

Let's get slaughtered

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A young married couple cruise down a poplar-lined country road in a dark green 1960s convertible. The sun is shining. Others are doing the same. Soon there are more and more cars, and they've slowed down to a crawl. It seems everyone has the one idea, everyone's out for a Sunday drive. The traffic has stopped moving. Drivers and passengers step out onto the grass. It doesn't take much for the pair to begin an argument with the others on the roadside. Before too long there's a fight, which escalates into a brawl. Back in the queue, horns blast, a car rams into a ditch, there are screams, a man strangles the driver in the next vehicle, a woman tears a handbag from another woman, cars in the queue ram and force each other off the road; there is twisted metal, piled up bodies and bloody human remains strewn over grassy fields, which some survivors cannibalise – all of this usurping the couple's secret plan to kill each other.

That's Jean-Luc Godard's anti-revolution: slaughter the new pastime for a weekend without purpose or distraction. 'The horror of the bourgeoisie can only be overcome by more horror.' Godard's cynical voiceover text in *Week-end* (1967) states that there's no hope for the leisure classes. Pleasure and material possessions are on an equal plane with exploitation and hatred (of foreigners and the poor), because in a capitalist system these extremes feed off each other. And social harmony only exists as long as meaning doesn't pierce the meaninglessness of this setup. Yet hatred can turn against meaninglessness itself, as in the final scene of Godard's earlier film *Tout va bien* (1972), in which irrationality takes over in the second half of the film. *Tout va bien* takes the Brechtian deconstruction of filmic form to an extreme (following Bertolt Brecht's political conception of Epic Theatre), and the 'alienation effect' is ubiquitous in its explicit staging, being mostly comprised of tableaux or static camera shots where the action passes in front of the lens. One such shot captures an unexpected and extended scene of looting and wanton destruction of a supermarket. Without any apparent cause, and in an unbroken ten-minute take, orderly shoppers start to attack a store, ripping down its shelves and wheeling trolley-loads of stock through the registers – filmic conventions come apart with social and political disintegration.

'In a western suburb of Sydney, John Morkos (George Basha), a 25-year old Lebanese Australian, walks free after two years in prison, determined to go straight.'¹ First televised on Australia Day this year, the ABC's plotline of *The Combination* (released in cinemas in 2009) demarcates its political intent right there and, clearly, the national public broadcaster thinks that inclusivity is born of racial stereotyping. Watch the feature film's three-minute promo, however, and the movie underscores the utter futility of its 'going straight' premise, as Morkos has no hope of escaping the inculcated cultural violence of the western suburbs.

DAVID: Well, that's right. I mean, it's a tragedy in some ways, and the easy prejudices, the easy assumptions – the assumption that all Arabs are terrorists, kind of thing, that the white kids have, seemingly, which, you know, we know where they got that from.

MARGARET: Well, that's a sense of entitlement and, you know, I mean it's just disgusting. You know, not being able to embrace everybody in this country. What are you giving this?²

Like untying a tangled rope, sometimes attempts to tease out the meaning of violence only tighten the social noose. While *The Movie Show's* David and Margaret felt the film showed the subtleties of Sydney's social tensions, when it was first released Greater Union pulled the film from its screens after management claimed that fights broke out in some of its western suburb cinemas.³ *Tout va bien* and *The Combination* share one thing: they show that violence is integral to society; the difference between the two films is belief, which Morkos keeps and Godard's shoppers have lost. And how well the film illustrates the schism of 'harmonious' Australian multiculturalism – nappies branded with the Aussie flag are the latest height of our scary hilarity (namely madness), okay for kids to crap on the national emblem but it's sedition to torch it.

In the *Burn what you cannot steal* catalogue essay, Curator Reuben Keehan points to the 2011 London riots and the looting that took place as 'the logic of fetishism and abundance taken to its natural conclusion'. I would add that the commodity is not the primary object of looting; yes, the icons of capitalism are caught up in an anarchic scenario but they are not the only targets of hostility. In order to delineate the power relations involved a few distinctions must be drawn. A riot is a revolt of oppressed yet unorganised collective, generally in reaction to its so-called keepers' transgression of the law. A riot is an outburst; a reaction to a warring incitement – generally unjust constabulary brutality – but it only ephemerally revives that repressed memory, *whereas* the status quo of the oppressor's culture and its history of violence is perpetual, reiterated in enduring representations such as prisons, museums, uniforms and public holidays. In this way, it becomes possible to interrogate the representation of violence and to expose the link between a site and past violence and what follows in the reprised recollection of a violent hegemony.

If you trace back the sequence of events, the London riots were a *natural* response to injustice, to the police shooting of local man, Mark Duggan, who was killed on 4 August 2011. Many of the people of Tottenham, in the district where the shooting took place, also wear the scars of long-term social exclusion and deprivation, and the act opened the old wound of poor relations between the police and the local black community. It is not necessary to defend the riot, except to note that it is not just a window of opportunity, because a riot is an enactment of lawlessness taking place in the hours following an incident where the law of the society has been transgressed and therefore shattered by its keepers. Tell me if you can't decipher a pattern.

- A jury acquittal of three Los Angeles Police officers of black motorist Rodney King's bashing is cited as the incendiary match that lit the Los Angeles riots inferno in 1992.
- In New South Wales, on 14 February 2004, the culpability of police in the death of 17-year-old Thomas 'T.J.' Hickey triggered the 2006 Redfern riots.
- On 19 November 2004, Queensland resident, Mulrunji Doomadgee died in a Palm Island police cell. After the medical evidence was heard in a local court, a riot erupted on the Island involving about 400 people.
- On 6 November 2005, ten days of riots began in a rundown suburb north of Paris and spread across cities and towns of France, following the 'accidental electrocution' of teenagers, Zyed Benna (aged 17, of

Tunisian origin) and Bouna Traore (aged 15, of Mauritanian origin) after an encounter with French police.

When you see them on television, looters are often stealing televisions, and here the logic of the fetish arguably returns in the choice of goods, for this is the object on which their own lawlessness is projected and a representational zone from which looters are generally excluded. 'Senseless ... Senseless acts', the nice folks (in sitting rooms probably north of the Thames, east of Redfern, and north-west of Compton) say to their television screens, shaking their heads. Mainstream sentiment surrounding temporary disorder is today buried somewhere between repressed grief for the demise of capitalism and the liberal democratic dream, and unexpressed fear, that it will devolve into politically engaged anarchy. The conflation of spectatorship and experience thus generates terrific anxiety in the unfolding televised nexus of sacrifice as an entertainment and a fantasy. Tracing the geneses of art in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche argued in 1872 that Greek theatre offered an authentic way to release repressed anxieties and the irreconcilable evils of corruption, hatred, pain, abuse and death, or the necessary detritus of civilisation – could it be that in the forum of the riot Tragic Theatre is reborn, while on television the allegorical work is subsumed into the totalising bad faith of despotic media representation?⁴

Nietzsche also inspired Georges Bataille's assertion that the destructive impulses of the human race were the direct consequence of not knowing what to do with our exclusion from the excesses of existence. In *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, Bataille argues that the excess of force is a cosmic law, because every 'living organism... ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life', and that one need only to look to the sun as an example.⁵ Bataille uses this claim to historically analyse the composition and hierarchical behaviour of powerbrokers across a broad range of cultures, whereby he contends that they each follow this same 'general economy' of excess and annihilation. Bataille purports that the generative excess of the cosmos, as an overwhelming, unknowable and transforming entity, is greatly feared by humanity, giving rise to destructive and repressive impulses, and that this terror is the basis of all war. Like Charles Darwin's notion of the evolutionary paradox, the burning and looting of the riot is thus a demonstration of the transformation of this excess into something completely unforeseen and terrifyingly unknown: the pure force of destruction.

In market terms, a surplus is the by-product of an excess of production, and it is this word that Bataille chooses to apply to the greater logic of the expenditure of transgression. In *The Accursed Share*, cosmic economies expose twentieth century capitalism as a sacred enterprise, in which sacrifice and desire are essential elements – a rationale by which the subprime mortgage industry and ensuing Global Financial Crisis surely abides. The scheme of ritual practice necessitates an exchange of representations of sacred capitalism, and the reiteration of the lawlessness of the law is the supplementary in the sacred contractual process. As such, police killings and the naked aggression of street bashings become explicit signs of state sacrifice and it follows that after any sacrificial act the affronted community are obliged to demonstrate their collusion in a reciprocal public defacement in which the ritual counterpart is the riot. To clarify: the purpose of theft is ownership, whereas the destruction of private property is an act of sacrifice.⁶

In civil societies we are spellbound by the magic of the state, which is analogous yet antinomic to Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'dreamworld' or the lost utopia of the socialist project. In *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* Susan Buck-Morss argues that the

enigma of both liberal democracies and totalitarian states is recognisable in the 'wild zone' of violence and terror, which is legitimised in the enemy of popular mobilisation.⁷ While Buck-Morss contends that the lost dreamworld might be seized again in a reenchantment (and re-politicisation) of the structures of power, at the very least, identifying the invisible contract of state-sanctioned violence is critical to dispelling the illusion cast over the collective and its potential for legitimate social action.

Bloodied and sprawled out on the bitumen or silhouetted against the flames, rioting bodies act out an ancient communal ritual. Further eroticised on the television screen, some will 'get off' on the festive collapse of order, not realising that the impetus is transgression. The broken screens and screams are a kind of carnival, a farce of society but also a celebration of the pleasure of that transgression and the exuberance of death, painted in lurid colours like theme park faces. As Mikhail Bakhtin expounds in his writings on the carnival in *Rabelais and His World*, there is a close proximity of the riot to sanctioned gratification of the sacrificial human impulse – and its 'unmasking' – and the negative dialectic of sovereignty, which is only maintained at the exclusion and cost of the surplus.⁸ Yet the alienated body also suffers real economic and social conditions, and the problem that Bataille and other philosophers of the time confronted was how they might usurp the facades of western representation in an age of mechanical reproduction. On this point Walter Benjamin recognised montage as one of the critical techniques of surrealism, with the dual power that combined mythical process with Marxist operation in its dialectical subversion of mimetic images of nature. In this regard, the readymade has a role to play in the contemporary political scene and must not be relegated to the museum, because, as Chris Marker propounds in his text for the 1953 film *Statues Also Die* (*Les Statues meurent aussi*, directed by Chris Marker and Alain Renais), an archetypal article constitutes more than the mere figure it depicts. For, as Karl Marx insisted in another allegorical analysis, the superstructure and the material conditions of production mirror its unconscious in the capitalist substructure.

Ever noticed how many national public holidays celebrate gory history? (invasion, war, blood offering?) Australia Day is just one of the significant annual occasions for a collective celebration of a historical paradox. This holiday is synonymous with violence, not simply because it marks the arrival of the First Fleet, or Invasion Day as it is often more appropriately renamed, but because the day is celebrated with unabashed aggression. Sure, it's a social occasion: people throw parties, sink some piss, BBQ some cheap Coles-brand snags and listen to the triple j Hottest 100 countdown. Simultaneously, hordes of teenagers occupy the city streets and seashores; draped in two dollar shop Australian flags, and mob behaviour prevails with yelling and brawling. Alcohol-fuelled belligerence, that's the problem! But it's not so simple. Why is it that a certain persona comes out on this and other such days? Why is that character loud, white and angry? Go to particular sites and the archetype doesn't wait for a day off. Why, you can go to Rottnest Island, out where this archetype is getting slaughtered *anyday*.

A pack of young blokes are drinking VB stubbies (short bottles of Victoria Bitter), eating blood-dripping burgers and playing a game of charades. The Yard is the Island's supermarket and open-air food court. It's also part of the former Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prison complex. The blokes shout and leap over the picnic tables, falling into garden beds, while black crows and seagulls swoop for scraps. A few of them are hamming it up in cheap fancy dress. (Who knows why. A buck's night?) Decked out in black and white stripes, and dragging a (plastic) ball and chain, the convict costume is a jaw-dropper.

Is pleasure only found in Paradise? Leaving aside the revamping of dying religions into commodity forms, not so long ago Rottnest Island was Hell. This place, which Noongar people call Wadjemup, still represents Perdition, and it was a netherworld for its 3,700 Aboriginal men and boy prisoners, at least 370 of whom died in stinking, dark 'Native Prison' cells, many of them Elders taken from their tribal lands in an incisive campaign of colonial liquidation across Western Australia, between 1838 and 1931.⁹ Well after its official closure in 1904, in the early 1950s the offshore enigma still haunted the mainland and, as the contagion of post-war amnesia spread, a campaign of forgetting spread onto the pages of Western Australian tourist brochures:

*Rottnest Island
For Glorious Holidays
The Isle of Girls
Nestling in an Opal Sea*

Razed by white tourism with the objective of forgetting, sixty years later most visitors to the Island only see a whitewash. During the making of his latest documentary film, with the working title *Rottnest Island as Black Prison and White Playground*, Noongar filmmaker Glen Stasiuk asked some young girls about the Island's penal history and apparently they were both aware of the Prison and were very sensitive to the suffering of aboriginal people.¹⁰ But surely being conscious in this way only worsens the affront – for it's therefore a thinly-veiled public secret over which flagrant hedonism is subsequently dumped. Getting slaughtered in this place is doubly vicious: it's terrorism for the aboriginal memory of genocide. In January this year, after concerted efforts on the part of a group of Noongar elders and local artists, the Rottnest Island Authority announced that (very profitable) rental of the former prison buildings as tourist accommodation will finally cease. At this, and many other sites, the truthful representation of the pain inflicted on the dispossessed and, since colonisation, systematically excluded aboriginal population is the most important opportunity for a mature acknowledgement of the violence of Australian colonial history.

Coloured lights flash by, faces and hair strung out, loops, dips and turns, blackness, cobwebs, wide red lips, white sheets, rubber masks and spiders, oooooohhhh, gaping mouths, gasping for air, squeals, deathly screams of delight. A spark, smoke-filled air, coughs and we're running from the carriage. Mum, Dad. Where are you?

It's the evening of 9 June 1979. A fire is started in the Ghost Train ride at Luna Park Sydney. By 11:30pm, seven bodies are found inside. A 2003 *Sydney Morning Herald* article stated, 'A tree was planted on the fun park site in 1995 alongside a bench inscribed with the names of the six children and one adult who died. But workmen have now uprooted the tree, and the bench has been lost.' Apparently Warwick Doughty, a director of Luna Park Sydney, the company undertaking the development, said, "I don't believe it's an issue in the minds of anyone".¹¹ If so, why have the memorial gardens been repeatedly bulldozed? Even today Park management still hope that people will forget it ever happened.¹² The Ghost Train haunts the Park, as every kid's wild cry calls up the transgressive spectre of the reciprocity between enjoyment and sacrifice. Everyone knows that those seven people died for a terribly probable reason: so that the site might be closed and sold on to developers.

In an analysis of the politics of collective mnemonic erasure, Michael Taussig has written,

‘Defacement evokes a prehistory of the face as sacrifice...’¹³ This ‘face’ haunted me too, well before I found it in a random search of Flickr shots of Luna Park, especially one photograph of the abandoned and decaying face, taken in the 1980s by Sydney resident Robert Klein. I felt it was no coincidence when I also discovered that Luna Park Sydney is sited at Lavender Bay, once Hulk Bay, site of the Phoenix hulk – a prison vessel holding colonial convicts about to be exiled to Norfolk Island, a quarantine for the infected and the insane, and a depot for the chain gangs that worked on the shores and roads of Sydney.

If you ever decide to visit Sydney’s Luna Park, take a peek inside Coney Island. Hopefully you’ll find eight framed photos on a wall behind the wonky mirrors. These pictures reveal that, since opening in 1935, the Park has worn eight faces, each one *defacing* its predecessor: for instance, the first face was too scary so a smile was forced; a few years after the fire the crumbling face even more scary as it made death too real; and there have been several facelifts since then. But a ride on the Ghost Train? No way!

On 1 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned ‘to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of Paris’, where he was to be ‘taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds’; then, ‘in the said cart, to the Place de Grève, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds’.¹⁴

Robert-François Damiens was a simple servant but following his assassination attempt on King Louis XV of France, Damiens’ execution was conducted in an explicit demonstration of the authority of the state to perform public sacrifice in lieu of punishment, and, as the last of its kind in France, a legendary and controversial act. In the opening lines to *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault gives great attention to the details of the method of Damiens’ ritual execution, but it is the residual life of the site in which I am interested.¹⁵ In its time, the Place de Grève was named thus because it skirted the gravel or *grève* banks of the Seine. Today, the Place de l’Hôtel de Ville occupies the same public square. In the interim, over the centuries intervening the braying throngs of Mediaeval Parisians and bus loads of ogling contemporary tourists, this square served as the chief location for gatherings of public dissent and is the source of the prevalent and extant expression *faire la grève*, which is what the French call a strike.

Place de l’Hôtel de Ville is haunted, though it’s not ghosts that wander over the flagstones, because the excise or expulsion of law (comparable to *Terra Nullius* in Australia) demarcates a ‘wild zone’ (and not a temporary autonomous zone) for necessary acts of sanctioned transgression and violence occupied by the victims of state lawlessness. The sacrificial site of public slaughter – police bashings, deaths in custody, and the ‘accidental’ killing of children – therefore lays the foundations for the place of resistance, where the collective mental representation of the dreamworld is violently restaged – in a riot. Such violence only takes place with reference to history. Civilisation

hasn't eradicated that force but, since the twentieth century, it has been organised differently: now it is institutions that stand on sacred ground. Today, visitors to museums eagerly pay for the image of violence, as spectacle organises the masses. And, in the archaeology of this history, slaughterhouse and museum are not so far apart, while riot is disenfranchised somewhere in between.

A young woman in big sunnies and a flouncy black dress poses in the warehouse shell. She's in a building called Stara klaonica Zagrepčanke, at Heinzelova 66, Zagreb. The space is raw, with exposed iron rafters and huge rusted doors. It has a 'certain' attraction, according to visitors, for it used to be the city slaughterhouse. Does this make it cool? It must: The White Stripes played there in 2005.

I'm not attempting to conflate organised collective strike action with capital punishment; their impetus and outcomes are evidently dissimilar. Nor am I positing that public execution sites and slaughterhouses serve the same societal purpose. I am, however, interested in thinking about the residual life of the site in the two anecdotes I have just cited. At both Stara klaonica and Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, the masses gather in pleasurable distraction: one group cognisant of the former bloodletting, the other blissfully ignorant. But what happens to original excess and to memory after the evidence of violence is razed? What becomes of the traumatic residue? What if the return of repressed violence, whether historical or contemporary, forces its way back to the surface? I will resume this point again but, like Benjamin, I would argue that the apparition is only recognised in lieu of an awakening of historical consciousness. Either way the sites, I think, carry a message, for therein a sacred transformation occurs. On the one hand, it's a representation, while on the other it is a literal return to violence. The right hand is the museum and the left hand is the riot. In autoimmune diseases the body attacks itself; accordingly, in order to maintain a peaceful safe society, a certain amount of violence is necessary. Picture the masses thronging to the museum, like shoppers to a Boxing Day sale, it has everything to do with expenditure of the surplus.

In an article entitled 'Bloody Sundays', Denis Hollier refers to a 1929 issue of the Surrealist journal *Documents* in which Bataille contributed several entries from his ongoing Critical Dictionary, interspersed between Eli Lotar's photo essay of the old Paris abattoirs titled 'Aux abattoirs de La Villette'.¹⁶ The following is part of Bataille's 'Abattoir' definition.

The slaughterhouse is linked to religion in so far as the temples of bygone eras (not to mention those of the Hindus in our own day) served two purposes: they were used both for prayer and for killing. The result (and this judgement is confirmed by the chaotic aspect of present day slaughterhouses) was certainly a disturbing convergence of the mysteries of myth and the ominous grandeur typical of those places in which blood flows.¹⁷

Describing the conversion of the traumatic site into a weekend urbane amusement park, Hollier is at pains to emphasise that 'museums have a strange way of following in the footsteps of slaughterhouses...'¹⁸ For, on this location, to this day, stands an extraordinary 1980s spectacle in its own right, a massive arts and science centre – the Cité des Sciences de l'Industrie, with its silver geodesic dome – situated in the 'spacy' deconstructionist zone of the Parc de La Villette, in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris. In the dictionary definition, headed 'Musée', Bataille prophesies this eventuality. 'A museum is comparable to the lung of a great city: every Sunday the throng flows into

the museum, like blood, and leaves it fresh and purified.¹⁹ Yet, as Hollier explicates, the consequence at the former Paris abattoirs is uncanny but 'not an absolutely novel phenomenon'. How so? Because, as Hollier states, the 'event is programmed in the logic of the modernization of urban space'.²⁰ By logic, Hollier also infers the rationalising role of the collective unconscious. About half way through 'Bloody Sundays' Hollier cracks a joke: 'Woes war... soll Museum wer den'.²¹ This is a wordplay on a famous line of Sigmund Freud: *Woes war, soll ich werden*, the latter translated as *Where id was, ego must come*, while Hollier's pun means, *Where id was, Museum must be*. The Museum thus powerfully occupies the place of *id*, whereby, in Hollier's words, the 'cultural reconversion of slaughterhouses' involves the 'transformation of a harsh expenditure into a mild one...'²²

Godard's *Week-end* pivots on this point, reverting the mild back into the harsh expenditure: they kill both time and each other, and it is not vacuous. When a nice Sunday drive turns into mass murder and mindless carnage, is this simply an expression of dissatisfaction with contemporary life? Does it illustrate alienation from society? Are the atomised time-killers lashing out at capitalism? In the same way that Bataille's surplus feeds the cosmic General Economy, the need to slaughter is much more essential to human life that we dare to admit. For the state, a sacrificeable surplus can be found in the outlaw (or child). But the urban masses have no animal therefore, in Hollier's words, 'they kill time'. Does the ritual really take place in the vacuum, in the emptiness of consumption and the meaninglessness of the citizen's diversion? Hollier thinks otherwise, saying that within the Museum there is 'an uncanny holocaust, a pure consumption with no remains, no trace, a total sacrifice, bloody but with a blood that does not stain, that leaves no memory'.²³ But how can a citizenry contend with the lawlessness of invisible state-sanctioned violence? It's easier in an openly lawless land where the horror of the extra-military or civil war is apparent.

I'm recollecting a recent trip to Colombia, just having spent three weeks being told things like – *Oh no you can't go down that street because the kids have grenades, but the next one is fine* – then listening to some young friends express their shock at the concurrent London riots, as if that was unimaginable in their country. Ironically, the events in the United Kingdom lacked any collective ideological impetus and (although they stirred up a few crotchety radicals) there were no revolutionary outcomes. Apart from the sad loss of life and the pillaging of a lot of material goods, the shock of the riots only revived a moral turpitude similar to that expressed by those who are appalled at role-playing video games. Alas, something far more powerful and dangerous is disguised in the contact zone between a civilisation and the denial of its historical violence. *Week-end* is a good illustration of what I am getting at because it sensationalises what is produced in the contagion of the bourgeois diversion of surplus expenditure – the sacrifice.

Explicitly capitalising on the history of violence, the contemporary prison museum epitomises a spectacle sometimes called 'dark tourism', which also involves aggressive touristic pilgrimages to limit or boundary sites of former violence. In the worldwide trend of *thanatourism* the consumption and enjoyment of ritual state sacrifice is symbolic.²⁴ At visits to concentration camps, places of death and sites of horror, like Cambodia's Killing Fields and the S-21 prison in Phnom Penh, have become major sites of tourism where victims' suffering is retailed for the explicit enjoyment of the visitor. In such places, the spectacle evacuates the site of empathy because it valorises the right of the state to slaughter its victims.²⁵

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault delineates the shift from the public castigation to the concealed yet explicit demonstration of punishment – both real and symbolic – within the order of the penal institution. All of Foucault's work, essentially, reiterates this same point; that society is the institution and vice versa. We all know that confinement is cruel and that it offers very little social benefit. That's civilisation, right? It's sacred: something must be sacrificed and what Erving Goffman called the Total Institution, in 1961, still neatly describes the purpose of punitive confinement.²⁶ Bataille takes this further, claiming that the prison is the blueprint for all architecture, because architectural production is in a league with the authoritarian work of civilisation. It is little known, however, that the foundations of Australian penal institutions were imported with the Solitary System, when the Model Prison was exported with the human cargo of convict labour to Australia. However, the plan was perverted under the colonial imperative of exile and punitive transportation, with the added bonus of an indentured and well-behaved labour force (the Prisoners of Millbank, or POMs, were renowned for this). Follow the trail of this chain gang and you'll find a network of roads built by POMs and Pentonvillians: the first labour force brought out to Van Diemens Land, then to Melbourne, and later over to aid the fledgling Swan River colony.²⁷ Today, the Solitary System remains at the clandestine core of all institutions of confinement. The evidence is concrete: isolation cell sizes are exactly the same as at Pentonville (six by eight feet); the hours in sequestration are still twenty-three out of twenty-four. Instead of being slavish witnesses to a spectacle, we are complicit in a public secret, because everyone feels comfortable about such punishment when it's behind closed metal doors.

Damiens is sitting staring a blank wall tonight, in Cell Block 18, Acacia Division, HM Barwon Heads Maximum Security Unit. He might get an hour out in the concrete yard tomorrow. There might be a cloud in the sky. The brutality is on show is the same; it's just that inside the prison cruelty is both covert and authorised. It was not so long ago, in *For The Term of His Natural Life* that Marcus Clarke wrote, 'The floggings are hideously frequent. On flogging mornings I have seen the ground where the men stood at the triangles saturated with blood, as if a bucket of blood had been spilled on it, covering a space three feet in diameter, and running out in various directions, in little streams two or three feet long...'²⁸ *Oh, that's all in the past. But history, we love it.* Let's try a bit of ritual self-shaming and get in the stocks! How about a ghost tour at Port Arthur?²⁹ Or we can gasp at the dramatisation of convicts on the whipping post at Fremantle Prison.³⁰ But, of course, no harm is done, for the cat whip has no sting in its tail, because within the sanctioned spectacle of the commodified institution these are like Hollier's 'mild expenditures', little transgressions of popular leisure in 'a system in which the ambivalence defining the sacred nucleus is situated'.³¹ In a pleasing vocalisation of changing attitudes, at the 2011 Museums Australia National Conference I heard Deakin University's Andrea Witcomb condemn the questionable sensationalism of Old Melbourne Gaol tours, like 'The Watch House Experience', in which visitors are 'arrested' and submitted to the thrill of being thrown into one of the unchanged original cells, framed by a series of melodramatic restagings of inmates' and gaolers' stories (one might also decry the jaded performances).³²

With our beaches as theatres, and with our isles of exile, revelry and forgetting, getting fucked up on Rottnest Island is just one of the litany of unrepresentable Australian locations for violence perpetuated in the spaces of evacuated history. Apart from the whitewash of tourism, both schoolies and the all-white piss-up all take place in zones within which lawlessness is endorsed, the latter raging on the graves of aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest Island; the former pitching tents on Stradbroke Island's old quarantine camps. This offers an illustration of the broader behaviour of aggressive

territorial occupation, in a country that claims there is no prior society, no historical memory and no responsibility. For children born in this false paradise, there's nothing else to do except purchase an Australian flag and don it as a thin veil between utopia and perdition. And, even with recollection, Rottneest Island may therefore become yet another slaughterhouse-museum where, in the war of representation, the playground of *terrortourism* is upheld.

Benjamin once said that 'history decomposes into images,' and when collective memory resurfaces, on one hand, it operates negatively, as in an eclipsing Nietzschean recurrence. This is due to the insidious caprices of 'Otherness,' which Hollier reminds us 'is not simply a matter of pleasure and enjoyment'. Hollier adds, 'There is no carnival without loss, no Luna Park without a slaughterhouse.'³³ Alternatively, Benjamin would argue that we might yet recuperate something out of history's rubble to understand the present political condition. Benjamin's mnemonic fragment would activate historical consciousness as the destructive forces of sacrifice at once deface and illuminate the past. Inasmuch as the noose may yet choke its outlaw, in teasing out the knots of this debate, it emerges that both the readymade art object and rioting constitute compatible forms of transgression: both have an ethical rationale, political substance and meaning (the riot capable of defacement; *detournement* offering political life to the readymade). The difference with the riot is its connection to memory, which is doubly sacrificed in the effacement of meaning along with its image, like the iconoclasm of smashing a television as it plays footage of the same riot. The readymade, on the other hand, is inevitably caught up in the razing of the representation itself.

Given that the spectacle of dark tourism involves strategies of active erasure, creative work could have a part to play in the interpretation and recuperation of forsaken or unwanted pasts, for, like the decades of activism at Luna Park, art sometimes makes incursions into the no-go zone of exiled histories. Reconciling the past with the present, former institutions of punitive confinement might soon become sites of conscience, where appropriate recognition of the continuity of nation's colonial inversion of human rights into human cruelty.³⁴ Only in revealing the ethos and foundation of this punitive nation state will we ever come close to comprehending the constitutional frame of this place or non-place, and the collective need to continue the public secret of a representation of violence. Haunted by the mad face that once crumbled at the entry to Luna Park, I wonder where we'd be if the theme park of the Total Institution had never been imagined to start with.

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¹ ABC TV Guide, webpage, www.abc.net.au/tv/guide/abc1/201201/programs/ZX1128A001D2012-01-26T213712.htm [accessed 02 February 2012]

² ABC TV, transcript of televised conversation between Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton, *At the Movies*, webpage, www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2492722.htm [accessed 04 February 2012]

³ *At the Movies*, webpage, op cit. See also, 'The Combination pulled as audience starts fight', Caroline Overington, *The Australian*, 02 March 2009, online article, www.theaustralian.com.au/news/film-pulled-as-audience-starts-fight/story-e6frg6o6-111119003483 [accessed 02 February 2012]

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- ⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Michael Tanner, Penguin, London; New York, 1993. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin took up Nietzsche's critique and decried the dangerous 'conception of the symbol into aesthetics', harkening to the classical form of tragedy, which he claimed deployed the powerful recuperative agent of allegory. See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), trans. John Osborne, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 1977, p. 160
- ⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Zone Books, 1988, p. 21
- ⁶ When Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson) coined the term Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), this was at once extolled as a postmodern revival of Anarchist ideology. There is a big difference, however, between the free-for-all autonomy of the outlaw, and the defiance of a corrupt sovereignty and the temporary occupation of the lawlessness of the state. And I have suspicions that TAZ activates Anarchism about as well as Errol Flynn's swashbuckling narrates the merits of piracy. See, Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, New Autonomy Series, Brooklyn, New York, 2003
- ⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2000
- ⁸ Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Belknap-Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1984, p. 303
- ⁹ See Neville Green, *Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia*, Focus Education Services, Perth, 1984
- ¹⁰ Based on conversations held with Glen Stasiuk in November 2011
- ¹¹ 'Ghost Train memorial tree haunts developers', Sean Nicholls, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July 2003, www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/07/13/1058034877881.html [accessed 20 October 2011]
- ¹² In November 2011, the Director of Performance Space received a call from the General Manager of Luna Park, the day before a scheduled performance of a collaboration I was making with WART, titled *Benevolent Asylum: just for fun*, at Luna Park, asking that no mention be made of the Ghost Train fire.
- ¹³ Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 4
- ¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, Penguin, London, 1991, p. 3
- ¹⁵ Foucault, op. cit.
- ¹⁶ Denis Hollier, 'Bloody Sundays', trans. Betsy Wing, in *Representations*, No. 28, Special Issue: Essays in Memory of Joel Fineman (Autumn, 1989), University of California Press, pp. 77-89. Thanks to Dr Charles Wolfe for both insightfully suggesting and sending a copy of Hollier's article. See also, *Documents*, ed. Georges Bataille, Issue 6, 1929, pp. 329-333
- ¹⁷ Bataille, 'Musée,' *Documents*, ed. Georges Bataille, Issue 2, 1930, p. 330
- ¹⁸ Hollier, *ibid.*, p. 81
- ¹⁹ Bataille, op. cit.
- ²⁰ Hollier, *ibid.*, p. 82
- ²¹ Hollier, *ibid.*, p. 81
- ²² Hollier, *ibid.*, p. 82
- ²³ Hollier, *ibid.*, p. 86
- ²⁴ See, A.V. Seaton, 'Guided by the dark: From thanopsis to thanatourism', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, v2, 1996, pp. 234-244; Strange, C. and Kempa, M. 'Shades of dark tourism: Alcatraz and Robbin Island', *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 2, no. 30, 2003, pp. 386-405; and, Lennon, J.J and Foley, M. *Dark Tourism: the attraction of death and disaster*, Continuum, New York, 2000.
- ²⁵ A number of thanatourism sites have distinguished themselves from dark tourism sites, forming The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in 1999
- ²⁶ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, Doubleday Anchor, New York, 1961. Thanks to Dr Neville Green for recommending this book.
- ²⁷ This history is partially documented in, James Semple Kerr, *Out of Sight Out of Mind: Australia's Places of Confinement, 1788-1988*, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney, 1988; and J.S. Kerr, *Design for convicts: an account of design for convict establishments in the Australian colonies during the transportation era*, The Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1984
- ²⁸ Marcus Clarke, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, Penguin Australia, Camberwell, 2009

²⁹ 'Join a lantern-lit walking tour to experience the Port Arthur Historic Site by night. Port Arthur can seem a very different place after sunset, full of mystery and intrigue. Unlike many other ghost tours around the world, visitors on our Ghost Tours have exclusive access to our World Heritage listed Site, so the atmosphere won't be shattered by crowds or traffic.' Quoted from Port Arthur Historic Site webpage, www.portarthur.org.au/index.aspx?base=1459 [accessed 09 February 2012]

³⁰ 'Cat o Nine Tails Whipping at the Fremantle Prison', YouTube video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EmssFlejak [accessed 09 February 2011]

³¹ Hollier, *ibid.*, pp. 80-82

³² Old Melbourne Gaol webpage, www.oldmelbournegaol.com.au/city_watch_house [accessed 03 February 2012]

and 'Ghosts... What Ghosts???' Night Tour, www.oldmelbournegaol.com.au/what_s_on [accessed 04 February 2012]

³³ Hollier, *ibid.*, p. 88

³⁴ See the Sites of Conscience website <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/>