events are 'likely' to occur. Baudrillard's singularities defy all such sociological categorisations, including Baudrillard's early formulation of symbolic exchange (Baudrillard 1997/1998:51, 65-6). While these do
provide crucial ways of thinking such events in an alternative manner, the notion of singularity insists on the radical incompletion and uncertainty of all truth claims, all discourse, all modes of understanding. In this sense singularity expresses something of Bataille's notion of depense, the inescapable expenditure, loss without profit or possibility of re-investment, a fundamental principle of incompletion, disaggregation, chaos.

Baudrillard's singularities are events that are infinitely dense in the sense they reflect no light, or allow no light to escape, (Baudrillard 1978/1983:1-12) and are events which undermine the possibility of 'enlightenment', of rational explication by theory (theoria meaning 'to see' implying 'light' or illumination). /Singularities erupt as breakages or anomalies in the contemporary global networks of media, communications, scientific and entertainment technologies; ruptures in the systems of transparency, instantaneity, virtuality. More precisely, singularities are not 'caused' by technological systems, by some fault, flaw or malfunction that may be corrected. Nor does a relation of repression, whereby the repressed may be liberated and re-incorporated into the system, govern singularity. Rather for Baudrillard there is a sense of an original or primeval principle of disobedience, antagonism, irreconcilability, which in one form or another has always haunted and threatened social units from the earliest times to the contemporary age (Baudrillard 1983/1990:181-191). This principle has, in modernity, been under attack from the strategies of the subject; by morality, rationality, dialectics and technological mastery. Yet such systems are always unstable, never complete, and the more energy they expend in attempting the final mastery of the world the more vulnerable they become (Baudrillard 1990/1993:60-70, 1995/1996). The excessive, exorbitant energy of technological systems becomes increasingly unstable, and prone to paradoxical effects of reversal, involution, objective irony; evil. These two orders or principles however are not fully distinct or separable they are conjoined in a double spiral, immanent to each other. In this sense Baudrillard no longer seeks to represent excess as 'subversive region' or bounded territory, and so is no longer susceptible to Lyotard's critique of the symbolic (Lyotard 1974/1993:95-154).

The theoretical and methodological notions of singularity, viral negativity and evil are surely very suggestive for approaching that particular class of extreme
phenomena that occupy us here. The torture and murder of children or young women are 'singularities', anomalies of the worst kind, radical negatives that are disarticulated from any 'positive'. Such events appear beyond subjective or communicative rationality. There is no adequate 'explanation'. Yet at the same time there is something very straightforward, brutally obvious about such cases.

Baudrillard's conceptual methodology has the great advantage that it situates extreme events beyond subjectivity, historicity and rationality; beyond enlightenment thinking, beyond even the 'limit-experience' notion of Bataillean subjectivity. Enlightenment categories of thought generate 'irrationality' as a fixed and unthought waste product or remainder of rationality so that disturbing and excessive behaviours can be dumped, marginalised and contained without being seriously thought about. Rationality can only think its outsides, its excesses, through the inverse category 'irrationality', which is the privation or absence of full rationality (Foucault 1961/1967). All that cannot be comprehended is marginalised. Media, journalistic and popular opinion, when confronted with extreme events must conjure the images of demons or monsters, figures that can be housed within the category 'unreason'. Even where 'reason' is interrogated critically, these studies never go far enough, they remain bound to reason as the sole reality principle, they draw attention to some of the problems associated with the reason/unreason disjunction or may even attempt to re-draw its boundaries but this is done to re-juvenate reason against that which threatens it, to maintain a re-fortified or re-doubled reason. For Baudrillard reason has already, through this process of re-doubling and infinite extension, accelerated beyond the boundaries of meaning and reference, and this process itself is central to such abberations or singularities (Baudrillard 1997/1998:65-76).

Reason, as Bataille, Baudrillard and others have shown is a cultural construct, an historical conjunction, a functional illusion. There is a before and after of reason, where this goes unrecognised contemporary death-events, horror, singularity can only appear 'inexplicable'.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

This section has addressed contemporary death-events as the fate of negativity. Negativity is fated always to appear, always to be manifest in one form or another; it cannot be eliminated. The archetypal form of negativity is death, destruction, and dissolution. Death; individual, tribal, civilisational has always ravaged the social group, but it has been understood in very different ways. I have argued that death in the contemporary world has become more terrifying; obscene in its absence of meaning and collective mythic inscription. Here then the negative is magnified, accelerated by the collapse of religion and the failure of rational technologies to achieve the total mastery that has always been their raison d’être.

The form of social organisation currently in ascendance, a quasi-global liberal democracy, has been hailed by some as the completion of history and therefore the final rational incorporation of all useful negation into the positive (Fukuyama 1992). However, drawing on material from Bataille and Baudrillard this chapter has shown that from the very beginnings of liberal democracy, the emergent system has been prone to sudden reversal, to the eruption of anomaly and aberration, suspending its principles and leaving it helpless. The sudden appearance of negatives which cannot be assimilated, incorporated, negatives which do not 'work', which possess no utility, which destroy the subjectivity of rationalism, whose essence was said to be work and productivity. Death cannot be assigned a progressive, dialectical purpose and for Bataille it returns us the core of "sacred horror". It is only here, within the realm of the sacred, that the actions of a Gilles de Rais are anything other than inexplicable, without meaning, a total void in the rational system.

Baudrillard's discussion of death develops a position, through the notion of the symbolic, which is distinct from Bataille. For Baudrillard death is not a bio-materialist absolute, but a shifting culturally constituted notion, which is central to power relations in western history. Following Baudrillard it might be said that contemporary liberal democracy is indeed 'the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation' (Hegel 1807/1931:93), but this project can only fail, death cannot be denied and radical negativity is fated to return.
Negativity, according to this approach then, is inexhaustible, uneradicable, existing in excess of reason, order and progress. For Baudrillard it is of the order of fate and destiny. Negativity did become bound up with the dialectics of progression, but only for a time. In Baudrillard's terms negativity 'played' at being dialectic, progressive, while always, secretly, exceeding it (Baudrillard 1997/1998:66-71). The negative has always held the possibility of reversible, paradoxical or singular events. The actions of Gilles de Rais at the beginning of the so-called dialectic of enlightenment or of Frederick and Rosemary West, after its 'end', can be read as such singularities. These are actions which admit of no illumination, no explanation, terrible and catastrophic events whereby, in Baudrillard's terms, the energy of the (hyper)-positive is suddenly reversed into the (hyper)-negative.20

In the contemporary period useful, productive, critical negativity appears to be at an end, its energy exhausted, its reality depleted. What remains is excessive, unutilisable, unemployed, viral and catastrophic negativity; negativity radicalised by the excessive accumulation of the positive, as it becomes involuted and increasingly vulnerable to reversal. This is negativity in a post-dialectical, post-modern space, in which, as Baudrillard puts it, the negative can no longer appear in "homeopathic doses" (Baudrillard 1990/1993:60-70). Negativity is displaced and fragmented across the semiotic, technological and virtual systems.

The fate of negativity then was to be separated out from the positive and made to serve it, no longer its equal, and to be distilled into a resource of progression, through the mechanisms of dialectical negation and critical reflexivity. Yet the negative has always exceeded the real and the rational, has never been subordinate to it and now, according to Baudrillard, resurfaces in non-human, inhuman, viral, and fatal forms (Baudrillard 1983/1990, 1990/1993). These are forms of the negative unhinged from reason and predictability, beyond the competence of subjective control. Such contemporary eruptions of radical negativity are, it is suggested by Baudrillard, now beyond the reversibility of good and evil, they are neither signs of hope and deliverance, nor are they pure malevolence to be either reviled or celebrated according to moral criteria. For Baudrillard 'the catastrophic development in question is neither beneficial nor malignant: it is simply catastrophic' (Baudrillard 1990/1993:100). If such events were either beneficial or
malevolent, they would still be, in principle, of the order of meaning, of moral choice, but Baudrillard stresses, these are events beyond the limits of rationality, of subjectivity. After the travail du negatif, the excess of the radically negative; after the positive, the excess of the hyper-positive.
NOTES

1) According to Hegel, 'Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is per se; it assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself-it is externality (otherness), and exists for self; yet, in this determination, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself-it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once' (Hegel 1807/1931:86). In Kojève's reading of Hegel the importance of the sacred, revolving around self-consciousness of death is not developed. Kojève tends to reproduce the enlightenment impetus of Hegelian thought which situates such beliefs as backward and inferior.

2) Perhaps the most influential of these is the work of German philosopher Jurgen Habermas. Fukuyama (1992) has also presented a liberal, humanist reading of the theme of the end of history where a more or less complete dialectical resolution or synthesis is argued to have been attained in contemporary liberal democracy and globalised capital. In enlightenment and dialectical thought the specificity of the negative, certainly the possibility of its becoming autonomous or independent tends to be denied or rejected as nonsense or superstition. Either the whole genus of negative phenomena, negative events detached from or independent of positive phenomena; is said to be meaningless and unworthy of philosophical investigation (this attitude is expressed in the Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Philosophy; 8 vols. London: Macmillan) or, as with the Kantian and Hegelian anthropology the specificity of the negative or evil event is argued to exist only within the naiveté of 'primitive' superstition. Negation is the motive force of Hegel's enlightenment subject where meaning is forged through the movement of assimilation. Of course the negative is always harnessed to the productive and progressive, to historical development. Particular individuals and institutions die, but the dialectic guarantees that all movement is ultimately positive and progressive. This process then always contains the negative within the positive.

3) This is usually taken as the definition of the dialectic in its most simple form, see for example Beiser (1993: 1-25). Zizek (1993: 9-45) has questioned the importance of this formulation arguing that it was rarely used by Hegel himself.
4) Fukuyama's (1992) reading of Hegel, Kojève, and the theme of 'recognition' seriously underplays the importance of death, of fear and ambivalence and the closely related failure of dialectical resolution to operate.

5) The question of precisely how global contemporary 'global' capitalism really is, is an important one and has been addressed by a number of recent studies, see for example Lash and Urry (1994).

6) In fact Bataille invokes Freud surprisingly rarely given that they were near contemporaries, and when he does refer to him it is generally in the context of Freud's work on the taboo. Human subjectivity need not be said to harbour universally repressed instincts beneath its established codes of reason. Though there is a certain sense of analogy with Freud, for Bataille reason is already a discursive phenomenon, not a naturalistic or biologistic one. Further human subjectivity can never re-capture, order or manage its removal from nature, rendering it into a comprehensible lived presence, a scientific hypothesis or a 'talking cure'. The conventions of modern civilisation do not so much necessitate a repression of instincts for Bataille, as they 'exclude' access to a sense of sovereignty in the face of death that still resonated in the Mediaeval period. Bataille does not theorise 'repression' or psychical 'control' so the intensely problematic distinction between normal and pathological is largely avoided. Rather the distinction for Bataille is between 'normal' meaning narrow, utilitarian; and sovereign implying full or 'unbounded' existence. See Bataille 1957/1986: 164-196.

7) This line of thought is developed particularly by Lacan and more recently by Zizek in a series of recent works; see Zizek (1991, 1993, 1994). Zizek expresses a condition he terms 'the void called subject' (Zizek 1993:9-90). This is the condition in which consumerism flourishes as the ever-deferred satisfaction of the void of self, through the mechanism of desire. However Foucault (1976/1979) has challenged many of the assumptions guiding the work of Lacan (and by implication Zizek) strongly. The ways in which Bataille and Baudrillard differ from the psychoanalytic approach is developed below.

8) Milbank (1992) has challenged the assumption of the ontological centrality of death and violence. This is not the place to review the intricacies of Milbank's
work but it is worth pointing out that his arguments depend, fundamentally, on the writer's Christian faith.

9) De Rais actually returned to the Christian fold during his trial and confession. The 'result' of these events then was in no sense the 'progressive' outcome of Hegelian dialectics, rather they were infused with the atavistic, sacred and religious, throughout, ultimately a conflict between Christianity and Satanism. Foucault also discusses the case of De Rais, see Foucault (1961/1967).

10) Bataille's use of the category 'sacred' is again fundamental to his divergence from Hegel. For rather than the condition of Lordship encountering 'contradictions' by being unable to solicit the 'recognition' of an equal, de Rais was impelled towards the sacred as the domain proper to one of nobility. This strategy was then 'positive' not 'negative' in the Hegelian sense. The 'contradictions' of de Rais' social position did not drive historical progress, but fuelled an obsession with the atavistic and archaic, with Satanism and sorcery. While the world of bondage and slavery, of work and utility could not, as Hegel's position suggests, provide the master with recognition, the Mediaeval period, as Bataille argues, still included a powerful sense of the maleficence of the sacred. For Hegel and Kojève production or work were the essence of humanity and the fundamental motor of human history, sweeping aside superstition and inequality. For Bataille it is the relationship of humanity to the sacred that is fundamental. The sentiments, beliefs and terrors that are involved in the apprehension of the sacred are not mere historical by-products that may be neatly superseded by the progress of production. Bataille states that, by the mid-15th century the age of the great sovereign lord, the ferocious uncalculating warrior, those such as Gilles de Rais, was already passing. Nobles, by this time, had to learn the arts of political manoeuvre and compromise in order to secure their position of privilege. While other lords were engaged, however unconsciously, in a process that might, from a certain viewpoint, be seen as one of Hegelian historical progression, the paradoxical and 'inhuman' effects of this 'progress' were to impel de Rais to a diabolic exploration of sacred horror. De Rais hired the services of sorcerers and alchemists, and after appeals to God to restore his fortunes had failed, he turned to black magic to gain the favour of Satan, orchestrating the sacrifice of children in order to summon the presence of devilish forces. De Rais and his family had ruled
by 'divine right', they were the 'gods' of their particular region, so the realm of the sacred was proper to nobility, that class which refused work and sought only splendour. This relationship of sovereignty to the sacred provides a condition whereby the Hegelian dialectic cannot be played out as progressive movement. Only with the erosion of a sense of the radical negativity of the sacred and its unstable containment within an entirely beneficent, positive yet far less powerful category 'the holy' could work, production and utility become the governing principles of social organisation.

11) Of course events of this kind do occur in many areas of the world, recent examples being events in China, Indonesia and South Africa. Nor are they entirely absent from Western democracies. However the important point here is that political violence and upheaval, in the West, no longer seem to be politically 'meaningful' events. That is they cannot be read within the conventional terms of political dissent and action. For example the recent events of June 18\textsuperscript{th} 1999, and May 1\textsuperscript{st} 2000 in the city of London where easily managed and dismissed by the authorities, political parties and mass media as 'anarchist trouble-makers', serious debate about the nature of global capital did not occur. In the latter event the potential for radical political challenge was effectively neutralised by images of the defaced statue of Churchill. The ease of containment and neutralisation deplete such events of meaning. These processes occur, increasingly, in the mass mediation of events around the world.

12) Bataille was fully aware of this convergence but it should not be over-emphasised. On the relation between Bataille and Heidegger and Bataille's own views of Heidegger's philosophy see Comay, R. in Stockl (ed) 1990: 66-89.


14) The sacrifice of an animal for religious purposes is regarded, by contemporary 'liberal-global' culture as a disgusting and pointless anomaly, while the secular-industrial destruction of animal's \textit{en mass}, whose only purpose in existence is death, dismemberment and devoural, is a global industry employing millions. This situation can be seen as a reversal of the practices of so called 'primitive' religion where all death, include the sacrifice of animals for food, was imbued with symbolic and mythic meaning. See Durkheim (1912/1961) and Clastres
(1974/1977). Yet the importance of these themes is not confined to anthropological study, in addition to the thought of Bataille and Baudrillard, the theme of the sacred is beginning to re-emerge in the social sciences. For example a recent study of consumerism and religion by Taussig (1997) takes up Bataille's notion of the sacred. Derrida has written on the importance of death and gift exchange in recent years, see Derrida (1992; 1992/1995). In addition Caillios' 'sacred sociology' is beginning to be acknowledged, see Grosz (1995), Seltzer (1998). Before the inception of the dialectic, that is before the beginnings of Baudrillard's second order of simulacra, the negative; that which threatened a community or social group, such as 'natural' disaster or the death of an important member of the group, would be managed through the rituals of the symbolic. Here, as Mauss argues, no death or disaster is considered merely natural but is treated as the result of magic, further such magic does indeed have the power to bring about death through what might be termed 'collective suggestion' (Mauss, 1950/1979: 35-47). In such a system signs are strictly governed and bound by ceremonial or religious demands. In the event of a catastrophe such as the sudden death of the tribal leader or sacred personage, a range of ritual forms would be invoked in order that this potentially destructive and contagious rupture in the social fabric is managed. Durkheim's *Elementary forms of the religious life* (1912/1961) describes in detail such piacular rites, as does the anthropology of Marcel Mauss, in particular his influential study of magic (Mauss 1950/1972) which provides ethnographic support for many of Baudrillard's assertions regarding symbolic ritual and gift exchange. In this system the sudden death of a member is inherently a matter of the sacred, since the cycle of birth and death is inscribed, exclusively, within the sacred. The sacred is an ambivalent force, beneficent and malefic, highly dangerous and contagious, it must be managed carefully in order to deliver beneficial results for the community. If these ritual codes are not observed or if for some reason they are deemed to have been unsuccessful, then the energy generated by the event and channelled through the sacred may become focused at its negative, malefic or evil pole. This Bataille, Caillios and others sometimes referred to as the 'left' pole of the sacred. Here then there is a principle of reversibility within the sacred between good and evil, or more properly the beneficent and the malefic. If the communal energies reverse to the
malefic pole of the sacred, evil contagion may be unleashed bringing about
generalised havoc and destruction. The ethnographic data supporting these
assumptions can, of course, be questioned, though while Structuralist ethnography has
questioned such notions recent Poststructural studies have again embraced the notion
of the sacred and the radically other.

15) Dahmer is often understood as the archetypal serial killer; white, male, a
loner, apparently devoid of personality and of anonymous or chameleon-like
appearance. However Seltzer's study notes how this very 'transparency' to dominant
sociological and psychoanalytic explanation was not only constituted through the
particular discursive conditions developed by these disciplines but further were taken
up by Dahmer as self-explanation, becoming tautologically true through a complex
process of mediated involution and feedback. Here Seltzer covers very similar
territory to Baudrillard's in the discussion of media, technology and 'transparency'.

16) Some interpretations of Bataille and of Deleuze seem close to what
Baudrillard specifies here, see for example Land (1992) on Bataille and (in
Featherstone and Burrows 1995) on Deleuze. See also Goodchild (1996) on
Deleuze.

17) This waning sense of the historical, is defined by Baudrillard as, 'a
succession of non-meaningless facts, each engendering the other by cause and effect,
but doing so without any absolute necessity and all standing open to the future,

18) Baudrillard engages Hegelian and Marxist dialectical thought by developing
an account of the transition of slavery into labour, showing the primacy of the
symbolic stake of death in this process. For Baudrillard the system of labour in
modern production is the imposition of a slow, deferred death, in place of the
immediate or sacrificial (spectacular) death that was always a possibility in the
system of slavery. In the sacrificial system death was still reversible, consequently
power was reversible, unstable, subject to transformation and replacement. Death
could challenge the system of political power and actual material violence permeated
the culture. In the modern economic order the 'workers' or masses can no longer be
put to death by the masters, yet equally they are no longer able to use their death as a
challenge to the system. Nevertheless sudden, catastrophic or sacrificial death
continues to haunt the modern system, since it is built on this very expulsion, 'The end of the spectacle brings with it the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real... (T)hrough reproduction from one medium to another the real becomes volatile, it becomes the allegory of death, but it also draws strength from its own destruction, becoming the real for its own sake, a fetishism of the lost object which is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denegation and its own ritual extermination; the hyperreal' (Baudrillard 1993:71-72).

19) Baudrillard's central argument in The Illusion of the End (1992/1994) is that the West cannot reach 'the end of history'; that recurrent motif of modern thought from Hegel, through Kojève, to the influential sociological 'end of ideology' theses of Lipset and Bell, and the recent assertions by Fukuyama. For Baudrillard the notion of reaching 'the end' of history is an illusion generated by the modern faith in linear temporality, 'the whole travail du negatif disappears on the horizon of the media, exactly as work disappears on the horizon of Capital... [T]his disruption of cause and effect is not now the work of the critical consciousness, but that of objective irony alone... [events] no longer have a negative (progressive, critical or revolutionary) potency since their only negativity is in the fact of their not taking place' (1992/1994:16-7).

20) For example while the dialectic of enlightenment in the West was a condition limited according to Baudrillard to the second order of simulacra, the situation in the former Soviet Union though different in important respects, is also governed by a perverse and ironic destiny. According to Baudrillard here the dialectic; of progress, liberty, and of the balance of good and evil was frozen during the seventy years of the communist era. However the collapse of communism or 'thawing of the East' did not bring about the end of history in a positive resolution, a New World order of universal capitalism and human rights. Rather, for Baudrillard, history, as it cannot come to an end shifts into a mode of perpetual recycling, 'all the left overs - the church, communism, ethnic groups, conflicts, ideologies... nothing one thought surpassed by history has really disappeared (1994:27). In a further ironic twist the West has no real, authentic, liberty to offer the East, since any sense of living democracy long ago passed into simulation, mass-marketing and sound-bites. Rather East/West exchange, according to Baudrillard, consists of an exchange of the
lowest common cultural denominators, the West, 'bartering itself off in a binge of cars and electrical goods...mind-bending drugs and pornography' (1994:29) while the former Soviet Union floods the Western terrorist market with ex-cold war military hardware. Yet beyond Baudrillard's deep pessimism concerning the 'compatibility' of different cultures is a powerful indictment of the vacuous and exhausted nature of Western values. He makes the point that the East's real demand; fervour and energy for authentic liberty, is not only absent in the Western democracies, but that such a surge of real energies directed at the West can have a catastrophic destabilising effect on the 'very fragile metabolism' of Western culture. It may upset the delicate balance of simulation and deterrence, revealing the West as the weaker partner and, ironically, causing it to shatter. The 'real' or dialectical negativity of the East threatens the virtuality of the West since it is no longer able to deal with or even 'think' the real, there is then, for Baudrillard a viral cross-contamination between East and West that destroys the contemporary myth of a dynamic, pluralistic new world order.
CHAPTER FOUR

SEDUCTION - THE SIMULACRUM OF SEX: DESIRE, EROTICISM, AND
SEDUCTION.

INTRODUCTION

'We need...a genealogy of sexual Reason similar to Nietzsche's genealogy of good and evil, for it is our new morality' (Baudrillard 1979/1990:37).

This chapter continues to elaborate the theoretical proximity and distance between the theory of Bataille and Baudrillard in relation to excess. Chapter two established the ways in which each adopt and explore theoretical positions of, and on, excess. Yet the relations between utility and excess are complex and shifting as that discussion showed. The present chapter will consider extreme violence as excess in relation to the field of sexuality. There is a long-standing tradition of thought that links sexuality with violence; with uncontrollable drives and urges (Freud 1991a, Bristow 1997:62-115). Such 'drives' were argued to be rooted in biological or genetic disposition, they are interpreted as a feature of male sexuality, whether this sexuality is comprehend as biologically given, culturally constructed or a combination of both.

Both Bataille and Baudrillard address the sexual or erotic sphere in some detail (Bataille 1957/1986, Baudrillard 1979/1990). Both situate these important themes of their work at, or beyond, the limits of established theoretical reflection; which they argue to be compromised by a restricted, domesticated or utilitarian nature. Yet it becomes increasingly apparent that they differ in their readings of the excessive in many crucial respects and this is particularly evident in their theories of sexuality. The preceding chapters attempted to draw out the multiple and ambiguous connections of Bataille and Baudrillard's thought in relation to the negative and catastrophic, against the context of other modern and contemporary thinkers. This insistence on the negative
defines much of the distinction between this lineage of thought and that of other Post-structuralist thinkers such as Lyotard, Foucault and Deleuze. Bataille and Baudrillard’s focus on radical negativity and its effects persist in their treatments of sexuality. Just as notions of negativity and evil are, in various ways, expressive of that which falls outside utilitarian calculation and rational explanation, in related yet distinct ways the sexual or erotic can be seen to express something similarly excessive. Generally speaking both Bataille and Baudrillard approach sexuality as ‘excessive’ in some sense though both draw sharp distinctions between their approaches and other, more established, views of sexuality as ‘excess’.

The sexual is often presented as the ultimate source of human pleasure, as the key to self-understanding and contentment. Much popular thinking assumes that our sexual ‘nature’ is the most ‘true’ or fundamental aspect of ‘self’ or ‘personality’, that the sexual is the fundamental ‘reality’, the basis or stake ‘behind’ most if not all human actions, endeavours, relations. Such opinion may draw, very loosely, upon intellectual sources such as Freudian psychoanalysis, feminist theory, or theorists of ‘desire’ as ‘liberation’ (Bristow 1997, Wilson & Seaman 1983, 1992). Similarly sexuality has been understood as ‘breaking through’ the conventions of everyday life and offering an elusive ‘something’; a meaning or goal to human existence, a fleeting experience of wholeness, completion or ecstasy. Sexuality is often held both in social theory, literary expression and popular opinion in contrast to the banalities of productive, working life; as contrary as day and night (Freud 1991a, Marcuse 1956, Bataille 1957/1986).

These assumptions are both explored and challenged in the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard. Baudrillard, through his notion of seduction, is able to move beyond the terrain of other theorists such as Freud, Bataille and Foucault.1 Baudrillard’s emphasis on contemporary extremity and violence linked to an alternative reading of sexuality enables a reading of the ‘excess’ of contemporary death-events not available through the terms of other thinkers.

The deployment of sexuality is clearly a key component of contemporary lifestyle politics and global capitalist economics. The use of sexualised imagery is
crucial to the functioning of consumer culture. As well as forming the principal
dynamic of global marketing and promotional culture, the sexual is also the major site
of political or ideological contestation. An array of sub-cultural and 'oppositional'
groups stake claims concerning their 'sexual nature', tastes or 'rights'. Yet there is no
clear-cut division or separation between the operations of consumerism and the 'deeper
realities' of political contestation. Rather they fuse in the most complex; even
undecideable ways since they draw upon shared themes of individualism, freedom and
progress, and shared techniques of mass-media promotional culture. Gay and lesbian
lifestyles are marketed as an 'escape' from patriarchal sexual structures, as liberation, or
as supplement to 'straight' relationships. A politics of celibacy has even appeared
across the tabloid press, presenting the 'truth' of personal fulfilment in abstinence. Each
new lifestyle choice appears as a supplement to existing choices, like a new brand of
shampoo. Any 'radical' political charge intended by such groups tends to be
incorporated within standardised market and mass media routines. 'Serious' political
issues cannot be separated from banal or quotidian mass media output. Each choice
appears more or less equal, as homogenised, something to 'buy into' as if from a pre-
coded range of possibilities.² For these reasons, Baudrillard argues, sexuality must be
seen as our 'reality principle', we live in the age of sexual reason. Further, for
Baudrillard this 'rationality' threatens to bring about 'the end of the sexual illusion'.
These claims are addressed below through a reading of extreme violence.

This chapter enquires into the relationship between sexuality and violence,
particularly extreme violence and physical destruction. Can 'sexual reason' establish
the nature of these relationships, can it prescribe remedies, or does sexual violence
reveal something of the limits or failures of sexual reason. More specifically, can any
of the contemporary death-events specified in the earlier chapters be comprehended in
terms of the functioning of sexuality, either normal or pathological? How does the
'excessiveness' of sexuality map onto the 'excessiveness' of violence?

The following section will evaluate and challenge the matrix of assumptions
that define sexuality as the 'truth' of human nature, as its fundamental 'reality'. It will
probe the commonplace and academic arguments presenting readings of sexuality as
the 'explanation' of human, especially male or masculine violence. Existing accounts of
the nature of sexuality do little to enhance understanding of contemporary death-events.
Indeed reference to a meta-category such as 'Sexuality' may serve to contain or restrict
awareness of the diversity, singularity or indeterminacy of these cases. Such cases are
so disturbing precisely because they make recourse to 'sexual reason' to notions of
sexuality-as-cause or rationale, appear deeply inadequate. It is precisely such
inadequacy that compels us to seek alternative modes or styles of thought.

In this chapter it is necessary to address, briefly, the work of Foucault, both in
its similarities and differences to both Bataille and Baudrillard. The models of
sexuality central to Freudian and other psychoanalytic traditions will also be appraised
briefly. The second section will explore Bataille's notion of eroticism, drawing on both
his theoretical and fictional works. Eroticism, for Bataille, is distinguished from the
category 'sexuality', and is shown to be rooted in complex and shifting cultural matrices
of taboo or interdiction and their ritual transgression. In this sense eroticism exists in
excess of mere sexuality. Bataille's emphasises the intimate proximity of death,
vigour and religious sacrifice to the realm of the erotic. Of course Bataille's major
theoretical works on this subject can hardly be presented as complete analyses of the
contemporary era without serious re-evaluations regarding recent social and cultural
change.

The final section will present a detailed exposition on Baudrillard's notion of
Seduction. This is a controversial and poorly understood aspect of his work, which is
nevertheless crucial to his later theory. I will consider the ways in which such a
reading of Bataille and Baudrillard affords an approach to crucial issues of the
'excessive', and extreme violence in particular, which appear to be beyond the scope of
mainstream social scientific thought.

The provocative and unsettling dimensions of Bataille's writings on eroticism
and particularly his erotic fictions, have led some critics, especially certain feminist
writers, to perceive his work as pornographic, masculinist and thereby redundant.
Other writers, including feminists, have welcomed Bataille's de-stabilisation of subjective rationality and its implications for theorisation of sexuality and intimacy. This latter view is perhaps now the more dominant, although Bataille's utilisation for the feminist cause is never unproblematic and has been overstated recently. Interestingly Baudrillard has suffered a similar fate since the publication of *Seduction* in 1979. The tide of opinion is still firmly against Baudrillard however and though much critique remains superficial and over-hasty, more considered and valuable pieces are now appearing. The principal aim here is not to defend Bataille or Baudrillard against feminist charges, some of which are well made as I will indicate. Rather the discussion will emphasise some shared concerns and attempt to move beyond simplistic critique and counter-critique towards an engagement with the extremities of sexuality and violence.

What is of primary interest is the often asserted, but seldom interrogated, linkage of sexuality with extreme violence, with torture and murder, with uncontrollable 'impulses'. Surprisingly little academic work has been published on the connections between sexuality and extreme violence. Such a connection has been explored in art and literature throughout the modern period of Western culture, notably in the Romantic and Gothic traditions and these themes have filtered into academic discourse on sexuality from the early 19th Century. Yet such a linkage is rarely confronted sociologically as such.
FREUD, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE REALITY OF SEX

"...we cannot escape from the fact that people whose behaviour is in other respects normal can, under the domination of the most unruly of all the instincts, put themselves in the category of sick persons in the single sphere of sexual life. On the other hand, manifest abnormality in the other relations of life can invariably be shown to have a background of abnormal sexual conduct...The highest and the lowest are always closest to each other in the sphere of sexuality (Freud 1991a: 75)

A number of cultural-historical studies have documented the emergence of 'sexuality' as a fundamental category of scientific enquiry and of systematic knowledge. Perhaps the most influential of these is Foucault's three volume History of Sexuality. According to Foucault the modern period has witnessed a spectacular proliferation of discourse on sexuality, indeed an "incitement" to discourse ranging from the Christian confessional to modern sexology. Further what Foucault terms the classical period (17th & 18th centuries) marks a new episteme whereby nature replaces God as the fundamental object of knowledge, the fundamental source of meaning (Foucault 1966/1970; Major-Poetzl 1982). Knowledge during this period is constructed by grounds its claims in the natural order; nature and the natural become the indelible marks of truth. By the 19th century the new category "Man", and its unfolding through "History" become crucial yet knowledge continues to be guided by appeals to nature and the natural state. At this stage, according to Foucault, the human sciences such as psychology, sociology and biology are born while the category sexuality emerges as a central object of enquiry for these new disciplines. Sexuality is figured as the fundamental or 'true nature' of "Man" as generic type, and specifically as individual being composed of needs and desires.

Laquer's (1990) historical investigations claim to reveal a fundamental re-ordering of sexuality occurring in the late 18th century. According to Laquer understandings of sexual difference shifted such that, 'An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of
women in relation to man' (1990:4). Men and woman were henceforth regarded as fundamentally different; this difference was fixed in biological nature, in the physical facts of anatomy. For Laquer this represented a shift from a "one-sex" model, where women were conceptualised as physically inverted or inferior versions of men, to a "two-sex" model of fundamental 'natural' incommensurability. What needs to be emphasised here is the appeal to the 'facts' of nature as final and fundamental truth. Sexuality becomes fixed as the truth of human nature, with males and females possessing distinct and different truths in their 'bodily reality'. Also at this time sexuality generally was conceived as operating, in some sense, in opposition to, or in conflict with, the demands of culture, that is, the nature/culture dualism became crucial. As a result the 19th century saw a proliferation of new scientific discourses on the nature and vicissitudes of human sexuality, one of the most influential being psychoanalysis. Before drawing out the implications of Bataille or Baudrillard's approach to the erotic, it is necessary to consider Freudian theories of sexuality. Of particular importance is the number of ways in which Freud connects sexuality, especially male sexuality, with violence.

Freudian psychoanalysis attempted to formalise, scientifically, the notion of deep-seated, natural; intense sexual drives which conflict with the demands of modern respectable society. In addition Freud posited a fundamentally conflictual, contradictory or ambivalent nature to the individual's psychic structure. Conflict and ambivalence are said to exist at many levels; between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, within the Oedipal and castration complexes, (which function differently for males and females) and between the emergent subject and a range of objects, persons and processes into which it comes into contact. In short there are many possible sites of conflict, aggression and violence, many ways in which 'normal' development may be thwarted or perverted, many senses in which a fusion of sexuality with violence, hatred or death could be established. A wide variety of thinkers have deployed or exploited readings of Freud in order to establish why, (usually) male sexuality is prone towards extreme violence.
Many popular and academic accounts of violence, of notorious murderers, 'sadists' and mass or serial killers draw upon a Freudian framework to a greater or lesser extent. Since such offenders are almost exclusively male explanatory frameworks tend to focus on the difficulties faced by the male as it passes through the Oedipus and castration complexes. For example the masculine disposition toward sadism may be said to represent a psychical defence mechanism against the guilt and anxiety provoked by the castration complex. Here the 'inadequate' male may feel unable to achieve full masculinity through identifying with a father figure. Further if the Oedipal 'death wish' against this figure is not transformed into a rejection of the mother and successful identification with the father the resulting psychological 'disorder' may be anything from slight 'effeminacy', to homosexuality, to serial killing. These speculations are of course very simplistic and highly unsatisfactory, all assume sexual drives to be the fundamental reality of human experience, the 'core' of subjectivity. They are, nevertheless, extremely influential.

Many academics have sought to develop, 'correct', or extend these Freudian notions. Perhaps most influential here is the work of Lacan, Lacanian feminism and more recently, Zizek. In these traditions the notion of fantasy becomes highly significant, and though the dualist distinction between fantasy and reality, between interior states and external action is problematized here it tends to remain in place in some form. Zizek, drawing on Freud and Lacan has argued recently, 'We are [all] murderers in the unconscious of our desire' (1991: 59). Here the assumption is not only of a universal or trans-cultural 'We' but also a sense of 'our' desire, our desires being contained within the unconscious, a sense of possession, if not 'self'-possession' as such. The unconscious here is figured as a private, hidden interior, a great resource of 'real', base drives and instincts. In the reading of Bataille and Baudrillard that follows I will emphasise their departures from Freud, and their re-workings of what Freud terms 'the unconscious'. In particular I will suggest that both Bataille and Baudrillard conceive the relation of subjectivity and 'excess' in a fundamentally different manner from Freud. Bataille's sacred and Baudrillard's symbolic are both emphatically social,
their source is material not phantasmal, they are manifest not hidden, they express complete cultural practices not repressed instinctual residuum. Further, Baudrillard emphasises the social and material effects of semiological and technological transformations of the contemporary period. Here, Baudrillard suggests forms of human subjectivity are reorganised and relocated around simulation and technology such that human desires are constituted only through relations to the technological or mediated environment. For Baudrillard, there is no interior or private core of subjectivity that might organise or at least 'contain' particular desires or fantasies. It may well be then that what has appeared as unconscious or instinctual in psychoanalytic theory is in fact the result of cultural and technological transformations, which themselves radically volatilise the fundamental distinctions made in psychoanalytic theory.

An influential feminist study of sexual violence by Cameron and Fraser (1987) exposes many of the limitations inherent in popular and scientific accounts. According to Cameron and Fraser nearly all fail to acknowledge that sexual murder is fundamentally something which men do to women. Such theories, they argue, are riddled with patriarchal prejudice and essentialist assumptions. Nevertheless, in their own explanation of sexual murder, they draw upon many elements of Freudian psychoanalysis, while insisting on the fundamental misogyny of male sexuality. They explain sexual murder as an intrinsic part of the male quest for mastery and transcendence, as extreme aspects of 'normal' male sexuality:

It is relatively easy to see killing as male violence taken to its logical extreme, where humiliation becomes annihilation. Death is the ultimate negation of autonomy, and the kind of death inflicted by many serial killers - the ripped breasts and genitals, the womb torn out - is the ultimate violation of the female sex and body (Cameron & Fraser 1987:165).
Though the authors rightly emphasise the intensity of violence; the assault on the female body as object, the programmatic nature of their study leads to an overly narrow focus. More theoretical work needed to be done establish the movement from "humiliation" to "annihilation" which appear to be fundamentally different. Further the authors do little to account for the difference between murder through sudden lust or rage and the phenomena of serial killing. It needs to be asked whether 'sex killing' and 'serial killing' are similar or fundamentally different phenomena. Locating such violence exclusively within the relations between men and women, that is in terms of male heterosexuality, may obscure further questioning of identity, sexuality and violence that may not be structured by heterosexual male misogyny. Paradoxically, Cameron and Fraser domesticate the horror of extreme violence by interpreting, in this way, all such phenomena as existing somewhere on the continuum of normal male sexuality. It may be that extreme phenomena, such as serial killing, is neither normal, 'male' or sexual. We must ask whether appeals to the vicissitudes of sexuality as meta-explanatory principle, as ultimate grounding ontology, actually elucidate or in fact obscure something of such events.

BATAILLE'S EROTICISM

'[the sexual act] in time is what the tiger is in space' (Bataille 1967/1988:35).

Bataille's earliest published writings were literary-fictional engagements with eroticism. His best-known fiction The Story of the Eye was first published in 1928 only ten years after his first publication, the still conventionally pious Notre-Dame de Reims written in 1918. 9 The Story of the Eye, The Little One and W.C. (the unpublished manuscript was destroyed by Bataille) evince a fascination with the scatological, coprophilic and generally with violence and obscenity. Yet already there is a fundamental interest in the sacred, religion and death, which fuse with the sexual into what Bataille terms Eroticism. Bataille's erotic fiction is highly distinctive and makes
for a very different experience from reading Sade, for example, though the two are often conflated in critical treatments. Such secondary literature has added momentum to the claim that these works are 'pornographic' and Bataille is perhaps still best known as a pornographer rather than serious thinker. However as Mayne (1993) argues, to label these works pornographic is to misinterpret them.

Bataille's notion of eroticism emphasises its excessiveness, its ability to undermine moral and institutional structures, to ruin utilitarian calculation and epistemological certainty, opening the reader into a domain beyond subjective agency, rationality and morality. Bataille's approach to eroticism is far more conceptually sophisticated and nuanced than it appears in the representations of many secondary sources. His theoretical approach is historical and sociological, depending, fundamentally on the binding structures of taboo and the process of their transgression.

Bataille's *Eroticism* (1957/1986) situates the Maussian sociology of the "total social fact" as a significant move in this direction (1957/1986:257) and credits Mauss with specifying the cultural importance of the logic of transgression in his work on sacrifice. For Bataille the notion of taboo is of the greatest conceptual importance since it marks the inauguration of a system defining the distinction between animal sexuality and human eroticism. Taboo is not a straightforward interdiction, far less a repression in the modern sense. Taboo encodes or symbolises the sense of horror and loathing, with which social organisations hold death. Where animals strive endlessly to avoid death they do so without any conceptual self-awareness of mortality. Though pain and terror are doubtless experienced by animals they are not perceived as mortal threats to discursive self-presence. The anguish caused by the foreboding of death is for Bataille, uniquely, quintessentially human, yet this is not to claim that humans 'know' or 'understand' death and it is, in fact, this very impossibility that demands the notion of the sacred.

A taboo then is not a restricting social convention that may be 'overcome' for the sake of greater human freedom; it is rather the very condition of being 'human'. Yet what Bataille affirms is not only the centrality of taboo but also the crucial importance
the Aztec sacrifice the taboo on murder is transgressed, spectacularly, only to be re-affirmed after the completion of the ceremony (Bataille 1967/1988:45-61). Similarly the piacular rites described by Durkheim involve the expression of behaviour forbidden in normal circumstances, but demanded when the community has suffered the devastation of sudden death (Durkheim 1912/1961).

For Bataille, once the rudiments of conscious awareness are achieved, that is once 'humans' begin to distinguish themselves from animals, the taboo/transgression pairing emerges. Taboo/transgression is the essence of the religious, according to Bataille; it constitutes the sacred, beyond not only profane and utilitarian calculation, but equally removed from the brute blindness of animal nature. That is the taboo/transgression pairing creates the possibility of the human experiencing of 'excess', where for animals (and perhaps children) the conscious choice to transgress is not possible, hence they may act in an apparently brutal or cruel manner, but not, strictly, in a 'transgressive' one. Transgressive rituals once held to be crucial to the sacred would in later history be condemned as sin and more recently pathologised as 'sickness'. 'Excess' then should not be interpreted as the return of animality. 'Eroticism' is not 'natural' for Bataille; it derives from social forms of taboo/transgression. Even the most savagely transgressive act is a cultural one.

The privileged terms of Bataille's theory of excess; continuity, sovereignty, ecstasy - the mystical and erotic, are created by the movements of taboo/transgression. Such experiences are never a simple return to animality, a return of the repressed but affects beyond the scope of animal nature, yet somehow expressive of the impossible desire to return to "intimacy" with nature. Here Bataille's thought departs, markedly, from the simplistic reading of the erotic or sexual as 'deep' fundamental nature, as somehow expressing untamed 'natural' animality. For Bataille then eroticism is neither 'reality principle' nor 'pleasure principle', certainly 'beyond' the pleasure principle but as ceremonial form not biological 'reality'.

Erotic couplings transgress the (now weakened) taboos on nudity and bodily proximity, the cultural boundaries that separate sexed bodies, which protect
“discontinuous” existence. Eroticism represents a convulsive fusion beyond subjective identity, beyond sexual or gender difference. Eroticism is a transgression of order, calculation, reason and meaning. For Bataille eroticism borders on death in a number of crucial interrelated ways. Death is a fundamental condition of all sexual reproduction. Where asexual reproduction occurs without 'death' through cellular division, death is implied at the moment of copulation in sexual reproduction (Bataille 1967/1988:33-35). According to Bataille the intimate relation between eroticism and death is expressed through its proximity to sacrifice; the ritual character of undressing or stripping, the violation of denuding. The violence of penetration, the destruction of dignity, integrity, separateness, the dissolution of individuality and rational awareness, all express its sacrificial nature. There is the actual physical violence of eroticism; biting, scratching, pulling, crushing, deforming. The obscene, fascinating and repulsive genital organs are the marks of sexual being, the marks of the inevitability of death in sexual reproduction (Bataille 1957/1986). Eroticism represents a vast expenditure of energy far beyond that which could be summoned for any other purpose, an experience beyond the calculation or even awareness of time and space.

For Bataille the violence and excessiveness of eroticism are not the result of individual developmental malfunction, but inevitable consequence of bio-chemical excess channelled by ritual taboo/transgression. The demands of extreme violence ravage ‘human’ being and are fused with its sexual cravings. There is an awkward tension in Bataille’s thought here. His discussion of taboo/transgression as social constructions is underpinned by cosmological assertions of bio-chemical excess, which can appear essentialist. As we saw in chapter two, Baudrillard rejects the latter aspect of Bataille’s thought while affirming the reciprocal ‘play’ of eroticism which he theorises as seduction. Yet Bataille’s theory is distinctly social and historical; transformations in the nature of social being from a sacrificial to an economic basis have dismantled the taboo/transgression pairing. Eroticism is also a reciprocal relation, a relation of mutual self-sacrifice and expenditure. All calculation or ‘profit’ is rendered impossible, according to Bataille, hence eroticism flourishes in non-
reproductive sexual activity. In erotic abandon neither ‘partner’ gain mastery over the other, both are irredeemably lost, sadism and masochism then, in this sense, are alien to eroticism. The withering of taboo, and the sacred in generally, results, for Bataille, in the ‘curse’ of accumulated energies that cannot be expended in ritualistic form, in the accruing of profits, in control, mastery and exploitation. In modernity transgression is individualised, radically, disarticulated from any moorings in taboo or the sacred. Transgressions are de-socialised and become indecipherable or ‘inexplicable’, except perhaps as individual ‘pathology’.

BAUDRILLARD'S SEDUCTION

‘To seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion’ (Baudrillard 1979/1990:69).

Seduction (1979/1990) is probably Baudrillard's most controversial work, much reviled as an affront to the feminist movement. It is certainly a difficult and at times obscure work and it challenges the enlightenment, rationalist and democratic foundations of modern thought, on which much feminism depends to a greater or lesser extent. Nor has Baudrillard's work been received as an important contribution to 'a genealogy of sexual reason' (Baudrillard 1979/1990:37). A Nietzschean influence is present, though it is indirect rather than formative. Further Baudrillard's position is, in this area, distinctly removed from that of Bataille's Eroticism; in fact it shares far more with Foucault's influential History of Sexuality.

Baudrillard's Seduction is not, in the first instance, directly related to sexual or gender relations, still less to claims concerning the innate nature or 'proper' role of the human female. Seduction is introduced as phenomena of "malediction", closely related to evil and therefore intolerable not only to religious or moral thinking but, uniquely according to Baudrillard, also despised by modern secular, 'liberated' thinking. Baudrillard's position here, though polemical and hostile to any notion of 'rights' does open up the possibility of alternative readings of 'sexual reason' and its relation to the
'excessive'. Baudrillard, contrary to the claims of some critics, does not deny or close off all possibility of resistance or destabilisation, only those forms structured by dialectical reason.\textsuperscript{12}

Seduction then, unlike 'perversion' and fetishism has not been 'restored' or reaffirmed by the sexual revolution of the 1960's and after. Seduction remains marginal, even vehemently denounced, according to Baudrillard, precisely where free sexual expression is celebrated and insisted upon as fundamental right of the individual. This assertion leads Baudrillard, rather indiscriminately, to reject the whole impetus of the 'sexual revolution', which he interprets as an attack on "sexual illusion" - the fundamental relation of reciprocal otherness between the sexes. Baudrillard, it has been argued, upholds traditional gender roles. Certainly Baudrillard is incautious here, yet his theory, I will argue has much to offer that is neither traditional nor 'patriarchal'!

Seduction is still laden with a "diabolic" aura; it suggests not brutal sexual exploitation, but rather subtle manipulation. To seduce suggests the wilful diversion of another's sense of responsibility, autonomy and self-control. It is to solicit behaviour in another, which is, perhaps, against their 'better judgement', a turning of the will of the other, and a stealing of their self-hood. Here lies seduction's "immoral" nature, it is a strategy that undermines the most fundamental, taken-for-granted 'truth' of contemporary culture; the rights of individual autonomy and choice. Seduction is a strategic assault on individual choice, on the freedom to decide, to pursue ones own will.

Baudrillard assigns seduction an immanently reversible (symbolic) nature and locates it within his alternative theory of power. Here the seducer becomes the seduced; the power relations reverse as the seducer (archetypally masculine for Baudrillard) is absorbed by the enchantment of the other. Indeed phallocratic or patriarchal 'power' here is not only reversed but also, according to Baudrillard, abolished by the play of seduction:
The crucial stake of sexuality is never the sexual difference, it is the illusion that shows through the real, the absence that shows through the presence, the feminine that shows through the characteristics of the artificial ideal-type that one has fabricated for it (Baudrillard La fin: 1).

Baudrillard's work is developed into a polemical assault on Foucault's position regarding the relationship between power, knowledge and sexuality. Baudrillard though shares much of Foucault's position on sexuality, aiming to turn it upside down while "still accepting its central hypothesis". Both reject the assumptions of Freudianism at a fundamental level, for Foucault:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power...[S]exuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality...the most varied strategies (Foucault 1976/1979:103).

Baudrillard is clearly influenced by Foucault in the following assertion:

...the unconscious, the "adventure" of the unconscious, appears as the last, large-scale attempt to re-establish secrecy in a society without secrets. The unconscious appears as our secret, our personal mystery in a confessional and transparent society...the unconscious was created at the same time as psychoanalysis, that is at the same time as the procedures for its assimilation, and the techniques for the retraction of the secrets lodged in its deep structures (Baudrillard 1979/1990:80).

Both Foucault and Baudrillard are engaged in alternative cultural histories or genealogies of modernity. For Baudrillard a sense of ritual seduction, fundamental to symbolic cultures, still resonated in the 18th century before suffering a more
thoroughgoing exclusion. While for Foucault the same period involved a fundamental cultural shift in the deployment of sexuality from that dominated by a confessional-pedagogic form to that of a positivist-scientific one. Both offer variants of a disenchantment thesis, though this is more pronounced in Baudrillard's work. Methodologically Foucault's vision tends towards the language of complexity, multiplicity, networks of inter-relation, while Baudrillard seems to favour simplicity or better *post-complexity*. The notion of seduction and its reversible form, according to Baudrillard, radically undermine Foucault's analytics of power. For Baudrillard production and seduction do not oppose each other dialectically, rather production expands and accelerates its domain through the mechanisms of 'power' and desire while ever vulnerable to seduction, which operates through inversion, reversal, and annulment:

'Foucault sees only the production of sex as discourse. He is fascinated by the irreversible deployment and interstitial saturation of a field of speech, which is at the same time the institution of a field of power, culminating in a field of knowledge that reflects (or invents) it. But from whence does power derive its [somnambulistic functionality] this irresistible vocation to saturate space? If neither sociality nor sexuality exists unless reclaimed and staged by power, perhaps power too does not exist unless reclaimed and staged by knowledge (theory). In which case, the entire ensemble should be placed in simulation' (1979/1990:47-8).

This is an important passage which draws attention to key weaknesses in Foucault's theory. For Foucault the 'reality' of sex is always already discursive; it is always a process of production, more or less smooth and orderly. Further the multiple networks of relations between discourse, power, knowledge and sexuality tend to result in a circularity of argument, a systematic and ordered vision which minimises the violence of these phenomena and the violence of their ordering into discursive or epistemic regimes. Foucault's work denies their mystery, their intractability, what Baudrillard terms their "secret". Foucault's is a functional and operational vision.
rooted in the metaphoric of production. Forces, relations, objects and phenomena appear, as Baudrillard argues somnambulistic, inert, as if asleep.14

Further Baudrillard is convinced of a pervasive enervation in the 'reality' of the sexual, what he calls 'the end of the sexual illusion'. Here the influence of Nietzsche is decisive. 'Reality' does not exist as deep, final principle, nature or truth. Just as the universe is not, in ultimate nature moral, nor is it predictable or ordered, its ultimate form is not an anthropomorphic God, but nor is it molecular structure, bio-chemical energy or libidinal drive.15

For Baudrillard seduction, the enchantment of the object, beauty, the perfection of the surface, is deadly dangerous, in a word, fatal. According to Baudrillard the seduction radiated by beauty operates as the giving of a gift; a gift that can never be returned or repaid. A challenge without answers, a potlatch. The impulses of desire or the bio-mechanics of sex cannot answer the seductiveness of beauty; it is radically incommensurate to these. As in the potlatch, seduction has the effect of raising the stakes to the ultimate level, that of violence, sacrifice and death. The negotiations of desire and sexual pleasure represent only compromise, pragmatism and vulgarity. Seduction and 'perversion' then are closely related for Baudrillard. However the difference is crucial and is as follows, 'Perversion is a frozen challenge; seduction a living challenge. Seduction is shifting and ephemeral; perversion monotonous and interminable. Perversion is theatrical and complicit; seduction, secret and reversible' (1979/1990:128).

Perversion then appears as a contemporary 'pathologised' residue of seduction. Baudrillard's discussion of the seduction, the rule and play is developed into a critique of the assumptions founding the modern preoccupation with sex-violence, with sex as violence, with male desire as murderous lust:

Their violence is ceremonial - and by no means instinctual; only the rite is violent, only the rules of the game are violent, because they put an end to the
system formed by reality. This is true cruelty, and has nothing to do with bloodlust (1979/1990:125).

Here Baudrillard echoes Bataille’s emphasis on the sacrificial form as the destruction of profane ‘everyday’ reality. The ceremony is cruel, as demanded by its form or “rule”, but the violence is not instinctual or psychical in origin, not ‘bloodlust’. Symbolic sacrificial rites did not require ‘real’ suffering or death but could occur through symbolic substitutions. Baudrillard does not celebrate ritual ‘murder’ but opposes the real and material through seduction and illusion. ‘Instinctual violence’ is possible only where the symbolic order is broken, such that the ‘real’, ‘rational’ and ‘natural’ can be posited. These are the conditions of the emergence of modern sexual violence, or loosely speaking, ‘patriarchal sexual violence’. Baudrillard project is to rediscover the “radical otherness” of seduction, the symbolic form that is marginalised by both patriarchy, and, Baudrillard argues, by modern feminism.

Psychoanalysis, which deals in the ‘instinctual’, concerns itself, not with the rule, play and game, but with law, repression and even transgression. Baudrillard moves against Freud, Lacan and Lacanian feminism and also against the celebration of transgression by Sade and in Bataille’s important coupling of taboo and transgression. All of the above must maintain the centrality of the law, ‘all transgressions are possible, but not an infraction of the rule’ (1979/1990:126):

Because the Law - whether that of the signifier, castration, or a social interdiction - claims to be the discursive sign of the legal instance and the hidden truth, it results in repression and prohibitions, and thus the division into latent and manifest discourse. Given that the rule is conventional and arbitrary, and has no hidden truth, it knows neither repression nor the distinction between the manifest and the latent...[T]he endless, reversible cycle of the Rule is opposed to the linear, finalised progression of the Law (1979/1990:132).
Games and play are not 'free' but are governed by ritual and reciprocal obligation. In the enchantment of the game, the psychoanalytic distinctions between reality principle and pleasure principle, between conscious and unconscious, between interdiction and transgression no longer hold. Here a crucial difference of approach between Bataille and Baudrillard emerges. For Baudrillard the Law is, or has become, the generalised form, encompassing both exterior socio-political and interior 'psychical-sexual' space such that this very distinction breaks down. The value then of the ritual, the ceremonial, the rule, is precisely that they are restricted, proscribed exchanges. They prevent such cultures from attaining a total, transparent, and in Baudrillard's terms, “obscene” nature through unrestricted unmanageable exchange. This would not be a General economy in the Bataillean sense, as Goux for example has argued (Goux in Stoekl Ed. 1990:206-224); though the resemblance is considerable. According to Baudrillard, 'the symbolic sphere of these cultures knows no remains. In games too, unlike the real, there is nothing left over' (1979/1990:1350. Here then there is no remainder, no excess, yet no utility either. Further:

...it makes no difference whether they be the rules of the game of the universe itself: there is no metaphysics looming on the horizon of the game's indefinitely reversible cycle - and certainly not the metaphysics of desire, which is still dependent on the world's natural order, or natural disorder (Baudrillard 1979/1990:147).

Here it is clear that Baudrillard finds little of value in Deleuze's discussions of the rhizome, of micro-relations of force and desire. These conceptual tools seek to accurately describe the 'real' nature of the universe, expressing an ontology of what Baudrillard terms "natural disorder". It may well be that Deleuzian philosophy offers the most plausible, most adequate metaphysics that has been developed in Western philosophy but this is of little interest to Baudrillard, 'Desire may well be the Law of the universe, but the eternal return is its Rule' (Baudrillard 1979/1990:147).
Baudrillard, again sometimes close to Foucault's position, contends that the sexual, beyond its apparent liberation and proliferation has, in fact, become radically uncertain and indeterminate. This uncertainty is, in general, not enabling, according to Baudrillard; it does not open the way to authentic freedoms but rather is a condition of the hyperrealisation of the sexual. An authentic, true or 'real' nature of human sexuality can no longer be located, though such a 'truth' is indeed still sought by the majority of those who aim to free sexuality from repression. Baudrillard does not mourn the loss of the real in some nostalgic fashion, as has been charged, rather he attempts to chart the effects of this manic attempt to 'free' the sexual, to realise the truth of self through desire, to cast off all restrictions in the quest for sexual reality. In Nietzschean terms then the contemporary quest for the unfettered truth of sex is but the latest manifestation of the nihilist spirit. A will-to-knowledge that is moralistic, resentful, that seeks to fabricate a new reality, a promised land, as a substitute for the spiritual emptiness of which it is but a manifestation. However in Baudrillard's reading this 'stage of nihilism' has achieved the form of a generalised system, rooted in global capital, untrammelled commodification, the consumer culture of 'individual' desires, pleasures and gratification. This is "generalised simulation":

...erotic polyvalence, the infinite potentiality of desire, different connections, diffractions, libidinal intensities - all multiple variants of a liberatory alternative coming from the frontiers of a psychoanalysis free of Freud, or from the frontiers of desire free of psychoanalysis (Baudrillard 1979/1990:6).\textsuperscript{16}
'If seduction is a passion or destiny, it is usually the opposite passion that prevails - that of not being seduced. We struggle to confirm ourselves in our truth: we fight against that which seeks to seduce us' (Baudrillard 1979/1990:119).

'...seduction belongs to the cultures of cruelty, and it is the only ceremonial form of the latter left to us. It is what draws our attention to death, not in its organic and accidental form, but as something necessary and rigorous, the inevitable consequence of the game's rules' (Baudrillard 1979/1990:124).

It has been made clear throughout this thesis that Baudrillard does not, specifically, address the phenomena of 'inexplicable' violence, of sexual or serial killing. However in a section of Seduction entitled 'The fear of being seduced' Baudrillard comes remarkably close to such an analysis. He addresses the gamut of contemporary psychopathological 'conditions' such as hysteria, anorexia, fetishism and impotence as strategies for the avoidance of seduction. Hysteria, for Baudrillard, represents the blocking of the immanent reversibility of seduction; while anorexia is the effacement of seduction through the self-disenchantment of body/image, which he argues is also central to the problem of impotence. Baudrillard does not define any of the above as specifically masculine or feminine 'disorders' but as generalised conditions that can afflict all in contemporary culture. Psychoanalysis and indeed the whole pop-psychology/therapy industry are for Baudrillard, the tools by which seduction is systematically effaced or rather 'imprison[ed] within the dilemma of sex'. However Baudrillard's analysis of fetishism, first addressed in The System of Objects (1968/1996) does probe the connection of 'sexuality' and extreme violence. According to Baudrillard the fetishist fears and detests not only the seduction radiated by the object but also any seduction emanating from him or herself. The discussion hinges on a fictional character that kidnaps, imprisons and abuses a young woman in an attempt to achieve total control over the processes of seduction, love and intimacy. The fetishist also collects butterflies:
He prefers the monotonous fascination of the collection, the fascination with dead differences, this obsession with the same, over the seduction of the other...she will die, not because he is a dangerous madman, but because he is logical, motivated by an irreversible logic. To seduce without being seduced - without reversibility (Baudrillard 1979/1990:123).

These logical games of collection, the "monotonous fascinations" with "dead differences" or with "the same" are crucial in that they facilitate an alternative reading of contemporary death-events, particularly serial killing. Baudrillard's fictional character plays logical games but has broken the rule of reversibility. The 'game' is of his own design, it is individual. His victim is only part of his game and has no value beyond it. This is the cruelty and perversion of his game, which is quite 'real'. The collector seeks power, control over his own failure, the failure to be seduced. He seeks total domination. This is achieved through collections, through control over parts, components, dead and inert objects.

It has already been noted that Jeffrey Dahmer and many other serial killers have been distinguished by their tendencies to collect objects related to their killings. Fred West, for example, was a voracious collector, fascinated precisely with the 'dead differences' of women's bodies, buried, or rather stored around his house, garden and other territories he regarded as his own. Wansell's (1996) detailed study of the West's makes only scant reference to academic studies of violence, yet emphasises, repeatedly, Fred West's obsessions with collections. The varieties of 'collections' are almost innumerable in this case. Firstly the burial sites of victims, the corpses themselves, stored not according to criteria based on the likelihood of discovery but rather in locations laden with symbolic meaning for West. More particularly West usually extracted certain 'favourite' bones from these bodies; fingers, ribs and kneecaps; sometimes these were labelled and stored away. West also collected the sperm of the men who visited his wife as she worked as a prostitute. West would collect his wife's stained underwear, partially burn it, then date and label each item before storing them.
individually in glass jars. Other collections were perhaps less idiosyncratic, including pornography, sex toys and torture devices. Clearly West's actions followed a set ritual or logic and were carefully carried out. However West's perverse logic operated far beyond the moorings of 'rationality' in any legitimated form. West was an accomplished liar and as Wansell argues, remarkably adept at eluding police attention. However the sheer volume or 'excess' of West's macabre collections finally made it impossible for him to remain undetected. West played cruel but 'real' games of collection, following a strict logic of his own making. He tried to eliminate the reciprocal form of seduction in order to maintain a mastery or control. Survivors of the West's crimes stress that Frederick himself rarely participated sexually but rather controlled the events from a 'safe' distance. Their abuse and murder of young women can be seen as a vicious attempt to destroy, more precisely to disenchant the bodies of the victims, eliminating their seduction.

The established explanatory schemes of sociology, criminology and psychology are woefully inadequate faced with these events. A Freudian account of fetishism and sadism may provide something of a starting point but no more since any typology of universalised instincts and developmental stages is unable to approach the distinctiveness of this case. Certainly neither Fred or Rose West had a 'normal' childhood, both were involved in long-term incestuous relationships with their opposite sex parents. Freudian accounts of the Oedipus and castration complexes are scarcely adequate here. Nor did Fred West seem to correspond to any culturally sanctioned form of masculinity; to claim he represented 'normal' masculinity is highly problematic. While aggression certainly is a key component of modern masculinity the ritual destruction of women's bodies is not. Variants of the 'crisis of masculinity' thesis then appear to have little purchase. West was described at length by a number of those around him. None regarded him as either excessively masculine or 'macho', nor as 'weak' or 'effeminate'. He was felt to be a good talker, the sort of person who would always avoid a physical fight, who would talk his way out of trouble. In general he was
a popular man and seemed to find it easy to attract company, especially that of women. Perhaps then West was seductive.

Further neither Fred nor Rose West seems to correspond in anyway to Seltzer's (1998) description of the serial killer. Seltzer describes the serial killer as "statistical person", the "mass-in-person" the "devoid" (Seltzer 1998:1-25). By these terms Seltzer refers to ways in which contemporary identity may be 'swamped' even 'erased' by mass-technologies of media and simulation. Subjectivity is reduced to standardised themes or codes drawn from the mass media, the serial killer seems to lack any personality or distinctiveness, they merely reflect the established discourses about their nature and reflect or fulfil the roles that criminologists and the media assign them. Though dealing specifically with American serial killers Seltzer does refer to Fred West in passing but does not draw out the distinctiveness of this case. Rather than being in any way "abnormally-normal", as Seltzer would suggest, both the West's seemed highly distinctive, far from 'fading into the background' they were well known in their community. Neither affluent nor poor, they seemed a little old-fashioned, provincial in outlook, and not at all the technologised, post-subjective "mass-in-person" that Seltzer describes. Something of the distinctiveness of the West's case resides in the fact that it was understood by the media as 'individual' (or inter-individual) criminality, located in the 'acts' of the principal actors. This is in contrast to the 'event' of Hungerford in 1987, and the 'event' of Dunblane in 1996, which were not understood in terms of individual actions but as 'Event', as if the actors involved where indeed 'devoid' of identity and motivation, 'irradiated' by their 'environment', the space of the event. Michael Ryan and Thomas Hamilton then do seem to correspond, in part, to Seltzer's suggestions, lacking in 'self-hood', deficient, mimicking a particular variant of contemporary 'survivalist' culture in order to maintain 'inadequate' or absent identities. However the West's seemed to retain, stubbornly, highly idiosyncratic personal identities. Perhaps these cases are fundamentally different, the West's being serial killers, Ryan and Hamilton spree-killers. Paradoxically though Seltzer's characterisation of the serial killer seems able to grasp something of the cases of Ryan
and Hamilton, who were not serial killers, while it is ineffective in West's who, arguably, were.

Baudrillard's later work has theorised the appearance of singularities within mass culture. This provides a way of thinking beyond Seltzer's formulations while retaining what is of importance in his work. Baudrillard (1978/1983) posits the collapse of 'the social' as referent and meaning, into the 'mass' a silent, inert and paradoxical post-social form. The mass or masses absorb meaning (the media, information) more rapidly than meaning can be produced. This represents "the death of the social" and the failure of the social sciences, which attempt to 'capture meaning', 'That the silent majority (or the masses) is an imaginary referent does not mean they don't exist. It means that their representation is no longer possible,'(Baudrillard 1978/1983:20). Masses and the singularities within them are of the dimension of simulation not representation. Baudrillard speaks of a transition from the 'rational' violence of political power to an 'irrational' violence of post-political forms; his privileged example is terrorism. My contention is that contemporary death-events and the phenomena of 'serial killing' are even more characteristic of the contemporary order Baudrillard seeks to describe. In these also 'meaning is absent, it is an irrational violence without purpose as such' (ibid.). This is violence beyond utilitarian purpose, beyond any 'gain', perhaps even in terms of 'pleasure'. Yet these cases reflect the 'violence' of contemporary culture; individual gratification is prized beyond any ethical relation. The serialised and compulsive production of horror mimics the serialised production of commodities and consumers; the serialisation of desire. Seltzer argues serial killing is inextricably bound up with modern techniques of serialisation, recording and transmitting, it is a thoroughly media-tised phenomenon from the construction of F.B.I. profiles to 'copy-cat' simulations of the media, cinema and literature (Seltzer 1998:125-158).

For Baudrillard such events are not the revolt of disorder against order, but the mutant acceleration of order into horror and obscenity, "a hyperreal conformity". Yet Baudrillard rejects the suggestion that contemporary culture or media 'produces' such
violence. Reason, he argues, cannot extend this far; in fact it attempts to “neutralise” such events by assigning them ‘meaning’ without actually ‘thinking’ them. Beyond meaning, according to Baudrillard, is pure fascination, thought can only affirm the “simultaneity” and “violent implosion” of these events. In a certain sense they are indeed ‘inexplicable’, ‘elsewhere’, “mythical perhaps, simulacrum undoubtedly...a strange mixture of the symbolic and the spectacular, of the challenge and simulation” (Baudrillard 1978/1983:54). Within the mass, where any ‘identity’ exists only in simulation, in the network not the individual, sudden singularities emerge. Such “anomalies” acquire force or intensity “within the indistinct ensemble of the system” (Baudrillard 1997/1998:76) but are catastrophic to it because they are “explosions” in an “imploding” system.

However is it not the case that sexuality, desire and lust were the central components of the West’s crimes? It cannot, plausibly, be argued that sexuality played no part in these events, but equally sexuality should not be asserted as the ‘real foundation’ or ultimate ‘cause’ of such activities. The notion of power is perhaps more crucial here and Baudrillard’s reading of seduction involves a significant relocation of the role played by power in violent activities. The fear and avoidance of the reciprocity of seduction, Baudrillard suggests, actualises a dangerous and highly unstable form of power relation between subject and ‘object’. Such a system remains at the mercy of the principle of seduction through sudden reversal and is only maintained by the subject raising the stakes to an impossible degree, to a matter of life and death, a radically disenchanted ‘sacrifice’.19

Finally it is necessary to return to perhaps the most harrowing recent example of the death-event; the murder of James Bulger. I return to this case because here any residue of ‘sexual rationality’ seems to be absent. In fact events of this case suggest the deliberate fabrication of the sexual as motive, reason or ‘cause’ of behaviour. This feature suggests a new reading of sexuality as a mode of fabrication or simulation is necessary.
The Bulger case seems to be unique in many ways. Despite the existence of a number of documented cases of children killing children during the post-war period, both in Britain and elsewhere, this case seemed to signal, for many, an event of fundamental importance. According to Morrison (1997):

Some deaths are emblematic, tipping the scales, and little James's death...seemed like the murder of hope: the unthinkable thought of, the undoable done. If child-killings are the worst killings, then a child child-killing must be worse than worst, a new superlative in horror. In that spring of fear, it was as if there'd been a breach in nature. [T]hose nameless boys had killed not just a child but the idea of childhood, all its happy first associations...[T]en year olds were looked at with a new suspicion, and toddlers kept on tight reins (Morrison 1997:21).

A further apparently unique characteristic of the case was the existence of security video-footage of the abduction taking place: cameras in the shopping centre had recorded the event for all to see. Again this accelerated the horror; the viewer was situated within the event, yet powerless to intervene, implicated in horror yet only able to watch. This was a hyperreal event. The trial of James Bulger's killers was also unique, though the defendants were only ten years old their trial was public and carried out in an adult court and under intense media scrutiny. This event, it seemed, was too momentous; too shocking to be handled in the manner usually reserved for juveniles. The global media descended demanding to know 'why' this event occurred. What must be emphasised here is that despite the intense scrutiny, this will-to-knowledge, no convincing 'account' of why the death occurred has ever emerged. The court proceedings certainly did not provide this and for important reasons examined below. The event seemed to disable all forms of explanation and comprehension. The media, the police and others circulated many 'explanatory' factors. These ranged from the social and environmental; for the 'left' high unemployment, social deprivation, poverty, for the 'right' breakdown in family and school discipline, and falling moral and
religious standards. Both left and right supplemented these claims with appeals to the effects of violent video 'nasties'. The trial judge, Sir Michael Morland even referred to video 'nasties' in his sentencing despite the fact they had not been mentioned during the trial.

The inadequacies of these 'explanatory' devices are obvious. They can offer no more than 'background', in the crudest sense, to this event. For example the media discovered and circulated a list of the 50 video films that the father of one of the accused boys had hired, and so may have been watched by his son, in the six months before the murder. Not only was the number of videos rented very low, less than one per week, but the films themselves were all mainstream and universally available. Only one of the fifty could be regarded as 'top shelf', involving nudity but no violence. There was nothing, except media hypocrisy, to indicate that the boy's father was a 'porn-freak' or 'horror-buff', or any evidence that his son watched any of the films.

Further neither of the boys came from particularly deprived backgrounds. Some signs of behavioural disturbance at school emerged retrospectively but these were insufficient to warrant attention from schoolteachers or other professionals at the time. There was never any suggestion that either had suffered any form of child abuse, sexual or otherwise. 21 One of the boys was from a 'poorer' area, and his family were known as petty offenders by the local police, on this basis alone the media claimed, widely, that he was the 'ring-leader', persuading the boy from the 'better' family to join him, 'egging him on'. This is pure conjecture of the most stereotypical and uninformed variety yet it helped the media present the comforting illusion of explanation.

In his sentencing the trial judge offered the following:

The killing of James Bulger was an act of unparalleled evil and barbarity...it is not for me to pass judgement on their upbringing, but I suspect that exposure to violent video films may in part be an explanation (reproduced in Morrison 1997:228-9).
The language of 'evil', of innate human evil, reappears here, as if it is the final resort when all 'rational' explanation fails. The language of evil is deployed to name the 'un-nameable', the beyond or excess of humanity and reason. This event had redefined, re-articulated evil, it had re-located excess, the limit and its beyond. This event was beyond the limits of reason, suggesting not Kant's radical evil but something else, something from 'elsewhere'. The response of the then Prime Minister John Major revealed, clearly, the flight from reason, in order that a simplistic condemnation could be made, 'We must condemn a little more, and understand a little less' (ibid). This is a truly ridiculous formula but one that reveals the catastrophic failure of reason when confronted by horror, by excess.

Morrison and Sereny are highly critical of the court proceedings, the use of psychologists and other 'experts' to establish the grounds for guilt. The court, Morrison argues, restricted itself to the 'how' of the event, excluding the 'why'. Morrison speculates that the two boys did not "yet" understand the distinction between right and wrong, as adults do, and blames psychologists for suggesting they did. He also takes issue with the Judge over the use of the term 'evil'. Morrison suggests a more 'rational', legal system, involving more women in positions of power, would have been more sensitive to the trauma faced by the accused boys. This, he argues, may have allowed the 'Why' of the events to speak and to be heard. Morrison emphasises the unforgivable "repression" of the 'Why' but what his appeal to a reconstituted reason fails to address is that the 'repression' of the 'Why' is fundamental to the operation of Reason. This 'repression' itself enables and safeguards a space that allows reason, in both 'left' and 'right-wing' variants to function. Without this space reason itself collapses. What had to be held in place was at least some functioning of reason. Though reason fails to secure a stable or fixed 'explanation' of such events, it interprets this incompleteness by setting up a residual space, positing a limit that safeguards rationality this side of the limit. Further the beyond of this limit, since it is beyond reason and thereby unfathomable can be claimed as a supplement or even transcendent source of reason.
This limited space is where John Major effects condemnation while it also enables Morrison, Sereny and others to effect compassion. These then are political/discursive supplements or deferrals of the operation of reason, reason can never complete itself, yet so long as it can create some form, some account, it can actually thrive on these limited, restricted and useful instabilities. What this event threatened was to rip apart, to short-circuit the recuperative and supplementary operations of reason. Indeed as Bataille argued it is the instability, danger and impossibility of forging a stable rationality that creates spaces for zones of transcendence in a 'beyond', which can be claimed as God, Pure reason or any other transcendent principle (Bataille in Shaviro 1990:10).

More specifically structures of 'sexual reason' were disabled by this event. Police interrogations searched for a sexual motivation in vain. In fact it seemed the boys had interfered with the body in order to simulate the appearance of a sexual crime, probably in order to create the impression that an adult was responsible for the death. This is the conclusion reached by Smith (1994) and suggested by Morrison (1997). This feature of the case is crucial in a number of respects. Firstly it indicates the 'logical' character of the boys actions. They did not merely 'lose their tempers' or 'lapse' into spontaneous violence. This aspect of the case shows, to chilling effect, something of the interpenetration of logic and horror, of reason and excess. To simulate the appearance of adult sex crime suggests rational calculation accompanied by an act which can only be 'thought' in terms of 'unreason'. Reason and excess (in modernity labelled 'unreason') cannot be separated, they cannot be disarticulated, and this case demonstrates their interconnection in the most brutal fashion. This is a stark example of the symbolic relations of connection and reciprocity between 'good' and 'evil', between positive and negative, between reason and excess that Baudrillard insists upon.

A second aspect, which must be emphasised here, again relates directly to Baudrillard's thought. It concerns the phenomena of simulation and the simulacra. Sexual reason, as any branch of reason, cannot complete itself, cannot ground itself
convincingly in any principle or cause. Reason then is always a mode of fabrication or simulation. This is not to say that reason is thereby false, mistaken or a ‘lie’, rather as Baudrillard argues to simulate is ‘to feign to possess what one does not possess’ (Baudrillard 1981/1994:3). Any ‘rational’ account of an event or process, particular events as threatening and ‘inexplicable’ as those cited here, must depend on the weaving of signs, images, appearances, connections; procedures that are not ‘given’ in the events but are structures of thought, of reason. In this way they ‘feign’ an explanation. Thought can either acknowledge ineffable limits to its operation or it can deny or attempt to efface them. Sociological thought, in general, fails to admit of these conditions, interpreting its limits as something to be minimised or controlled, or as an ‘enabling’ condition that stimulates greater efforts. Baudrillard suggests a different strategy, ‘Since the world is on a delusional course, we must adopt a delusional standpoint towards the world’ (1990/1993:1). This expresses Baudrillard’s remarkable project; to think a world that eludes the categories of reason. However this world is not merely ‘irrational’ or even ‘indifferent’, for Baudrillard it contains the possibilities of maleficence and evil.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has explored Bataille’s notion of eroticism and Baudrillard’s principle of seduction. I have shown that these notions are distinct from dominant thinking on sexuality, which posit either sex instincts or the construction of masculine sexuality as the foundation, cause and explanation of extreme violence. These modes of thought fail; in particular to grasp the class of violence I have termed contemporary death-events.

Bataille’s approach to eroticism and violence is important and suggestive but contains tensions and problems, particularly concerning the bio-chemical ‘need’ for violence. Baudrillard’s notion of seduction is related in some respects but ultimately departs sharply, from Bataille’s influence. As well as rejecting Bataille’s bio-chemical
base materialism, Baudrillard's idiosyncratic, even perverse, rejection of feminist theory and the 'sexual revolution' *en masse* accounts for much of what is distinctive and difficult in the latter's thought.

I have emphasised the importance of Bataille's eroticism and Baudrillard's seduction as reciprocal and reversible forms that undermine the possibility of masculinity as control and mastery and are antagonistic to all contemporary notions of individualism. Where such reciprocal forms are broken or marginalised, mastery, control and the accumulation of power over the 'Other' come to the fore. Here 'mastery' may take the form of collections; such activities can be interpreted as radically individualised, 'psychologised' forms of ritual behaviour, contemporary rituals devoid of socially legitimated meaning but invested with personalised 'signatures'. Rather than the "return" of subjective agency in a world of insecurity and "powerlessness" (Masters 1996, Wilson & Wilson 1998) – a reading which naturalises individual subjective agency, Baudrillard approaches such events in terms of ritual. In this reading subjectivity is always an illusory, impossible project because the fundamental stakes of the symbolic; ritual, illusion and reversibility disable or abolish the basis of subjective agency. Baudrillard reads contemporary 'psycho-pathologies' in this way but fails to make clear that reason, even 'patriarchy', breaks the symbolic relation long before feminism or the 'sexual revolution' emerged, though certain features of the latter do indeed repeat the destructive gestures of enlightenment reason.

This chapter has drawn, selectively, on the themes of eroticism, seduction, and latterly Baudrillard's notion of the mass and the singularity as contributions to an alternative reading of contemporary forms of extreme violence. To develop this reading further it is crucial to consider the meaning and status of 'evil' in contemporary culture. To what extent can extreme violence be thought in terms of 'evil' and what forms would such 'evil' take?
NOTES

1) These assumptions are also challenged in feminist theory. Much feminism however is locked into the sexuality as ‘deep’ reality paradigm, particularly popular feminist writing. This can be the case in both ‘constructivist’ and ‘essentialist’ feminism. Of course some feminist thinkers do not fall into this category and have made important contributions to problematising such assumptions. Perhaps most notable here is Judith Butler whose focus on iteration and citationary techniques of gender construction is, at times, close to the approach I seek through a reading of Baudrillard. See Butler (1993). As Foucault (1976/1979) argued, it is increasingly meaningless, though often politically or rhetorically expedient, to speak of sexual ‘repression’ per se. This is not to claim that a paradise of sexual freedoms has now been achieved, though such a notion, scarcely even meaningful, structures much popular reflection, either as goal to be attained, or condition to be enjoyed.

2) Of course it is still, generally speaking, the case that heterosexual lifestyles are more vigorously marketed than gay or lesbian ones. However it is difficult to maintain the claim that these groups are simply ‘repressed’. To some extent, the feminine has been situated as ‘other’ in that it is comprehended bothprivatively, as the absence of male or masculine characteristics, and as containing the possibility of a substantive, threatening form that is unknown and does not correspond to recognised forms of rational subjectivity. In this sense there is clearly a connection between the notions of negativity, evil and femininity as locations or sites of excess in the Western tradition. Each of these have occupied an unstable and dangerous position in Western thought, with conceptualisation veering from the strictly privative, to claim that they represent no essential otherness or difference, or indeed do not exist as such, to claims of a substantiveness, an autonomy or a radical otherness, an excess. Tseelon (1995) has begun to examine these themes.

3) This attitude has been expressed most powerfully in the work of Andrea Dworkin (1981).


5) For example see The Baudrillard Reader, Kellner Ed. (1994).
6) For an excellent summary of these themes see Bristow (1997), other important studies here include Havelock Ellis (1897&1933) and Kinsey et al. (1948&1953).

7) In Freud's tripartite scheme the earliest sexual pleasures are oral, centred on breast-feeding and sucking. The second stage is anal, and pleasure is still autoerotic, revolving around defecation and learning to control this process in accordance with adult wishes. Both oral and anal stages are, according to Freud, characterised by tendencies toward cruelty or sadism. Biting in particular is a sadistic form of oral pleasure, while for Freud the anal stage marks the emergence of the experiences of activity and passivity, of sadism and masochism. It should be noted here however that since instinctual drives are blind and impersonal, they are not manageable through the subject's conscious mind or 'choice'. For this reason childhood is often said to be a domain of innocence, since apparently cruel acts are in fact only trial and error attempts to gain mastery over unruly objects. The connections between sexual instincts and violence or aggression are treated in detail in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905 in Freud 1991a), in particular the first essay 'The Sexual Aberrations' which deals with sadism.


11) Pornography is rooted in rational calculation, certainty (of outcome) and utility (titillation, masturbation). It is frequently dull and repetitious even in its most extreme forms, for example Sade's novels. Mayne contends, rightly, that social definitions of pornography and obscenity actually serve to forestall any serious thinking into what constitutes obscenity. According to Mayne censorship is not geared to the repression of pornography, indeed the sex industries are allowed to diversify and flourish, rather what is intolerable is actually eroticism, that is the serious and direct reflection on human sexual natures in the widest possible sense. See Mayne (1993).

12) Though there have been many criticisms directed at Baudrillard's work *Seduction* few of them really engage Baudrillard effectively. An exception is Gallop
(1989) who charges Baudrillard, rightly, with refusing to follow through the implications of seduction and counter-seduction (i.e. reversibility) in his attacks on the feminist movement. As she argues, Baudrillard remains stubbornly unseduced and indiscriminate in his rejection of it.


14) This was not the case with Foucault's earlier studies, such as his work on madness (1961/1967).

15) Each of these is an anthropomorphic or at least 'morphic' gesture, weaving meanings from unfathomable flux. For Baudrillard, as for Nietzsche, some human cultures achieved a relation to the beyond that is based on the affirmation of enchantment, ritual and play, which have engaged in a mutual exchange of seduction and counter-seduction, of gift and counter-gift. These relations, of course, are mythic yet that does not indicate that they are somehow 'false', mistaken or naive. This is the prejudice of Western scientific procedures, which seek to unveil, to correct, to finalise and to contain. The scientific myths necessary to achieve these operations are often highly effective and long-lived yet they never attain, despite frequent claims to the contrary, fixity or completion. What is important about this lack of completion is not the suggestion, or indeed the hope, that there will remain stubborn vestiges of the unknown at the perimeters of scientific knowledge. Rather it is that scientific method itself interprets this lack of completion as failure, as obstacle to be eliminated in the quest for final, total functional transparency. It is then fascinating that the scientific community still claims to be on the verge of the final solution, the completion of its project. Yet, even in its own terms, science fails to arrive at this point. It is this restrictive, calculative nature; the drive to unveil, reduce and dissolve that makes scientific myths banal, utilitarian, disenchating. It may have been possible for scientific mythology to become affirmative, enchanting, life enhancing, as Nietzsche hoped, but this has never happened and as scientific exploration is narrowed into technological and military application the possibility becomes increasingly remote. Baudrillard's terminology for these systems of myth and metaphor, the weaving of meaning and 'reality' from cultural imperatives is the *simulacrum*, the modes of the appearance of 'reality', the codes, models and matrices of simulation. For Baudrillard, Foucault's work situates production and functionality
as reality principle that is as the ultimate grounding of reality, as meta-principle. Baudrillard's *Seduction* however is not merely substituted for production as new reality principle, though an incautious reading of Baudrillard's work could give this impression, rather seduction is a term for the radical absence of the real, the impossibility of any deep or final grounding principle. Seduction then is the play of appearance, of artifice, of surfaces. It is opposed to everything that is supposedly deep and essential, fixed and real.

16) Baudrillard's target here seems to be Deleuze, and those who have followed him in the celebration of libidinal desire as the ultimate form of materialist thought; the multiple, rhizomatic connections of a post-Freudian libidinal economy of liberated desire. Indeed Baudrillard develops a rather disjointed but suprisingly persistent critique of Deleuze in *Seduction*, 'New diagonals of meaning, new sequences can be engendered from the untamed flood tides of desire...the molecular or intensive philosophies...claim to undermine meaning by diffraction, hook-ups and the Brownian movements of desire. One does not escape meaning by dissociation, disconnection or deterritorialization. One escapes meaning by replacing it with a more radical simulacrum, a still more conventional order...[I]ndeterminacy, dissociation or proliferation in the form of a star or rhizome only generalise meaning's sphere of influence to the entire sphere of non-sense. That is, they merely generalise meaning's pure form, an abstract finality with neither a determinate end nor contents. Only rituals abolish meaning. (1979/1990: 138).

17) According to Wansell (1996) Rosemary West's father continued to have incestuous relations with his daughter throughout her marriage to Fred West, who would encourage and sometimes observe these occurrences. Wansell also reports that Frederick, at the age of 14, had been initiated into bestiality by his father and, shortly after, incest by his mother. A Freudian framework of 'normal' sexual development is surely disabled by these events. These events were not 'repressed childhood trauma' since they were consciously recognised, talked about and in the case of incest frequently repeated. Even more importantly neither Fred nor Rosemary West exhibited any signs of recognisable 'mental disorder' in adult life according to psychiatric accounts. Like Thomas Hamilton and the killers of James Bulger the West's were not mentally ill. Recent psychiatric research, such as Jenkins
(1988) and Stone (1994) suggests that as many as half of all documented serial killers suffered no physical or sexual abuse nor physical or emotional deprivation in childhood. In many other cases levels of abuse or deprivation are insufficiently serious to function even as ‘contextual factors’ according to these researchers.

18) Recent studies of the relation between masculinity and violent crime have been unable to confront these issues convincingly. See for example Newburn and Stanko (Eds.) (1994).

19) Baudrillard's analysis here clearly owes much to Freud, though Baudrillard claims, rather problematically, to have 'turned Freud against Freud' and to have broken out of psychoanalytic orthodoxy. Genosko (1998) has begun to probe Baudrillard’s writings on the symbolic and illusion more effectively than most secondary sources. This work questions Baudrillard’s reading of Freud; see Genosko (1998:12-47).

20) The national average in 1992-3 was 11% approx. while in Liverpool it was considerably higher at 15.2%. In fact 30% of all 18-24 year-olds were unemployed. See Morrison (1997).

21) Sereny (1995) repeats the common assumption that children who have been sexually abused go on to be abusers. In fact she makes this point the centrepiece of her account of the Bulger case despite admitting there was no suggestion that either of the boys convicted of killing James Bulger were sexually abused.
CHAPTER FIVE

EVIL: SOCIAL THEORY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

INTRODUCTION

'The admirable beauty of the Universe is composed of all things; there even what is called evil is well-balanced and in its place, serves to enhance the good' (St. Augustine 1953:10).

'Nature herself, I fear, implants in men some instinct towards inhumanity' (Montaigne 1958 2:11).

'under what conditions did man invent the value judgements good and evil? and what value do they themselves have?' (Nietzsche 1994:5).

The preceding chapters explored contemporary death-events through a reading of excess, negativity and the relation between extreme violence and sexuality. The discourse of 'evil' appeared, repeatedly, in these discussions. For some thinkers 'evil' is the only term which adequately expresses the horror and intensity of these events. For others, however, the terminology of 'evil' is totally mistaken and must be avoided at all costs if such events are to be properly 'understood'. 'Evil' seems to be somehow central to perceptions of contemporary death-events. The language of evil cannot be ignored or obliterated, it persists and must be confronted. The following chapters address 'evil' in detail. The present chapter is concerned with the conceptualisation of evil in Christian, enlightenment and modern social thought.

Evil occupies a crucial yet exceptionally ambiguous position within Western religious, moral and social thought. The meanings assigned to evil, and reflections upon it, are usually constrained by the rubric of the 'problem of evil' and its possible solutions. Evil is so problematic because its existence or manifestation, still worse its expansion or acceleration, seems radically destructive of faith, not only in a benevolent god but also of a meaningful universe, rational humanity and progressive society. Recently the 'problem of evil' has been called the 'Achilles heel' of Christian
theology and declared to have no satisfactory solution within either religious or secular thought. However in modern and contemporary social theory new and different approaches to evil have emerged which are not structured by the logic of 'a solution to a problem'. Some of these approaches insist on the existence of evil, others reject, deny, displace or re-articulate it. The purpose, over these two chapters, is to explore these theories, against the context of theological and enlightenment sources and to question how satisfactorily they approach contemporary experiences of 'evil', of 'random' destruction and 'inexplicable' violence.

The etymology of the term 'evil' is not especially revealing, but does yield a wide range of meaning. Evil connotes, the "wicked, bad, mischievous", also the "unfortunate"; harm, illness, disease, curse and sin and finally is associated with "the devil" or Satan. The term encompasses the most "depraved or repulsive" as well as the merely "disagreeable" (ibid.); simultaneously applicable to both human and divine agency, and seems able to signify at once, the quintessentially human, the inhuman and the supernatural. It has been suggested that today the term 'evil' has lost its stronger metaphysical overtones and merely connotes the 'bad'. Such an evaluation is hasty and far more readily applicable to the term 'wicked', the notion of 'evil', it will be argued, retains an immensely powerful charge, a fierce grip on the human imagination.

This chapter claims that evil forms a crucial and apparently ineradicable dimension of human experience, marking the perhaps unrepresentable limit-point of cultural meaning; 'evil' seems to operate at the boundaries of the knowable and explicable within any cultural system. In this sense evil plays a crucial, yet often unspecified symbolic role in determining how any cultural system understands and orders itself in relation to that which threatens it. The term 'evil' is invoked in situations where order, predictability and proportion are broken, lost or torn apart.

Further I argue that 'evil' in contemporary experience possesses a new specificity. While 'evil' remains a fundamental axis of cultural experience symbolising the excessive and terrifying, recent culturally traumatic events have seemed to signal new, different or intensified forms of 'evil'. This can be termed deracinated or destructured 'evil'. The global news industry displays atrocities and 'humanitarian disasters' from all over the world structured by divisions between
ethnic, religious or political groups. However recent events, contemporary death-
events, seem to be new and culturally 'indecipherable'. This apparent inexplicability, 
though significant, can serve to foreclose further enquiry and make 'evil' actions and 
'inexplicable' actions somehow synonymous. Some 'evil' actions are in fact all too 
comprehensible, not 'inexplicable' at all. These complex issues of responsibility, 
'evil or illness' are explored below.

Many 'notions of evil' abound in contemporary literary, juridical, scientific, 
media and popular thought. The term 'evil' is deployed in commonplace and 
journalistic accounts persistently, even where the mode of enquiry is otherwise 
secular, agnostic, or atheist. Both juridical and media accounts of culturally traumatic 
events, such as the murder of James Bulger, the activities of Frederick and Rosemary 
West and the Dunblane massacre, resort to the language of inherent or innate human 
evil. While such phraseology may appear incautious, archaic or 'counter-
productive', liberal-progressive and medical-psychiatric discourse seeking to 
uncover social, psychological or environmental factors such as childhood 
mistreatment, to account for the 'lapse from full humanity', are often deeply 
unconvincing. Such accounts aim to minimise or eliminate the possibility of an 
action being defined 'evil' by deploying a symptomology of illness or malfunction. 
However as Connolly (1991) has argued simply substitute 'illness' for the term 
'evil' is still to expel and contain threatening possibilities without confronting them. 
In short, they offer restricted economies. Such discourse repeats many assumptions 
of Christian, moral and enlightenment thought, often in unacknowledged ways, 
paying little attention to the distinctiveness of such bodies of thought. Distinct or 
contradictory terms are conflated, particularly in popular discourse where phrases 
such as 'evil madman' are common despite the fact dominant rationality depends on a 
clear distinction between criminal responsibility and 'insanity'. Such discourses 
lose their explanatory moorings by being unable to engage with the material and 
cultural horror of such events with anything like commensurate terminology. 
Academic accounts of evil as extreme violence, for example Staub (1989) try to link 
social and ideological 'enabling' factors to psychological 'triggering mechanisms' 
such as stress and fear. Such studies go some way towards thinking violence
structured by ethnic, religious or political intolerance but fail when faced with events lacking these features.

The contemporary natural sciences are far from immune to hypothesising on the apparently archaic notion of evil. Within the context of post-Darwinian biological and genetic theory a new scientific 'myth' of evil has appeared. Here the social implications of Darwinian theory are said to be evil, 'the selfish gene' as unchangeable biological 'given' has been argued to impact upon the human world as 'evil'.

In much popular, media and juridical discourse that utilises the notion of evil, the term appears, not in its strictly Christian sense, as a privation or perversion of the inherent goodness of the universe, but rather akin to a Manichean or Zoroastrian dualist sense of the term. Evil, as it appears in such systems, is presented as a radical and substantive force, a fundamental, ineradicable affliction, equal and opposite to the Good. This dualist sense of evil, where the mind/body disjunction is even more pronounced than in Christianity, has haunted the Western imagination for centuries having an enormous impact on social theory as well as the popular imagination. The tensions, instabilities and slippages between privative and substantive notions of evil are central to the history of this concept in the Western tradition. Many accounts, especially populist ones conflate the privative and substantive or straddle, unknowingly, the two. This occurs, it will be argued, because these terms are inherently unstable and unsatisfactory.

A substantive force of evil, the assumption goes, may either be positively chosen by the morally debased for excitement or 'kicks', or it may engulf the mentally weak or impressionable. Here the theorisation of evil is both privative and substantive, since evil as a substantive force can only, or is likely only to be chosen where there is a pre-existing privation in the individual, group or culture. In this situation evil, conceived simultaneously as privative and substantive becomes locked in perpetual conflict with moral goodness. Further and crucially, evil, in some largely unspecified sense explored below, is often presented as more powerful, exciting and seductive than moral goodness. Such an interpretation or intuition is more closely aligned with Manichean than the mainstream Judaeo-Christian views of evil, though these sources are not fully separable.
Such contradictions and ambiguities concerning the nature of 'evil' persist in modern social theory. The remarkable endurance of such a sense of evil exposes something of the inherent weakness of modern rationalism, in particular its failure to complete its progressive project, and the unending resistance of the human imagination to its claims.

No conclusive definition of 'evil' can be given, but by tracing its forms, manifestations and inscription across a variety of cultural settings it should be possible to facilitate a keener sense of what constitutes 'evil'. In the following chapter the theorisation of evil in Bataille and Baudrillard will be addressed in detail, vis a vis other important strands of Post-structuralist thinking on excess. The distinctiveness of Bataille and Baudrillard will be emphasised in order to demonstrate their irreducibility to this imprecise term. These writers are concerned with evil as principle, not as problem; the distinction is crucial. The purpose will be to evaluate and develop their thinking, and specifically to situate the linked phenomena of transgression, cruelty, and seduction in relation to the principle of evil.

Their treatment of evil is as excess, not as substantive form, but neither as 'lack', privation or non-existence. This understanding of the notion of evil is argued to be central to an appreciation of their distinctiveness and importance, and to offer a potential approach to recent cultural traumas that remain beyond the grasp or competence of other, more mainstream, forms of social thought.

The discussion here will, necessarily, draw upon a wide range of imprecise or apparently archaic terminology; evil, the malefic, the sacred, and emotions or affects such as lust and rage. These are overlapping yet far from synonymous terms and phenomena.

To dwell on the meaning of evil is commonly regarded as highly suspect and for many can be dismissed as the return of bizarre superstitious or irrational fears at the very moment when freedom and liberation should be on the agenda. Yet this discussion will argue that the process of rationalisation itself facilitates conditions where various forms of 'evil' may emerge or accelerate.

The contemporary imagination, when confronted with the extremes and excesses of human experience, events such as the murder of James Bulger or the Dunblane massacre, finds it exceptionally difficult not to employ the language of
'evil'. In this respect techno-scientific rationality is a no more successful bulwark against violent 'excess' than was monotheistic theology, indeed a case has been made that theology is better able to come to terms with such phenomena than is conventional scientific rationality.8

The aim here is to begin to establish a radical approach to the various meanings gathered around the notion of evil, particularly where manifest as the 'problem' of evil in the major traditions of Western thought. What form does evil take in these systems? How has 'evil' changed or mutated? What is evil for contemporary culture? Such a task is only coherent if something of the richness, intensity and lasting influence of sacred and religious thought is appreciated and retained. Of major concern here are the representations of the notion of evil within so-called 'primitive' and archaic religions, in Christian and Enlightenment traditions and the manner in which these feed into contemporary philosophical and sociological material.

The Western tradition has undergone many shifts in the symbolisation of evil, from the earliest beliefs in impersonal, (social) forces, towards beliefs concerning personalised, individual, and moral 'deficiencies' in archaic Greek and Christian thought.9 With the erosion of Christianity in the modern period the term 'evil' may have been expected to become obsolete, however Enlightenment reason was unable to avoid an encounter with it, in fact it was Kant, the champion of modern progressivism who coined the term 'radical evil' in 1793.10 Hegel's phenomenology attempted to re-absorb the 'excesses' liberated by Kant, through the system of dialectics, yet Hegelian thought appears entirely outmoded by the events of the 20th century. Nor has the term 'evil' been forgotten or superseded in modern and contemporary society; following mass 'death-events' such as the Nazi holocaust and more recent occurrences in Bosnia and Rwanda 'evil' is frequently evoked as an explanation of the 'inexplicable'. While traumatic events such as the murder of James Bulger or the Dunblane massacre, lack even ethnic, nationalist or political lines of division and are all the more resistant to rationalising explanation. Further, in contemporary culture themes of excessive violence and evil form the staple of popular literary, cinematic and televisual entertainment, while academic philosophy
and theology still struggle to create satisfactory and coherent accounts of evil, arguably with little success.\(^{11}\)

However theories of evil have recently returned as a central theme in some branches of contemporary social theory, including psychoanalysis, various strands of Post-structuralism and of particular concern here, the relatively marginal work of Bataille and Baudrillard. Before exploring the form these engagements take, it is necessary to establish the religious, metaphysical and enlightenment approaches to evil and their continuing, sometimes indirect, influence on modern thought. In particular the aim is to show how such systems have operated in the constitution of the contemporary experience of 'inexplicable' evil.

**CONTEXTUALISING CHRISTIAN AND THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS OF EVIL**

'the sovereign good is the cause of the whole of being. There just cannot be a contrasting principle which is the cause of evils...there is nothing that can be evil by essence...every being is good and evil does not exist save as seated in a good' (Aquinas 1967:129).

Evil plays a pivotal yet ambiguous role in many Western (and Eastern\(^{12}\)) mythologies, perhaps the most influential the account of creation in the book of Genesis.\(^{13}\) The 'problem of evil', within Christian and Humanist thought, lays at the core of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and is central to Western modes of thought, belief and social organisation. The fundamental problem of the existence of evil within the Western theological tradition is a terrifying paradox that all believers must face; on the one hand the belief in a benevolent and all-powerful deity and on the other the continuing existence of evil in the human world.

In many Eastern religious traditions, this 'problem' does not arise in that evil and the associated vicissitudes of the material world are asserted to be merely appearance, and so superficial while the principles of goodness or love are interpreted as deep and essential. This is often termed the monist approach in the sense that only goodness is essentially real. The major Western religious systems, in particular the dominant Jewish-Christian-Islamic lineage, operate an ethical dualism yet by positing one supreme God (cosmological monism) are confronted by the
'problem' of evil. An ethical dualism, combined with a cosmological monism creates the problem of evil, in its most general form.\textsuperscript{14}

St. Augustine completed his best-known theological treatise \textit{Civitas Dei} or \textit{City of God}, around 426 AD.\textsuperscript{15} This 'city' could not be built on Gnostic or Manichean foundations, a thriving, wealthy and moral social order must neutralise or expel threatening groups and ideas, and the notion that evil is a fixed, autonomous and even dominant principle in the human realm was intolerable. This aspect of Manichean teaching also severely limited the notion of human responsibility for evil that is crucial to the Christian understanding of evil. Much of Augustine's work takes the form of a refutation of Manicheanism, a sect that actually enjoyed his youthful adherence. In fact Augustine's \textit{Confessions} reveal his early experiences of sensual pleasure and in particular his keen appreciation of the pleasures of sin, transgression, of doing evil.\textsuperscript{16} Only after his rejection of Manicheanism Augustine began to develop his privative conception of evil. For Augustine, after his conversion, God, as entirely good, cannot be the cause of evil. Evil then, can only emanate from rational human will.\textsuperscript{17} This basic contention concerning the cause of evil remained largely unaltered throughout Augustine's career. Satan chose evil, as did Adam, both were 'free' to make this choice. Adam's choosing of evil brought about the 'fall' of the human race and the introduction of death, pain and endless toil as God's punishments. Yet, since evil is privative or 'nothing' Adam, and Satan before him, had no positive evil to choose and partake of. Their sin is actually one of disobedience, after stepping beyond God's edict, they become prey to confusion, immoderation, the negations and distortions of the good on which evil depends for its (non)existence. However, according to Augustine, God retains complete control over Satan and all fallen angels and humans and is even able to use them for his own ends. Numerous examples of this situation are available in the Old Testament, though largely absent from the New.\textsuperscript{18}

What, in particular, needs to be emphasised about this theological system is the all-encompassing nature of God. Since God is said to be omnipotent and entirely benevolent, evil cannot be allowed substantive existence and is conceptualised as privative in nature. Evil does exist but only as a contingent and fleeting phenomena. All evil, even Satan himself serves, ultimately, as an agent of God's greater good.
Evil is argued to be the result of human freewill, of choice. This is the doctrine of culpability, and while devils, fallen angels or evil spirits may act in assistance, for example offering temptations, their actions remain ultimately within God's control. This factor allows, simultaneously, Augustine's doctrine of pre-destination. There is a delicate balance at work here, one that is highly unstable, and particularly prone to the emergence, and re-emergence, of dualist 'heresies' whereby God and Satan become autonomous, opposing forces.

A second, and related, distinguishing feature of this system is that the boundaries of human freewill, of human subjectivity, are contained within God. Here, strictly speaking, there is no limit point to human subjectivity, and no true subject-object relation, since God is infinite. Human actions are then, always rational, explicable, or they are inexplicable only to the extent that God is inexplicable, beyond the reach of human knowledge. The possibility of human irrationality, 'unreason', or excess is not developed. It is 'evil' but quite rational for the human being to break God's command for personal gain or pleasure, but for Christianity no evil must be allowed to reflect back onto God. Evil then is contained in personal choice, which again is contained in God, yet evil 'contaminates' only the individual subject and its desires. Here we draw close to the 'Achilles heel' of the Christian approach and its inherent tendency to lapse back into dualism. Human beings cannot bear full responsibility for evil if God is all-powerful. This unstable relation between human and God is fundamental to the meaning of evil in Western culture.

Towards the end of the Mediaeval period St. Thomas Aquinas devoted much energy to resolving, once and for all, the 'problem' of evil in his Summa Theolgiae completed in 1273. His argument, more technical than Augustine's reinforces the privative conception of evil. The argument hinges on the logic of opposition, that is the meanings of negation or negativity. For Aquinas good and evil are not strict opposites, where, for example, property A cannot co-exist in the same object, in the same way at the same time as property B. Rather, for Aquinas, developing Augustine's theology, the logic of opposition in the case of good and evil is one of privation. Evil is declared to be the mere privation of the full properties of the good, what is evil, though real, only becomes thus because it lacks some property.
that it should ordinarily possess. For example, the perpetrator of an act of cruelty would not be said to be fuelled by an evil force, but to be suffering from a temporal and contingent privation of conscience, pity or compassion, normally in the possession of all human beings. Such a view continues to be influential in contemporary liberal-humanist thinking, in some human rights discourse and in assumptions concerning the 'progress' of humankind through education or moral guidance.

Aquinas insists evil is not a pure, impersonal, autonomous force arising either within the logic of strict opposition, a position close to Manichean dualism, nor within the relationship of positive contraries, such as between, for example, blue and red. In answering the question 'is evil some sort of reality?' Aquinas replies, 'evil cannot signify a certain existing being, nor a real shaping or positive kind of thing...it signifies a certain absence of the good'. (Aquinas 1967: 109).

For Aquinas, as Augustine before him, the privative conception of evil holds for both moral evil, sinful acts by human beings, and natural evil, earthquakes and other 'acts of God' which are divine punishments for sin. It remained necessary within the orthodox Christian tradition to maintain a strong sense, or presence, of evil. The ontological status of evil had to be affirmed in one form or another to ensure the doctrines of original sin, human culpability and divine punishment were preserved and remained meaningful. This conundrum seems to lead Aquinas to posit a fundamental inseparability of good and evil:

Hence many goods would disappear were He (God) to permit no evil. For example no fire would be kindled were no air spent, the lion would not survive were the ass not killed, and there would be no vindication of justice nor patient endurance to be praised were there no wickedness (Aquinas 1967:117).

This is a fascinating assertion, since it seems to present good and evil almost as complimentary partners, operating in a reciprocal relation. Here the notion of felix culpa or 'happy fault' becomes apparent; a term often applied to the Christian interpretation of the crucifixion.
Volume nine of the *Summa Theologiae*, deals with the sin of angels and the resulting punishment of Satan by God. Aquinas asserts, not only that angels have real, material existence, further that they are able to turn towards evil voluntarily, by an act of will. Of course Aquinas is unwilling to entertain the Manichean 'heresy', that is that some angels may be evil by nature, though he offers only tautological reasons as to why this cannot be. As with the fall of Adam and Eve again it is rational, discursive knowledge or the 'intellectual capacity' which enables the choice of evil over good. The creation of the devil comes about as Satan, the highest angel deviates from the path of God's grace. In this view Satan and evil come into existence as an acceleration of the desire to experience bliss, a property of God, and not a definitive turning against, transgression or subversion of it. It is rather the rejection of what might be termed 'divine guidance'; nothing more excessive, since Satan does not assert a contradictory or opposed set of goals, at least not until after his expulsion by God. Aquinas refers to the authority of St. Anselm's *De Casu Diaboli* in the assertion 'the devil desired that to which he would eventually have come had he curbed his desire' (in Aquinas 1967:259).

Once more, on what can be read as a metaphoric level, the horror of autonomous, substantive evil is denied, or suppressed but cannot be obliterated. Dualist thinking, structured by the mind/matter dualism, where matter is equated, however indirectly with evil, tends to re-surface in the cultural imagination, though it is resisted, partially, by systems of both Augustine and Aquinas. Both insist matter is not, and cannot be, intrinsically evil, as the Manicheans had supposed. Rather it is the rational, discursive operation of moral choice and immoral desire that led to the disproportion, confusion and discord that is evil. The orthodox Christian understanding of evil is not of autonomous demonic or satanic forces nor even of the inherent corruption of the flesh, but of human choice rebelling against God. Human choice is the third term, preventing the full reduction to dualism and this allows the modern free-will defence of the existence of evil. 19 This remains a highly unstable conception, readily lapsing or reversing into Manichean, Pelagian or Satanist heresies. That is human culpability can easily be argued to reverse onto God, not to exist at all, or be affirmed, celebrated and worshipped. The Christian tradition is
unable to construct a stable account of the relation between God and human responsibility for evil.

Though the hegemonic power of theological metaphysics has long been shattered, Christian theology continues to struggle with the 'problem' of evil, addressing the events of the holocaust in particular. However this discussion will now turn to explorations of good and evil not contained or defined within theological systems yet that appear equally if not more unstable and unsatisfactory.

**RADICAL EVIL, RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT**

'Men are wicked, as sad and repeated experience demonstrates. And yet, Mankind is naturally good. What, then, could have brought him to such a point of depravity, unless it be the changes in his constitution, the progress he has made, and the Knowledge he has acquired...There is absolutely no fundamental perversity in the human heart' (Rousseau 1991: II).

Here Rousseau expresses the fundamental enlightenment faith in human nature; evil, cruelty and perversion are argued to be the result of malign social conditions. If society could be ordered more rationally, more fairly and equally, evil would disappear along with other religious terms, superstitions and illusions. By the age of enlightenment, social, political and moral theory had become progressively less dependent on overtly theological postulates. The political and philosophical systems of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Descartes and Kant did not require the active participation of God in order to function. However none of the above explicitly denied the existence of God and Descartes and Kant in particular, did require God as 'passive' presence to secure their philosophical systems. It was, by contrast, the scientific and technological successes of the age that finally made a sense of the sacred, religious and otherworldly strictly unnecessary and increasingly unconvincing. This was the age of reason.

In his important essay 'What is Enlightenment' Kant demonstrated the reflexive questioning of human individuality and history that was to become a dominant theme of modern thought. Kant defines enlightenment as, 'man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity' (Kant 1983:41), it describes the newfound confidence of the individual to determine its 'own understanding...without
guidance from another'. Enlightenment, for Kant, is constituted by the very reflexivity that characterises his own work, to this extent Kant is read as the embodiment of enlightenment. Kant's term 'immaturity' [Unmundigkeit] clearly refers to the delusions, apathy and fatalism that were supposed to define 'primitive' communal life, which, so the orthodoxy goes, suppressed individualism and imprisoned its people in a child-like state. 21

With the marginalisation of the sacred and of God the emergent human is dependent on reason alone. Kant's transcendental subject was grounded in a pure yet necessarily limited principle of reason. Following Kant, Hegel was to understand the Christian God as the highest aspect of the principle of 'mind' or spirit, ultimately human subjective reason. In enlightenment thought reason tries to claim a universal applicability and the destiny to complete itself. However reason in this form must always encounter unreason or the beyond of its limits. This is evident in Kant's metaphor of childhood and his (related) view of non-Western cultures, which are argued to labour under similar delusions and immaturities. 22 Reason itself generates the residual category, or waste product, unreason, irrationality, inhumanity, a terrain is created where reason, by its own definitions, has no competence. Kant promises liberation; individual autonomy is presented as the realisation of maturity. 23 Freed from dogma and superstition the mature, enlightened individual can stand aloft. Of course such a characterisation of enlightened modernity is highly problematic, particularly in its individualism and formalism which can be read as a blueprint for the bourgeois capitalist and techno-bureaucratic systems of modern discipline and control. This thesis has been developed particularly by Weber and, more recently Foucault. 24 In the following discussion it is crucial to bear in mind this Kantian conception of individual autonomy and its philosophical foundation the transcendental ego. Of fundamental importance is the connection between Kant's notion of radical enlightenment and that of radical evil; a connection implied, entailed or even necessitated by his unique understanding of enlightenment.

It is frequently noted that Kantian philosophy, and specifically his writings on morality represent a thorough 'emptying out' or voiding of the content of former philosophical understandings of community, morality or social contract. Kant's moral system confines the Christian God to the outer-most, unfathomable reaches of
the universe, it breaks with Platonic and Aristotelian ethics, and it does not depend on a Rousseauean social contract; so dispensing with notions of community and collectivity. Kant's focus is on the individual and its duty to itself as rational being. His highest moral principle or categorical imperative is as follows 'Act only on that maxim (or principle of conduct) whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law'.

The ramifications of such an individualised understanding of moral duty, coupled with large-scale bureaucratic systems and modern juridico-legal structures have been explored by a number of writers. Arendt (1964/1994) has related these phenomena to the genocidal destruction of the Nazi death-camps. More recently, Zizek (1991, 1993) and others have explored Kantian individualism from a psychoanalytic viewpoint drawing out the implications for modernity of Kant's radical evil. These, important lines of thought will be contrasted and explored below.

Kant had addressed the notion of human evil in his third critique, The Critique of Practical Reason in 1788, where it already appeared as rooted, in some sense, within human freewill. In 1793 Kant returned to the problem of evil with Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, a work which was met with consternation and even horror by those of a secular humanist disposition. For Kant the problem of evil:

...is radical because it corrupts the ground of all maxims; it is, moreover, as a natural propensity, inextirpable by human powers, since extirpation could occur only through good maxims, and cannot take place when the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt (Kant 1793/1960:32).

Kant's approach to evil is complex, technical and even contradictory; nevertheless he clearly postulates a radical evil rooted within human freewill, a "foul taint" which, at least potentially, corrupts all human choice and action. Kantian evil is not a 'lack' or privation but a positive, 'chooseable' reality, reached through the process of corrupted maxim making. The choice of an evil course does not however destroy the fundamental nature of freedom, if it were to do so then human
responsibility for evil actions would also disappear, a logical objection that Augustine too was forced to confront. With this assertion Kant opposes the most general thrust of Enlightenment philosophy, represented by Rousseau and Diderot, of an innate goodness and perfectibility in 'human being'. For them any corruption can only be a result of malign social factors, such as the persistence of illusion and superstition, inhibiting human goodness. Evil actions are explained by 'ignorance' and injustice, not 'natural impulses'. By contrast Kant proposes absolute limits to human autonomy, progress and goodness. For Kant rational freewill has a 'natural' not pathological, 'propensity' to turn against 'duty' and 'virtue', against its security and self-interest and to seize evil, sensuousness, and excess. Such a formulation anticipates the Freudian conception of the death drive as psychoanalytic thinkers have stressed. Further Kant insists radical evil cannot be expelled, or transcended, by any degree of human effort or action, since all human principles and decision-making processes can, at any point, favour evil over good. In fact the Kantian system is left with recourse only to Christian scriptural authority, and ultimately to God, in order to provide the possibility of moral regeneration, the triumph of good over evil.

These manoeuvres demonstrate how close Kant's radical evil is to the Christian notion of original sin. Yet it expresses an important cultural difference; it offers no simplistic subsumption of evil within the terms made available by its own explanatory system. Kant defines a system, crucial to enlightened modernity, which intellectually affirms the existence of radical evil, but cannot, in intellectual terms, provide any commensurate solution to this problem. Christianity, by contrast, is not solely dependent on rational discourse and had been able to offer, at least in its own terms, a 'solution'. Here is a new situation. The 'enlightened' individual can, according to Kant, choose rationally to pursue evil ends. An evil maxim can be constructed and followed in a rational manner just as can a 'good' maxim. Though human beings bear the burden of moral responsibility for choosing evil; this in no way eliminates the possibility of evil choices being made. In fact evil choices possess a new seductiveness. They represent freedom, liberation of the individual from custom and superstition. This conceptualisation has led to some thinkers, notably Lacan (1963/1989) to propose that the writings of Sade represent, in a sense,
the truth of Kant's moral philosophy, that Kantian morality implies sadism. The existence of an innate freedom favours the falling into evil, as much as, and somehow more than, the difficult process of constantly resisting evil temptations. Here Kant encounters something of the notion of transgression. Transgression, since it possesses only an individualist and irreversible register in the Kantian system can only favour evil and do nothing to bond the collective or communal group as it had in pre-Christian understandings of the sacred. In fact the 'morally' evil actions of an individual rip through what remains of a sense of community with a devastatingly destructive force. Individual freedom, as the centrepiece of the Kantian system 'lets loose human possibilities that will not submit to conceptual control' (Michalson 1990:28).

Kant's evil is indeed more radical than the moral evil of the Christian tradition, for with the Kantian system evil is radicalised by reason. Reason sets up fundamental and intractable limits to its own operation, yet evil cannot even be banished to the depths of unreason and confined there. As Kant shows there is no ultimate reason why evil should not be pursued rationally. In fact evil has, throughout the modern period, been conceived as an unstable force, simultaneously at the limit of, and beyond reason. For example sexual murder can be seen as the rational and premeditated pursuit of what are 'irrational' or 'abnormal' desires. In modernity then, the conditions exist whereby the individual is able to pursue rationally, a course of action that to the majority is highly unpleasant. The individual may choose to become 'inexplicable', to express a certain desire, pursue a certain lifestyle or merely to gain notoriety. Such a situation was not strictly possible within the theological worldview since the Christian God embodied a principle of completeness and perfection without any limit points. For any human violence, God possessed the greater destructive power, the destruction of the human soul. Reason, which replaces God, is always limited, at the limits of reason new evils emerge.

With Kant the possibility of a dialectical resolution of the problem of evil encounters its impossible limit. In this sense both the collapse of the Christian worldview and the expansion of enlightenment rationality can be seen as actuating a cultural decoding or more figuratively, unleashing, of evil; an evil now 'radicalised' by Kant. An active evil but a passive God, evil without God, evil that is inherent in
human reason yet is beyond control, evil that can only destroy since it serves no higher purpose. Evil, in this conception, is more powerful and dangerous then it ever was in the Christian worldview. 29

With Kant, as with Augustine, there is a tendency for the theoretical system to lapse back into dualism, despite the greatest efforts to produce stable explanatory economies, which resolve, domesticate or sublimate evil. The fundamental latent dualism of the mind/body or spirit/matter distinction provides a fertile ground for a good/evil distinction, suggesting part of humanity, the 'baser part' is evil and in conflict with mind/spirit which are good. It seems the Manichean dualist position, though simplistic, possesses a charge that is alone commensurate with cultural perceptions of evil. It has this because it denies complete, rational, human responsibility for evil and retains a sense of the unknowable, inexplicable, fatal.

THE NIETZSCHEAN REVOLUTION: EVIL AS MORAL EVALUATION

The philosophy of Nietzsche signals, for social theory, the end of enlightenment it its radical and immensely influential demolition of the postulates of rational, subjective and moral thought. The enduring importance of Nietzsche for contemporary theory supports the view that his philosophy represents a radical break, or discontinuity at a theoretical level.

Nietzsche was fascinated by the notion of evil, and, in particular the possibility of the surpassing of the values 'good' and 'evil'. 30 Nietzsche's interest in moral values or evaluations date back to his earliest published works. By the late 1870s Human, All Too Human (orig.1878-80) presented what he termed a 'Twofold pre-history of good and evil', declaring:

Good and bad is for a long time the same thing as noble and base, master and slave...one does not regard the enemy as evil: he can requite. In Homer the Trojan and the Greek are both good. It is not he who does us harm but he who is contemptible who counts as bad (Nietzsche 1878-80; translated in Nietzsche 1994:131).
Here Nietzsche elaborates his position of strict moral relativism. If a member of the noble class should act in an ignoble or 'unworthy' way, this fault would, in Greek antiquity, be attributed to a god who had afflicted them. Later, in the Platonic-Christian era, the fault or 'excuse' would be sought, not externally in the whims of capricious gods, but rather internally 'in the soul of the subjected, the powerless' (ibid.). This is a fundamental shift in the relationship between human and god, the divine no longer absorbs human fault, rather it finds the human guilty, a theme particularly characteristic of Judaism and Christianity. For Nietzsche what had been regarded, by the ruling class, as noble, strong and dignified, comes to seem cruel, violent and evil, as the 'subjected' and their moral 'herd' values come to form the dominant culture of western society.

In his works of the late 1880's Nietzsche does not hesitate to sketch out a relatively crude historical or genealogical scheme. *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1990:63-4) offers a tripartite notion of human moral history. This begins with the pre-moral stage where the moral evaluation of an action, whether it is thought good or evil, was decided purely by its consequences. Then, in the moral stage humankind experiences what is simultaneously a "refinement" and "a fateful new superstition, a peculiar narrowness of interpretation". Here the value of an action is decided by the intention said to exist behind it, as its origin. This is a fundamental shift, creating a new sense of internal or psychological responsibility or guilt. Yet Nietzsche also foresees a new age, the extra-moral in which the psychologistic notion of consciousness would be revealed as a mere "surface and skin" a "sign and symptom" requiring further interpretation. Nietzsche does not advocate the wholesale abandonment of all criteria of right and wrong, but a progressive 'self-overcoming of morality'. Such further interpretation may, for example, reveal that the tyrant, seeking unlimited power is characterised by weakness not strength. Indeed Nietzsche proposes, very sketchily, that in modernity a certain type of tyranny comes to the fore, not that of the overman, but that of the weak, a pathological form. This thesis becomes apparent in book one of *The Gay Science*. 

Nietzsche retains the idea that what is frequently called 'evil' is functionally necessary to enhance the human species, to guide it and move it forward:
The strongest and most evil spirits have so far done the most to advance humanity: again and again they resumed the passions that were going to sleep...[W]hat is new, however, is always evil, being that which wants to conquer and overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pieties; and only what is old is good (Nietzsche 1882/1974:79).

Nietzsche completely rejects the (Manichean) dualist conception of good and evil and therefore cannot be accused of merely reversing these values in order to celebrate evil. Nevertheless Nietzsche's historical assumptions remain crude and simplistic and reveal a fundamental reliance on individualism:

Lofty spiritual independence, the will to stand alone, great intelligence even, are felt to be dangerous; everything that raises the individual above the herd and makes his neighbour quail is henceforth called evil; the fair, modest, obedient self-effacing disposition, the mean and average in desires, aquires moral names and honours (1886/1990:123).

This distinction between the individual and "the herd" was to become a pronounced feature of Nietzsche's philosophy. It is highly problematic and cannot go uncontested. It becomes apparent, increasingly, as his investigations into the origins of moral evaluation progress, that Nietzsche conceptualises nobility and strength in almost entirely individualist terms. What had been, for Nietzsche, originally the property of the ruling elite becomes the striving of the individualist warrior-philosopher, such that collectivity, community, custom are viewed as merely restrictive tradition, stock or 'herd' wisdom. In fact, even where Nietzsche distinguishes clearly between a sense of community that is 'effervescent' or affirmatory rather than moralistic, both senses of community are assimilated by the derogatory term 'herd'. The crucial, and presumably socio-historical, movement from an affirmatory or orgiastic community to a moralistic one is never properly shown. Rather brief schematizations are offered allowing Nietzsche to move from the one assumption to the other with great ease. However it must not be assumed that Nietzsche's individualist assumptions are analogous to those of the utilitarian tradition of Bentham and Mill. Nietzsche opposed utilitarian thinking with great, perhaps unrivalled passion, never reducing the individual to a rational, self-certain
Nevertheless Nietzsche's basic unit of analysis in his explorations of good and evil is the isolate individual, choked and restricted by community, ritual, tradition and legality.\textsuperscript{32}

Moreover in book three of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche's madman proclaims the death of God:

\begin{quote}
We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers...[W]hat were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? (Nietzsche 1882/1974:181).
\end{quote}

The enlightenment thought of Kant and Hegel had marked the retreat or abdication of God (as limitlessness) and sought to establish the limits of reason and subjectivity. Yet Nietzsche proclaims not only the death of God but also the death of 'Man' as universal, rational, knowing subject.\textsuperscript{33} Here Nietzsche open up terrain that will be explored by Freud; that of the unconscious, hidden desires, apparently inexplicable forces that do not correspond to any notion of morality. The psychoanalytic tradition emerges which posits desire as expressive of the finitude, limit or lack characteristic of human nature and relations.

For Nietzsche these new conditions though profoundly unsettling are also fundamentally enabling. The death of God and of the transcendental subject imply that the constraining moral evaluations 'good' and 'evil' can be overthrown, surpassed. Beyond good and evil a new humanity can reveal these values as the superficial "signs and symptoms" of the more fundamental will-to-power. While previous understandings of nature and the cosmos, both theological and scientific can be swept away by the "de-deification" of nature. For Nietzsche 'Man' must be reintegrated into nature in order to affirm life. Importantly though these new conditions of life "might include error". That is the new conditions will not be 'objective' truths but vital illusion, myths of affirmation that nourish the human spirit.\textsuperscript{34}
With Nietzsche the Christian ‘problem’ of evil, evil as privative in nature is completely abandoned. The human being is liberated from moral responsibility before God, left not to pursue evil but to surpass moral judgements. Nietzsche attempts to contain evil within the prejudices and activities of the morally minded. ‘Evil’ is the result of a distorted interpretation of a non-moral universe and like good must be surpassed in order to advance the ‘human’ spirit. Milbank (1990) argues Nietzsche’s approach to morality is in fact dialectical, which is a serious problem for Nietzschean thought. Nietzschean thought does, in part, succeed in its ‘surpassing’ of moral evil, of the ‘problem’ of evil but is disabled by the persistence of new experiences of evil which cannot be managed within its framework. When confronted by the ‘evil’ of contemporary death-events Nietzsche’s approach is rendered inadequate. His approach simply cannot ‘absorb’ such events into the category of ‘evil’ as moralistic prejudice. Connelly (1991) argues Nietzsche’s thinking allows a shift from “the first problem of evil” (Augustine), to “the second problem of evil”, where evil results from the prejudices of self against other, but evil is no longer contained in either the first or second orders Connelly specifies. It is now necessary to think a third order of evil.

What must be emphasised in this brief discussion of enlightenment and post-enlightenment thought are the conditions of emergence of contemporary individualism. This is the individual uprooted from traditional and collective existence; the individual characterised by a fundamental limit, divided against itself by the demands of modern civilisation. Here is the emergence of the individual whose ‘deepest truth’ is said to be the nature of their desires and sexuality. These cultural and epistemological conditions define Nietzsche’s ‘warrior-philosopher’, Marx’s alienated worker, and Freud’s divided subject. These are the relations through which ‘evil’ is located and expressed in the contemporary period, where human responsibility for evil can never be secured or identified because subjectivity is said to be fundamentally divided. ‘Evil’ is no longer configured within theological or moral principles, nor is it confined by the structural relations existing between one ethnic/political/sectional group and another. ‘Evil’ is allowed to flourish in the absence of omnipotent god or universal reason. ‘Evil’ in the contemporary order is
rooted in individual desires, within the functioning and dysfunctioning of the divided self, yet it is always in excess of these, somehow 'inexplicable'.

The following chapter will explore Bataille's reading of Nietzsche and the divergence that is often overlooked, between them. Bataille's focus, to a far greater extent than his precursor, is the disabling nature of the death of God and the collapse of enlightenment reason. Bataille's reading of the principle of evil could hardly be more removed from Nietzsche's. Indeed the simplistic individualist analysis Bataille called the weakest and most unsatisfactory element of Nietzsche's work. This divergence is frequently overlooked and is crucial to an appreciation of the distinctiveness of Bataille's approach, specifically to evil and eroticism. The latter does not follow from Nietzschean philosophy and is approached, more fruitfully, from the viewpoint of the French sociological tradition.

Before turning to distinctive approaches to evil in contemporary theory, it is necessary to examine, briefly, other recent engagements with this concept. Firstly anthropological material which looks at evil in non-Western cultural settings. This may enable us to challenge the individualist and eurocentric bias of much of the thought reviewed so far. In addition this material plays an important role in the theoretical developments made by Bataille and Baudrillard. In particular the work of Durkheim and Mauss will be shown to be of decisive importance in shaping the theory of Bataille, and to some extent Baudrillard, enabling reflection on their divergence from, as well as proximity to, the Nietzschean tradition. Finally it may enhance an appreciation of the relation between evil and rationality, the extent to which they remain opposed or fuse together.

SOCIOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH EVIL

Before the impact of Durkheim, functionalist sociology, such as the system of Herbert Spencer, had approached evil as sentiments that a social unit may develop to those outside the group, such as competing tribes. This form of analysis, developed in *The Principles of Ethics* (orig. 1892) defines the notion of evil as a structural feature of the relations between group and non-group. However it does
little to examine the movements of evil within a social group and it is here that occurrences of evil seem most shocking, intense and 'inexplicable'.

Durkheim's theoretical approach to the meaning of religious sentiment rests on his general sociological proposition that each and every human community or society, will, and must as a necessary precondition of its existence, establish collective representations or collective conscience. A number of central dimensions of Durkheim's approach to religion are important here. Firstly, the nature of the sacred; as malefic as well as beneficent excess; secondly, the transformation of the meanings of the sacred in modern society; and finally, the social as a prior, collective, and constraining field of material forces. In each of these theoretical axioms Durkheim's approach is collectivist or anti-individualist. This feature sets the Durkheimian system apart from other, more dominant modes of social thought particularly the Weberian.  

Durkheim's Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912) made a fundamental distinction between sacred and profane and sketched out a typology of 'primitive' religious rites. Durkheim's work on religion focuses, to a far greater extent than Weber's and other sociologies of religion, on the negative, dangerous, threatening, impure and evil aspects of religious systems. Such an approach militates against the crude but widespread tendency to view religion (often all religion) as a system of thought that deals in cosy and comforting sham; illusion in the most pejorative sense. Durkheim was to show, in a compelling fashion without resorting to mysticism, that such convenient assertions are entirely inaccurate empirically and untenable epistemologically. The ambivalent, reversible trajectories of the beneficent and malefic, or good and evil aspects of the sacred are sketched out by Durkheim here and in more detail in Annee Sociologique. This understanding of the sacred reappears in Bataille's deployment of the term and in Baudrillard's emphasis on the reversibility of good and evil as we shall explore below.

Durkheim, perhaps more markedly than any other classical sociologist, guarded against the implicit or explicit, denigration of so-called primitive or archaic religious systems. Unlike both Marx and Weber he gave primacy to the notion of the sacred, over ritual, belief, church or (Weber's) 'promise', even over the idea of 'religion' itself. He had derived the concept of the sacred and in particular the sacred-
profane dichotomy from the emerging disciplines of anthropology and ethnology, indeed his introduction to such empirical data prompted a significant transformation in the direction of Durkheim's thought. His major work on the religion relied almost entirely on existing, and already slightly dated ethnographic material, especially concerning 'totemism', this led to a range of criticisms by the sociological mainstream, for example Evans-Pritchard (1962). Where Weber was to focus on the 'well-developed' or rationalised 'world religions', Durkheim sought, like Bataille and Caillou after him, to probe the earliest human engagements with the sacred and evil.

In Durkheim's system piacular rites were associated with death, decay, mourning and terror. Piacular rites were magical communal or tribal gatherings designed to ward off, protect against or compensate for threatening events or occurrences. Here malefic, dangerous, terrifying, but not strictly speaking evil forces menace the group. The term 'evil' requires for its meaning, a sense of personal, individual and moral sensibility, without this the term malefic is more appropriate. Moral evil specifically, this view suggests, emerges only with notions of individualism and 'self'. For Durkheim 'evil', as malefic force, is that which is interpreted as harming or threatening the social. This view inverts the assumptions of both Kant and Nietzsche both of whom situate evil within the 'psychological' tendencies of the individual. The nature of evil after the 'death of the social' then is of particular importance and is approached through a reading of Bataille and Baudrillard below. Ricoeur's (1961/1967) typology of evil is also instructive here. He specifies three stages in the history of evil. Firstly evil as "defilement", characteristic of polytheist religion, secondly evil as "sin" which emerges with Hebraic monotheism, and finally evil as "guilt" which characterises the Christian tradition. Here the earliest stage, "defilement" is akin to Durkheim's conception of malefic evil. The emergence of monotheism destroys beliefs in evil gods and so tends to fix perceptions of evil within the individual, as desire, sin and transgression. These themes are developed, through a reading of Bataille, in the following chapter.

Structuralist ethnographic studies, dating from the influential work of Levi-Strauss since the late 1940's and early 1950's, have questioned the validity of many of the assumptions and extrapolations of earlier sociological and anthropological material. What is perhaps most remarkable about more recent studies, such as De
Heusch's (1985) is its use of terms such as energy 'debts' and 'shares', terminology that invites comparison with Bataille's notion of General economy and its Durkheimian underpinnings. In fact De Heusch references Bataille's work on several occasions and though he resists generalising the term 'sacred' he does refer to sacrifice and transgression as "the core of myth" (1985: 125). Further he offers a detailed examination of the phenomena of "sacred kingship" (1985: pp 98-124), developing Durkheim's suggestive remarks on reversibility and providing ethnographic support for Baudrillard's assertion of the inherent reversibility of status/power in the sacrifice of the king. The fundamental opposition at work in De Heusch's study is not the sacred and profane nor good and evil, it is rather life-death, specifically the symbolic debt that life owes death.

Other Structuralist accounts of 'evil', such as Vernant's study of archaic (sacrificial) Greek religion (in Detienne and Vernant 1989) show how the notions of good and evil ceased to be conceived as impersonal forces, either beneficent or malefic. In Greek antiquity they came to be thought as personalised and gendered properties, though of course cosmological in foundation. Vernant describes how, in Homeric and Hesiodic myth, Zeus creates woman as both gift and fatal punishment for the Promethean transgression of the stealing of divine fire. The original woman, Pandora, is described as a kind of divine potlatch, a gift of "beautiful evil" capable of bringing both great happiness and intense misery to man. For Vernant Greek sacrifice was a means of bridging the void, however vicariously or ephemerally, between the human and the divine, which since the primal transgression had been separate. His approach to sacrifice, though diverging from Mauss ends on a point of general agreement with Bataille's approach to sacrifice and sacred 'mediation'. It is, according to Bataille, the mediatory role of the Christian God (between the human and the supernatural) that causes the principle of the good to weaken in relation to the 'sovereignty' of evil.

Both De Heusch and Vernant's studies conclude then, on a note of considerable congruence with the problematic suggested by Bataille and Baudrillard, which is perhaps surprising given the marginal status of the latter thinkers. The General economic paradigm of life and death, accumulation and destruction, good and evil, underpinned by the reciprocal, mimetic (inter)play of the cosmological and
the social/cultural is central to these Structuralist ethnographic studies and to the theory of Bataille and Baudrillard, 'the sacrificial debt is entirely based on the cosmogonic order upon which, in the last resort, social order depends' (de Heusch 1985:213).

These mythic, sacred and symbolic relations and their connections with the notion of evil in the theory of Bataille and Baudrillard will be explored in the following chapter. The following points drawn from this discussion of ethnographic data need to be emphasised. If there are said to be evil spirits or gods active in the life of the community, as for example in the 'primitive' religions described by Durkheim, or more recently the Structuralist anthropology of Douglas (1966) and de Heusch (1985), then such evils are symbolised, inscribed and defined within the religious system. As they are configured within these systems, ritual and ceremonial practices can be invoked to reverse, appease or combat the forces of evil. For example if evil forces are said to influence or govern certain times, days or periods a number of sacred rites can be performed to protect society. Of course these may or may not be successful. Further there is no distinction between moral evil and natural evil since individualism on which morality depends is not developed. In the later monotheistic religions particularly Christianity the forces of evil tend to be occluded, without a (collectively sanctioned) face or form. Pure evil, rather than human imperfection, tends to be symbolically banished, excluded, the most notable example being the expulsion of the fallen angel Satan from Heaven in the Judaean-Christian tradition. Here the personification of evil is marginalised but the symbolisation of evil remains, though in nebulous and unstable forms since an expulsion is also, in a sense, a freeing. The principle of evil then gains power, mystery, stealth and the force of seduction. In the Western tradition any possible ritual protections against evil become increasingly ill defined or evoked so rarely as to be of little value, as is the case with exorcism. The possibility of conflict between good and evil is, in the Western tradition, either left to God, or else, as is particularly the case in modernity the conflict is moralised, internalised, psychologised. The site of conflict remains dualistically conceived, between the 'baser' human 'instincts' and the 'higher' moral principles.
Once again the symbolisation of 'evil', in the course of socio-historic change, seems to gain in strength and power. It is expelled and freed, its scope is radicalised or extended by the 'progress' of rationalism and it becomes increasingly focused within the individual, its passions and desires. The remainder of this discussion, and the following chapter will further interrogate these relations, and the theoretical assumptions that lay behind them in order to enable a more precise reflection on the contemporary forms taken by 'evil'.

**EVIL AND THE MODERN STATE**

Contemporary theoretical reflections on the nature of evil have taken a number of distinct forms. In functionalist-oriented sociology evil is approached as a necessary, hence functional, aspect of certain authoritarian forms of social organisation, such as the totalitarian state manifest in Fascism or Communism. Yet clearly the capitalist system also deploys violence, terror and murder when faced with perceived threats to its internal and international security. Further it is difficult if not impossible to claim that instances of excessive violence, or 'evil', are a necessary rather than contingent or unpredictable feature of a particular form of social organisation. Moreover, where 'violence' can be related to the functioning of the nation-state in general symbolisations of evil are a far more difficult and elusive, more frequently evoked as a description of a particular individual behaviour.

The Second World War and the Nazi genocide have cast a bleak shadow over post-war social thought, though often in an indistinct and unacknowledged way. Generally speaking, contemporary theory, philosophy, sociology and psychology, has attempted to engage, in various ways, with the category 'violence' rather than that of 'evil'. Yet where accounts of violence encounter conceptual difficulties, for example where the violence has a particularly abhorrent character or seems to serve no rational purpose (that is 'self-interest), the term 'evil' often makes a furtive re-appearance as supplement to restricted economies.

The terminology of evil is often invoked in reflections on the Nazi holocaust, some aspects of which seem to fulfil this category. Indeed the event is often taken as the principal example of modern evil. Yet the genocide also involved
much that was, apparently, paradigmatically rational. The highly efficient bureaucratic machine devoted, ultimately, to annihilation is perhaps the best example. Once again this suggests, strongly, that the principle of rationality and the pursuit of 'evil' are far from mutually exclusive. Indeed the events of the holocaust utterly undermine Hegelian assertions of inevitable human progress through reason. Rationality was put in the service of 'evil' without causing any serious 'contradictions'. In fact rationality greatly accelerated the human potential for destructive actions.

However in many studies of the holocaust 'evil' has tended to remain focused here, as if these events were both unprecedented and totally unique. Where the scale of bureaucratic organisation devoted to destruction was unprecedented the actual instances of cruelty, violence and 'evil' certainly were not. Evil in modernity then appears, at once, fused with rationality yet always already in excess of it, ahead of it, certainly irreducible to it.

Of the many studies of the Nazi period Arendt's (1964/1994) is perhaps the most influential. This study, dealing with the trial and execution of Adolf Eichmann is sub-titled 'a report on the banality of evil'. It argues that 'evil' was actuated not through the diabolic personality of Eichmann, but rather through the bureaucratic processes common to twentieth century society in which he was enmeshed. Eichmann was charged with 'war crimes', 'crimes against the Jewish people' and, most significantly 'crimes against humanity'.

Arendt emphasises the extent to which Eichmann simply did his 'duty', obeying, to the letter, both the orders of superiors and the law as established by Hitler. In fact Eichmann cited Kant's categorical imperative in his defence. Eichmann, Arendt argues, was neither a sadist nor a racist fanatic, nor was he dominated by blind obedience. Eichmann's actions then cannot be explained in individualist, still less, for Arendt, psychoanalytic terms. According to Arendt, Eichmann had merely vulgarised Kant's moral principle, substituting 'general law or principle' for 'the will of the Fuhrer'. Yet this was entirely in keeping with the state and legal structure of Germany at the time. Arendt asserts that Hitler's rule represented a 'period of crimes legalised by the state' (Arendt 1964/1994:136). While the abhorrent nature of the genocide may tempt us to agree, it is surely the
case that crimes legalised by the state, strictly speaking, are no longer 'crimes'. A similar point was made by Eichmann's defence, and what ensured his conviction, as Arendt notes, was rather that he pursued his 'duty' so diligently, disallowing exceptions or favouritism even where personal financial gain had to be sacrificed. Eichmann could have saved lives and made himself rich, as many leading Nazi's did simply by being less diligent. For Arendt:

...this was proof that he had always acted against his "inclinations", whether they were sentimental or inspired by interest, that he had always done his "duty" (Arendt 1964/1994:137).

Further any inclinations towards cruelty or malice seemed to be absent; indeed any sense of desire; lust or passion played no part in Eichmann's behaviour. Here Arendt indicates that a *new kind of evil* was a work, a highly efficient bureaucratic and technical machine put to the service of 'criminal' principles as easily as they may serve a liberal democracy. The modern bureaucratic system contained no internal structures, codes or methods to resist such an ideology. Such a system can never possess more than an 'outward appearance' of legality, of legitimacy. Accordingly for Arendt the manifestation of evil undergoes a crucial qualitative transformation in modernity:

Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognise it - the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted not to murder...[B]ut, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation (Arendt 1964/1994:150).

This is a fundamental transformation, one that constitutes for Arendt the 'banality of evil'. With this thesis Arendt specifies new and distinctive cultural conditions which undermine moral responsibility and enable a new form of evil. There are parallels with Baudrillard's *transparency* of evil; the key difference is that for Arendt the innately moral disposition of human consciousness was submerged by impersonal
and inhuman bureaucratic procedures. Yet can a 'moral disposition' be innate? This seems unlikely and in any case is not shown in Arendt's work. The terminology, which she offers in this respect, such as "animal pity", is awkward and unconvincing. In addition, although Arendt is convincing in her account of Eichmann as bureaucrat rather than 'monster' other leading Nazi's, particularly Hitler himself, haunt her text. At no point does she suggest that Hitler too was a mere bureaucrat, indeed she suggest that he and others such as Goebel's were far closer to the 'personification' of evil. This allows her account to hover between what should be two distinct formulations. On the one hand the understanding of evil as substantive, positive, as individual choice or duty (as the temporary suspension of choice), and on the other as privative, systemic effect of techno-bureaucratic culture. Yet reason cannot provide a stable separation of these two formulations, it can only function by merging them, allowing one to supplement the other.

Bauman's (1989) study of the holocaust shares much with Arendt. Bauman's account emphasises how the Nazi bureaucratic machine disabled, diverted or re-articulated the "innate" moral disposition of the personnel who carried out the genocide. For Bauman evil is unambiguously privative since it resulted from the socially based disablement of natural goodness. Similar bureaucratic technologies are, of course, endemic to modern life not unique feature of German society in the early 20th century. To support his case Bauman cites the well-known psychological experiments of Milgram (1974) on the relationship between obedience to authority and the willingness to inflict serious physical pain. Studies of these kinds are important and revealing however they leave much unquestioned and have little purchase when confronted by contemporary forms of 'inexplicable evil' which are of particular interest to this inquiry. These events cannot be 'explained' by reference to modern structures of bureaucracy and authority. In fact such factors are notably absent from the cases cited in the appendices. 'Moral responsibility' can be non-operational without the intervention of bureaucratic 'distance'. This suggests, strongly, that the privative approach to evil is misleading and inadequate. The existence of 'innate' moral responsibility cannot be assumed. Psychoanalytic and Post-structuralist thought challenges these assumptions and tends to view 'moral
sentiments' are constitutive of evil actions, not as a safeguard against them. These approaches are evaluated, briefly, below.

Contemporary death-events suggest that the experience or manifestation of 'evil' has shifted again. Contemporary evil can no longer be thought, successfully, as residing in the conflict between innate human goodness and techno-bureaucratic 'badness'. Such as comfortable separation can no longer be made. Contemporary horrors are not merely structured by national, ethnic or political or religious difference, nor fuelled by perverse ideological machinery. Doubtless extreme horrors occur in these situations but are in no way confined to them. Contemporary death-events cannot be comprehended through the effects of bureaucratic and authority structures, they call into doubt the whole explanatory orthodoxy of 'the self persecuting 'the other'. Further, as I stressed in the previous chapter, there appear to be no convincing medical, psychological or psychiatric 'pathologies', or explanatory resources available to manage such cases.

**PSYCHOANALYTIC AND POST-STRUCTURALIST THEORIES OF 'EVIL'**

The previous chapter reviewed the Freudian attempt to 'explain' extreme behaviours such as sexual violence. Freudian psychoanalysis was criticised in a number of respects, particularly for its positivistic assumption of deep, 'real' impulses as explanation of social behaviour and cultural experience. Yet the Freudian tradition does break with the 'problem' of evil, the conceptualisation of evil as privative in nature. In Freud the polarities of Christian thought are reversed, aggressive impulses are the 'substantive' cause of evil while civilisation and morality attempt the control, limitation or privation of aggressive instincts. Moral responsibility is then always split, divided or fractured by the instincts, which do not recognise morality. This section will review contemporary attempts to apply Freud's thinking to evil.

A classical Freudian approach suggests that individuals who commit 'evil' acts are somehow locked within an immature, infantile stage of the sadistic expression of libido. With the removal of Freud's evolutionary framework we reach the position that all individuals, at all stages of life, and may experience the most
sadistic impulses, which however they ordinarily express only in domesticated, vicarious or phantasmal form. Where such desires are pursued in more material form then apparently 'inexplicable evil' may occur. Such an approach is crude but Freudian concepts, primarily of a libidinal economy of desires that operate without regard for moral categories, have been taken up, modified and developed by a number of important contemporary theorists. Differing understandings of what Freud termed 'the unconscious' and libidinal psychic economies are developed by Lacan in the Post-structuralist theory of Deleuze, Lyotard and Zizek. The term Post-structuralist, of course, comprises many different strands of theory, developed at different times and in different contexts. Despite a general concern with limits and what lay in excess of limits in Post-structuralist thought, direct theoretical engagements with evil remain rare. For example, Foucault examined madness, violence and transgression in detail but offered only asides on 'evil'.

Lyotard (1992) developed a new 'politicised' notion of paganism but does not deal with 'evil' as such despite referring to his early work *Libidinal Economy* (1974/1993) as an "evil book". Deleuze refers to the devil and diabolic in his explorations of excess entitled 'becoming-animal' and discusses cruelty, sadism and masochism but 'evil' is not a primary concern. Recently Derrida has published lengthy meditations on the gift, which involve brief considerations of evil in relation to the legacies of Kant and Nietzsche. More recently still, working within a Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytical tradition, Zizek (1993, 1997) has examined Kant's radical evil and presented a typology of evil, in terms of the Freudian categories ego, superego and id. Clearly evil, the diabolic, the excessive, and related areas have re-emerged to exert a profound fascination for contemporary thinkers.

Each of the above offer complex and distinctive methods for thinking about evil, and excessive phenomena in general. Much contemporary theory involves re-evaluations of the established figures of structuralist thought, pre-eminently Marx and Freud. This is true of Bataille, Baudrillard, Foucault and Deleuze. For such writers 'excess', conceived in different ways, has become a recurrent theme. In order to think excess the socio-political and socio-psychical revolutions of Marx and Freud are regarded as crucial yet flawed and inadequate conceptual tools. Perhaps the most fully developed critique of the Freudo-Marxist tradition is that of Deleuze and
Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In common with Lyotard (1974/1993) they argue that the central concepts of Freudo-Marxism limit and imprison, within structural categories (ego, id, consciousness, labour, class) and dialectical movements (revolution, emancipation, resolution) the general libidinal economy of untrammelled drives, desires, pleasures and creativity. For Deleuze, deeply influenced by Nietzsche, the terms 'good' and 'evil' are merely resentful moral evaluations, which should be overcome. Further Deleuze develops a notion of 'positive ontology' which militates against the consideration of any so-called negative phenomena of which evil might be a class. Again a Deleuzian approach might be to examine the 'deeper' relations of desire, of which moral evaluations are 'signs and symptoms'. This is not the place to challenge the Deleuzian ontology except to suggest that such an 'overcoming' may be impossible, and perhaps increasingly naive. In the next chapter I will argue that Bataille's thought attempts to force through some of the more radical implications of the Freudian approach to evil which are erased in other strands of Post-structural theory.

A number of thinkers drawn from psychoanalytic and literary backgrounds have recently addressed the topic of evil. Doubtless these writers offer many important insights but their approaches are often so individualist and ahistorical as to be highly suspect. Perhaps foremost amongst these is Slavoj Zizek. Zizek's (1994:70) Freudian typology of evil restricts the phenomena to the 'ideological' plane, that structured by the regularities of 'self' against 'other'. Ego-evil is defined in terms of selfishness, super-ego evil as 'fanatical devotion to some ideological ideal' (ibid.). Finally id-evil, a far more problematic notion, is described in terms of the 'skinhead beating up foreigners'. Although Zizek argues that this form of evil is characterised by neither selfish nor simplistically ideological behaviour (in other words there is no clear rationalisation of it) he approaches it as:

...structured and motivated by the most elementary imbalance in the relationship between the Ich [I] and jouissance...the primordially missing object-cause of desire (Zizek 1994:71).
There is a considerable awkwardness both in the psychoanalytic terms themselves and their deployment alongside examples and illustrations which, far from capturing any sense of the "primordial", actually are borrowed from noticeably contemporary cultural products, effects and processes such as 'ethnic cleansing' and modern cinema and rock music. Exploring contemporary psychoanalytic accounts of 'radical evil' entails plunging into a universe of technical terminology, some of which we may not be inclined to accept. Even such apparently basic terms as the unconscious and 'the small object of desire' need to be contested. It is precisely this problematic conception of the id and the unconscious, which are supposed to be somehow universal or "primordial", that are re-evaluated, though in different ways, by Bataille, Baudrillard and in a different ways Lyotard and Deleuze. The possibility of a general and/or libidinal economy is most fully explored by these writers and, increasingly, is the concern of Post-structuralist feminism.

I will make the case for the superiority of a General (social) economic approach to those of a restricted psychological or psychoanalytical nature. In developing a reading of Bataille and Baudrillard's engagement with evil their respective challenges to both Freud and his successors will become apparent. The theories of Bataille and particularly Baudrillard involve a direct challenge to the psychoanalytic notion of drives and desires, which are argued to remain within a productivist paradigm. Further they allow us to re-consider the position of sexuality and eroticism as distinct from desire and its relation to evils which seem to be unbounded from moral and structural categories.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has offered a necessarily brief consideration of various conceptualisations of evil in the western traditions of social thought. It does not claim to be either exhaustive or evenly representative of established modes of thought in this area. Nor does it claim to present the 'truth' of evil, even where such an assertion is implicit in some of the sources that have been drawn upon. Clearly what has been offered is a selective, partial and condensed reflection on a number of thinkers who have presented powerful, persuasive and in some cases historically
influential approaches to evil. This chapter has shown something of the intractability of 'evil', how this notion eludes definition or comprehension, how it changes and mutates, representing a point of severe danger and instability in any system.

The contemporary order when confronted with traumatic or catastrophic events, whether defining itself in religious, moral or techno-scientific terms, is torn apart, immobilised and left grasping at the apparently archaic terminology of 'evil'. Yet such events do not, at least for the majority, mark a return to, or sheltering within theological systems, it seems the language of evil cannot be expunged, rather it separates from systematic religion and never ceases to hold a certain power over the human imagination. Faced with such 'evil' the inadequacies of dominant or state theological systems, the aporias of modern techno-scientific culture, and the weaknesses of 'liberal-pluralist-(post)-modern' thought, are revealed with devastating clarity. For all these systems the positive flourishing of an autonomous and excessive, not merely privative/substantive notion of evil is, strictly, impossibility, a non-sense, a horror that should not even be contemplated.

Modern thought, upon encountering 'evil' is paralysed and powerless, unable either to locate moral responsibility successfully, or to dispense with notions of responsibility. It is left grasping at two, equally unsatisfactory, possibilities. One declares evil is inexplicable in rational terms because human beings possess an ineradicable kernel of irrationalism which may render them temporarily or permanently 'ill' and so not responsible for any acts which may seem 'evil'. This is a position shared by psychoanalytic, psychiatric and bio-genetic accounts of violence. Sociological and social psychological accounts of 'privations' in environment or other adverse contextual influences follow a similar pattern as Connolly (1991) stresses. Secondly, modern thought offers rationalisations of evil that are simply incommensurate with the traumatic and catastrophic phenomena involved in such events. These positions overlap and encompass both liberal-humanist prescriptions for greater educational guidance, and some anti-humanist and Post-structuralist positions which attempt to contain evil within the 'moral evaluations' of the resentful, or latterly in the moral panics of the mass media. All of these positions avoid a full engagement with such events, either containing evil within the moral, 'irrational', the pathological or the textual.
Privative conceptions of evil appear naïve while theories which assert a "real" substance of evil, such as untamed instincts or impulses, encounter severe problems in locating, plausibly, the nature of this "substance". Further both privative and substantive conceptions of evil are unsatisfactory because they attempt to contain evil within particular forms which contemporary evil eludes or refuses. This is why a new approach must be sought.

The deployment of the term 'evil' seems to require a number of conditions. Firstly evil must be excessive, disproportionate, devoid of notions like pity and compassion, it must be 'inhuman' in intensity. Secondly, the term 'evil' is invoked in cases of intentional, deliberate and calculating action. This expresses the extreme intractability of evil. It suggests, at once, both purposeful, calculating action and the suspension, erasure or destruction of all 'human' responsibility, all reason and meaning. The paradoxical nature of evil is that it encompasses both.

In modern thought evil is often defined in terms of the excessive pursuit of some higher cause or principle, that is as embodying a moral claim or principle. This assertion leads to a general critique of morality, it is argued that morality itself, at least in its moral-Christian form directly or indirectly leads to intolerance, persecution and ultimately 'evil'. Here evil is no longer conceptualised as divine punishment for sin but as structural effect of moralistic culture; the persecution of the 'other'. Some 'evils' can be read in this way, the 'witchhunts' of 17th century Europe being a favoured example. Yet these seem distinct from the 'inexplicable' class of contemporary 'evil' which I am most interested in here. Evil, where structured by ethnic, racial or gender-based hatred is perhaps all too explicable, all too human, based on fear and attempts to control a perceived 'other'. Investigation of these forms of behaviour is important and many existing accounts are clearly inadequate. However to argue that evil is always structured in this way, serving a spurious moral 'greater good' which can by critique be shown to be defective is in my opinion a domestication and artificial containment of the meaning of 'evil' and of the limits of human behaviour.

It may be that new terrain is emerging, that contemporary death-events represent a new regime of 'evil'. Drawing on Ricoeur's (1961/1967) notion of the 'symbolisation' of evil it is perhaps now necessary to trace the movements of evil.
beyond the metaphysics of self and other, beyond the structures of morality and persecution, beyond its articulation with any polar opposite of the 'good'. Violence structured along ethnic or nationalistic lines, even were it is most extreme, is always accompanied by ready-made apparatus for its deciphering and comprehension. The historical and political context of hatred between Serb and Muslim, Arab and Jew, Hutu and Tutsi is relatively easy to trace and functions as a rationalising or domesticating tool. While these mechanisms of rationalisation are unable to 'think' the intensity of hatred and violence, their constant presence, relayed through the global news media, serves to ward off the invocation of 'evil'. Similarly the violence of men inflicted on women is comprehended through stereotyped mechanisms, again fuelled by the media. Too often the usage of notions such as 'patriarchy', 'misogyny', 'sadism' 'perversion' comprises a popular remedy for thinking away unpleasant and sickening events, however inadequate they may be. Such events then come to seem commonplaces, unable to provoke much general interest. They certainly do not radiate the profound fascination of the 'inexplicable', the 'incomprehensible' atrocity, the contemporary death-event.

Those death-events specified above seem to refute all rationalising procedures, and here 'evil' reappears. 'evil' as the symbolisation of excesses, of negatives, beyond rational comprehension. Indeed it is the necessarily limited and partial, relative and perspectival nature of reason that, paradoxically, guarantees 'evil' a place in the contemporary landscape. 'evil' will exist then as long as thinking, reflection, reason continue, and perhaps long after their demise.

Perhaps, as Baudrillard suggests the dualist 'universe of meaning' is collapsing, good and evil no longer meet, their 'rapport' is broken, they cannot be either brought together, as Bataille urged, nor can they be surpassed as Nietzsche hoped. Perhaps we are experiencing the final disarticulation of 'good' and 'evil'. Who, today, would even attempt to define these terms? Meaning is contained within their functioning as polar opposites; neither can be isolated and remain meaningful. Yet these terms do not suffer the same fate, the 'good' loses its moorings, its force, by being culturally generalised, normalised, reduced to the level of lowest common denominator, amounting to no more than that residue of politeness necessary for consumer-driven culture. Evil, however, retains its aura of seduction, its thrill of
transgression, its force of fascination. 'Evil' exists beyond conceptual containment, at
the limits of understanding and meaning, its seductive elusiveness only magnified by
a contemporary culture that seeks to forget or deny it.

The following chapter will examine, in detail, the related approaches of
Bataille and Baudrillard to 'evil'. The thinking of limits and excesses will continue to
be of central importance. For them the notion of evil is not merely archaic or
embarrassing, it is not theorised in specifically Christian or enlightenment terms, yet
nor do their approaches correspond to other figures in the Post-structuralist canon.
Here I will seek an alternative thinking of 'evil', one which is better equipped to
approach contemporary horrors.
NOTES

1) Quoted in Michelson (1990).
3) Taken from *the Chambers Dictionary* (1995).
6) On the responsibility/insanity issue see Reznek (1997).
7) See Dawkins (1976).
9) These changing forms have been traced in a number of anthropological studies. For example Durkheim (1912/1961), also see Detienne and Vernant (1989) and De Heush (1985). In addition such shifts are a crucial component of Nietzsche's reading of Western history, see especially Nietzsche (1887/1994).
10) From Kant, I. *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793/1960).
11) This is certainly the view expressed by Paul Barry Clarke in *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, April 25th 1997.
12) See Boyd (1975) for a consideration of the parallels in the conceptualisation of evil between western and eastern religious thought.
13) There is an array of conflicting versions of the creation within the Judeo-Christian tradition. The canonical book of Genesis disregards a number of other accounts, myths and fragments of the Christian faith. There are many Coptic, Greek, Manichean and Gnostic writings pertaining to the creation which at various points in the history of the Christian church have been rejected, excluded or amended. Some of these are collected in *The Nag Hammadi Library* (1977) Ed. James M. Robinson. See also Ricoeur (1961/1967:232-279).
14) In Zoroastrian, Manichean and Gnostic dualisms there are said to be good and evil gods constantly at war with each other. This assertion entails that these gods are plural and finite. This system constitutes both a cosmological and an ethical dualism and involves a principle of evil but not the problem of evil as such. In this
regard it is more logically stable than the Christian system. In Manichean
metaphysics, which has a certain influence on the theory of both Bataille and
Baudrillard, the evil gods are posited as the more powerful at least during the time
frame occupied by humanity. This temporal ascendancy of the evil gods is held to
account for the inherent tragedy and fatality of the human condition. In the Gnostic
version Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament is said to be a false deity, mean and
vengeful who created the world and the human creature in error. The human being is
a part of this false god or demiurge, a fact explaining human imperfections such as
cruelty, violence and 'evil'. In this tradition the true God is unknown, beyond
rational or discursive thought, alien or entirely other and thereby uncontaminated by
the vicissitudes of the human world. However by the notion of a false creator,
Gnosticism imputes an irremediably evil dimension to all humankind, while the
entire world is said to be an error, and so human suffering is both inevitable and
senseless. Yet the Gnostic system, emphasising the power of a principle of evil
endemic in the human world, was for many early Christians a more plausible
position that that which would be established by St Augustine as Christian
orthodoxy.

15) This work was provoked, in part, by the sack of Rome in 410 by Alaric and
the Goths. The Roman empire had been, at this time, only recently Christianised
and the fall of the great city was widely attributed to the recent erosion of faith in the
more war-like pagan gods whose cults had been suppressed by the Christian
emperors Gratian and Theodosius. *The City of God* was Augustine's response both to
the collapse of the Christian(ised) empire and the specific charge that the pagan gods
had been more powerful, virile, and offered greater protection. In 428 the Vandals
invaded North Africa, where Augustine himself was Bishop of Hippo, Augustine
died during the siege of that city.

16) The best known example is the young Augustine's pleasure in the stealing of
a pear. See *The Confessions* (1982).

17) Augustine argued that evil originates in the volition of the human being
(Adam), thereby establishing the fundamental Christian doctrine of human
culpability and the complete goodness, and so blamelessness of God. However in
attempting to establish these points with consistency Augustine is forced to suppress
many potential implications, interpretations and objections; most seriously that if evil is nothing why strive to avoid it or repent for it, and perhaps more fundamental still the position of an omniscient God in the causation of evil, suffering and severe punishment. For more on this area see Connelly's (1991;1993) interesting discussions.


19) The so-called ‘Free-will’ defence of the existence of evil (in a universe dominated by an omnipotent and benevolent God) has become increasingly popular over recent decades. It argues, broadly speaking, that evil must exist in order that human beings are able to ‘choose’ either good or evil, and are hence culpable for those choices.

20) See for example Surin (1986).

21) It is interesting that Kant should rely upon a metaphoric of child/adult, since childhood can be seen as both the time before maturity and access to self-determination is reached, and also as an enchanted realm. This is a realm of radical freedom and of a certain 'innocent' eroticism and excessiveness yet these elements are absent from the Kantian account. Bataille (1954/1988) refers to the excessive and exuberant nature of childhood and its superiority over the restricted and domesticated nature of adult life. See also Leiris (1984) for a fascinating account of childhood.

22) See the excellent discussion by Owen (1994). Kant is occasionally very simplistic in his treatment of the newly emergent discipline of anthropology, see for example Kant (1793/1960:28).

23) Nietzsche's critique of Kant's view of autonomy, morality and reason is somewhat fragmentary but is particularly evident in the second essay of On the Genealogy of Morality (Nietzsche 1994). For Kant the true essence of religion did not reside within the community and its sacred or symbolic investments, but rather within individual consciousness striving for autonomy. Here religion finally becomes fully rational and individualistic; civic, but not collective in the Durkheimian sense. According to Bataille's Theory of Religion, the General economy of the sacred is increasingly narrowed, domesticated and rationalised, becoming an unstable restricted economy. The sacred is diminished and logicised
into a single God, and with Kant, God is finally rendered subordinate to reason and a metaphysic of proportionality. Where Kant really differs from the Augustinian reading of original sin, and the Manichean dualist 'heresy', is by erecting his system of individualist maxim making. Kant's avoids falling into a simple dualism of good and evil by arguing that rather than good maxims opposing evil maxims, the foundation of maxim-making is human freewill, that can equally choose good or evil. Kant's understanding of the content of evil is, again, closely related to the Platonic and Augustinian denigration but not outright condemnation of the body. For Kant, as for Augustine, the sensuous nature of the body is not evil in itself, yet freewill does often choose to pursue bodily lusts and subordinate the higher mental and spiritual faculties to them. Again it is fundamentally a question not of repression but of proportion and since the embodied nature of human consciousness is a universal 'given' then so, for Kant, is the propensity for evil.

27) Notably Goethe, see discussions in Michalson (1990) and Copjec (1996).
29) However an enervated sense of the divine remains crucial to the Kantian system. Human moral goodness is not traced to cultural factors alone but depends on 'an infinitely distant noumenal realm, with no practical bearing upon our present circumstance' (Michalson 1990:4) and a whole matrix of Christian and especially biblical teachings. A moral, meaningful universe can only be secured against the chaos and destruction of evil by a 'human-divine partnership' (ibid.) and it is precisely this mediatory role of the divine that according to Bataille, as we shall see, further weakens the good and, reciprocally strengthens the force of evil.
30) In the preface to On the Genealogy of Morality (1887/1994), Nietzsche rejects the search 'for the origin of evil beyond the world', that has been characteristic of religious and metaphysical thought. Yet Nietzsche does not seem to distinguish
adequately between religion and metaphysics. A religion need not necessarily depend on transcendent or otherworldly conceptions, as a metaphysic must, below we will examine anthropological and ethnographic data that will support this claim. Religion, particularly that often termed 'primitive' or 'archaic', is concerned with the cultural and material efficacy of its communal rites and need not be, strictly speaking, 'otherworldly'.

31) See in particular Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (1886/1990a) sections 38 and 39, and also Nietzsche, The Gay Science, note 79.

32) Volume two of Human, All Too Human, (1880) deals with the origin of such 'custom'.

33) This is the thesis made, famously, by Foucault towards the conclusion of The Order of Things (1970/1974).

34) Nietzsche's philosophy, despite its frequent and unsatisfactory equation of religion and the otherworldly, also exhibits a powerful and repeated concern with the efficacy of illusion, myth and aesthetics. Megill (1987) explores this neglected aspect of Nietzsche, which conflicts with a number of recent interpretations of his thought. According to Megill, Nietzsche ascribes aesthetics an ontogenetic of "world-making significance" (1987:31). Reality is woven as a web of illusion, with no deeper, more essential real in some way 'hidden' behind the illusion. The world, for Nietzsche, gives birth to itself as illusion. Megill situates Nietzsche as 'the founder of what became the aesthetic metacritique of "truth", wherein "the work of art", or "the text", or "language" is seen as establishing the grounds for truth's possibility' (1987:33). Nietzsche's later writings returned to the nature and centrality of myth that had been present in his earliest work. In an attack on the Romantic Movement, Nietzsche declared art, not the privileged mode of access to "truth", but rather as the highest mode of illusion. Nietzsche's final writings collected as The Will-to-Power declare 'We have art lest we perish of the truth' (Nietzsche 1964: no.822). There is then a profound anti-materialist and anti-realist dimension to Nietzsche's thought,
is no 'reality' for us - nor for you either, my sober friends' (Nietzsche 1882/1974:121).

The notions of myth and illusion are then all-encompassing for Nietzsche. Myth is the foundation of culture and society, it attained its most profound and expressive form, according to Nietzsche, in Greek tragedy, later expressed through religion, art and literature, and then through the successes and transformative power of supposedly a-mythological science and technology. However it is the weakness, effacement or lack of binding force of myth in modern society that has lead to the impoverishment of human culture and the expansion of nihilism. This reading of Nietzsche, I will argue, plays a crucial role in situating the recent work of Baudrillard on illusion. It is precisely this symbolic relation, (not real but in Nietzsche's terms mythic, illusory) that is affirmed and insisted upon in the marginal sociology of Bataille, the College and more recently Baudrillard and that is denied or obscured in dominant or orthodox sociological thought as it attempts to approach 'excessive' phenomena in western societies. It is apparently felt or assumed that such an approach could only be valid as an explanation of 'primitive' thinking long surpassed in the developed Western world. Here, there is clearly a deep and often unacknowledged complex of enlightenment assumption guiding contemporary sociological thought concerning the unquestioned desirability of notions such as individualism, autonomy, progress and utility. Bataille and Baudrillard, in turn, utterly reject such evolutionist assumption concerning the efficacy of Western rationalism and while much structuralist thought has attempted to show that 'primitive' thought is equally, though divergently, as logical and systematic as Western modernity, Bataille and Baudrillard are more interested in showing the reverse hypothesis, that Western modernity is as irrational, as dependent on illusion and myth as 'primitive' thought.


36) Durkheim's fascination with religious thought and life; and specifically the notions of sacred and profane, can be traced to the influence wielded by Fustel de Coulanges' The Ancient City, first published in 1864 and Robertson-Smith's
anthropological study *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, first published in 1889. In addition many of the central axioms of Durkheim's later sociology of religion had already been worked out in earlier works, his *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (1957) contains the notion of the sacred, presents God as hypostatised social forces and contains the important idea that the individual self forms the quasi-sacred cult of modern life. Durkheim's extremely ambitious project; attempting to probe the most basic and essential attributes of social and religious life and to show the epistemological rootedness of modern secular thought in religious and sacred principles, has received a great deal of critical attention, much of it hostile. Central to many critical accounts are Durkheim's supposed over-generalisations, even universalisation of the concept of totemism generally, and the categories of sacred and profane specifically. Durkheim, though agnostic in personal belief, raised the importance of suspension of disbelief and deep empathy with sacred principles to a fundamental methodological axiom. Simultaneously, he never doubted the total and exclusive ability of scientific reason to establish the truth. In this sense he was a strict positivist and forerunner of structural-functionalism in the social sciences. Pickering (1984) has provided a detailed examination of Durkheim's sociology of religion, and a close reading of his sacred-profane dichotomy. Pickering argues, rightly, that Durkheim's notion of the sacred incorporates both the positive and the negative, that is both the socially useful or beneficent and the socially destructive or malefic. The Latin *sacer*, the French 'sacre' and to a lesser extent even the English 'sacred' connote both that which is holy, consecrated and that which is cursed, damned, destructive, evil. The latter meanings are now rare in English, but is still clear in French and central to the Latin root. The term profane is also complex. The Latin *profanus* means, literally, outside the temple. It is that which is not sacred, or not consecrated and connotes the unholy though largely in the sense of commonplace, everyday, mundane. In French the verb 'Profaner' means, in addition, to profane or desecrate something sacred, a church, temple, altar or grave. While the most common meaning of the adjective profane is secular, meaning commonplace, it also confers the ungodly or irreverent. The meaning is very similar in modern English.
37) See Bataille (1947) 'Du rapport entre le divin et la mal' in *Critique*. See also Durkheim (1902) *Annee Sociologique*, 5, 82 'Sur le totemisme'.

38) Durkheim discusses piacular rites at length, see Durkheim (1912/1961:196).

39) It is not possible here to assess the relative merits of the 'structuralist revolution', nor to evaluate, in any detail, its contribution. Rather I will attempt to situate the problematic established by both Durkheim and Mauss in relation to recent structuralist ethnographic studies and latterly within the movement loosely known as post-structuralism. For example De Heusch's (1985) study of African religion describes how, when a social transgression occurs it is often a third, or unrelated, party upon whom the symbolic 'curse' or 'debt' is visited. The ontological assumptions of individual self divided by the mind/body and good/evil dualisms do not seem to be present, nor are the epistemological dualisms of cause and effect, innocence and guilt. Sacrificial rites are deployed in order to 'restore the normal physical condition of man - his health, or his status - which has been compromised by some event' (1985:5). Such ethnographic data helps us to think through the limitations of the Eurocentric obsession with the individual; its rights, liberation and desires. The movements of sacralisation and desacralisation, central to the accounts by Durkheim and Mauss, do not take place in such cases and the notion of the sacred does not appear to be the central to such processes. Drawing on the work of Benveniste (1969) De Heusch argues that the Durkheimian tradition conflates the Latin sancta and sanctum, that is sanction or prohibition, with the sacer or sacred thereby creating an enlarged 'umbrella' concept of the sacred in a similar way to anthropological treatments of 'totemism' before Levi-Strauss' influential critique. Despite a number of well-made criticisms the point remains that Durkheimian and Maussian remain relevant for a consideration of Western cultures, so long as they are not assumed to be the end-point of some great evolutionary process. Douglas (1966) has argued that prohibition should not be confused with 'pollution'; connoting that which is felt to be filth, dirt, decay and the 'unclean', and that these notions were separate until the rise of Christianity which compounded them in the concept of sin. With the rise of Western state and authority structures, which for centuries organised themselves in at least nominally Christian terms, the dualist conceptions of mind/body and good/evil were able to take on a greater fixity, becoming entrenched...
within Western cultural experience, and manifest in many institutions and processes. Prior to this, in Greco-Roman religion, and to some extent in the African religious thought described by De Heusch (1985), the sacred tended to be identified with pollution, but not with prohibition as such. Individual guilt, 'sin', or personal responsibility is not a salient feature of such belief. This absence of a sense of individualism and moral responsibility is crucial for an approach to contemporary forms of 'inexplicable' evil.

42) According to Masters (1996:112-138) exorcisms are still surprisingly frequent occurrences, particularly where 'the disturbed' do not respond to orthodox psychiatric treatment.
44) There are interesting though brief and scattered references to evil in Foucault's study of madness, see Foucault (1967/1971:199-220).
49) Stanford (1996) discusses this in terms of self persecuting other.
50) Evil of this kind has been approached in Nietzschean terms with some success, specifically as the result of resentful, condemnatory moralities. Similar definitions of evil have been used to explain 'humanitarian disasters' in South American countries for example. However such an account is far less readily applicable to the Nazi holocaust where the followers of a supposedly vengeful religion were themselves destroyed by a regime that did not justify or express itself in moral terms, but through economic, racial and finally bureaucratic and organisational terminology. Nor does it offer a convincing approach to contemporary examples of 'inexplicable' evil.
CHAPTER SIX

EVIL: THE PRINCIPLE OF EVIL IN BATAILLE AND BAUDRILLARD

INTRODUCTION

"the modern forms of Evil know no bounds...Evil has metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms that obsess us" (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 81).

The purpose here is to explore, in detail, the related yet distinct approaches to 'evil' in the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard. For these thinker's 'evil' is a fundamental axis of cultural experience, a principle, not a moral problem that may or may not have a 'solution'. Further this principle is, they contend, an active and radical force, increasingly disarticulated from any reciprocal or dual relationship to anything that could, convincingly, be termed the 'good'. Bataille and Baudrillard claim new and distinctive forms or manifestations of evil that cannot be contained in moral, subjective or structural thought and are somehow 'inevitable'. Further their approaches are argued to be crucial for an enhanced reading of extreme violence, 'inexplicable evil' or contemporary death-events.

The first section of this chapter is concerned with the context and trajectory of Bataille's thinking on evil, and the related themes of the sacred and transgression. Bataille's thought is situated in terms of Christian, Gnostic and mystical sources as well as the Hegelian 'enlightenment' project and its Nietzschean critique. Bataille's divergence from Nietzsche on the theme of evil is emphasised. Bataille's thinking on evil is fundamentally social in conception, and the themes of expenditure and base materialism offer a thinking that leads away from conceptions of evil in moral, individual and privative/substantive terms. Most of all Bataille seeks to 'confront' evil, to 'measure up' to the limits of experience.

The second section turns to Baudrillard's engagement with evil. His thought is contextualised through the philosophy of Nietzsche and Bataille but is shown never to be reducible to these influences. It will be argued that Baudrillard has
moved further and further from these influences, as the principle of evil becomes a more important dimension of his thought. Baudrillard's important but neglected *Fatal Strategies* (1983/1990) is discussed in detail and a reading of the fatal and ironic forms of the object, in relation to 'evil' and notions of subjectivity and moral responsibility is developed. The implications of Baudrillard's thinking on evil are drawn out in order to offer a reading of contemporary death events as a distinctive regime of evil.

For Bataille the 'human' condition is always one of limits, "discontinuous" (individual) existence the result of a temporary and unstable restriction of biomaterial energy excess. The sacrificial rituals of 'pre-monotheist' religion offered a hallucinatory, unreal(isable) opening of the human spirit onto "immanence" or "continuity". However Bataille's reading of Aztec sacrifice suggests that some sense of the accursed share has been incorporated into certain cultural systems, rendering them unintelligible to Western moralism. Consequently it is inadequate to read Bataille exclusively on a literary/poetic level, and equally important; as with reading Baudrillard, to resist too great an assimilation to the philosophy of Nietzsche. With Bataille the Nietzschean 'overman' is replaced by the wounded, anguishiéd being-in-excess. The Bataillean General economy is one of expenditure, irremediable loss and disablement, not enabling, overcoming and transvaluation. Bataille's notion of evil is radically different from that presented in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*. Evil, for Bataille, is no mere moralistic value judgement, created by slaves' moral resentment, rather evil symbolises excess, the intolerable and indecipherable. In the age of modernity, the instinctive sexual and aggressive drives are locked away in the 'basement' of modern 'being'. There is similarity with Freud here, however Bataille's concern is less with instinctual drives and biological functioning than with the social and cultural effects of the Accursed share, that is with luxury not functionality.

For Bataille 'luxury' occurs precisely were necessity, utility and instincts and drives are set aside through the existence of abundance. This may be the abundance of material wealth, of social power and prestige (as in the case of the Potlatch) or a superabundance of physical or mental energy, devoted to athletic or military competition, artistic creativity or erotic expression for example. These are activities.
that in no sense can be deduced from biological drives, instincts or functions. Here then are important distinctions between Bataille and Freud that impacts on Bataille’s reading of evil.

According to Bataille evil is both expelled and freed in modernity, existing in an unknown or unbounded dimension where it may strike at society with stealth, terror and incomprehensibility since it represents the ‘outside’, or ‘beyond’ of the limit. Evil is now sovereign, without master (God) since God exiled it beyond the limits of the known, before being, himself exiled into obscurity. The radical power of evil, as it appears in the writings of Bataille and Baudrillard, does not derive from a mystical or metaphysical source, nor is it based on moral claims, rather it emerges from concrete and material cultural conditions emergent in Western modernity. Evil symbolises excesses and remainders, processes that cannot be comprehended but cannot be ignored. Yet Baudrillard’s divergence from Bataillean themes must be emphasised. Baudrillard is dismissive of any notion of subject-as-excess. For him ‘the subject’ is a construct of reason and morality which, then sets limits to the subject. These dividing lines are shifted and redrawn to enable reason to function. Baudrillard’s project is to displace radical thought from the thinking of the subject onto the object. For Baudrillard the object is always in excess of the subject. The excessiveness of the object is, for Baudrillard, the new principle of evil.

BATAILLE'S PRINCIPLE OF EVIL

‘WE ARE FEROCIOUSLY RELIGIOUS’ (Bataille et al, Acephale 1937).

Bataille’s principle of evil first appears in his earliest articles written for the dissident Surrealist journal Documents in the late 1920's and early 1930's. ‘The Big Toe’ (orig.1929) attacks human Idealism, particularly as manifest in Enlightenment philosophy. The article revels in the thorough rootedness of ‘human’ being in the baseness of matter, of the human feet forced into contact with mud and dirt, as the very condition of its elevation above the level of the primates by standing upright. Throughout these early articles and into his full-length studies Bataille operates a
fundamental dualism, evident in this early article, between the base, low, materialist and the elevated, high and idealist. It is precisely this dualism that is restricted, yet not entirely eliminated by privative accounts of evil whether Christian, enlightenment, modern or contemporary.

This dualism operates as both a cosmological (rather than 'ontological') principle and a socio-historical 'reality' and it is crucial to keep these two interlocking phases in mind in order to resist the more simplistic or reductive accounts of Bataille's thought. Bataille makes clear that his dualist thinking owes as much Gnostic and Manichean religion as Nietzschean philosophy, French sociology and Marxist economics. The principle of darkness, base matter and filth, the pole associated with evil, is held by Bataille, as by the Gnostics and Manicheans, to be dominant or more powerful than the forces of light, form and elevation. A similar dualism is drawn upon Baudrillard yet both Bataille and Baudrillard are primarily concerned to trace manifestations of evil in cultural (material) contexts, in addition to any cosmological speculations.

Bataille's attack on latent and manifest forms of Idealism draws upon the "psychological facts" of Freud and the "social facts" of Durkheim (Bataille 1985: 15-16). In these early articles, both Marx and Nietzsche, though clearly important influences, are presented as crucial yet flawed materialisms. Bataille reads a radicalised Marx (moral/ethical as well as economic revolution) against both Nietzsche and the Surrealists, whose revolutionisms were inherently idealist, revealing a 'basic predilection for values above (italics in original) "the world of facts" with such banal formulas as "revolt of the spirit" etc.' (Bataille 1985: 33). Conversely Bataille reads Nietzsche against Marx, taking the principle of Dionysian orgiastic excess as a fundamental critique of Marxist utilitarianism and productionism.

In Bataille's article The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur (written 1929-30, first pub. 1968) the extent of Marx's influence is apparent, yet where Bataille speaks of 'the submerged masses dedicated to measureless agitation' (1985: 36) the limitations of Marxist economic rationalism for Bataille's purposes become clear. Bataille turns to Nietzsche for a mode of social revolt that is neither proletarian or
utilitarian, that is not related to human productivity, however Bataille cannot allow Nietzsche's individualist elitism, a "morality of the master":

But for a sick individual, isolated from his class and any social activity, what could the result finally be of these value substitutions? It is evident that a man like Nietzsche, wanting to assert the human splendour of a people who really had exercised a domination - a splendour determined by social forms that had disappeared - could only become aware, in the first place, of his ineptitude for current social forms, and, in the last, of the excessively derisive and even imbecilic character of his mental activity - 'brilliant or not (Bataille 1985: 38).

To move beyond this Marx/Nietzsche theoretical impasse Bataille elaborates his conception of base materialism, drawing as we have noted on Gnostic religion. The Gnostics, originating in ancient Egypt, privileged, according to Bataille, base material over ideal form. Their sacred iconography reveals an affinity for the monstrous and accephalic. The Gnostics, in contrast to the mainstream Hellenic-Christian thought, affirmed and incorporated base matter, filth, monstrosity and in particular the autonomous creative power of evil, within their cosmology. Evil was affirmed as the dominant principle of the human order since it was created by the false god 'Iao', (usually identified with the Jewish Jehovah). The Gnostics pursued a radical denial or refusal of this world since they held it to be permanently and irremediably characterised by the active principle of evil. The Gnostics sought the immediate, not deferred, return of the true God and the construction of a new social order. Unlike the mainstream Christian church which was willing to compromise with existing social institutions, in particular the Roman Empire, the Gnostics refusal was sufficiently radical to ensure they could never assume the role of official state religion.

According to Bataille the Gnostics had faced up to that most terrifying prospect, denied by all rational or 'legitimate' systems of thought, 'It is possible in all freedom to be a plaything of evil, if evil does not have to answer before God' (Bataille 1985: 49). This statement reveals important distance between Bataille and Nietzsche. For Nietzsche the "death of God" is enabling, a profit, an advancement to the state of (post) human elevation. For Bataille the 'death of God' is profound, as it
was when enacted within ancient religious ceremony, but the result is no simple 'elevation of spirit'. Bataille refutes the possibility of pure accumulation, without loss. The death of God then cannot be a pure profit for 'human' development. The result disables, as well as enables, and for Bataille 'liberation' from religion is neither possible nor desirable. Evil and religion generally, for Bataille, are not mere illusions that will melt away, or be re-incorporated in rejuvenated form for the trans-valued (post) human individual. For Bataille, as for Baudrillard, the collective dimension of existence is crucial and cannot be eliminated. The principle of evil is rooted in collective energies and sentiments, fears and terrors. This condition creates a kind of autonomy and resilience in the principle of evil, a radically seductive force that escapes human cultural re-assimilation even of the kind Nietzsche proposed. It always exceeds or eludes; yet it is somehow at the core of collective social expression or symbolisation. Further the principle of evil accelerates with the decline in any binding sense of 'the good', and hence is not dependent on a fixed dualism. For Nietzsche the uplifted, elevated overman could attain a final surpassing of both good and evil, that is, evil could be mastered within the trans-valued subject. His philosophy was perhaps the last refuge of 'heroic' subjectivity (see Strong 1975, White 1990). Bataille denies the possibility of such a re-incorporation, his early articles in Documents approach a number of phenomena, freaks, deformities, madness, sacrifice and automutilation from the perspective of a radical materialist dualism, where such phenomena characterised the dark and base side of this dualism. Nietzsche, by contrast, appealed to pre-Socratic religion, seeking a state of unity prior to the historical 'lapse' into dualisms and so finds no appeal in Manicheanism.

These early articles refine the basis of Bataille's sociology; the attraction/repulsion pairing building on the already established conceptual oppositions of sacred and profane, homogeneity and heterogeneity, appropriation and excretion, horizontality and verticality. Bataille's dualist materialism enables him to explore the negative; monstrous, obscene and catastrophic, forces, objects and events that radiate a "profound seductiveness". The "primitive" practice of sacrifice continued to exercise an intense fascination for Bataille during this period. The College of Sociology explored the sacred "core" of society, or social being, but it produced little concerned with the notion of evil as distinct from the larger category
of the sacred. The sacred, for the College, comprised both beneficent and malefic forces, both equally distinct from the profane, the cultural notions or materials from which the category 'evil' would later be drawn.

Bataille's three volume study *The Accursed Share* systematises his earlier insights into the sacred, General economy and *depense*, yet like his College of Sociology material, it is not concerned explicitly with the notion of evil. What Bataille does make clear is that his theory of the accursed share possesses serious socio-political ramifications for contemporary society since "our time" is the "accursed time par excellence":

If we do not make consumption the sovereign principle of activity, we cannot help but succumb to those monstrous disorders without which we do not know how to consume the energy we have at our disposal (Bataille 1976/1991:16).

The "monstrous disorders" to which Bataille refers, include pre-eminently the two world wars and the rise of Fascism. These events are interpreted as aberrations or pathological forms, distortions and re-channelling of the energy economy where excess is not collectively affirmed and expended by ritual but is narrowed, divided and re-directed in order to serve ideological purposes. For Bataille then, some form of violent or sacrificial expenditure, some manifestation of 'evil' remains an inevitability. It is precisely in modernity, where the amounts of energy "at our disposal" have accelerated at an incredible and unprecedented rate, that the principle of evil takes on a new and radical form, one that is theorised, or rather speculated on, by Baudrillard. Indeed Baudrillard's work focuses precisely on such "monstrous disorders" implied by Bataille.

Bataille's late works, *Eroticism* (1957/1986) and *Theory of Religion* (completed 1961, first pub. 1973/1989) attempted to locate the "strengthening" of evil actuated within monotheist religion by the Christian rejection of the religious force of transgression. The twin notions of good and evil appeared, according to Bataille as the sacred and profane dichotomy was historically reconfigured. The malefic portion of the sacred was expelled leaving only a residual and weakened
conception of the 'good' in fixed, absolute but impotent opposition to the active and seductive force of exiled 'evil'. This condition Bataille terms "the sleep of Reason", bound inevitably to (re)produce monsters. Bataille inverts the enlightenment doctrine with reason becoming the state of slumber and the inevitable re-emergence of excesses its sudden awakening.

In the modern period the once all-encompassing sacred/profane dichotomy is domesticated and put to the service of state religion. Finally, in the contemporary age the sacred all but disappears, a residual sense of the 'positive' is folded within the contemporary production/consumption pairing where nothing is sacred but conspicuous consumption is valued positively. The malefic or negative dimensions of the sacred have no 'place' in modernity, but are not entirely destroyed or eliminated, still converging around death.

As an increasingly secular technological order erodes both the sacred and the specifically Christian 'holy', the principle of evil is transformed. This historical condition is the focus of Bataille's influential study Literature and Evil (1957/1985), his most detailed examination of evil. Bataille's thesis is frequently expressed in cosmological or meta-historical terms, however his analyses of a number of important writers, Emily Bronte, Baudelaire, Blake, Sade and others, make explicit how rooted in socio-historical transformation his approach to evil actually is.

Bataille paints a vivid and multiple portrait of human evil, characterising it as; untamed erotic passion, the wild innocence of childhood, the reckless pursuit of glory, as the instinctual 'need' for sacrificial destruction. Ultimately, for Bataille, evil expresses the condition of radical human freedom without God, and is the "true" energy of the cosmos. Bataille does not distil a representational coherence from his chosen sources, but pursues each to the limits of their thinking. Nevertheless a central focus of his approach to evil does emerge. He insists, repeatedly, that evil can only be thought in relation to good, not as it's opposite but as its necessary condition. The principle of evil cannot be pursued or made present unless the force of 'good', "the law" is held to be meaningful and (ordinarily) binding. Evil then, according to Bataille, is fundamentally transgressive, neither privative, nor strictly speaking, substantive. Transgression is the crucial third term operating between the privative-substantive opposition. Evil is conceived, not an amoral or anti-moral
quality but is in Bataille's terminology "hypermoral" (Bataille 1947: 229). If the law; moral, rational and 'good' is not understood or held to be meaningful then a transgressive act is merely 'insane' or 'inexplicable' and is contained in these categories. For this reason the acts of an animal or an infant, cannot, readily, be termed 'evil'. According to Durkheim (1912/1961), and also Mauss (1950/1990), 'primitive' or 'sacred' societies invoked the transgression of their laws in order that they might re-assert or re-enact their binding force with renewed vigour. Here transgression is collective, communal, and not individual. Individual transgressions threaten but do not revivify the community, at least not until a collective ritual or process can be invoked. This notion of individualised transgression, possessing no social purpose or meaning (anti-social) is highly suggestive when related to contemporary events of extreme violence. It suggests a new or alternative approach to such acts as radically individualised transgression, transgressions after the social. These are the very events that are frequently termed 'inexplicable evil':

Transgression in pre-Christian religions was relatively lawful; piety demanded it. Against transgression stood taboo, but it could always be suspended as long as limits were observed. In the Christian world the taboo was absolute. Transgression would have made clear what Christianity concealed, that the sacred and the forbidden are one, that the sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo (1957/1986:126).

For Bataille the relations between social group and the sacred demand transgression. In Christianity evil is denied a sacred characterisation, as far as possible it is identified with the realm of the profane, the lowly, base and material, yet evil retains an aura that cannot be contained there. According to Bataille the profane realm is not subject to the restraints and controls which affect the sacred, therefore 'evil' is both freed and rendered more ambiguous, less well-defined. While the pious condemned evil, others could choose evil and its sensual pleasures became "the reward of the guilty" (ibid.). Only through evil could the vertiginous nature of transgression still be affirmed, 'Pleasure plunged deep into evil...transgression, transcending horror, and the greater the horror the deeper the joy' (Bataille 1957/1986:127). Here, for Bataille an abyss of evil is opened, the historical
conditions for sadism and holocaust are established by the very religion that sought to rid the world of ritualised slaughter.

Bataille does not ‘celebrate’ this shift, indeed at times his text suggest a traditional approach to the importance of social discipline and control. In modernity transgression assumes a different character again, the law does not claim to be sacred, merely rational, moreover human subjectivity in the contemporary order is conceived in overwhelmingly individualist terms. Transgression, were it still occurs is interpreted as the individual acts of the ‘irrational’, ‘incomprehensible’, such as in the ‘inexplicable’ transgressions of Frederick West or Thomas Hamilton. Such acts are said to be ‘inexplicable’ because they transgress basic cultural expectations in the most extreme ways. Any benevolent (social) effects of transgression as far as ‘the good’ or the law is concerned can now only occur as ‘meta-rational’, in the sense of breaking the law for ‘the greater good’. While this may still occur it is not transgression in the sense in which Bataille theorises it. Further the notion of ‘greater good’ itself becomes increasingly tenuous in contemporary life because any notion of the sacred, as the highest expression of the social group, is lost (see also Baudrillard 1997/1998: 1-4). In this way Bataille offers a distinctive historico-cultural thesis concerning the ‘worsening’ or ‘unleashing’ of evil in modernity. This thinking applies directly to the ‘inexplicable’ transgressions of contemporary death-events. Bataille specifies the cultural and theological conditions of emergence of radically individualised transgression. However it must be asked whether, given changing cultural conditions it is still possible to speak of a fundamental ‘need’ for transgression. Do individuals such as Fred West or Thomas Hamilton ‘answer’ the fundamental need of bio-chemical energy excess or do they rather ‘choose’ to pursue a destructive, transgressive course of action. Baudrillard rejects the metaphysics of need and compulsion without asserting a simplistic modality of subjective responsibility, agency or identity through a consideration of ‘ritual’ forms.

The later Bataille’s position on the meaning of evil emphasises the profound complicity or “rapport” between good and evil, their ultimate unity. Bataille’s position on evil can be read in the following way. As the archaic religious and cultural unity of the beneficent and malefic, the sacred and profane, is broken and reconfigured by both socio-economic as well as theological imperatives, evil...
becomes increasingly separated, or disarticulated from 'good'. Such a process was, according to Bataille, at work in pre-Christian antiquity, but received powerful and systematic expression in Christian theology and continued in enlightenment philosophy. In the culture of modernity evil gains a seductive autonomy, as an apparently pure or absolute quality beyond all limit and containment. Evil seems to represent a more intense or profound value than good. This is its seductiveness. In modernity evil is figured as an active and dynamic force, one which inevitably shears through the fragile limits and constraints of the moral orders, restoring a submerged dualism. Yet, according to Bataille, evil is never fully substantive and autonomous, it is dependent on its transgressive relation to the good. The impossible, riveting and inevitable excess of evil defines the human condition.

Of course the meaning of transgression is transformed, radically, in modernity. It has lost its social and sacred force, possessing scarcely any meaning in the contemporary world. To the extent that it remains it has been subsumed within (capitalist) structures of individual sexual desire and gratification. What are the consequences of this fundamental displacement or dislocation of evil, its disarticulation from any sense of the 'good' validated through the social or collective? Does 'evil' disappear? – the answer is an unequivocal 'no'. Baudrillard develops Bataille's speculations on the intensity of evil, providing ways of thinking evil, excess and their seductiveness, in contemporary culture.
BAUDRILLARD – FATAL THEORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF EVIL

'We need to reawaken the principle of Evil active in Manicheism and all the great mythologies in order to affirm, against the principle of the Good, not exactly the supremacy of Evil, but the fundamental duplicity that demands that any order exists only to be disobeyed, attacked, exceeded and dismantled' (Baudrillard 1983/1990: 77).

'Against the perfection of the system, hatred is a last vital reaction' (Baudrillard 1995/1996: 169).

In Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976/1993), the crucial turning point in Baudrillard's oeuvre, the apparently metaphysical distinction between good and evil first came to the fore in a discussion of political economy and death. Baudrillard, like Bataille before him, is concerned with the tension between Manichean or Gnostic 'heresies' and the mainstream Christian church, between a problematic dualism and the unstable strategies to deny the evil or negative 'pole' proper recognition. Baudrillard notes, just as Bataille had done in Theory of Religion, the powerful grip over the human imagination exerted by the notion of evil:

This very powerful vision comes from the ancient cults where the basic intuition of the specificity of evil and death was still strong. This was unbearable to the church, who will take centuries to exterminate it and impose the pre-eminent principle of the Good (God) reducing evil and death to a negative principle, dialectically subordinate to the other (the Devil). But there is always the nightmare of Lucifer's autonomy, the Archangel of Evil (Baudrillard 1976/1993: 149).

Here Baudrillard is not seeking to re-establish an outmoded and simplistic Good/Evil dualism, rather he offers an idiosyncratic and perverse reading of the malefic, the malevolent, the mischievous and duplicitous. Symbolic-ritual had ensured death and the closely-related principle of evil, where inscribed and exchanged within the life of the community. Yet evil, according to Baudrillard, supported by a number of ethnographic accounts, always threatened, exceeded or
"disobeyed" symbolic ritual and could in certain dire conditions strike at the community unimpeded. The principle of evil then, for Baudrillard, exceeds the functional rituals of even the most 'symbolic' societies. Baudrillard developed his notion of the principle of evil in a number of works and it has become a crucial term of his later theory. Important here is his controversial work *Seduction* (1979/1990), a genealogical exploration of that term which, Baudrillard argues, has within Western metaphysics, been interpreted as:

...a strategy of the devil, whether in the guise of witchcraft or love. It is always the seduction of evil - or of the world. It is the very artifice of the world (1979/1990: 1).

The relationship of seduction to evil is most fully developed in the important though neglected work *Fatal Strategies* (1983/1990). According to Baudrillard the world is, and always has been, 'sworn to extremes, not to equilibrium, sworn to radical antagonism, not to reconciliation or synthesis' (1983/1990:7). These conditions of human life or rules of the game had been appreciated and affirmed in symbolic cultures. For Baudrillard, as for Nietzsche, only modern sentimentality and idealism could take seriously notions like rationality, explicability, equality; forms of 'knowledge', belief and social organisation that are characterised by the reproduction of the sign. In the contemporary landscape, since the collapse of enlightenment certitude, these notions appear increasingly untenable. For Baudrillard the cosmology of extremity and antagonism constitutes the principle of evil. This is not, strictly speaking, a dualist understanding but a cosmo/sociological assertion, which claims antagonism, extremity, disobedience and reversibility as the fundamental "rule" of the world.

Baudrillard describes 'human experience' without drawing upon Freudian typologies or philosophies of consciousness. At times close to Foucault, Baudrillard installs the principles of the symbolic, of seduction and evil, at a more fundamental level than that of bio-power. Baudrillard must be read within the wider movement of Post-structuralism; the radical critique of Freud, Marx and their syntheses yet his theory remains highly idiosyncratic. The contemporary salience of the principle of
evil, for Baudrillard, derives not only from the expulsion and repression of evil, as for Bataille, but also the recent erosion or depletion of (human) subjective rationality, that is, from new scientific and cultural awareness of the limits of subjective knowledge. This has resulted in the radical critique even abandonment of the sense of human advancement, technological perfectibility and liberation by much Post-structuralist thought.

According to Baudrillard the object, not the subject, dominates the crucial stakes of the contemporary world. Objects or "things" elude subjective control and assimilation and, for Baudrillard exude an "evil radiance", an "evil genie", and an ecstatic or excessive form draining 'meaning' and 'reality' from the subject and condemning it to a subordinate role. Here evil operates at the level of generalised cultural insecurity, but also at a level of a post-Freudian reading of the human psyche emphasising evil and symbolic relations, rather than desire and the unconscious.

For Baudrillard objects mutate, re-double, ascend to limits then surpass them, not as the 'return of the repressed'; a fixed or static form of 'otherness' but as a dynamic, ex-centric power that takes a malicious delight in confounding the efforts of the knowing subject. Indeed, the object seems to grow more disobedient the more the subject attempts mastery over it. The "world" has not always been (experienced as) delusional, the object has not always been ecstatic. "Things" have become exorbitant because of the strategies of the subject, because of the drive of enlightenment reason, the erosion of the sacred/symbolic, the disproportionate acceleration of the semiotic/technological/virtual sphere. The subject's drive for mastery has over-reached itself, over-stepping the rules of the game and the object become dominant, taking its revenge on the subject. This process occurs through an ecstatic disarticulation; a surpassing of limits, objective evil radiates beyond subjective comprehension.

Baudrillard speculates on cultural trends and conditions in a methodological form close to contemporary epistemological critique. However in addition, he clearly draws upon other sources including the metaphysical or perhaps better 'anti-metaphysical'. In fact far from being locked in a 'hopeless relativism' as some critics (Kellner 1989, Sokal 1998) have suggested, Baudrillard's later theory makes strong
claims of a (anti)-metaphysical nature that cannot be made from within the confines of epistemological critique, based on a paradigm of cultural relativism.  

For Baudrillard the subject has expunged all but the most enervated sense of illusion, of the symbolic, and through the destructive march of Western metaphysics finally caused the real to coincide, fully, with the rational, but only by accelerating that 'real' into a hyperreal, an obscene 'over-exposure' of the real. The hyperreal depletes even those 'necessary illusions' that create the modern sense of materialism and 'reality'. The result is the 'real' deprived of illusion no longer has meaning or weight, it no longer convinces or inspires, it becomes inert, empty, meaningless - like the results of an opinion poll. These, Baudrillard terms the "final principle of reconciliation" but haunting and terrorising this inertia is the radical opposition of the "infinite principle of Evil and Seduction" (1983/1990: 72):

...beyond the final principle of the subject there stands the fatal reversibility of the object, pure object, pure event (the fatal) mass-object (silence) fetish-object, femininity-object (seduction)...after centuries of triumphant subjectivity, the irony of the object lies in wait for us, an objective irony readable at the very heart of information and science, at the very heart of the system and its laws, at the very heart of desire and of all psychology (1983/1990: 72).

The object is both the subjects' fate or destiny, and implies its death, fatality. The strategies of the subject are rationality, assimilation, production and accumulation, the strategies of the object, according to Baudrillard, are unpredictability, inassimilability, seduction and catastrophe. Such qualities entail for the 'subject' the principle of evil. Baudrillard traces the operations of this "evil genie" through the cultural system, in the intractability of the scientific object, and in the realm of passion, sexuality and eroticism.

In Fatal Strategies Baudrillard moves away from his earlier reliance on the principle of the symbolic as a historico-anthropological 'state', and is increasingly concerned with the fatal, ironic and banal strategies of the contemporary era which are haunted by the symbolic but are not reducible to it. The symbolic, too fundamental to be annihilated, divides into those reduced, enervated and vestigial
forms which Capitalism still finds useful (Christmas, Easter) and those radical, inassimilable forms that Baudrillard traces with the terms fatal and ironic strategies. Baudrillard's fatal strategies express ways in which the object (of analysis, representation, knowledge) eludes, confounds yet fascinates the subject while displacing the it to a subordinate role where it is at the mercy of the object, reducing the human subject to a peripheral status. Subjective choices, action and responsibility are outmoded and at the mercy of catastrophic objective conditions. An example, favoured by Baudrillard, is the Chernobyl disaster where 'human' decision-making was eclipsed and events driven by objective relations. The symbolic, such as Baudrillard continues to theorise it, is displaced but continues to be manifest in disproportionate, exorbitant form. These effects occur through the fatal and ironic modes of the object, reversibility, seduction and evil.

Baudrillard's writing style and method are, at times, somewhat incautious. However he does not claim that objects are autonomous, somehow separate from subjects. Clearly the changing modes of the subjects engagement with the object are at issue here. The shift from a mythic, symbolic relation to a scientific, technological one provokes transmutations in the status of the object. Recently Baudrillard has clarified his notion of fatal strategies:

The fatal strategy is often understood as the catastrophic development internal to the system. For me, it meant precisely the opposite...finding a form of play and destiny which precisely thwarted that implacable development of the system. For that development isn't fatal at all, but banal. The fatal strategy was the reinvention of a thought which explodes not the truth of the system, but its logic (Baudrillard 1997/1998:47).

Baudrillard's fatal and ironic strategies represent a considerable departure from Bataille's thought. Fatal and ironic strategies mark a contemporary effusion of symbolic principles; "play and Destiny", reversibility, seduction, cruel enchantment, in a global world order that is no longer culturally equipped to understand, allow or affirm these principles. With these notions Baudrillard traces contemporary excesses, 'inexplicabilites' and these inform new readings of excessive violence and contemporary 'evil':
We confuse the fatal with the return of the repressed (what is inescapable is desire), but the order of fatality is antithetical to that repression. What is inescapable is not desire, but the ironic presence of the object, its indifference and indifferent connections, its challenge, its seduction, and its disobedience to the symbolic order (and therefore also of the subject's unconscious, if it had one). What is inescapable, in a word, is the principle of Evil (1983/1990: 182).

There is some similarity with Arendt's banality of evil here since the 'objective' and transformative effects of new technology and new media provoke new modes of evil for both Arendt and Baudrillard. However Baudrillard's approach is more radical; it displaces the opposition between subject (moral) responsibility and 'dangerous instincts', impulses or effects. For Baudrillard both these assumptions are characteristic of subjective, rational thought, 'irrational impulses' being the remainder created by subjective reason. According to Baudrillard objective, or 'objectal' relations haunt the limited or fragmentary subject. Evil actions or contemporary death-events, from Baudrillard's perspective, are not caused by uncontrolled instincts or desires. Rather the challenge and seduction of the object are central to these events. This is the principle of evil; objects seduce, divert, disinvest subjectivity.

Applying this reading to specific events is a difficult and uncomfortable process. It suggests, for example, that Thomas Hamilton was 'seduced' by the object (schoolchildren), just as James Bulger or the victims of Frederick West 'seduced' their killers. It must be emphasised that Baudrillard does not theorise 'seduction' in moral, subjective or intentionalist terms. These victims were not, in any way, to 'blame' for what was done to them. Seductiveness, for Baudrillard, is a fact of 'objectness', it radiates irrespective of the subject's actions, intentions or beliefs, and this is its "diabolical" nature. We are all objects as well as subjects.

Nor is seduction, according to Baudrillard, specifically sexual, it is confused with sexuality but is never reducible to it. The 'subject' cannot reply to the challenge posed by seduction, only by 'becoming-object' can the strategy of counter-seduction, reversibility, be effected. The subject however, unwilling to be seduced and
threatened by dissolution erects the defences of rationality. It seeks to control, master, dominate and destroy the radical otherness, the fatal threat of seduction.

These strategies of control, where they result in the destruction of the object and its seduction, are where banal (subjective) strategies suddenly accelerate into fatality, into new and virulent "singularities" beyond the ritualistic forms of seduction, beyond subjective comprehension.

Baudrillard's approach here is certainly suggestive but it cannot be taken as the final or complete 'explanation' of such events. It functions as a powerful critique of moral and psychoanalytic assumptions and if read carefully and sympathetically it cannot be rejected as a crude affront to serious thought. However with these assertions Baudrillard is, at times, dangerously close to committing the error Lyotard specifies. Baudrillard dismantles structuralist thought (Marx, Freud) but then inserts an alternative in place of the "vanquished theory". This alternative inevitably repeats at least some of the operations of the former theory. In this case it is not clear how significantly Baudrillard departs from psychoanalytic thought. His emphasis on seduction contrasts with Freud but the structure of argument remains close to that which could be made from within psychoanalysis. Baudrillard does emphasise that the notion of the symbolic takes the place of the unconscious in his thought. Further the principle of evil introduces the theme of fundamental "disobedience" to the symbolic/unconscious. Though 'disobedience' does suggest kinship with the psychoanalysis of 'uncontrollable' impulses, a crucial difference remains. Psychoanalytic thought begins with the subject and its drives whereas Baudrillard attempts to think from the side of the object. This is fatal theory, an eccentric and paradoxical manoeuvre but one which should not be discounted for these reasons. Baudrillard does not attempt to 'escape' the subject, to think 'otherwise than subjectivity' as in the ontological thought of Levinas for example; rather he attempts the diabolical reversal of the priorities of rational thought. For Baudrillard reversal is a far more radical gesture than 'escape', liberation or overcoming. The latter acquire their meaning only within the ensemble of modern capitalism and so reflect its values, the former, for Baudrillard is 'other' to the modern system and so threatens it far more intensely.
According to Baudrillard the subject and its banal theories (metaphysics) try to separate or “distil” Good and Evil. Fatal theory takes as fundamental their inseparability; the object radiates with evil because unlike the subject it is transparent to evil, evil can shine through it unimpeded, the object does not freeze, limit, categorise, moralise, idealise, separating good and evil as the subject does. Baudrillard insists his principle of evil is not mystical nor transcendent, it is presented as a displacement or mutation in what was, in the past, exchanged, though still in unstable form, within the symbolic economy. The object is disobedient to cultural encoding; it is fundamentally excessive, particularly as ceremonial forms are enervated in favour utilitarianism and productivism.

Evil is 'a hide-out for the symbolic order - as the theft, the rape, the receiving of stolen goods and the ironic embezzlement of the symbolic order' (ibid.). Symbolic ritual involved the sense of a mirroring or doubling of the world: excessive, illusionary, and ironic. Bataille, and Nietzsche too, insisted on the inseparability of good and evil, but for the latter only as secondary or 'foreground' moral evaluations, which are theorised together only in order to be surpassed together. Baudrillard's symbolic operates in a distinct way, it seems that the object is not (re) absorbed within symbolic ritual, a tension remains unresolved, a principle of evil is affirmed:

Unlike the subject, it [the object] is a poor conductor of the symbolic order, but a good conductor of the fatal - that is to say of a pure objectivity, sovereign and incorrigible, immanent and enigmatic (1983/1990: 183).

The principle of evil is not fixed; it is manifest as a “spiral of worsening”. As the subject reflects the principle of evil, mirrors it in certain of its excessive actions, the object enters into such a spiral of “negativity” even the symbolic order is unable to contain it. For Baudrillard the ironic, seductive nature of the world is its primal, inexpungeable state and precedes symbolic ritual. Fatal, ironic and seductive objects are not reducible to the symbolic.

The 'subject' too can become fatal, can pursue fatal strategies. The strategies of the fatal subject Baudrillard refers to in this study, involve again,
redothing, intensification, excess. He posits a human ‘will-to-spectacle’ and illusion deeper and more powerful than the will-to-truth. Analogously objects, “things” and nature, rather than being characterised by a biomaterial or molecular 'real' are inherently or fundamentally excessive, disobedient, able to out-wit and elude all control, all productive connections, all liberations through desire. For Baudrillard the subject as well as objects; natural and technological, are somehow drawn towards the fatal, the spectacular, and the catastrophic. Such “fatal eccentricities” Baudrillard argues here ‘protect(s) us from the real and its disastrous consequences’ (1983/1990: 185)

MEDIA, SIMULATION AND EVIL

Baudrillard’s 1984 lecture ‘The evil demon of images’ deals with contemporary media and technological image production, the “diabolical seduction of images”. This explosion of images takes place within what Baudrillard earlier termed the “third order of simulacra”, an order where the sheer technical perfection of image production and dissemination, in accordance with pre-defined codes and models, creates for Baudrillard an “evil demon of conformity” or a “fatal strategy of conformity”:

When it [the image] appropriates reality for its own ends, when it anticipates it to the point that the real no longer has time to be produced as such...the image has taken over and imposed its own immanent, ephemeral logic; an immoral logic without depth, beyond good and evil, beyond truth and falsity; a logic of the extermination of its own referent, a logic of the implosion of meaning in which the message disappears on the horizon of the medium (Baudrillard 1987:16&23).

In an intensely media-tized system the referent, real or reality principle is submerged, depleted, de-realised by the instantaneous perfection of images, the 'real' becomes a fleeting, peripheral impression. Where the evil demon of images dominates, 'reality' is the fatality.
Baudrillard announces the death of reality like Nietzsche's madman announces the death of God, the analogy becomes clear in an interview that followed the lecture. Baudrillard locates his notions of seduction, play and "objective irony" not just beyond morality and therefore 'amoral', but actually within the immanent and reversible collapse of morality, that is rather as immorality. Baudrillard terms his position "fundamentally irrational"; drawing on Manichaeism which had posited creation, and therefore reality, as the actions of an evil demon:

According to Manichaeism, the reality of the world is a total illusion; it is something which has been tainted from the very beginning; it is something which has been seduced by a sort of irreal principle since time immemorial. In this case what one has to invoke is precisely this absolute power of illusion...The rationality that one has to invoke in order to make the world 'real' is really just a product of the power of thought itself, which is itself totally anti-rational and anti-materialist...But nevertheless one has to recognise the reality of the illusion; and one must play upon this illusion itself and the power that it exerts (1987:44-45).

For Baudrillard it is, and always has been, fundamentally impossible to reconcile 'the illusion' of the world with the 'reality' of the world:

...here the 'illusion' is not simply irreality or non-reality; rather, it is in the literal sense of the word (il-ludere in Latin) a play upon 'reality' or a mise en jeu of the real...the issuing of a challenge to the 'real' - the attempt to put the real, quite simply, on the spot...like the Manichaean I do not believe in the possibility of 'real - ising' the world through any rational or materialist principle (1987:45-6).

For Baudrillard any such 'reality principle' is necessarily enmeshed in the semiotic orders which, in modernity, entails that the 'real' becomes hyperreal. The fatal and evil are not alternative 'reality principles' they are fundamental aspects of the primary illusion upon which 'reality' is built and the material from which the modern disjunction between real and 'unreal' is derived.
Baudrillard's next detailed engagement with the notion of evil, *The Transparency of Evil* (1990/1993) represents a considerable development of his earlier positions. Pointedly, Baudrillard states:

For the real problem, the only problem, is: where did Evil go? And the answer is: everywhere - because the anamorphosis of the modern forms of Evil knows no bounds. In a society which seeks - by prophylactic measures, by annihilating its own natural referents, by whitewashing violence, by exterminating all germs and all of the accursed share, by performing cosmetic surgery on the negative - to concern itself solely with quantified management and with the discourse of the Good, in a society where it is no longer possible to speak Evil, Evil has metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms that obsess us (1990/1993: 81).

Evil is everywhere except in ritual and ceremony, everywhere except where it might be recognised or affirmed collectively. The “spiral of worsening” is crucial here, ‘bourgeois’ production and utilitarianism has now mutated into “hyperbolic positivity” and perpetual 'orbital' capital flows and virtual technologies. In turn the principle of evil mutates, growing in potency, increasingly able to disrupt and disable contemporary function and operationality. The notion of virus; viral infection, and prophylactics become crucial in this work. Evil and viral contagion do not operate merely as metaphor they carry a literal charge. Baudrillard's analysis cannot be reduced to a materialism or materialist energetics, such as Bataille's. Baudrillard opposes, rigorously, the idealism of the contemporary 'universe of synthesis and prosthesis, a universe which is positive, consensual and synchronous' (1990/1993: 71). Accursed or heteronomous elements rise up within the system; allergies, sickness, rejection mark the collapse even of the positivity/negativity distinction, any form of coding. They represent, 'a singular kind of energy, a visceral energy which has replaced negativity and critical revolt and bred our times most emblematic phenomena, viral pathologies, terrorism, drugs, delinquency' (ibid.).

Baudrillard’s recent work makes clear that 'inexplicable' or deracinated violence; contemporary death-events should also be approached in this way. According to Baudrillard the “insurrection” of such “singularities”,

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...may assume violent, anomalous, irrational aspects from the viewpoint of ‘enlightened’ thought – it may take ethnic, religious or linguistic forms but also, at the individual level, temperamental and neurotic ones. (Baudrillard 1997/1998:13).

For Baudrillard these are forces of disproportion, repulsion, rejection. The social core or nexus of Durkheimian sociology, re-worked by Bataille as the fundamental axes of attraction and repulsion, have for Baudrillard become so enervated that 'the social' as such no longer exists, is no longer suspended between these poles. The socius required for its life, its power to communify a sense of the inseparability of good and evil, of attraction and repulsion. Bataille's fundamental 'rapport' of the malefic and the beneficent not as opposed dualisms but as an entirety, a whole is lost. For Baudrillard any residual sense of negativity has been effaced in the techno-operational order, the principle of the accursed share is denied but takes its revenge. This is the excess of positivity, a hyper-positivity that constitutes "viral" collapse. Viral pathologies do not emanate from the depths or wellsprings of the communal or social nexus, to strengthen or revivify it; they are manifest unmediated, uncontrolled, emptied of cultural meaning, along the ruptured surfaces of technological culture. This is not the 'return of the repressed', the revenge of negativity but the immanent revolt of objects or things in a system of hyper-positivity that allows no expenditure, loss or negativity.

According to Baudrillard then, Bataille's vision of sacrificial expenditure as fundamental 'need' is no longer adequate, the contemporary system is able to re-channel, re-invest practically all expenditure. As Lyotard (1974/1993) argues there are no subversive regions, occupied by ceremonial forms for example, that might challenge or transform the system. For Baudrillard anomalies, singularities, excesses are no longer negatives, outside the system in some sense, they are immanent to it. Singularities are not abnormal but hypernormal, hyperpositive. Here there is a fundamental shift in the form taken by radical social theory. For Bataille writing in the first half of the 20th century 'excesses' appeared 'beyond' or 'outside' the systems of rationality and morality. These systems were argued to be limited and so vulnerable to critical assaults from the 'outside'. For Bataille subjectivity-as-excess embodied the limit of the system and so threatened it. In the latter 20th century the
vast expansion of consumer and communications technologies, the 'real' resulted in a 'globalised' system of capital that no longer required well-defined 'values' of morality or even rationality, in order to function. Hence it becomes increasingly difficult to theorise excesses outside or beyond the confines of an apparently 'unlimited' system. Excess for Baudrillard is the result of the (hyper) function of the system not some 'subversive region' outside it. Yet the system is fundamentally unstable, prone to "viruses", anomalies, and evil, the contemporary manifestations of Baudrillard's symbolic principle of reversibility. These forms are objective not subjective, not the return of archaic (theological, moral) evil but a new form Baudrillard terms the 'transparition of evil' (Baudrillard in Gane 1993:178).

Baudrillard affirms and prizes such viral eruptions as "a precious and supernatural sign of denial", not as aberrations to be combated or legislated against. Indeed because any cultural comprehension of evil has been lost or denied such events cannot be combated. No rites of reversibility can be invoked against evil since it is no longer defined, rather evil now appears as the principle of reversibility. The object has taken over the power of creating events, "the evil genie has taken up residence in things: this is the objective energy of evil" (1990/1993:108).

Returning to the examples of 'inexplicable' evil, Baudrillard's position suggests that Thomas Hamilton, the West's or the killers of James Bulger were not 'subjects' as such, subjectivity being irradiated by the technologies of transparency. According to Baudrillard otherness, "as gaze, as mirror, as opacity" are neutralised, resolved into 'difference'. Evil, otherness and excess become transparent or transparitional, 'Without the Other as mirror, as reflecting surface, consciousness of self is threatened with irradiation in the void' (1990/1993: 122). Without the other to act as mirror, seducer, object, 'self' loses its meaning, its identity, subjectivity is "dispossessed" (Baudrillard 1997/1998:19). The 'transparition' of evil is a process whereby the (hyper) banal technologies of transparency accelerate, or suddenly reverse into fatal or catastrophic events. Baudrillard terms this the "pure event" (the fatal)" (1983/1990:72). These events are 'pure' or "fatal" in that they are completely unpredictable; they cannot be comprehended through political, historical or genealogical enquiry. Such events then are 'inexplicable' to dominant rationality. Contemporary death-events should be approached through the notion of the
‘transparition’ of evil. They occur in the paradoxical, ‘inexplicable’, post-dialectical space were banality fuses with excess. Individuals such as Thomas Hamilton, the children who murdered James Bulger, and Frederick and Rosemary West should be seen as both products of contemporary culture, of the ‘irradiation’ of subjectivity by object, image and ‘screen’, and as excessive singularities with it. That is as the paradoxical or ‘undecideable’ point where the hyper-logic of the system generates sudden anomalies, extremities. These events and individuals then cannot be interpreted as ‘vital signs’ or as a ‘critique’ of the system in dialectical fashion, they are both the system and its point of collapse.13

In the contemporary system the object, like otherness and evil can no longer be easily identified, comprehended or defined. Rather than such excess residing in the specificity of a particular concept or idea (Satan, sin, death) evil no longer has a transcendent concept, it becomes an immanent process, a diffuse and unknowable property of things. This is the principle of evil, a new and distinctive order of evil after the demise of evil as moral problem.

Good and evil are still posed as opposites, adversaries, but evil, crucially, has the advantage:

The Good consists in a dialectic of Good and Evil. Evil consists in the negation of this dialectic, in a radical dissociation of Good and Evil and by extension in the autonomy of the principle of Evil. Whereas the Good presupposes a dialectical involvement of Evil, Evil is founded on itself alone, in a pure incompatibility. Evil is thus master of the game, and it is the principle of Evil, the reign of eternal antagonism, that must eventually carry off the victory (Baudrillard 1990/1993: 139).

Baudrillard’s recent work The Perfect Crime (1995/1996) builds on the exploration of the vital power of illusion. Evil is not examined in great detail however it is clear that the apprehension of evil had been a crucial dimension of the vitality of the radical illusion of the world, and its (attempted) expulsion and elimination (the perfect crime) has lethal effects. Illusion becomes the crucial new term of Baudrillard’s vocabulary and unlike Bataille, Baudrillard does not claim evil as ‘obscene’, material reality, but as an elusive and shifting cultural effect, an effect
of contemporary systems of meaning, not of any 'deeper' reality that supposedly lay behind them.

Evil is a strategy of destruction, a fatal strategy. It is an attack on the corpse of dead sociality that redoubles or accelerates through the 'hypermoral' codes of mainstream culture. In this sense 'society' experiences the aberrations it deserves, solicits the evils it encounters. As long as these evils are treated as merely 'inexplicable' they are contained and so do cannot confront the mainstream with the mirror of itself. Here the category 'inexplicable' itself becomes socially useful, a utility in the face of excess:

So the world goes its way naturally, by a logical enchainment of Evil which seems much more capable of accounting for it than the opposite enchainment of Good...[N]othing is exchanged in terms of positive equivalence - the only things really exchanged are absence and the negative. Evil has to be given and returned for human beings to be bound by profound reciprocity. Such is the economy of the accursed share, of which the nothing, the evil, the irreducible and absence are the symbolic operators' (Baudrillard 1995/1996:79).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION ON EVIL

This chapter offers a reading of the shifting symbolisation of 'evil' in the thought of Bataille and Baudrillard. I do not wish to assert an evolutionary schema, of either a progressive or regressive kind. However as the theory of Bataille, Baudrillard and others has shown, general cultural-historical shifts and mutations can at least be specified in schematic form. This cannot enable a definitive rational 'understanding' of evil itself but traces something of the changing symbolisation of evil in western culture.

Evil is not explicable or soluble through the terms of rational discourse and the 'real'; its resistance to rational, systematic thought is clear in the instabilities inherent in the work of Augustine, Aquinas, Kant and Hegel, Nietzsche, Arendt and Bauman. The force of evil is not confined to realities or materialities, if it were it would be a far less threatening. Rather it ruptures 'realities', whether they are
moral, bureaucratic or libidinal. Evil is not confined by, or contained within the real/unreal disjunction; it precedes it and is not conceptually amenable to it. Evil is all the more terrifying because its effects, ramifications are not restricted by the 'real' and rational. Rather evil grows and accelerates through myth; it can be justified by appeal to mythic notions; such as those of racial superiority. Evil is re-enforced by myth, re-created or re-directed through it. Evil actions are not dissuaded by appeals to the 'real', any more than education or moral guidance delivers us from evil.

It would be highly problematic to assert Bataille, Baudrillard or other theorists manage a definitive break with established forms of Western thinking on evil and excess. The theoretical speculations of these thinkers all involve particular, idiosyncratic reworkings of the immensely influential 'myth' of human falleness. For Bataille the 'fall' from immanent continuity with animality and nature, and for Baudrillard, a 'fall' from the realm of symbolic enchantment. Perhaps all Western social thought ultimately rests upon some sense of 'fall'. Such an assertion in no way implies that such theories are thereby mistaken or without value. In fact the reading of Nietzsche, Bataille and Baudrillard presented here argues 'myth' should not be taken as a pejorative term, connoting confusion, superstition or error; something less than 'real'. Rather 'myth' should be interpreted as the invocation of something more than merely 'real', (not hyperreal in Baudrillard's sense of 'the more real than the real'). That is as a crucial and inevitable principle of cultural meaning and, inevitably of non-meaning, of mystery, terror and otherness. Symbolic myth precedes the opposition of real/unreal, true/false, and rational/irrational, in its cultural force, impact and diffusion and 'evil' always appears on this symbolic level.

It is mistaken to assume that apparently archaic, sacred and religious forms of thought have been definitively superseded and are without value. This assumption can result in vulgar materialism, which is commonplace in contemporary thinking of both a scientific and popular nature. The force of symbol, myth and illusion are crucial for any understanding of the theorists discussed here. Further I contend they are important for a new and alternative approach contemporary death-events, 'excessive' violence, 'inexplicable evil'.

This chapter stressed the importance of Bataille's assertions concerning the weakening of the divine and reciprocal strengthening and 'unleashing' of evil, and
Baudrillard's notion of a contemporary "spiral of worsening" and the viral immanence of evil in the 'whitewashed' and transparent culture of today. Before the era of state and capitalist organisation, evil (and good) were inscribed, encoded culturally, and expressed within the social totality of myth, illusion and magic. The age of enlightenment reason had, or so it seemed, triumphed over superstition and illusion but the movement of reason created the new residual category 'unreason'.

Evil in enlightenment systems of thought was further radicalised and strengthened by the demolition of sacred, collective and 'religious' feeling. Far from modern enlightened societies surpassing the superstitions of gods and devils, the encoding of these cultural forces were lost or weakened to the point that they possessed no influence or meaning. While the systems of universalised religion collapsed, and with them any sense of fixed, transcendent 'Good', the cultural insecurities and 'intuition' of evil remained, and grew ever more powerful since the force of the Good was compromised, eroded and disarticulated from Evil. This is the fundamental assertion of Bataille and Baudrillard, which enables a new reading of extreme events and the generalised horror they provoke.

Much modern social theory is guided by domesticating gestures, imprisoning 'evil', excessive and destructive behaviour in the conceptual mirror space of Christian moralism. However it has no way of approaching 'gratuitous' inutile or 'inexplicable' evil, except as the construction of a resentful imaginary, not as material or actual.

Bataille moves beyond this impasse through the notions of base materialism, expenditure and evil but there are problems and tensions in this approach particularly between base materialism and the theorisation of evil. Baudrillard works with these themes and wrests them from residual forms of naturalism, functionalism, and the theoretical inadequacies of (base) materialism. This marks an important shift in the nature of radical, marginal social theory, away from materialism as 'deep' or 'authentic' substance to thinking based on genealogical principles. Baudrillard offers an idiosyncratic form of genealogical thought through the competing orders of banality and fatality, of transparency and evil, of material illusion and radical illusion.
When faced with the horror of contemporary death-events modern thought encounters the impasse of inexplicability/incommensurability. This failure must be seen as a product of modern, technological reason. However by pursuing an idiosyncratic path through the terrain of Post-structuralism evil can be approached in a more commensurate way. By reading Nietzsche, Bataille and Baudrillard both together and against each other, I have tried to sketch the possibility of a general(ised) economy of expenditure and excess in relation to contemporary instances of 'inexplicable evil'.

Events, processes and objects that can appropriately be termed 'evil' clearly exist and occur repeatedly. Evil exists as a fundamental axis of human cultural experience, but it is felt at, or beyond, the boundaries of discursive thought. There can be no fully satisfactory theoretical explanation, let alone 'solution' to the problem of evil, however this in no way implies that evil is non-existent. This assumption replicates the privative conception of evil, postulating such phenomena in terms of absence, lack or temporary 'lapse'. Both Bataille and Baudrillard move out of this restrictive frame of reference through their notions of the sacred and the symbolic respectively. They offer a general economic reading that affirms evil, the diabolic and destructive without operating simplistic dualisms of mind/body, rational/irrational, conscious/unconscious, real/mythic.

Evil exists; it is actual, not only as event, but also more fundamentally as cultural myth and illusion, as symbol, trauma and spectacle. In this sense evil is more radical, more threatening than if it operated merely as 'real'; be it a moral, bureaucratic or libidinal 'real'. Evil is only experienced, perceived, encoded, rendered culturally meaningful through myth and illusion. This assertion applies equally to the 'radical', or in Nietzschean terms, affirmative illusions of 'primitive' societies, and the, in Baudrillardian terms, banal, material illusions of contemporary thought. Myth and illusion express and inscribe evil, though different myths do this in very different ways and with very different effects. The myths of enlightenment reason have tended to unbind, release and 'strengthen' evil, often were the aim has been to deny, denounce or repress. Today 'evil' erupts immediately into the mythic, but these are myths that are divorced from any sense of cultural cohesion, of collective meaning. They are myths concerned with the restriction and containment
of evil within supposedly perverted, damaged or pathological individual subjects. They are myths concerning the validity of juridical decision making, of justice and legal neutrality, and of individual or subjective identity. They are the myths of scientific meta-narratives of progress, solution, treatment, cure and rehabilitation. These are myths which not only efface their own mythic status in order to condemn 'other' forms of thought, but they are also mythic structures which fail to engage in commensurate terminology with the phenomena of evil, that are rendered powerless by such events.

Faced with the trauma of 'evil' shock waves reverberate through society, initial reactions take the symbolic-mythic forms of grief and mourning. Only later come the pseudo-rationalisations, the domestication and structuralisation. In cases such as the murder of James Bulger or the Dunblane massacre, in the first moments, hours of reaction evil confronts us as evil, as cultural horror and abjection, as void destructive of all project, meaning and security. A symbolic or mythic terror saturates the rational-discursive order, more terrifying than any 'real' fear, any rational insecurity. Only later, after the enactment of symbolic ritual, time, duration and 'reason' re-emerge. Along the fault-lines and blindspots of contemporary culture are manifest contemporary 'fatal' forms; no longer ceremonial - 'human', but viral; contagious, implosive and catastrophic; as 'decoded' inhuman aberrations beyond social exchange.

It might be argued that appeals to myth and illusion are themselves idealist, are a flight from materialist or base materialist realities. However the mythic as it appears in Nietzsche, Bataille and Baudrillard is no comforting, superstitious sham. As Baudrillard argues, illusion or simulacra cannot be merely dispelled or transcended. The veils of illusion do not peel back in order to reveal the 'truth'. Any strong ontological claims must be regarded with considerable suspicion, whether the foundational principle is theological, rationalist or libidinal. Further, both Bataille and Baudrillard emphasise that the mythic is a cruel order, not a long-lost golden age.

Returning to Baudrillard specifically, his position is of course far from unproblematic. There is a certain incaution in his writing style; some polemics are more successful than others. Further, where much contemporary theory, drawing on
the work of Foucault and Deleuze in particular, advocates complexity as a theoretical model, Baudrillard seems to favour 'post-complexity' or 'decomplexification'. Baudrillard does not so much attempt a carefully thought out 'break' with western thought as to scorn it, drive it beyond its accepted boundaries, turn it against itself. Further Baudrillard's theoretical positions go beyond the idealist and materialist, relativist and absolutist. For this reason his thought is often dismissed as inherently contradictory. However such a paradoxical approach is also enabling, facilitating reflection on an immensely wide range of phenomena and processes as Gane (1995:113) and Genosko (1998) have argued.

Baudrillard offers a position that is not dependent on structuralist-functionalist conceptions of good and evil, as the necessary principles of stable societies. Durkheim approaches evil in this manner, and in places Bataille too is perilously close to it. Such an approach does, at least, take evil seriously. Durkheim and Bataille are then crucial influences on Baudrillard's theory. Yet Baudrillard and Bataille go beyond this position by offering a general economy of violence, destruction and evil. Their related approaches are able to operate both on the level of cultural meaning/non-meaning, and at the level of individualised psychical and perceptual phenomena.

Baudrillard's idiosyncratic thinking on illusion and evil allows him to work simultaneously on a culturalist and a psychical register, without necessarily resorting to functionalism, materialism or idealism as final instance or foundational principle in either case. Baudrillard's methodology approaches evil, not as structural-functional form, nor as individualised intention, but as objective force or energy. This is vital because the question of psychological motivation or intent is central to most contemporary accounts of 'evil' which draw upon psychology for juridical purposes. In both popular and juridical discourse 'intent' is crucial for the demonstration of guilt and culpability; intention defines the distinction between criminality and insanity. In the examples of murderous destruction cited below, the question 'how could they do such things?' is central to popular and media reactions. Intentionality is made to bear the burden of explanation, the acceleration of horror and the falling back onto the language of evil occur when notions of individuality, intention and responsibility fail to make events more manageable, more
rationalisable. It might be said that by establishing intention we show that a merely cruel or destructive action is actually an 'evil' one, yet it is where any understandings of intent or purpose break down that such cases become all the more 'inexplicable'. In the cases chosen notions of intention, responsibility and even awareness provide no clear avenue of rationalisation. This is the point where 'moral' evil disappears and 'objectal' or 'transparitional' evil appears.

It is the impasse of mainstream rationality that makes radical thinkers such as Nietzsche, Bataille, Baudrillard and others so important. This chapter has stressed the ways in which such thinker's challenge social theoretical, popular and scientific understandings of cultural change, 'progress', reason and subjectivity through their readings of excess, negativity and evil. Further they offer, radical and distinctive approaches to an increasingly salient contemporary trend, that of 'inexplicable' violence, destruction and death, events which we can only call 'evil'.

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2) Klossowski's analysis focuses, closely, on the French revolution, specifically the sacred crime of regicide; the execution of Louis XVI that he terms 'the simulacrum of the putting to death of God' (Klossowski 1992: 55). Klossowski situates the philosophy of Sade in opposition to the catholic counter-revolutionary social thinkers, Joseph de Maistre, de Bonald and Maine de Biran. Where they viewed the execution of Louis XVI as a 'redemptive martyrdom' that expiated the collective crime of the nation, for Sade the death of the king creates, according to Klossowski, as vicious circle which 'plunges the nation into the inexpiable' (ibid.), the rule of arbitrary violence resulting in 'the consummation of evil to its extreme limits' (1992:57). Sade's political tract 'Yet another effort, Frenchmen, If you would be Republicans', which forms part of his Philosophy in the Bedroom, introduces the notion of the laws of Nature as crucial to the founding of a new social order. His understanding of the force of Nature is not greatly dissimilar to that of Bataille's notion of the accursed share as has frequently been noted. This view presents Nature as characterised by an irremediable, inexpungable drive towards loss, destruction and death. This assertion is fundamental to Sade's assault on the 'illusory' and idealist prescriptions of Christianity. For Sade 'the most sacred of Nature's movements...[is] that of preserving ones own existence at no matter whose expense' (in Klossowski 1992:600). With this assertion Sade's social system, which Klossowski terms 'a utopia of evil' (Klossowski 1992:62) bears a obvious similarity with the emergent capitalist economic order and the notion of 'survival of the fittest' popularised within Darwinian evolution and classical liberal political economy.

3) Bataille relationship to Nazism is far from clear-cut and has received a considerable amount of critical attention. Some earlier critics had claimed that Bataille himself was a Nazi, yet such a claim has no support and is similar to untenable accounts of Nietzsche, presenting him as a Nazi. For a recent discussion of these themes, see Besnier in Bailey-Gill Ed. (1995:12-25). Bataille's work The Psychological Structure of Fascism is reproduced in Bataille (1985).

5) Baudrillard's idiosyncratic, even perverse approach straddles epistemological critique and cosmological assertion, combining what is conventionally always separate; materialism and idealism, relativism and historicism. These moves do not claim to 'resolve' standard debates but to explode their limitations. Here both the style of theoretical reflection and the object of that reflection operate beyond the boundaries erected by enlightenment thought.

6) Indeed Baudrillard's emphasis on the persistence of evil and the fundamental irreducibility of seduction, the accursed share and the fatal, to modern reason, cannot be made from within the paradigm of strict cultural relativism.

7) Baudrillard discusses the Chernobyl disaster in Baudrillard (1992/1994:34-53), arguing that it was the objective condition of the unsafe power station, rather than the subjective relations of diplomacy, that brought about the 'end' of the cold war.

8) Important here is Baudrillard's In the shadow of the silent majorities (1978/1983), particularly on the mass and hyper-conformity as fatal strategy. Baudrillard's work after S.E.D. provides little detail on the precise nature of the epochal shifts that are crucial to his theory. However it seems that the symbolic cultures incorporated evil within their ceremony whereas in later cultures, Christian and bourgeois-secular, the symbolic is reduced or lost to the extent that it is no longer sufficient to encompass the principle of evil. Evil then separates off from the inscription and exchange rituals of the community. This tension was clearly apparent in the conflict and competition between the Gnostic and Manichean sects and the Christian mainstream which did not appear to many believers to offer a satisfactory account of the nature of evil. If Christianity preferred to expel or repress evil rather than engage with it on its own terms this was far more true of the enlightenment, (with the partial exception of the later Kant) of bourgeois and scientific thought. However the influence of Durkheimian functionalism is still evident in such assertions and is reproduced in the sociological and anthropological assumptions of Bataille, particularly in his later more scientific work. Here evil tends to be conceived as fixed quanta of social experience for which rituals, ceremonies and later institutions are designed to manage. The separating off of evil from the cultural mainstream is traced by Bataille and Baudrillard, in different though related ways,
which constitute an original departure from functionalist sociological models in that the foundational ontological and epistemological dualistic assumptions are radically questioned, or pushed beyond the limits of sociological utility. In treating the 'evil genie of the social' Baudrillard has much in common with Nietzsche, arguing that the crucial historical unfolding of society is determined by immoral principles; competitiveness, struggle, glory, fashion and seduction. Baudrillard argues that the social as such never existed, 'no group has ever really considered itself as social, that is to say in solidarity with its own values and coherent in its collective project' (1983/1990:75). At this point in his argument Baudrillard makes references to so-called primitive societies and the work of Bataille on Aztec sacrifice in particular. For Baudrillard, as for Bataille, such peoples implicitly understood and affirmed the inevitability of death, depense and evil, of cruelty, irony and reversibility. It was central to their approach to issues such as social power, authority and hierarchy, Baudrillard refers to, though does not properly reference, the reversibility of social power and prestige that operate in such societies. Here the king or chief, would, if social customs dictated it, be sacrificed (either actually or via a substitute) in order to safeguard the position of the tribal group from the influence of malefic forces. Their appears to have existed a generalised social injunction or taboo against the pursuit of individual wealth, power and prestige and this applied particularly to the king or chief who often had little 'real' power and would be obliged to take the role of scapegoat in certain circumstances. This point is also discussed by Sahlins (1974). The social fragments when the forces of attraction/repulsion are eroded, the impact of capital, technology and market on the social have been the subject of much neo-Marxist thought, however Baudrillard has greatly expanded the terms of this critique in what could be termed a general economic manner.

9) However this 'real' from which the human world needs 'protection' should not be identified with a 'raw' unmediated, bio-materialist real, as Baudrillard makes clear, rather this 'real' is itself an idealism, a fiction dependent on modern myths and metaphors.

10) Deleuze and Guattari, with differing conceptual resources and methodological operations follows a similar pattern in specifying the distinctions between 'primitive' uncoded cultures, and modern coded and decoded cultures.
Deleuze and Guattari are very close to this position in *Anti-Oedipus* where they argue, '... primitive codes, at the moment they are acting on the flows of desire with a maximum of vigilance and extension, binding them in a system of cruelty, maintain an infinitely greater affinity with desiring-machines than does the capitalistic axiomatic...(T)his is because in the primitive socius desire is not yet trapped, not yet introduced into a set of impasses, the flows have lost none of their polyvocity...' (Deleuze and Guattari 1972/1984:184-5).

Here it is clear that the 'primitive socius' is a system of codings, of mythic orderings, yet of a very different nature from those of modernity, encodings of an 'infinitely greater affinity' with the fundamental nature of human collectivity and experience. For Deleuze this is expressed by the term 'desiring-machines', for Bataille it is the sacred, for Baudrillard the symbolic. However these terms are not synonymous, in *Forget Foucault* (1977/1987) Baudrillard makes the case for the superiority of his terminology over that of both Foucault and Deleuze. In short Baudrillard approaches myth and illusion not through libidinal machinism, which he views as a replication of the productivist, realist and utilitarian assumptions, characteristic of Marx and the industrial age but through the terms of the object, the fatal and evil. Similarly, Deleuze's work on the diabolical immanence of the pack, swarm and multiplicity works on the plane of socio-cultural functionality, that is as the modes of securing against becoming-animal. It also offers a means of thinking the excessive at the level of psychical process.

However there are important divergences between the approaches of Bataille, Baudrillard and Deleuze and Guattari. In *Anti-Oedipus* patterns of consumption, no matter how destructive are presented not as inutile 'excesses' but as an aspect of all-encompassing ontology of production. Deleuze seems to lack a theory of expenditure since all energies, all intensities tend to be relocated or reinvested. This is not the place to evaluate the complexities of Deleuzian thought, however his system is far from unproblematic. Their rejection of Bataille (Deleuze and Guattari 1972/1984:4n.) is somewhat simplistic and serves to obscure other proximities and similarities between Bataille, Baudrillard and themselves. Baudrillard however distances himself increasingly from both Deleuzian and Bataillean readings of general economy, by attacking not merely restricted economies but also the restricted
materiality, of the theories offered by Deleuze and Bataille. Baudrillard's method could then perhaps be termed objective or general illusionism. Evil, the accursed, the negative and destructive continue to be central yet not as 'deep' base material realities, rather Baudrillard operates on a cosmo-illogical level, one suggestive of chaos theory. Baudrillard's emphasis on indifference differs strongly from the Deleuzian economy of productive connectivity. There are, of course, considerable problems with the Deleuzian positive ontology of desire and while Baudrillard rejects it in too cursory a manner (Baudrillard 1987:9-64) the term desire certainly possesses a distinct affinity with the language of consumer capitalism and the New Right's privileging of individual choice. It is notable that Foucault, who was a companion and admirer of Deleuze, made it clear in a late interview that he regarded the term as unsatisfactory. The later work of Foucault seemed to depart, increasingly, from Deleuze and his emphasis on desire. In this respect Foucault's situating of desire as a discursive movement crucial to modern culture (see Foucault 1976/1979; 81-91) is more akin to the view expressed by Baudrillard (1979/1990:5-11). It seems likely that Baudrillard would regard Deleuzian desiring-machines to offer a theory of the third order of simulacra, or perhaps of the collapse of the second order; characterised by productivity, into the third order of coded re-productivity. However Baudrillard's own interest has turned to what he has termed the collapse of the codes of the third order into the 'fractal' and increasingly 'transparent' contemporary order. Baudrillard's recent terminology of the virus, the catastrophe and the fractal do appear more contemporary, at least in a superficial sense, Deleuze's emphasis on machinic connections of productivity, in particular the example of the 'handyman' in Anti-Oedipus. However the viral and immanent collapsing of Baudrillard's 'code' does seem similar to the Deleuzian notion of the rhizomatic 'plane of immanence' which is often presented in cultural or sociological as well as ontological terms.

There are then, certain parallels between Baudrillard's later work and the Deleuze of decoded uncontrolled flows across the social field which refer to inhuman, a-cultural, anti-social energies, that which even the earliest 'primitive' or symbolic cultures dreaded, yet which were coded, in however an unstable form within the myth and ritual of the socius. Yet classical and modern society attempt to expel or deny such
forces or flows not engage them, with the result, for Baudrillard that contemporary culture is entirely at their mercy. The most fundamental divergence with Deleuze then consists in Baudrillard's cultural pessimism against Deleuze's liberatory optimism.

11) That is not to say that weak, minimal or even moderate ontological claims are impossible or cannot be made. For a recent discussion of these and related themes see Sayer (1997).

12) Bataille's discussion of the Aztecs appears, in its most pointed form, in Bataille (1967/1988:45-61). It is sometimes claimed that Bataille abuses or exaggerates ethnographic and historical data to suit his own ends, for comparisons with standard text-book accounts of the Aztecs see, for example, Vaillant (1944).

13) Nor can events such as these be interpreted as "homeopathic" as "vital", signs of denial as Baudrillard (1990/1993) suggests of some instances of reversal, breakdown or malfunction, for example computer viruses or temporary breakdowns of television networks. Such events do not serve to restore 'equilibrium' as the term 'homeopathic' might suggest. Perhaps then to use Baudrillard's terms specifically the ultra-violent individuals involved in contemporary death-events, are 'the catastrophic development internal to the system' (Baudrillard 1997/1998:47) and so represent 'banal strategies' of the subject. They are not representative of 'fatal strategies' which would 'explode not the truth of the system, but its logic' (ibid.), and so 'thwart' the development of the system. The subject is not a fatal strategist, it is the object and, above all radical thought which are fatal strategy, 'There is perhaps but one fatal strategy and only one: theory' (Baudrillard 1983/1990:181).

14) It is reported that the children convicted of killing James Bulger no longer have any awareness or memory of the event. According to two detailed accounts of the James Bulger case, Morrison (1997) and Smith (1994), the two boys detained for the murder no longer appear to be aware that they were responsible for the death, or for any related crime.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING REMARKS

'What good is theory? If the world is hardly compatible with the concept of the real which we impose upon it, the function of theory is certainly not to reconcile it, but on the contrary, to seduce, to wrest things from their condition, to force them into an over-existence which is incompatible with that of the real' (Baudrillard 1987/1988:98).

This thesis confronts contemporary culture with its most monstrous creations, its extreme limit cases. It is a challenge to dominant social theory, yet it also challenges the alternative theoretical formulations of Bataille and Baudrillard to exist, to survive in a system that confines them to the margins. It challenges their theories to continue to disrupt, divert and threaten the dominant discourse of rationality. It has sought this in the principles of the sacred and symbolic, in seduction, evil and the Accursed share, notions which will not submit to the routines of legitimate academic thought but continue to haunt its margins.

This task is not a simple one. In a generalised, global, or limit-less system, excess resides within rather than beyond the system, Rationality has long broken free of any determinable moorings in moral or utilitarian calculation, and since it does not generate strong or distinctive values of any kind it no longer exists in opposition to any ‘opposed’ value systems. It is not sufficient to invoke ‘radicalism’ as if it is located in a space that is ‘outside’, sealed and separated from dominant rationality and somehow able to displace it. As Baudrillard argues contemporary rationality reduces difference to plurality, forging an homogeneous yet vacuous cultural terrain, a culture of transparency where symbolic spaces, social and individual are irradiated by ‘generalised communication and surplus information’ (1990/1993:74). Yet contemporary culture, driven by orbital capital flow and prophylactic technologies, by the limitless proliferation of energy and the annihilation of all otherness, also constitutes the ‘modern history of the accursed share’. Here the regeneration or mutation of accursed, inassimilable and irreducible elements, results in ‘the reign of
incoherence, anomaly and catastrophe’ (Baudrillard 1990/1993:108). These are the conditions of the appearance of contemporary death-events.

Though the approaches of Bataille and Baudrillard are closely related, the specific theorisation of excess; of the excessive, the marginal, the inassimilable, differs considerably. For Bataille such excess, thought through the notion of the accursed share, resides in the subject-as-excess, subjectivity at “boiling point”. This conception does not correspond to phenomenological or psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity as limited, of a ‘rift-in-being’. For Bataille being is rift or wound, “accursed” excess energy floods ‘subjectivity’ and rationality becomes the residue, the remainder. ‘Subjectivity’ then is always at the limit; subjectivity is the limit of the human that always borders the inhuman, the animal, the sacred. Extreme violence is an inevitable consequence of the accused share on the social order and, for Bataille, such violence becomes all the more frequent and extreme as the sacred in dismantled, marginalised or transposed into the terms of moral productivist thought. Here we must ask not why do ‘contemporary death-events’ occur, but why do they not occur more frequently? Perhaps now they are occurring with far greater frequency, the current spate of mass shootings in America suggests this.

Bataille’s thought then can be made to function as an alternative discourse on excess, as an account of horror and violence, albeit a powerful and neglected one. For Baudrillard however, such a theorisation of excess is no longer adequate. According to Baudrillard it is “the world” that is excessive, not the subject. Subjectivity, in whatever form, is the construct of rational thought, which posits a ‘real’ and then develops theory to reflect upon it. The adequacy of any particular theory can be questioned, developed or modified through dialectical and critical thinking, yet these strategies remain “banal” for Baudrillard because they do not question or challenge the status of the real itself. Excessive objects, excessive events elude the banal theories of contemporary reason. Excess resides with the object, which eludes subjective thought, with the event which eludes genealogical thought, with the world which eludes human thought. Excess is on the side of the object, not the subject. Here there is a fundamental shift in radical or marginal thought based on both the shift in emphasis from subject to object as excess, and relatedly, in the
thinking of the ‘real’, from a (base) materialist form in Bataille, to a construct of rational thought in Baudrillard.

In order to escape “banal theory” in favour of “fatal theory” Baudrillard’s later writings depart from any notion of theory as accurate reflection of the ‘real’. Rather, he argues, theory must challenge the real. By ruse and seduction, theory must lay traps ‘in the hope that reality will be naïve enough to fall into it’ (Baudrillard 1990/1993:110). Radical thought is, for Baudrillard, the only fatal strategy, thought which does not assume the “complicity” of the object but its impenetrable, inexplicable otherness, yet which is at the heart of the contemporary system.

The reality of contemporary death-events is certainly excessive, far in excess of the conventional explanatory paradigms of the social sciences. But how can radical theory ‘partake of and become the acceleration of’ (Baudrillard 1987/1988:99) this ‘logic’ of extremity? How can theory be excessive or fatal? There is a fundamental ambiguity or undecideability here. In Baudrillard’s thought the distinction, relatively stable in Bataille’s work, between utility and excess breaks down, excess becomes the logic, or hyper-logic of the mainstream. This point is crucial to an appreciation of the theoretical distance separating Bataille and Baudrillard. Further the distinction on which a theory of excessive events must be based becomes reversible and, in a sense undecideable as Baudrillard argues. This perverse spiral, applied to theory, here becomes an increasingly undecideable ‘distinction’ between excess (as symbolic, sacrificial, excluded) and excess (as hyper-positivity, hyper-banality, accelerated). Here there are two modes or phases of excess, the excess of the system, and excess of former systems somehow antagonistic to, yet not properly ‘outside’, the system. These relations are expressed by Baudrillard through the notions of fatal, ironic and banal strategies, where banal strategies may accelerate in a curvature that seems to merge them with the fatal, so becoming “pure” fatal events beyond the grasp of dominant thought. Since stable distinctions between forms of excess are, perhaps, undecideable theory divides into a number of conflicting and irreconcilable hypotheses. Baudrillard’s transparency or “transparition” of evil expresses the same situation. This notion refers to a process whereby the increasing transparency of contemporary culture generates new forms of
evil, not as lapses, failures or remainders but as a part of its (hyper) normal functioning. Evil resides in the process of "transpiration" not 'outside' it. Contemporary death-events, sudden, inexplicable events are excesses, both the excess of the contemporary systems of hyper-positivity, the neutralisation of otherness, and the excess of the excluded, the expelled, the accursed share.

In this compulsion to resemblance, every extradition of difference, in all contiguity of things and there own image, all conflation of beings and their code, lies the threat of an incestuous virulence, a diabolical otherness boding the breakdown of all this humming machinery. This is the reappearance of the principle of evil in a new guise. No morality or guilt is implied, however: the principle of evil is simply synonymous with the principle of reversal, with the turns of fate (Baudrillard 1990/1993:65).

This thesis then cannot contend that the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard provide a definitive or complete account or 'explanation' of such events. Indeed throughout the course of this thesis the intractability and impossibility of 'comprehending' such events has been emphasised. The theories of both Bataille and Baudrillard insist on incompleteness, loss, uncertainty and undecidability. Nevertheless it is important and possible to present theoretical and conceptual notions that appear better able to approach extreme events.

This thesis has offered detailed theoretical engagements with the mainstream sociological tradition. This was argued to be compromised by utilitarian and productivist assumptions and unable to approach excess in anything like a commensurate way. In order to begin thinking the excessiveness of contemporary death-events it was necessary to break out of individualist and utilitarian paradigms. The theories of Bataille and Baudrillard provide precisely this.

Bataille and Baudrillard's theme of "radical negativity" was contrasted with the concept of negativity in enlightenment and modern thought influenced by Hegelian dialectics of 'useful' or 'rational' negativity. Bataille's thinking on "unemployed negativity", the sacred, transgression and sacrifice was presented as a crucial alternative means of thinking contemporary death-events. Such events, it was argued, can be read as contemporary transgression, as radically individualised,
deracinated forms of heterological expenditure, as 'sacrifice' after the sacred. Here 'evil' is the only remaining form of transgression.

In Bataille's reading the 'subject' is terrorised by mortality drained of collective meaning or sacred significance. Death, as the ultimate limit of modern subjectivity, becomes infused with eroticism and sexuality as the only remaining activities that retain a profound meaning or intense value. Bataille approaches extreme violence in terms of the sacred and its erosion in modern society.

Baudrillard differs, fundamentally in his theorisation of death, it appears not as absolute bio-chemical termination but as symbolic, reversible form. The erosion of symbolic and ritual processes, and their reappearance in new and uncontrolled forms is crucial to the application of Baudrillard's thought to contemporary death-events. Further the movement of excess from a subjective to an "objectual" form is according to Baudrillard both 'fortunate' and 'vital' (1990/1993:108). The subject becomes "mass"; it is "disinvested", "dispossessed" by objective or objectal relations. Contemporary excess passes into events, processes, and objects. Baudrillard's notion of "singularity" is crucial here since it refers to events so strange, alien or catastrophic that they defy rational explanation. These aspects of Baudrillard's thought were related to contemporary death-events and to literature on serial killing where aspects of rational subjectivity, moral responsibility or personal 'culpability' break down.

The often-asserted connections between sexuality and extreme violence were interrogated. Here the 'reality' of sex and sexuality is presented as the ultimate rationale for extreme violence. Such thinking is inadequate in a number of respects, which were highlighted through a reading of Bataille and Baudrillard. For Bataille eroticism is not the manifestation of (Freudian) drives but has a fundamentally social dimension, related to the taboo/transgression pairing. Excess opening the individual to a domain beyond subjective agency, rationality and morality. Yet Bataille suggests the tumult of eroticism is alien to the modern 'pathological' forms of sexual violence such as sadism since it eliminates the rational agency on which sadistic destruction, as ultimate subjective mastery and control, depends.

Baudrillard's controversial notion of seduction was also related to contemporary death-events. The "diabolic" and "objectal" nature of seduction is
emphasised and Baudrillard’s proximity to Foucault’s theorisation of sexuality is addressed. Baudrillard approaches extreme violence not as the result of innate drives, or of energy excess. For Baudrillard extreme violence should be understood as ceremonial or ritual neither as ‘bloodlust’ nor as sacrificial ‘need’. Where symbolic ritual is eroded, and where the reciprocal and reversible form of seduction is denied or rejected “abberational” forms such as fetishism and sadism may emerge. These are theorised as contemporary residues of seductive exchange. The activities of Frederick and Rosemary West are addressed in this way as fetishistic, as fascination without seduction. Existing literature on serial killers is unable to approach the distinctiveness of such cases convincingly. The murder of James Bulger was also re-examined though these themes. Existing attempts to explain mitigate or even contextualise these events are dismally inadequate. No ‘rational’ account of such an event is possible, or is commensurate with the intensity and horror of its violence. Reason itself was disabled and the language of evil reappeared, apparently as a necessary and continuing feature of the operation of reason. That is reason needs to retain ‘unreason’ as its supplement, where it can dump unwanted or unthinkable events.

The form of evil utilised by reason when confronted by contemporary horror remains the moral-Christian form. This conception, ostensibly privative but also characterised by latent dualism allows the ‘agents’ of evil to be both condemned as substantively evil while containing the horror of the event through appeals to the ultimately privative form of moral evil. The ‘aggressor’ or ‘agent’ of evil is neutralised through imprisonment despite the extreme difficulties in locating stable subjective guilt or culpability in such cases. Victims and their families suffer in incomprehension while society in general, traumatised and terrorised can only wait, impotently, for the next event of this kind to occur. The only beneficiary here is reason, contemporary rationality. Reason still prefers to embrace (moral) evil rather than risk confrontation with its own inherent failings. Such a confrontation demands a thinking of contemporary forms of evil, which elude the moral-privative system of thought, the privative conception of evil that is disabled when confronted by contemporary death-events. The radical force of evil is that it shifts and mutates into new forms while remaining the ‘accursed share’ of any value system. Both Bataille
and Baudrillard explore this conviction in detail. A number of differing orders or regimes of evil were specified in this thesis in order to theorise the contemporary experience of 'inexplicable' events. It argues that contemporary death-events should be approached as a new and distinctive regime of evil.

Bataille's exploration of evil suggests a strengthening or 'unleashing' of evil in modernity while his departure from Nietzsche's approach to evil is central to an appreciation of the distinctiveness of his thought and its relation to contemporary death-events. Baudrillard's fatal theory and "principle of evil" is irreducible to either the genealogical method, as developed by Foucault, or the nihilist relativism of which he is sometimes accused. The "transparency of evil" represents a new terrain in the thinking of excess. The disarticulation of the values of good and evil is argued to lead to a new condition of "viral" "interstitial" evil, which eludes rational explanation. These themes offer an alternative thinking of the 'inexplicability' of contemporary death-events.

Modern reason is disabled by the horror of contemporary death-events. Conventional social scientific, as well as popular, media and juridical thinking are forced to attempt to reconstruct or expand reason to cope with such events. Reason attempts to locate and contain evil within individuals and their acts. This containment protects no only existing power distributions but more importantly the status of reason itself. Contemporary death-events strike at the heart of modern reason. They open a void of horror that cannot be bridged by reason in any of its forms. They demand a thinking of excess that is inadmissible to rational thought.

What good is theory if it cannot reflect, reconcile or critique the real? What can theory do? Fatal theory challenges the culture of transparency, the culture of contemporary death-events, and it challenges rationality, which both generates and denies the horror of extreme violence. Contemporary reason excludes the excess of sacrifice, of expenditure but generates the excess of the "transparition of evil". Contemporary death-events are suspended, undecideably, between these forms. Perhaps radical or "fatal" thought can recreate symbolic spaces, recreate zones of density, seduction and enchantment that would combat the culture of transparency and its catastrophic events. Such dreams only become possible when the worst horrors of contemporary life are confronted in all their intensity.
APPENDIX

This section offers a brief outline of the facts of each case. Interpretation is kept to a minimum here as the contention of this thesis is that a new and alternative theoretical approach is needed to facilitate a more adequate reading of such events.

THE DUNBLANE MASSACRE

On the 13th March 1996 Thomas Hamilton entered the primary school in the town of Dunblane, Scotland and opened fire on a class of five-year old children. He killed 16 children, their teacher and then himself. He carried several weapons, all of them legally possessed. The event generated intense media interest, for a time, and this was focussed on the character, background and upbringing of Hamilton. A confused quasi-religious terminology of good and evil appeared in the media with phrases such as ‘evil psycho’ used (Daily Record 14/03/96 Quoted in Scott & Watson-Brown 1997/8). Parallels were drawn with the earlier ‘spree killer’, Michael Ryan in Hungerford, 1987.

Very quickly the media procured the testimony of local people who claimed to know Hamilton. The media reported simplistic and tautological ‘explanations’ of Hamilton’s actions, labelling him a ‘fat, balding 43 year-old’, a ‘weirdo’ and ‘pervert’. It was rumoured that Hamilton, who was unmarried, frequently entertained youthful male ‘callers’ and was never seen in the company of women. He also worked voluntarily in local boys clubs. These ‘facts’ were presented as evidence that Hamilton was a ‘potential’ murderer, a ‘time-bomb’ waiting to explode.

The tabloid press conflated homosexuality with paedophilia and ‘murderous impulses’ creating the impression that Hamilton’s crimes were somehow inevitable, wired into his sexuality. Other media speculation dwelt on ‘irregularities’ in Hamilton’s upbringing. He had been ‘abandoned’ by his father and brought up largely by his grandparents. However no evidence of deprivation or abuse, sexual or otherwise, was located. Instead in the days and weeks which followed attention, both media and political, focussed on reforms to firearms legislation and provoked...
conflict between political parties and gun lobbyists. Limited changes to the licensing of handguns and the handling of firearms in gun clubs were made in 1997.

The event seemed to have only a limited media lifespan and the recent third anniversary of the massacre passed with little interest. No book-length studies of this event have yet appeared to my knowledge.

FREDERICK AND ROSEMARY WEST

On the 1st January 1995 Frederick West hanged himself in Winson Green Prison, Birmingham. He was awaiting trial, charged with the murder of 12 people including his first wife, his eldest daughter and numerous long-term and casual sexual partners. All of the crimes took place in the Gloucester area.

The murders began in 1967 and may have continued until the early 1990's when West was held in a low-security bail-hostel awaiting trial for the rape of his daughters. Unofficial estimates of the full extent of West's killings suggest a figure of around sixty (Wansell 1996). In 1972 Fred West married Rosemary Letts, his second wife, who had been his sexual partner since 1969, when she was 15 years old. They had five children together, although during their marriage Rosemary gave birth to three other children, fathered by her 'clients' as she worked as a prostitute with her husband's encouragement.

During the 1970's and 1980's the couple imprisoned, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered and buried at least ten young women. The details of these murders are grotesque; the women were drugged and kidnapped. Some were kept imprisoned for days; they were systematically raped and tortured. Sometimes bones were removed, in all probability while the victims were still alive. In one case a foetus was dislodged and torn from the womb during an 'abortion'. According to Wansell (1996) some victims were made to kneel over a pit and were then decapitated.

Rosemary West was charged with ten murders and sentenced to life imprisonment in November 1995. Her claims that she had not known what her husband had been doing were rejected by the jury while the mass media felt able to declare that she was actually 'far worse' than her husband.
In addition to these murders Fred and Rose West systematically raped and abused their children throughout the course of their time together. The couple were remarkably skilled at eluding the attentions of social workers, police and other professionals. The authorities investigated West many times, dating back to 1961 when alleged incest charges were thrown out by Hereford Assizes. In November 1969 West was imprisoned for 3 days for non-payment of fines. In 1970 he was imprisoned for 9 months for theft. In 1973 Fred and Rose West pleaded guilty to charges of Actual Bodily Harm and Indecent Assault, and were fined £50 each. In 1980 Fred West was convicted of receiving stolen goods. Social Services investigations of the West’s date back to the mid-1960’s. Despite these events Fred West maintained the appearance of a hardworking, amiable, petty-criminal who was proud to work as a police informant on certain occasions. Local people knew him as friendly, helpful though “weird”. He was according to Wansell (1996) a very accomplished liar.

During the trial of Rose West the media speculated over who had been the dominant personality in the murderous relationship. Many declared it to be Rose though there is little evidence for such an assertion. Fred had murdered twice before meeting Rose, yet the facts suggest she was an equal partner, certainly able to match Fred for brutality and destructiveness.

Neither Fred nor Rose West ever expressed any guilt or remorse for their actions. Wansell (1996) speculates that, within the logic of their “private world” they had the power and therefore the “right” to take sexual pleasure by whatever means they chose. Wansells’ account reviews a number of genetic and psychological ‘explanations’ of the West’s behaviour. Expert opinion agrees on one fundamental point, neither Fred nor Rose was in any sense ‘mad’ or ‘insane’. Both seemed to act ‘in full possession of their senses’. This leads Wansell to reject scientific accounts of genetic or psychological malfunction and instead affirm ‘evil’ as the only appropriate designation of their actions.
THE MURDER OF JAMES BULGER

On 12th February 1993 two 10 year-old boys truanting from their local primary school abducted, tortured and murdered James Bulger, aged two.

The boys were classmates though had known each other for only about one year. On the morning of the murder the boys truanted in the Strand shopping centre in Bootle, Merseyside. The boys had a reputation for being cheeky and mischievous but were regarded by teachers; peers and local people as a minor irritation not a serious problem. Neither had shown any inclination towards violent or aggressive behaviour.

On this particular morning the two boys stole small toys, pens and sweets but became “bored” and decided to “get a baby lost”. This activity was clearly premeditated since security video-footage revealed the abduction of James Bulger was their second attempt, the first ending in failure.

It is impossible to piece together the events of that afternoon since the boys admitted only what direct evidence prohibited them from lying about. However James was left unattended for only a matter of moments before being lured away. He was carried, pulled and dragged almost two and a half miles across Liverpool. The boys were seen by many witnesses but managed to persuade the few who enquired that they were taking the boy home. The boys claimed they tried to leave James at the local police station, but he would not enter alone. They also admitted to leaving him by a busy road hoping he might wander onto it and be knocked down. Clearly the boys were now ‘bored’ with James and wanted to be rid of him while avoiding any difficult questions being directed at themselves. James was taken to a railway line, only 50 yards from the police station. It was now getting dark. Here James was punched, kicked and stamped upon. Paint was thrown into his face; bricks were thrown at his head. An iron fishplate weighing 22 pounds was thrown at his head, leaving him unconscious. Then his lower clothing was removed. Both the boys, after their arrest, refused to answer any questions concerning sexual abuse but the body of James was found with the foreskin of the penis pushed back in a way that could not be caused by kicks or punches. There was also some suggestion that one of the boys had pushed a small battery up their victim’s anus, though the two boys
blamed each other for this. Since medical examinations found no evidence of injuries consistent with this act it seems the boys made a half-hearted attempt to simulate the appearance of a sex attack, for which an adult would be suspected.

The boys then built a small platform using bricks to cover the body, which was put on a railway line. Morrison (1997) not unreasonably, interprets the 'burial' as a mark of respect, while for Smith (1994) and the police investigation team, this 'burial' merely ensured the body would be severed by the next on-coming train. James Bulger received 41 separate injuries, mostly to the head.

The two boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson were found guilty of abduction and murder on 24th November 1993. The Judge, Mr Michael Morland dwelt on the issue of 'inexplicability' and stressed the effects of 'video nasties' though their was no evidence, even circumstantial, that these played a role. This event seems devoid of all 'reason' and allows no 'explanation'. The boys involved were 'average'. Detailed psychiatric and psychological analysis revealed nothing except that the boys were 'sane' and 'fit to stand trial'. Both police and psychiatric interviews established that the boys knew 'right' from 'wrong' and to kill a baby was 'wrong'. The boy's education had involved a definite Christian and moral dimension. Both Sereny (1995) and Morrison (1997) stress that the city of Liverpool possesses an unusually strong sense of community or 'solidarity' that has been lost in other urban centres. Before admitting the attack Jon Venables repeatedly declared to his mother that whoever was responsible should be severely punished.

There is no evidence that either boy had ever been mistreated or abused, sexually or otherwise, but parents or anybody else. Jon Venables was brought up in a stable and affectionate family atmosphere. Though his parents divorced the family remained very close and according to Sereny (1995) his parents remained lovers. There was never any financial hardship. Robert Thompson's upbringing was not so straightforward. His father left his mother for another woman when Robert was four. Robert had four brothers and their mother found it difficult to cope alone. Money was scarce and the older brothers were known to the police as petty offenders. Robert however was close to his mother and stayed out of trouble with the police. He often looked after his baby brother. All the Thompson brothers were immediately discounted by local police as suspects for the murder of James Bulger.
According to Smith (1994) both Robert and Jon had, shortly before the murder, become more settled and well behaved at home and school.
Where the bibliography gives two publication dates, e.g. Aries, P. (1974/1976) the first date refers to the first original language publication date where this could be established. The second date refers to the first English translation. This system facilitates an appreciation of the chronological development of the projects of key figures in this thesis. In the case of Bataille his extensive use of pseudonyms, extremely limited print-runs, and his destruction of certain manuscripts complicate this process. In the interests of clarity and consistency the first date refers, in these cases, to the first widely available edition bearing the name of Bataille as author.

For the very old theological texts cited in this thesis the most recent English translation date alone is given. In some cases the original publication date is unknown, could not be established or the text was not originally published in its present form. In these cases the thesis provides either the probable completion date of the work in its main text or through supplementary endnotes giving further details.

Augustine, St. (1953) *Enchiridion*, London; S.P.C.K.
Baudrillard, J. *La Fin d'illusion Sexuelle* – publication details unknown (probably in *L'Observateur*).


Irigaray, L. (1985) This Sex Which is Not One, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.


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