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Images of the End

Representations of the Apocalyptic in Contemporary Film

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to investigate the relationship between the 'classical apocalypse' and the contemporary apocalypse as portrayed by the films *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Crash* (1995). The 'classical apocalypse' is a literary genre which supplies a rich and vivid imagery where the image takes precedence over the narrative. At the centre of the 'classical apocalypse' is the image, and this thesis explores if the imagery of the apocalypse can be translated from its traditional literary form to the visual form of film.

The apocalypse is a revealing of that which has been concealed and which lies in the future of humankind at the end of time. In the postmodern era with the absence of meaning, apocalypse and God, the apocalypse has become a nihilistic repetition and the revealing has become feared since it might be a revealing of nothing. These contemporary depictions of the end, I would argue, help the apocalypse to come into its own in a postmodern setting, and the medium of film offers a possibility to further emphasise the visuality and potent imagery of the end, expressing the concerns of the apocalypse fully. As such they provide a 'sense of an ending' and an apocalyptic sentiment which is as unnerving and evasive as the 'classical apocalypse'. These films revisit as well as revamp and rehearse the imagery of the Biblical apocalypse, becoming a-theological statements if not on the Bible, on the state of society and the apocalypse.

Content

Chapter 1: What is the Apocalypse Anyway?	1
1:1 Defining Apocalypse	5
1:2 The ‘classical apocalypse’	7
1:3 The Works of Classic Apocalyptic Literature	12
1:4 A Working Definition	14
1:5 The Apocalypse on Film	16
1:5:1 Film and Religion	16
1:5:2 Hollywood Apocalypse - Film as Theology	18
1:6 The Apocalypse Revamped	20
Chapter 2: Characteristics of the Apocalyptic	24
2:1 The Ongoing Relevance of Apocalyptic Literature	24
2:2 Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature	25
2:2:1 Apocalyptic as Crisis Literature	26
2:2:2 The Image at the Centre of Apocalyptic Imagination	29
2:2:3 Image and Real in the Postmodern	33
2:2:4 Language of the Apocalypse or how to Speak the Unspeakable	35
2:2:5 Apocalypse as Ritual	41
Chapter 3: A Clockwork Orange	46
3:1 Stanley Kubrick and His Works	46
3:1:1 Kubrick’s Art of Adoption	47
3:2 Structure and Style	50
3:2:1 The Narrative	50
3:2:2 Language, Music and Movement	52
3:3 <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> as a Depiction of the Postmodern	57
3:3:1 <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> as a discussion about Human Nature	59
3:3:2 Violence at the End	62
3:3:3 Non- relational Sexuality	64
3:3:4 A Matter of Free Will	66
3:3:5 To Watch the Unwatchable	71

3:4 Apocalyptic Visions	73
Chapter 4: <i>Apocalypse Now</i>	77
4:1 Taking it to the End - the Making of <i>Apocalypse Now</i>	77
4:2 War on Film - War as Spectacle	81
4:2:1 <i>Apocalypse Now</i> as War - More Real than the Real War	84
4:3 <i>Apocalypse Now</i> and the <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	86
4:3:1 Conrad's Narrative and Coppola's Vision	88
4:3:2 The Narrative	91
4:3:3 The Characters	95
4:3:3:1 Kurtz, Marlow, and Willard	95
4:3:3:2 Chief and Chef	97
4:3:3:3 Clean and Lance	98
4:4 Ritual and Myth at the End	100
4:4:1 Death of Nature as a Mythological Theme	100
4:4:2 Reading <i>Apocalypse Now</i> through Eliot	102
4:4:3 The Killing of Kurtz	104
4:5 <i>Apocalypse Now</i> as an Apocalypse	106
Chapter 5: <i>Crash</i> - a Postmodern Apocalypse	109
5:1 Narrative Versus image - The Written and the Visual	110
5:2 The Written Versus the Visual in <i>Crash</i>	110
5:3 Construction of Identity in <i>Crash</i>	113
5:3:1 <i>Crash</i> as a metaphor for the new life	115
5:3:2 Born Again, the Crash Victim in Hospital	119
5:4 Sexuality as Pornography	121
5:4:1 A Desire Leading Nowhere	123
5:4:2 The Communion of Human Flesh and Technology	126
5:5 <i>Crash</i> as an Existential Love-Story	129
5:6 The Sacred	130
5:6:1 The Prophet or High Priest	130
5:6:2 Ritual and Sacramentality in <i>Crash</i>	131
5:7 The Apocalypse of <i>Crash</i>	135
5:7:1 The Voyeuristic Lens of the Camera	135

5:7:2 Language Reassembling Images	138
5:8 Domestication or Apocalyptic	141
Chapter 6: The survival and transformation of the apocalypse	144
6:1 On Eating the Scroll	146
6:2 From dying metaphor to living image	148
6:3 The Ethical Absence that is a Presence	151
Bibliography	152

Chapter 1

What is the Apocalypse Anyway?

Six o'clock - TV hour. Don't get caught in foreign towers.
 Slash and burn, return, listen to yourself churn.
 Locking in, uniforming, book burning, blood letting.
 Every motive escalate. Automotive incinerate.
 Light a candle, light a votive. Step down, step down.
 Watch your heel crush, crushed, uh-oh, this means no fear cavalier.
 Renegade steer clear! A tournament, tournament, a tournament of lies.
 Offer me solutions, offer me alternatives and I decline.

It's the end of the world as we know it.
 It's the end of the world as we know it.
 It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.¹

Today, almost 2000 years after the writing of *The Book of Revelation* and Mark's urgent call, telling us to 'watch' as the end unfolds, *The Book of Revelation* and the Apocalypse continue to challenge and interest us. The Apocalypse has always had a secure place in the realms of popular culture where it has emerged in social movements, art and literature. The word apocalypse has been associated with the weird and violent as well as with the obscure and fantastic, and its vivid and seductive imagery has lent its power to a variety of movements throughout the history of Christianity.² The apocalyptic texts have been seen as problematic since the beginning of Christianity as a result of their tendency to influence extreme movements and individuals, hence they have always existed on the fringe of official religious practice. The questionable status of the apocalyptic texts has often resulted in their exclusion from the canon, the early church excluded apocalypses such as the Apocalypses of Paul and Peter, and Martin Luther among others wanted to exclude it from the canon, and many times the papal authority has attempted to suppress apocalyptically charged movements. This tendency to exclude or overlook the apocalyptic writings may be seen as a result of the declining eschatological hope during certain times but it might also be due to the great potential they have for fuelling political

¹ 'It's the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine)', song by REM on their 1987 Album, *Document*.

² Klaus Koch, 'What is apocalyptic? An attempt at a preliminary definition', (1972), in Paul D Hanson (ed.), *Visionaries and their Apocalypses. Issues in Religion and Theology*, part 2 (Philadelphia/London: Fortress Press, SPCK, 1983), p 16.

and religious extremes.³ In contrast to the popular interest in the apocalypse, theological study has often neglected the study of the apocalyptic, something I would argue is still the case today. As a result, like many of my generation, my first significant encounter with the apocalypse was through the *'apocalypse of Hollywood'*. However, in the 21st century we are living with the constant reminder of the apocalypse, in sectarian movements, environmental disaster, nuclear threats, global warming and terrorism, things often discussed and brandished as apocalyptic with or without their biblical references. This apocalypse of the postmodern is an apocalypse of urgency and fear, as well as of defeat and cynicism. This is reflected in contemporary events such as when President Bush sets out to fight his apocalyptic enemy in his war on terrorism, or when others like the REM song, take the defeatist or cynical approach of 'it's the end of the world as we know it- and I feel fine'.⁴

This thesis is to attempt to unravel what the contemporary apocalypse is and how it presents itself in the format of film. Further I wish to discuss how the 'classical apocalypse' has lent itself and its characteristics to its contemporary counterpart and whether this has left the contemporary apocalypse an empty shell without content, or revived and revitalised the apocalyptic imagery as well as the theological challenge that the apocalypse poses. My concern is the contemporary apocalypse as portrayed in the films here chosen and I do not set out to survey the 'classic apocalypse' and the apocalyptic texts of the Bible or to give an account of film theory. The interest here is not contemporary theology and the contemporary theological theories used are only used as examples of theories available to the study of contemporary apocalyptic and should not be seen as exclusive. My aim is to highlight the different ways these films use the 'classic apocalypse' freely without the restraints of the traditional theological framework. Hence the theories used to read these films are using an equally free definition of theological theory such as Thomas Altizer, Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, and Robert Detweiler. In the study of the contemporary apocalypse on film it is important to dispense with ideas of high culture/popular culture and instead consider both content and response. My role is not that of a film-critic but of a theologian seeking to understand the

³ Ibid, pp 17- 18.

⁴ A title that has teased me throughout my work is the *'A Rebirth of Images'* from a book by Austin Farrer, a title that seems strangely appropriate when taking into account the apocalypse of the modern which again and again reinvents itself. Farrer looks upon *The Book of Revelation* as a book written with great care and genius, creating patterns that reveal God the Artist in the same instant as it creates new images. The mystery of the apocalypse lies in the rebirth of images that reinvent and resemble, creating a surface hiding the abyss below. And herein lies the great problem with the apocalyptic text that is at the same time only surface and yet hints at a depth that always escapes the readers

apocalypse of our times and the various expressions it might take. The apocalypse has always been attractive to popular culture, which has risen to the challenge of apocalyptic; and apocalyptic theology has often appeared outside the boundaries of the theological academy and the realms of academic study. The popularity of the apocalypse outside the boundaries of academic study has led scholars to define apocalypse more narrowly in order to bring it back to its Biblical roots. This has led to a gulf between the apocalypse discussed in academic study and the more popularised usage of the term. What is apparent is that the unease over the popular apocalyptic that academia suffers, is not shared by popular culture, which has taken on the challenge and created its own responses, or what might be described as apocalyptic theology, in art, literature and film outside the boundaries of the Church and the academy. In his book *The Power of Images* (1989) David Freedberg argues for a departure from the tradition of an academic critical study of art to a study that takes into account the response of an audience to images.⁵ Following this discussion my aim is to attempt an analysis that emphasises the critical investigation of these films alongside the study of the power of the imagery in these films, and the response we give them. This I believe is important since the urgency and the power of the apocalypse lie in the immediacy of the threat as well as in the emotions stimulated by these visions. The apocalypse cannot be confined to high art or the Bible and it lies in the very nature of the apocalyptic to use the means possible to express its conflicting characteristics of appealing as well as appalling. And herein lie the conflict that make the apocalypse into the confusing and complicated theme it is, attempting to say what is unsayable, think the unthinkable and make us see that which ultimately is unwatchable, namely the face of God, or the very absence of the same. The Book of Revelation is often read as an extended metaphor for a particular time and a particular situation and yet it is a piece of literature that contains metaphors translatable for any time and any place. Similarly the films discussed in this thesis should be seen as a metaphors of their own times, containing the imagery and the language of their particular eras. The nature of the apocalyptic text is metaphorical and meaning escape the reader, always moving in front of the text making a true reading is impossible. Herein lies the strength of the metaphoric text/film: it escapes interpretation, it challenges and intrigues and most importantly, reinvents itself in every new situation.

attempts of understanding and interpretation. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (London: Dacre P, 1949).

⁵ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Reading and watching the apocalypse becomes a constant search for meaning, for metaphors that reinvent and transform themselves and an attempt to reveal what is concealed.

Thomas Altizer as a 'death of God theologian' has contributed greatly to the debate on the apocalyptic and its standing within the Christian tradition. He argues that theology has to totally re-affirm the profane and instead see it as a new manifestation of the sacred (an argument that is crucial and internal to this thesis). He finds that the apocalyptic is crucial to modern society itself and sees the great thinkers of the modern movement such as Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche as great apocalyptic thinkers. Following this he argues that the apocalyptic always has been an important part of Christianity and that contemporary Christianity has failed to recognise its apocalyptic nature. Still the apocalyptic has survived in philosophy and art, and there is a need to retrieve this apocalyptic if theology is not going to be alienated from both Bible and culture in a contemporary society where we are confronted with the end of the world as well as the end of history.⁶ Altizer sees philosophy and literature as places where the apocalyptic has survived. I would like to venture a bit further and look at contemporary culture, especially film, to find expressions of the apocalyptic of our times. The revitalised interest in the end is reflected in contemporary culture and film and contributes to the creation of imagery and language that describes the contemporary apocalypse. The fear and anticipation of society is reflected in these films which also provide images and a language that articulate the horror and fear that we are unable to imagine and verbalise. Film media provides a language and images to describe the end, and as a result the apocalypse is presented as an historical event, a nuclear holocaust or another imaginable horror, quite far from the classical description of the apocalypse as an a-historical event which is unknown or unimaginable. A-historical in the sense that human history is only a little part of God's history and that the time scope of the apocalypse is wider than the individual persons history and hence take place at anytime, anywhere. Altizer argues that a rebirth of theology must take place in the contemporary world. This contemporary world is one born out of the realisation that God is dead, thus it is as a result a nihilistic and atheist world. This postmodern realisation that God is dead makes it possible and even necessary to form a contemporary theology aiming at the absolutely new, not avoiding the end.⁷ In

⁶ Thomas Altizer, *Genesis and Apocalypse: A Theological Voyage Toward Authentic Christianity* (Louisville Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 9-12. Thomas J. J. Altizer, 'Apocalypticism and Modern Thinking,' *Journal for Christian Theological Research* [http://apu.edu/~CTRF/articles/1997_articles/altizer.html] 2:2 (1997).

⁷ Altizer (1990), pp 12-14, 28-30

Thomas Altizer's words: 'So that if an original Christian apocalypticism is truly reborn in the modern world, that rebirth is inseparable from the death of God, even as a uniquely Christian apocalypse is inseparable from the Crucifixion.'⁸ Following this statement, a theology that would be true to itself, and its apocalyptic core, would acknowledge that at its heart lies the death of God, which also is a new beginning. For Altizer the death of God, the crucifixion of Christ is also the death of death, which is realised in the resurrection. Through the crucifixion death is conquered and resurrection is possible, a resurrection that is the resurrection of God. To cite Altizer: '... for this is the voice of the resurrected Christ and therefore the voice of the crucified Christ, the voice of that Christ who is the crucified God.'⁹ This view of Christ would free Jesus from his tomb, where the Church and Christendom have sealed him. Instead of the transcendent and solitary God, and a salvation history that is past, worshipped by Christendom a new beginning is possible through a radical theology and a new beginning which also is the apocalypse. Following this the advent of modernity is to be understood as an apocalyptic event, starting with the realisation of the freedom that the death of God brings and which at the same time ends the old world as it ushers in the new world.¹⁰

Where Altizer has chosen to look at modern literature and philosophy as places where the apocalypse has not only survived but is thriving, I have chosen the field of contemporary film. What can be argued is that the apocalypse of today has continuity with the 'classical apocalypse' by sharing its compelling appeal and seducing form as well as its literary traits. Even if society today is a different one from the society of the 'classical apocalypse', apocalyptic literature, philosophy and film manage to transcend the differences and adapt themselves to different times and contexts. With religious experience and expression changing with the times the genre of the apocalyptic is constantly giving way to ever-new apocalyptic expressions. Following this development there is a need for an apocalyptic theology that does not avoid the end, but responds to the changes, and hence is reborn in the contemporary atheistic, and possibly nihilistic society.¹¹

⁸ Thomas JJ Altizer, 1997 'Apocalypticism and Modern Thinking' in *Journal for Christian Theological Research* (http://apu.edu/~CTRF/articles/1997_articles/altizer.html) 2:2 (1997), pp 9

⁹ Altizer (1990), pp 70-72

¹⁰ Thomas JJ Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p 182.

¹¹ Altizer (1990), p. 13.

1:1 Defining Apocalypse

What we colloquially call the apocalypse or apocalyptic is often something quite different to the theological definition given by theologians and biblical scholars, and we can conclude that there is a constant movement between this wider popular use of the term and the narrower theological definition. Popular culture frequently uses the term ‘apocalypse’ or ‘apocalyptic’ to categorise religious movements, film and literature or simply trends and events in society that can be remotely linked, and as a result empties the term of its original meaning and connection to the biblical text. This wide usage of the term in the context of popular culture does however feed on similar images of decay, disaster, social collapse and moral breakdown, just as the classical apocalyptic literature and millenarian movements in history do.¹²

Since Norman Cohn wrote *In the Pursuit of the Millennium* (1970) discussing the wide usage of the term apocalyptic and its representation in popular religious movements the connotations and descriptions of apocalypsis have become even wider. Today in facing the millennium shift as well as all the literature, films, games and other products driving on the millenarianism and the apocalyptic of Judaism and Christianity the concept has become increasingly misused and blurred. This wide use of the term has become a problem to scholars who attempt to look at the apocalyptic as a phenomenon closely, and exclusively, linked to the Judeo-Christian texts. As a result, biblical scholars have aimed at limiting the way the term apocalypse is used by creating a definition that excludes the more ‘populist’ use.

The problem in following a free and wide usage of the term apocalypse in popular culture has resulted in biblical scholars attempting to define it more narrowly as a biblical, literary genre. This task leads Collins to formulate the following definition in *Semeia 14* (1979), which has become a definition widely accepted by theologians who focus on the apocalyptic as a biblical genre. ‘Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory

¹² Millenarian movements support an eschatology that believes a second-coming of Christ will establish a 1000 year kingdom on earth followed by judgement. Millenarianism, similar to the apocalyptic, is widely used and attempts to formulate a definition have often proved difficult, with the result that either limits the concept to a literary genre or makes it far too wide, taking into account every possible notion of the end. Norman Cohn argues that it has recently become common among scholars to use millenarianism in a more liberal way and the term has become a convenient way of referring to a certain type of salvationism. Cohn welcomes this shift and it is in the more liberal sense that he uses the term. He sets up a series of criteria that a millenarian movement has to conform to. The requirements are as follows: (A). Millenarian movements are collective and salvation is enjoyed by the faithful as a community. (B). Salvation is terrestrial and is realised on earth. (C). Salvation is imminent. (D). The salvation and transformation is total and changes all aspects of life to perfection. (E). Salvation is brought from the outside by a supernatural power. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd, 1970, revised edition (1957)) p. 13, and Mitchell G Reddish (ed.), *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), pp. 19-24. See Cohn for discussion on Millenarianism.

literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, spatial insofar it involves another, supernatural world.’¹³

The debate following both *Semeia 14* and *36* added a dimension to the apocalyptic as a mindset that is used to understand the world, but it is also a mindset expressed in movements of an apocalyptic nature.¹⁴ This attempt meant that scholars tried to isolate the apocalypse to a biblical genre and a mindset directly influenced by this genre, neglecting the claims of popular culture to the apocalypse. The distinction between a literary and theological apocalypse and a seemingly secular one is false since this does not take into account the presence and importance of the popular apocalyptic which bridges the gap between sacred and secular as well as religious and profane. Collins and others involved in *Semeia 14* and *36* focus on the literary definition, and see it necessary to comprehend apocalyptic movements as movements influenced by, or reflecting the literary tradition. This proves difficult and unrealistic since many of the apocalyptic movements are part of popular religion where the connections with the apocalyptic texts are freely interpreted and often tangential.

The meaning of the term apocalypse is simply revelation and in a theological context the term has been used to signify a particular genre of revelatory biblical writings such as *The Book of Revelation* and the Book of Daniel, writings seeing themselves as revealing God’s purpose in the end of times.¹⁵ The Apocalypse is a secret, a divine disclosure about the end of the world and of the heavenly state, a revealing to human beings which was previously concealed and only known to God. The apocalyptic today is used in a widening context, creating problems as well as opportunities, and it has underlined the need for a wider definition than the ones provided by biblical studies. However a wider definition is also problematic since it needs to limit the concept of the apocalyptic to a workable term that is still thoroughly theological. The understanding of the apocalypse is wider today due to changing historical, social, economical and psychological conditions of contemporary life. The images of a highly technological

¹³ John J Collins, ‘Introduction: Towards a Morphology of a Genre’ in *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism*. Vol 14, 1979. John J Collins (ed.), (The Society of Biblical Literature), p. 9.

¹⁴ Florentino Garcia Martinez, ‘Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls’ in John J. Collins (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Volume 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 165.

¹⁵ John J Collins (1979), pp. 1-20. For more discussion on the classical definition of apocalyptic see *Semeia*, Vol 14. For a discussion on the classical genre of the apocalyptic and examples of apocalyptic texts see Christopher Rowland *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) and

society running amok, the self-destruction of nations and the possibilities of mass-destruction influence the way we are thinking about the apocalypse, and the end of the world has become more of an absolute end than a new beginning. As a result a definition of the apocalyptic in this work has to take into account the characteristics of classical apocalyptic as well as the changes that contemporary society has brought with itself. The contemporary apocalyptic is as heavily dependent on the 'classical apocalypse' as it is dependent on the imagery provided by contemporary society and as a result a wide definition of the 'apocalyptic' is needed which takes into account the process of secularisation, as well as the de-contextualisation of Judeo-Christian concepts.¹⁶

1:2 The 'classical apocalypse'

The 'classical apocalypse' as a literary genre, carries certain characteristics that defines it as apocalyptic literature. These traits are in varying degrees represented in the contemporary apocalypse as presented in film and literature. One of these traits is that the apocalypse often manifests itself in the form of auditions or visions where the main character has 'the future' or 'the truth' revealed to himself whilst he is asleep or in an altered state of mind. What is seen, heard and experienced is so particular and so overwhelming that it changes the individual's life forever, and it is both the message and the medium that it is transferred through that leaves the receiver forever changed. In order to cope with and understand the experience the recipient has to internalise the message in different ways, and the most remarkable example is Ezekiel who has to eat the scroll to incorporate the message. After internalising the message a report on the recipient's physical and mental state follows, and for Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:1-6) what was sweet in the mouth becomes bitter in the stomach, implying that the message is confusing and conflicting for the recipient.¹⁷ The seer/hearer then attempts to make sense of the experience and draw conclusions for his readers or explains to his community what he has come to understand.¹⁸ Another important characteristic of the apocalyptic genre is the language that is used, the language in itself is metaphorical and evasive, constructed by images that avoid capture, slipping away from the reader's attempt at interpretation. The

Mitchell G Reddish (ed.), *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Not only are the concepts of the apocalyptic and millenarianism problematic in the context of the modern or postmodern western culture but also (as Bryan Wilson rightly points out) they are problematic in the context of non-Christian cultures which carry the traits of millenarian or apocalyptic movements. His investigation of millenarianism outside the Western world raises many important questions, which need to be taken into account. Bryan R Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest Among Tribal and Third World Peoples* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1973), pp. 484-486.

¹⁷ Klaus Koch (1983), pp, 21-22.

roots of this language are to be found among the writings of the prophets. However in the apocalyptic texts it has evolved into a multi-layered and intricate language that is metaphorical and heavily contained, but is also disruptive and strongly visual.¹⁹ The apocalyptic has a concealed meaning but at the same time is a revelation of that which is concealed, a revealing that through its evasiveness and ever changing quality is also a concealment. The apocalypse then reveals the future and God's plan but in the same instant conceals, which creates both a desire to find what is hidden and a fear that a revelation would be of nothing, of absence. This dual quality of the apocalyptic is part of its power and attraction but also part and parcel of the difficulty of containing and representing, a quality that makes the apocalypse disruptive and uncomfortable.

In 1972 Koch attempted to construct a definition of the apocalypse as a literary type arguing that this particular form of writing carries certain distinctive features that distinguish it from other forms of writing. He argued that the apocalypse is not only revelation but it also implies a participation in the final and unique coming of the New and of God. The apocalypse is a revelation of the divine revelation, which means that humans have a great part in this event being the elect to receive this heavenly disclosure. As a result the apocalypse cannot be seen as simply a literary type but also a prophetic mindset, an argument he tries to encompass in his definition of the apocalyptic as 'speculation which-often in allegorical form...aims to interpret the course of history and to reveal the end of the world'²⁰

The literary apocalypse can be seen as giving rise to a mindset that influences the way the reader looks at history and interprets her contemporary world. The writings dominated by an urgent expectation of an imminent change of the world, influence the reader to look for signs of this violent overthrow believed to take place in an impending future, effecting a change sudden and all encompassing.²¹ The end appears as a vast cosmic catastrophe where everything worldly is violently disrupted or as a world of increasing terror finally resulting in world judgement.²² In the texts the end time is closely connected to human and cosmic history where the apocalyptically charged individual searches for signs or even takes on an outlook on history that divides time into periods that have been predetermined from the beginning of creation, hence placing her

¹⁸ Ibid, pp, 22-23.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 29.

²¹ Ibid, p. 25.

²² Ibid, p. 25.

own life in the larger history of the apocalypse.²³ The end of the world is not a new theme and throughout history there are millenarian movements and apocalyptic premonitions. The apocalypse has been an important part of popular religion for as long as people have struggled with thoughts about their own existence. In early Christianity the apocalyptic was a significant part of belief. In his work on apocalypticism in the western tradition Bernard McGinn argues that apocalyptic belief and an apocalyptic mentality were the driving forces behind the foundation of a Western European culture. Western European culture was a product of leaders who were expecting the last judgement and the end rather than what other scholars argue was an attempt to form a new society.²⁴

From the time of the prophets apocalyptic and millenarian beliefs became increasingly popular and by the 2nd century BCE they had become central in religious and political life. It is in the writings of the prophets we find the seed of apocalyptic and millenarian thinking which was to reach its height in *The Book of Revelation* 400 years later. The prophets introduced the tradition of interpreting contemporary events in the light of the future, seeing them as signs revealing the fate of the Jewish people, placing them in the larger scheme of salvation history.²⁵ With the fall of the Temple interest in the apocalypse started to subside within Judaism, and this decline can be seen in the light of a failed promise, where the loss of the place of worship and sacrifice, as well as the scattering of the Jewish people, ending what was left of hope for a messiah and salvation. The Christians, now singled out as a new religion rather than a Jewish sect continued to worship the dream of Daniel, and were inspired by apocalyptic writings. In these early days of Christianity messianism was more urgent and immediate than it later became. An indication of this can be seen in Mark 13 which gives witness to an expectation that is more urgent, as well as in Paul's letter where he argues that there is no time for earthly concerns since the return of Christ is at hand.²⁶ During the 2nd century the immediacy of Christ's return was toned down as a result of the failing prophecy, and the Second Epistle of Peter (150 C.E.) suggests a less sure and immediate return of the saviour. As the promise failed, apocalyptic and millenarian ideas become increasingly theologised with Irenaeus in the 2nd century, solidifying the millenarian belief of an end where the unrighteous would be doomed and the righteous blessed.²⁷

²³ Ibid, p. 26.

²⁴ Bernard McGinn, 'The End of the World and the Beginning of Christendom' in Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the End of the World*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1995), pp 58-59.

²⁵ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, (London: Temple Smith Ltd, 1970 (1957)), pp. 20-21.

²⁶ Norman Cohn (1970), pp. 26-29.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 26-27.

Throughout the medieval period apocalyptic writings became increasingly influential, many of which were based on St. Augustine's ideas of seven ages, derived from the seven days of creation, where the contemporary age was the seventh. His theology about the end became the foundation for the medieval church making the time following the crucifixion a time of waiting, watchfulness and repentance.²⁸ Writers like Joachim of Fiore, Nostradamus and Savanorala became influential but were never accepted by the papacy. Majorie Reeves points out that both intense theological debate about heretical issues and attempts by the papacy to suppress apocalyptic prophecy show the real influence of apocalyptic movements.²⁹ In the 16th and 17th centuries apocalyptic imagery and texts became accessible to a larger group of people through the use of the printing press. With the publishing of Luther's translation of the Bible in 1522 (illustrated by Lucas Cranach the Elder), a new trend of illustrated and translated Bibles began which influenced the apocalyptic imagination.³⁰ In the 17th century millenarianism reached a high point again, and it was mainly among Protestant thinkers that the trend of relating the symbols and prophecies in the Biblical apocalyptic writings to historical persons and institutions became strong. This movement was political in its character, and crucial social and political events were seen as signs that the end was approaching. Different forms of Millenarianism emerged on the continent, and with the emergence of Puritan control in 1640 the movement gained ground rapidly and became influential in England. Movements such as the Ranters and Diggers prophesised God's kingdom on earth and the Fifth Monarchy actively sought to bring the end about.³¹

From the dawn of industrialism and the beginning of a new capitalist society the apocalypse displayed more secular imagery, and was fuelled more and more by the new industrial society which also influenced the artistic expression of the apocalyptic. An example of such influence is the figure of Benjamin West who in the 1770s started a huge series of paintings on the topic of revealed religion with the scenario set in his own time. The works were never finished since they started to cause concern among the clergy and the royalty who saw in them a possible political radicalism in the wake of the French

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 28-29.

²⁹ Majorie Reeves, 'Pattern and Purpose in History in the Late Medieval and Renaissance Periods' in Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the End of the World*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1995), pp 90-93, 100-102.

³⁰ Jonathan Alexander, 'The Last Things: Representing the Unrepresentable.' In Francis Carey (Ed), *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come*. (British Museum Press, London, 1999) pp 144-146

³¹ Robin Barnes, 'Images of Hope and Despair: Western Apocalypticism: ca 1500-1800.' In B. McGinn(ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*. Volume 2. *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*. (New York: Continuum 1998), p. 168. The Fifth Monarchy were probably the most radical of the millenarian groups and they argued for the end to be brought about with military actions. The Diggers and Ranters were also radical millenarian groups influenced by revolutionary millenarianism.

revolution.³² Another example of an artist influenced by the times is William Blake, who rejected rationalism, order and propriety which he saw as the dominating feature of the polite culture, and who found madness a challenge to a world of orthodoxy.³³ What makes Blake different from his predecessors is his style of painting, and his freedom from the source, as his paintings show a greater independence from the Bible and the literal style of depiction used by earlier painters.³⁴ At the same time, the French revolution inspired a millennial hope which had to do with the end of the oppressing social order of the society rather than the world as such. Conveying the spiritual ideal to a worldly realm brought with it the ideas of a New Jerusalem and utopian beliefs in a better if not perfect society.³⁵ Moreover, apocalyptic writings were read and criticised in a new light, in France the *Journal Prophetique* was devoted to showing the revolution as the event bringing on the new millennium. On the continent and in Britain the revolution was widely debated, millenarian groups flourished, and the unfolding events were read in the light of the Second Coming.³⁶ The millenarianism also effected literature and can be seen in the increased use of the Biblical apocalyptic writings in authors including Coleridge, Milton and Newton.³⁷

There is a distinctive trend throughout history of apocalyptic thinking, a trend that has been more or less influential at different times. A new historicist approach would link the appearance of apocalyptic writing and tendencies with times of pressure stemming from historical events and technological advances. Sometimes more dormant than at other times the apocalypse has always been a component of our culture, waiting to emerge and set the imagination aflame in times of social, political and religious unrest. There is a remarkable continuity of apocalyptic belief and expression throughout history, something which makes Kermode see history as apocalyptic where three elements of an apocalyptic set (being the sociological acceptance of apocalyptic structures), canonical apocalypse (classical apocalyptic writing), and interpretative apocalypse (other apocalyptic material and ideas added by time) interact. This interaction, he argues, is something ever ongoing, and this means that the apocalyptic is always present in society

³² David Bindman, 'The English Apocalypse' in Frances Carey (ed.), *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come*, (London: British Museum Press, 1999), pp 212-214.

³³ Harrison, J. F. C. *The Second Coming; Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London and Henley: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1979), pp. 216.

³⁴ Milton Klonsky, *William Blake; The Seer and his Visions* (London: Orbis Publ Ltd, 1977), pp, 9-11.

³⁵ Elinor Shaffer, 'Secular Apocalypse; Prophets and Apocalypics at the End of the Eighteenth Century' and Popkin, 'Seventeenth Century Millenarianism' in Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the End of the World* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1995), pp 137-139.

³⁶ Barnes (1998), pp, 178-179.

³⁷ Elinor Shaffer (1995), pp 144-146.

but more or less so at different times.³⁸ During pressure points in history when humans feel threatened by evils such as war, economic depression and changing values, the apocalyptic becomes a framework through which to read and understand history and society. The apocalypse then offers both comfort, in terms of providing an understanding of the events, and fear in knowing that what is ahead is the end to everything as we know it. This leads to Mark 13, sometimes called the Little Apocalypse, which like many contemporary apocalyptic works is a depiction of how we live at the end, where the only thing we can do is to watch and wait to see what will be brought about.

1:3 The Works of Classic Apocalyptic Literature

When I discuss the 'classical apocalypse' I refer to the biblical apocalyptic literature as well as the apochryphal apocalyptic literature. The aim is define some of the characteristics that are particular to apocalyptic literature and which have been transferred into contentemporary apocalyptic where they have been transformed and developed. These texts set the agenda for how the apocalyptic is perceived and which characteristics it uses to express its particularity. There are a wide variety of apocalyptic texts and I find it necessary to limit myself to a discussion of some of the many works in order to see which traits and themes are characteristic of the Biblical apocalyptic. The classical apocalyptic works can be seen as a continuation of the prophetic tradition which in the 3rd Century BCE which was succeeded by a new apocalyptic form of writing, and the astronomical book of Enoch (1 Enoch 72-82) and the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36) marks the beginning of this new genre. In The Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 93; 1-10 91; 11-17) we find an historical apocalyptic setting, dividing the end time into periods, but it also includes other important traits of apocalyptic literature in the form of visions, angels and tablets of heaven. Further the Animal apocalypse in 1 Enoch 85-90 elaborates on the visions, offering significant traits of the apocalyptic in the forms of symbolic language and the use of symbolism, where animals are used as symbols for people, and it is in this text that the first distinct messianic reference occurs. One of the more famous apocalyptic works, The Book of Daniel, probably written as a result of the Maccabean revolt in 165 BCE, shows how the language and the sign reading of the prophets had developed into an elaborate vision, delivered in a metaphorical language particular to

³⁸ Frank Kermode, 'Apocalypse and the Modern' in , Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Visions of Apocalypse. End or Rebirth?* (London/New York: Holmes & Meier 1985), pp. 85-87.

apocalyptic writings.³⁹ The style of Daniel becomes a mould from which many later apocalypses are constructed supporting a periodisation of history, highly elusive and powerful imagery, and a language that emphasises imagery over narrative. Daniel's book puts an end to the old pre-apocalyptic Neolithic four fold view of history, replacing it with a quicker and linear perception of history where an end of the world is fast approaching in a more linear and modern outlook on time, set into the context of salvation history.⁴⁰ With The Similitudes and the parables of Enoch 1 (Enoch 37-71) we find the earliest texts that provide a more extended and complicated depiction of an messianic individual. Since the text was found in Qumran the dating is debated but it does provide four different titles for the messiah that have become characteristic of him; the righteous one, the chosen one, messiah (anointed one) and the son of man. With 2nd Baruch and The Apocalypse of Abraham we see how events in society influenced the author and the writing of apocalyptic literature. The Apocalypse of Abraham was written after the war against Rome at the end of 1st or beginning of 2nd century CE whilst Baruch witnesses the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 CE.⁴¹

Within these early apocalypses there is a religious development from the early apocalypticism to the early mystical texts within Judaism, and when the apocalyptic tradition ceased a few decades after the destruction of the second Jewish Temple in 70 CE the emerging mysticism took over.⁴² This ending of the writing of apocalyptic texts within the Jewish tradition following the fall of the Temple is noteworthy for the understanding of how apocalyptic literature works. For the Jewish tradition the fall of the Temple meant both a loss of place of worship and a loss of sacrifice, a circumstance that positions Judaism in a situation of atonement, removing hope for God's intervention in history, forcing a new way of looking at divine intervention. With this loss of hope for God's intervention in historical events, the apocalypse becomes impossible, and a redefinition of faith and worship is necessary. Seen in the light of the fall of the Temple and the loss of hope as well as a place of worship and sacrifice, the need for redefinition was great and in this light the connection between the apocalypses and the mystic Hekhalot literature is plausible. The two forms of literature are separated by the

³⁹ Norman Cohn, 1970 (1957), pp. 20-21.

⁴⁰ Damian Thompson, *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London: Sinclair Stephenson, 1996), p. 18.

⁴¹ James C VanderKam, 'Messianism and Apocalypticism' in John J Collins (Ed) *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*. (New York: Continuum, 1998) p205-213.

destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. which signals a new era of national and nationalistic desire and the end of religious and social self-definition that had the Temple at its centre. The Qumranites are a good example of this, and their liturgy is best understood when the inability to attend the Temple became a reality, and this resulted in a liturgy that recites a heavenly liturgy instead of an earthly. Writers of apocalyptic thoughts linked their own views to those of their predecessors and it is not surprising that the same scriptural references and motifs exist in both apocalyptic and mystic literature.⁴³

1:4 A Working Definition

The meanings attached to the term 'apocalypse' in contemporary society are diverse. Popular culture frequently uses the term 'apocalypse' or 'apocalyptic' to categorise religious movements, film, music and literature. A variety of examples can be given from music, literature and film as well as from sectarian groups who view themselves as forming part of an elect group. Not too long ago, the sect 'Heavens Gate', committed mass suicide as a result of an apocalyptic belief mixing biblical mythology with belief in UFOs and evolution. The terrorist attack on September 11 was eagerly read in the light of Nostradamus' predictions, and President Bush has taken on an apocalyptic rhetoric in his 'war against terrorism' where countries and leaders are defined as evil in contrast to America.⁴⁴ Other examples are the various sects who set the date for the final tribulations and await their salvation or doom, or ironic (yet serious) comments on contemporary society like the lyrics from REM cited earlier. The interest in the apocalypse today is mainly an occupation of what we often define as popular culture and popular religion, and not by institutionalised theology which rather tends to steer away from the theme.⁴⁵

The problem facing us here is how to formulate a definition that is not so narrow that it excludes anything outside the biblical apocalyptic writings and that on the other hand is not so wide that it includes every cultural notion of the end. Of use in this task I turn to Lee Quinby's work on genealogy where he shows that the contemporary apocalypse is different from its classical origin but it does not automatically follow that in the postmodern age it has been diluted. Just because the apocalypse has changed it does

⁴² Michael Mach, 'From Apocalypticism to Early Jewish Mysticism' in John J Collins (Ed) *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*. (New York: Continuum, 1998) p 229-230.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 258-259.

⁴⁴ Steven Everts, 'Why Should Bush take Europe Seriously.' In *The Observer* 17 February 2002. And Mark Lawson, 'Nostradamus Tops the Best sellers'. In *The Guardian*, September 15 2001.

⁴⁵ Louis Parkinson Zamora, *The Apocalyptic Vision in America. Interdisciplinary Essays on Myth and Culture* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, Ohio, 1982), p. 6.

not mean that it is less authentic or unique, such a restrictive view would fail to recognise that apocalyptic images and mind-sets continue to attract and compel. He argues for an understanding of the apocalyptic as ‘a regime of truth that operates within a field of power relations and prescribes a particular moral behaviour.’ This means that the apocalypse is a discourse with its own rules and conventions that help in the formation of meaning, the apocalypse can then be seen as a continuous discourse that beckons, challenges and is remarkably persistent. Quinby also acknowledges the presence of different forms of apocalyptic and identifies three major contemporary forms that focus on different components of the apocalypse: the divine apocalypse focuses on the divine as an instigator of the end; the technological is an apocalypse where technology either brings humanity to the end and utter devastation or becomes the saviour; finally the ironic apocalypse is one where absurdity and nihilism rules and where dystopia is transformed into irony or cynicism.⁴⁶ This loose definition is rather satisfactory since it offers a possibility of seeing continuity in history as well as in the literary and artistic dimension, and does not devalue the contemporary apocalypse but acknowledges its continuing appeal and power.

The apocalyptic, in the way I intend to use it here, is therefore located somewhere between the definition provided by Biblical studies and the very wide popular definition. The apocalyptic is then not only a synonym for disaster or chaos, but has a strong connection to the revelation of the end that is not only a disaster but also a rebirth and a new beginning. It is connected to total renewal and a fundamental change of life into something we cannot comprehend and by forces that are outside our control. It is both a physical and mental revolution; life cannot become what it was before as something has radically changed. Luis Parkinson Zamora argues that in the historical development of apocalyptic thought there is a relation of the myth, or the ‘classical apocalypse’, to its sociological and political context. Following this the resurgence of the apocalyptic in contemporary society is a predictable reaction to the social disruption and temporal uncertainty of contemporary life.⁴⁷ In this way the apocalypse is a result of the conflict between God’s history (human history as part of God’s greater plan) and historical/human desire where the apocalypse concerns itself with how humans as temporal beings are to respond to the changing forms of temporal reality and time as a

⁴⁶ Lee Quinby, *Anti- Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp xiv-xvi.

⁴⁷ Luis Parkinson Zamora, *Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S and Latin American Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p 11.

vehicle for God's purpose. The apocalypse could be seen as a speech chosen by history where the apocalypse is a speech that emerges out of and responds to the historical context. Apocalyptic then grows out of its surrounding society and is a mythical reflection and extrapolation of this society and its history, and the narrative structure of the apocalypse is an attempt to make the divine word a historical fact as well as making history reveal God.⁴⁸ It offers an attempt to satisfy the desire of the apocalypticist and the readers to control and understand that which lies beyond comprehension. As a result apocalyptic fiction deals with the ultimate end and the nature of both historical and narrative finality. This connection between narrative closure and historical closure creates a tension that results in a sense of urgency communicated by apocalyptic literature.⁴⁹ This approach of seeing the apocalypse in the light of myth that influences history expresses the continuity of apocalyptic from classical apocalyptic to contemporary depiction without diminishing the importance of contemporary apocalyptic.⁵⁰

1:5 The Apocalypse on Film

1:5:1 Film and Religion

Scholars from film studies as well as theology have conducted a significant amount of research in the field of religion and film. Most research has been on so called religious films, the grand narratives and great stories from the Bible. The approach from religious studies scholars has often been from a Biblical-studies perspective where comparisons with the biblical stories have been central. This approach has taken into account how Biblical mythology is transferred to film and how the Biblical narrative is used as a backbone from which to build the narrative in a film. This work by scholars such as Bruce Babington, Peter William Evans and John R May has served to outline and discuss Biblical epics and the religious symbolism of many of the great religious films.⁵¹ Similarly, many scholars have focused on the representations of Christ in cinema, serving to extrapolate and discuss the image or images of Christ in film focusing of more or less well defined 'Christ' figures, whether in the form of Max Von Sydow in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), the ironic Jesus in *The Life of Brian* (1979) or the more oblique

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp 12-13.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp 13-14.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 18.

⁵¹ Bruce Babington & Peter William Evans, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1993). Other works on the Biblical epics are Larry J Kreitzer's works *The Old Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) and *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield Academic

images of Christ in films like *Breaking the Waves* (1996) or *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).⁵² Others have surveyed films less concerned with the Biblical narrative and were more interested in issues of spirituality, ethics and other religious issues, and here Margaret Miles has contributed by dividing films into different categories depending on their relation to religion. Her categories concern issues such as religion as a social problem, ethics, issues of religious otherness, religiously motivated films etc.⁵³

What all these films have in common is that they deal with more or less explicit religious issues or Biblical themes that invite examination based on Biblical scholarship. This approach lets the Bible be the starting point of the examination, and looks at similarities and connection to Biblical narratives and themes. This makes the Bible the primary source, and the film a comment on this primary source. It sees cultural studies as a good partner to religious studies and film as a commentary on religion. Joel Martin and Conrad Oswald discuss in their collection of essays the lack of research in the field of religion and film that deal with religion, myth and symbolism. What is apparent is that film critics for a long time ignored religion in film, and film has been a neglected field by theologians. It was not until the 1980s that issues on film and religion were included in the American Academy of Religion's annual convention.⁵⁴ The aim for Martin and Oswald is to find an approach to religion and film that is applicable to not only 'religious' films but also on more popular film. They work with a model that combines the three approaches, ideological, mythological and theological, and they hope to achieve a fuller understanding of the complex relation between film and religion. Popular film today is not as concerned with Biblical narrative in the way many of the 'religious films' of the 1960-80s were, and many film viewers today are not as familiar with the great stories and Biblical themes as the older generation were. As a result the study of religion and film has to embrace films which are not overtly religious and deal with a wider understanding of religion and spirituality.⁵⁵ Changes in society have led to an increased unfamiliarity with Biblical stories as well as with traditional religious themes often featured in film

Press, 1993). See also Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hollywood Dreams and Biblical Stories* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁵² The works on Christ on film are numerous, and significant contributions have been made by the following scholars: Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997), Peter Malone, *Movie Christ and Antichrists* (New York: Crossroads, 1990), Richard Stern, *Saviour on the Silver Screen* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), Tatum W Barnes, *Jesus at the Movies, A Guide to the First Hundred Years* (Polebridge, 1997).

⁵³ Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, Massachusetts, 1986), pp. 19-21.

⁵⁴ Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Oswald, *Screening The Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film*. (San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), pp 1-4.

such as redemption, salvation, and judgement. Contemporary film audiences as well as film-makers come from a different background, fuelled by values obtained elsewhere than in the traditional institution of the church. As a result we need to find a way to discuss religion and film from a perspective that does not restrict film to the confines of theology and the Biblical narrative but which allows film to be an independent statement about religion. In addition to seeing film as a commentary on religion and theology it is necessary to allow film to be theologising and 'doing' theology more or less independent of the Church and the great traditions.

1:5:2 Hollywood Apocalypse - Film as Theology.

As a result of the shift from an apocalyptic informed by the Bible to a fascination influenced by different cultural apocalyptic expressions in media, film and literature the contemporary apocalypse has taken on a legacy of its own. The apocalypse has been represented on film many times over from the *Seventh Seal* (1957) to *The End of Days* (1999) to *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and the accounts vary to a great extent some keeping closer to the narrative of Revelation like *The Rapture* (1999) whilst others like *Blade Runner* (1982) interpret the sources more freely.⁵⁶ I would argue that some of these expressions in literature, art, and film are merely Hollywoodised feel-good apocalypses, with high entertainment value such as the *Terminator- Judgement Day* (1991) films but little theological thought. These films provide a vision of the apocalypse that is linear and which have a conclusion and features an end that often is an avoidance of the end or a narrow escape. Others on the other hand have taken on the challenge and the role of theologians becoming real and serious commentaries on the apocalypse like *Apocalypse Now* (1979). There are of course several distinctions between the apocalypse of Hollywood and the Biblical apocalypse, partly in that Hollywood often offers easier solutions, and a simpler narrative, where the aim is to escape, or prevent, the apocalypse (for instance in *End of Days*), rather than to trust in the judgement of God. These apocalypses often involve a hero, adopting the role of saviour such as in *Strange Days* (1995), but a saviour that has the continuity of the human race as his aim rather than the radical change that the 'classical apocalypse' offers. As theological commentaries these films often come out short, failing to take on the theological message of the apocalypse

⁵⁵ A good example of this widened understanding of the study of religion and film is Clive Marsh & Gaye Ortiz (ed.), *Explorations in Theology and Film* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, Malden, 1997).

and face the bottomless abyss that the end of the world is. Among the contemporary apocalypses on film there are however also examples which stand closer to the sentiment of the 'classical apocalypse' and which take on the apocalyptic challenge creating contemporary examples of the end set within history. These films, such as *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *Crash* (1995) and *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1989), are sometimes produced by Hollywood, sometimes independently, and have in common the fact that they do not offer easy solutions or the postponement of the end which is to be found in most Hollywood apocalypses. These depictions of the end, I would argue, help the apocalypse to come into its own in a contemporary setting, and the medium of film offers a possibility to further emphasise the visuality and potent imagery of the end, expressing the concerns of the apocalypse fully. As such they provide a 'sense of an ending' and an apocalyptic sentiment which is as unnerving and evasive as the 'classical apocalypse'.

The films I have chosen to focus on here belong to this latter category, and are films by directors engaging in the wider issues of life, death and the absence of God. I have chosen to work on Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1995). This selection has been based on the content as well as the format of these films, and they are each based on a literary source, which I found helpful in surveying what happens to imagery (apocalyptic imagery) in the transformation from word to image. Further, they are chosen from three decades all representing their own particular fears concerning the end of humankind, and they all feature the condition of their particular times. The third criteria for my selection has been made based on content and I have chosen films that represent three of the main features of the 'classical apocalypse', namely violence, war and human relations. The films are secular in character and do not readily fall into the genre of religious films or Biblical epics; they do not overtly connect to the Bible or to the Christian tradition but nevertheless depict their own apocalypses. These apocalypses are coloured by their own time and the fears and troubles of the society they portray or comment upon, but they are also in their own right contemporary apocalypses, expressing and problemising the postmodern apocalypse. There is no saviour in these films, no God that intervenes, and no Holy Church to belong to, these are the apocalypses of loneliness and isolation, of societies and people in despair who no longer carry a hope for a saviour but to whom God is totally and utterly dead. The absence of God in these apocalypses

⁵⁶ I do not to assume that filmmakers are consciously using apocalyptic sources or are giving theological thought to their filmmaking or are making film according to the Book of Revelation. It is not the intention of the director that is

opens up an abyss that is close to the utter fear of God and the despair and uncertainty of the 'classical apocalypse'. Where the early Christians feared God and the Judgement, contemporary humankind in these films agonises and trembles in seeing only an abyss of nothingness. The death of God has brought on an absence that is not easily accounted for in the postmodern apocalypse and hence has to be bridged over by the loss of the apocalyptic or the utter nihilism in rehearsing an end that never happens but always is replicated. For Altizer it is this realisation that God is dead that makes it possible, and even necessary, to form a contemporary theology aiming at the absolutely new, not avoiding the end, something I would argue, at which the films discussed in this thesis aim.⁵⁷ What we see in the postmodern apocalypse, I would argue is a rehearsal, a repetition of the end, that is ever ongoing and everlasting, looking into an abyss of nothingness rather than beyond to what *The Book of Revelation* would call 'The New Heaven and New Earth'. This apocalypse is more in tune with Mark 13 and the Little Apocalypse that portrays the time before the very end urging us to watch and warning us for false messiahs. An apocalypse that finds itself caught between the final times and the end unable to proceed and instead begins to repeat itself, rehearse the end over and over without hope of reaching there. I hope to do this contemporary apocalypse justice as an artistic expression as well as an expression of a Biblical theme that has hounded Christians since the very beginning of Christianity. And the questions raised (to repeat) are what has happened to the apocalypse as it has become popular property; how is the imagery of the classic apocalypse transferred onto the screen and finally what happens when God becomes absent in the very heart of the Christian message. I do not set out to give any definite answers to these very large questions but merely partake in an exercise that might shed light on the apocalypse of today as portrayed in these three examples.

1:6 The Apocalypse Revamped

my immediate concern but what traits and connections the reader/viewer could be making.

⁵⁷ Thomas J J Altizer, 1990, pp. 28-30.

But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning -- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.

(Mark 13:32-36)

Mark speaks with an urgency of the impending end that comes like a thief in the night, an urgency that has been replicated in apocalypses sacred and secular ever since. The apocalypse of Mark urges us to 'watch' as the horror unfolds at the end of time, like we today only can watch as the film depicts our version of the end. Watching becomes the only activity we can do, unable to influence what is happening in the world or on the screen, watch and bear witness as death and terror descends. Mark 13 has been crucial to how contemporary apocalypses perceive the end. The warning of the imminence of the end and as well as of false messiahs is a theme ever occurring in popular apocalyptic depictions. The power of the Little Apocalypse lies in the suppression of reason and traditional ethics in favour of ambiguity and immanence, an element of surprise, in its warning that urges us to watch! The very character of the apocalypse is urgent, and is always and ever arriving, and therefore (as Frank Kermode rightly points out) the apocalypse can always be disconfirmed without being discredited which is part of its strength.⁵⁸ The apocalypse has become part of our mythical heritage, always present and always re-emerging in new shape and form. As a myth it has dominated society as well as history and adapts and conforms to the changes of the times effortlessly, taking its home on the forefront of an ever changing society.⁵⁹ As a result, the contemporary apocalypse owes as much to its predecessors in art and literature as it owes to its Biblical sources. The apocalypse continues then to be an urgent call, concerning that which frightens us most, the end that ultimately will come whether it is the downfall of the world or our own personal death. Contemporary times are as all other times plagued with its curses and its fears, which read through the apocalyptic imagination, are signs of the approaching end. Contemporary thought and philosophy has branded itself as 'postmodern', past the project of modernity with its opportunistic belief in progress which saw itself as

⁵⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 (1967)), p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp 112-113.

everlasting, resulting once again in a re-invented apocalyptic. The utopian thinkers saw in the industrial era progress and hope as well as a new secular utopia based on the new values of industrialism and social engineering, making God redundant as belief in human progress increased. The apocalyptic on the other hand saw in this very industrial development also a new image of downfall and doom where industrialism would eventually lead to the downfall of humanity. Subsequent history with genocide, global warfare and nuclear threat has ended what existed of the opportunistic belief in humankind and progress giving way to a dystopia and an apocalypse without new beginnings. In the aftermath of the modern project, Jacques Derrida and Jean Paul Baudrillard are competing, reading the signs of the end but an end that has become its own mimesis. To cite Baudrillard:

There is no more hope for meaning. And without a doubt this is a good thing: meaning is mortal. But that on which it has imposed its ephemeral reign, what it hoped to liquidate in order to impose the reign of the Enlightenment, that is, appearances, they, are immortal, invulnerable, to the nihilism of meaning or of non-meaning itself. This is where the seduction begins.⁶⁰

Meaning, as well as apocalypse, has been lost, leaving humankind to worship only the simulacra, leaving the apocalypse of the postmodern to go through the motions of the 'classical apocalypse', getting caught up in the game of mimesis where the real end no longer exists or has any meaning. For Derrida the contemporary apocalypse and the possibilities for mass destruction and nuclear war have taken on the apocalyptic trait of being unthinkable or 'unassimilable wholly other' and hence comes very close to the classical notion of apocalypse as revealing and concealing.⁶¹ This destruction is a destruction of the world as well as the end of philosophy, history and the death of God. In the postmodern era the apocalypse has become a nihilistic repetition, and this pondering on the absence of meaning, apocalypse and God, the revealing has become feared since it might be a revealing of nothing.⁶² It is in this context that I ask what has happened to the apocalypse and this thesis sets out to discuss the apocalypse in contemporary film as real and serious commentaries on the end as envisioned in contemporary times. Can these

⁶⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: Ann Arbor and University of Michigan Press, 2000 (1994)), p. 164.

⁶¹ Jaques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics* 14, Summer 1984, p. 28.

⁶² James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post Apocalypse* (Minneapolis/London: Minnesota University Press, 1999), pp 8-9.

films be seen as apocalypses or are they only bleak copies of their classical fore-runner? How do they relate to the 'classical apocalypse' and what characteristics keep them alive? Further I ask whether these apocalypses are theological/a-theological in their form and content and how they are faithful to their source. At the heart of the 'classical apocalypse' is the image, and what mainly interests me is the imagery of the apocalypse and whether the apocalypse on film successfully manages to translate literary imagery to a visual form without falling into the trap of domesticating the imagery. The films discussed here address the apocalypse from topical perspectives rather than as a narrative, focusing on the central themes of violence, war and sex. These films I will argue revisit as well as revamp and rehearse the imagery of the Biblical apocalypse, becoming a-theological statements if not on the Bible, on the state of society and the apocalypse.

Chapter 2

Characteristics of the Apocalyptic

2:1 The Ongoing Relevance of Apocalyptic Literature

One of the powers of apocalyptic literature is its ability to adapt and transform itself for different ages and audiences, a quality that gives it an ongoing relevance and urgency. This is what lies behind its survival, as Walter Schmithals points out, the Church has always been critical of the apocalypse, banishing it to the periphery of Christian theology.⁶³ The apocalypse has, however, always been part of popular culture and therefore it has been transformed easily throughout history, making itself relevant to each time and situation. It is in art, literature and film that we see many of the contemporary representations of the apocalypse. H. H Rowley argues that there is a set of spiritual principles underlying apocalyptic texts that make them relevant for each generation, enabling the apocalypse to adapt and transform itself.⁶⁴ The first of these is the belief that there is a reason for our existence and that our destiny is determined. God is seen not only an onlooker but as a partaker, and mankind's rise and fall in history is part of a wider outlook on history and God's plan, where God's history is different to our own and where we play a role that is unknown to us. This, I would argue, has been confused in some contemporary films where humans have adopted the role of God, and thus made him redundant. One example is *End of Days* (1999) where the messiah is exchanged for a human saviour, or in *Terminator 2, Judgement Day* (1991) where the humanised machine of the terminator assumes a messianic role, sacrificing himself in the fiery pit of molten steel for the benefit of humanity. Rowley's second principle is that of a dualistic worldview where good and evil engage in a constant battle over the world. This dualistic view where two forces are seen as oppositional and antagonistic is common to apocalyptic literature and plays on a simplistic worldview where good and evil are distinguished easily. This simplistic worldview is favoured in some contemporary apocalypses and has often been featured by Hollywood where films like *End of Days* show two distinct powers facing each other, and where evil is manifested by the traditionally apocalyptic imagery of demons and dragons. The dualistic worldview seems

⁶³ Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 214-217.

⁶⁴ H.H Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to Revelation* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952 (1944)), p. 150.

to be stronger at times of unrest and hardship when easy answers are sought, whilst stable times provide a more multifaceted outlook with less defined boundaries between good and bad. This more ambiguous distinction between good and evil is present in films like *Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *The Rapture* (1991).⁶⁵ The dualistic worldview, as well as the idea of human history being included in the larger scope of God's history, has been attractive to people throughout history since it provides an answer to the present state of the world and the future. In more psychological terms we could argue that the apocalyptic offers a 'meaning' to our existence that is greater than an individualistic and personal meaning to our own life. As Victor Frankel argues the feeling of meaninglessness is behind a majority of all neuroses and anxiety that people face, and in the post-industrial society humanity has entered an existential vacuum as a result of the loss of values and traditions that urbanisation and industrialisation challenged and broke down.⁶⁶ The existential anxiety, which drives humans to search for answers and solutions in ideas such as apocalypticism has always been present but has assumed different guises throughout the ages. Paul Tillich sees various forms of anxiety ruling life at different historical times, working as reactive anxieties that save humans from true existential anxiety which is the anxiety of nothingness.⁶⁷ By finding reasons for our anxiety in issues like the end of the world, the apocalypse, we are making our anxiety manageable. This leads to a search for meaning in our own existence as well as the world's, that assumes individualistic, communal, and universal traits. Discovering the meaning of one's individual existence might be achieved through the influence of others and the meaning they add to one's life, or, by searching for new experiences.⁶⁸ The universal and larger meaning is more difficult to find, but can easily be clothed in the apocalyptic, which provides a sense of belonging, a way to explain the existence of good and evil, and the course of history. Therefore, the apocalypse is versatile as it takes on different representations and traits at different times, hence relating to a changing society and the different anxieties relevant in different historical contexts.

2:2 Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature

When we refer to the apocalyptic we often talk about several different things, such as a literary genre, historical sectarian groups, a general sentiment of doom etc. The

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 156-157.

⁶⁶ Victor E Frankel, *Gud och det Omedvetna-psykoterapi och religion* (Lund: Natur och Kultur, 1987), p. 105-106.

⁶⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Welwyn: James Nisbet and Company Ltd, 1961 (1952)), pp. 37-39, 53-59.

⁶⁸ Victor E Frankel (1987), pp. 105-6.

apocalyptic can hence result in social movements, like the spiritually charged sectarians in Waco, and Heavens Gate, as well as in literary and artistic expressions like the apocalyptic of Ballard's *Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), films including *Strange Days* (1995) and Frans Masreel's paintings of the Paris bombing. We have on one side apocalyptic movements that we establish as apocalyptic or messianic based on a sociological analysis of their aims and features. At the same time we also have the apocalyptic as a literary genre, or as an artistic expression which displays certain characteristics exclusive to this genre. In this context the 'classical apocalypse' can then be seen as a literary device used in order to deliver an urgent and immediate message. It sets forth the teaching of the writer who is reporting a mystical experience that he believes is from God and that concerns the fate of humanity.⁶⁹ The mystical experience has been framed in a literary form that formulates the message, and attempts to express the unspeakable experience in itself, resulting in a literary form that is extraordinary and fantastic. This form of apocalyptic literature has various traits; it is esoteric in character, literary in form; symbolic in language, and often pseudonymous in authorship. A literary work can display all these characteristics and still not classify as apocalyptic literature, and likewise, literature might not have all of these traits and be apocalyptic.⁷⁰ As a result classification is difficult, and we can only attempt to catch the essence of what apocalyptic literature is and what it is about. Many of the traits found in apocalyptic literature are found in apocalyptic movements as well as in the artistic expressions of painting and film. What is notable is that since medieval times the literary form of the Biblical apocalypse has been joined by more artistic apocalypses of which the apocalypse in film and role-playing games are the most recent. The traits of 'classical' apocalyptic have evolved and changed with the times, and in the contemporary film apocalypses we find some traits emphasised and developed whilst others are less pronounced. Hence the traits discussed here are characteristics of the apocalypse that carry a continuing relevance and which have been transformed and developed in these contemporary apocalyptic expressions.

2:2:1 Apocalyptic as Crisis Literature

The apocalyptic should be read as crisis literature, formulated by a society that perceives itself as sociologically, mentally and ethically crumbling. This world is seen by the apocalypticist as being lost, 'Anomie' - a loss of an entire world with the erosion of

⁶⁹ Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (London: Inter Varsity Press, 1973 (1972)), pp. 55-57.

⁷⁰ D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (SCM Press & Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 104 ff.

structures, psychological and cultural that results in a feeling of emptiness of Being itself.⁷¹ The apocalypticist's world is considered as breaking apart, and there is no hope that humanity will save itself, leaving no other solution than to hope for God's intervention. The apocalyptic text provides an explanation to the perceived injustice, and offers hope that something new will come with God's intervention, such as a blissful existence for the faithful (as in Revelation 21 with its promise of a new heaven and new earth). There is an in-built determinism in 'classical apocalyptic' literature that recognises the forces of evil and the struggle of good and evil, but which ultimately believes that the end means a triumph of God. History as such, as well as its outcome, or fulfilment, is pre-determined by God who controls time, history and the events within.⁷² This belief has been contested and challenged by contemporary apocalypses, which find difficulty in seeing anything positive after the end, which becomes a means in itself. Examples of this include *Apocalypse Now* (1979) where there is only end and no beginning, only an abyss of the evil of which mankind is capable. The belief in the triumph of God is part of all 'classical' apocalyptic literature as well as a disbelief in the ability of humans to change their situation. This disbelief is echoed in some contemporary apocalypses such as *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) or *Clockwork Orange*, where the outlook is rather bleak, and where trust in God's judgement has been exchanged for a nihilist perception of humankind. The majority of film apocalypses do, however, carry an inflated self-image where a human or human/machine hero takes the place of God and sets things right, becoming the saviour of humanity in the style of *Robocop* (1989) or *Demolition Man* (1993). These saviours challenge the traditional image of the messiah and Christology in the sense that they explore the boundaries of a human messiah, seemingly arguing that a thoroughly human messiah is impossible. As a result of this disbelief in the ability of humankind arises the creation of a messianic figure that is part human, part machine, as in *Terminator* or the modified human being in *Demolition Man*. This saviour figure is often portrayed in such a way that he disowns the technological and scientific characteristics that make him supernatural and instead develops human characteristics of emotion and empathy. This development results in an increasingly human machine, a hybrid, which by the access to technological and scientific powers, becomes a seeker of justice and humanity. This hybrid of machine and man develops all cherished human traits, leaving the unpleasant ones of greed, jealousy, selfishness behind, becoming a hybrid that is more human than

⁷¹ Leon Morris (1973 (1972)), pp. 41-49.

⁷² Bernard McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Aldershot, Variorum, Ashgate, 1994), p. 10.

human, with a willingness to sacrifice itself. This dualistic and already pre-determined battle is described in 'classical' apocalyptic texts such as Psalm 2, which presents a victory by God over all nations, or in Ezekiel 38-39 where a dualistic fight is portrayed as a war but is also a spiritual concern. Just as the war can be between Israel and other nations, the final battle can also be seen as a national and a spiritual concern. The Dead Sea scrolls give an example of this where the battle does not coincide with the Biblical and apocalyptic vision of the victory against the foreign nations, but instead discusses the greater victory against all evil forces. The division here is not between Israel as such and other nations, but between the sons of darkness being the impure Israelis and other nations. The battle will be one against the evildoers and all those who are not members of the community. The scrolls are much more detailed than the canonical text, including things like the development of the war, as well as the tactics used.⁷³

Apocalyptic literature has a pessimistic strain owing to the fact that it is crisis literature, which attempts to console the suffering of the faithful. The perspective of the apocalypticist with regards to his own time and situation is pessimistic if not hopeless. There is little belief in any possibility of change, and as a result he places hope and trust in God's ability to bring about change. The deep distrust in humans to solve the situation is a strong trait of apocalyptic literature, contemporary and ancient. An example of this distrust is shown in *Blade Runner* (1982) where humans have destroyed their world, and as a result they live in a world of garbage where acid rain constantly falls, and where everyone is suspected of being a 'replicant'. Similarly, *Robocop* depicts a scenario where the majority live beneath the ground while a minority enjoy a socially engineered dream. Here, trust is typically placed in a human hero, in the shape of an antihero, a larger than life character to put things right. This is similar to the arcane 'classical apocalypse' where help is expected from the outside, through divine intervention, such as God intervening in history. In the 'classical apocalypse' the belief is that 'it has to get worse before it gets better', history is determined and the intervention of God will bring about the glory for the few whilst most will perish in the turmoil. The sin of mortals stands in the way of ultimate bliss and the triumph of God that will bring salvation to the few elect and damnation to the unrighteous.⁷⁴ This again is a trait that is displaced in films where people's greed, selfishness and corruption causes both the occurrence of the disaster and

⁷³ Florentino Garcia Martinez, 'Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls' in John J. Collins (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Volume 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 185.

⁷⁴ Leon Morris (1973 (1972)), pp. 39-41.

prevents any change. The consequence of this is the arbitrariness of damnation, and salvation is exchanged for a more simplistic elective process.

2:2:2 The Image at the Centre of Apocalyptic Imagination

The 'classical apocalypse', in spite of being a literary genre, is highly visual and this makes the literature so challenging and so adaptable to the visual medium of film. Apocalyptic imagery has always teased and stirred the imagination of artists from William Blake and Benjamin West to Martin Scorsese and Francis Coppola. Images in general, and images of the apocalypse in particular, captivate us and have the power to arouse, engage, and emotionally involve us. Images possess these powers, and we find many examples in art of how people get so involved in the image that they assault it, or pay devotion to it, making the images holy in themselves. Everywhere in contemporary society we are surrounded by images that effect and engage us in various ways, some of which have been put on a pedestal in a museum to identify their importance and make us approach them as critics. However in the response to the image there are always two voices competing: the voice of banality which says what we all see and think and on the other hand the voice of singularity which is to replenish the banality with an emotion belonging to the viewer herself. We are according to Barthes caught between two languages, one critical and one expressive and emotional, that refuses all reduction and we are being torn between the critical and the emotional.⁷⁵ As a result we often repress the simplicity in our emotional response and hide behind the language of art critics, emphasising our critical response.⁷⁶ Our first basic response is emotional, feeding on our emotions, sexuality, desires, wishes and memories but are repressed as a result of our embarrassment, and our talk, and our distancing which are merely evasions of our more immediate responses.⁷⁷ This is crucial to the work on the apocalypse which in itself, with its history and religious significance for the believer carry an emotional dimension, which is heightened by the emotional response we give images. With the apocalypse it is crucial to recognise the dimension of the emotional response, and as Barthes puts it, it is about being mad or tame in one's responses, distinguishing the emotional response from the tame and safe educated way. We are tame when we use the critical gaze, seeing the images as relative, and tempered by aesthetics or empirical habits. Mad when we see the realism as absolute, original and as reality, and interact with that reality, seeing emotion

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), pp 117-119.

⁷⁶ David Freedberg: 1989, p. 430.

as part of cognition.⁷⁸ For Barthes film can never be mad, but is always tame since it participates in society's domestication of the photograph, expressing the mad but not taking part.⁷⁹ This suggests that film always is a domestication of images, something very different from the images of 'classical apocalypse', which avoids domestication as a result of their otherness and evasiveness. I would argue that this is the case with most films which do not fall into the trap of the Hollywood apocalypse where the images are dead and unable to transcend themselves. Examples of these films are the *Terminator* films where the end always is avoided, or *Mad Max: Beyond the Thunderdome* (1985) where an apocalyptic image is transferred into something recognised and safe in the return to the city. There are exceptions to this domestication in films such as the ones discussed in this thesis, which as a result of their freedom from its original manages to create a contemporary apocalypse related to, but not dependent on its original. *Clockwork Orange* and *Apocalypse Now* continue to be thoroughly uncomfortable and disturbing, leaving us with no easy escape, or safe way out. The true redemptive character of images lies in their transcendence of death according to Freedberg. The photograph or the film does give an effect of seeing what has been abolished and hence transcends death and replenishes the lost being.⁸⁰ Reproduction in this context makes the images eternal. They fade but are reproducible and do not disappear, but continue to be alive, present, and real. Through this reproduction the image becomes real and points at what is, has been and will be. Here *Crash* (1997) is a good example, which manages through its obsessive repetition to stay and revel in the horror of the end, repeating and replicating it forever.

The images we receive through film like most images are reproductions of a distant original, in the case of apocalyptic film the 'classical apocalypse'. Connected to the idea of reproduction, and the replica, is the very notion of the original and the question of its authenticity, which again are central themes to the apocalyptic and its concern with false prophets and predictions. This issue can be addressed from the perspective of Walter Benjamin who argues that most of our images of art as well as of film are reproductions, replicas of a distant original. The films discussed here are replicas in so far they echo the original image of revelation but have, following the process of mechanical reproduction, become more independent and just like the work of art able to meet the viewer half way through its ability to be brought out of context. The dependence on the original decreases

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 429.

⁷⁸ Roland Barthes (1981), p. 117.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 117-118.

⁸⁰ David Freedberg (1989), pp. 439-440.

when the object can be completely brought out of its context and the camera lens can see things and copy things from the original, which the naked eye cannot see. Reproduction replaces the unique existence of an original with many copies, and by making the work of art available it is able to meet the viewer. This leads, in Benjamin's words, to '...a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.' What is destroyed is what Benjamin calls the historical testimony, maybe at its closest described as the context, time and space of the original, and in this process film is the most powerful agent being a medium that by necessity has to destroy traditional values and cultural heritage. From this follows that the criterion of authenticity is no longer applicable to the reproduced object but the object, or in this case the apocalyptic film, transcends the very idea of authenticity, leaving only replicas that at the same time are originals.⁸¹ Art is no longer created for ritual but rather for reproduction, which breaks the dependence on ritual making the work accessible to the masses, and a new function which is political and exhibitional rather than ritual.⁸² This thesis explores this relationship between the classical (original) apocalypse and the films that bear traits and characteristics of the original but transgress the boundaries of the original. This changed role of art as reproduction is not entirely negative since it has increased the accessibility to art for the masses, and detached and emancipated the image from its context and tradition making the image capable of meeting the viewer in her situation.⁸³ In this context the apocalypse in art has been freed from its original and heritage and has, as a result, a greater ability to conform and model itself after society. The apocalypse, always being the cuckoo-bird of theology, steals its home from remnants of others, and in the same respect excels itself in the contact with secular society and the sea of images it provides. With the dependency on ritual broken, and art being created for reproduction, the use value has diminished. This, I would argue, has in the case of apocalyptic film replaced the ritual by conflating the ritual of watching with the ritualistic elements of the films themselves. With the postmodern the claim of the apocalypse as being original as well as the beginning and the end, alpha and omega, has been exchanged for an apocalypse that is replica and repetition. Where the 'classical apocalypse' was rooted in an original, and was seen as the one and only apocalypse, the contemporary faces an encyclopaedia of apocalypses, and an ongoing apocalyptic which has lost its connection

⁸¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 214-216.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

⁸³ David Freedberg (1989), pp. 232-233.

to both its beginning and its end. In this a-theology of the apocalypse which is not rooted anywhere the replica and the repetition has become rule. In *Bladerunner* it does not matter whether our hero is a replica or not, and similarly in the postmodern whether its end, its apocalypse, is original or not is of no interest. Because with the loss of Revelation's promise of 'I am the beginning and the End', which is the loss of a saviour and hope, there are only replicas, only repetitions of the end.

2:2:3 Image and Real in the Postmodern

Baudrillard, in his essay *The Evil Demon of Images* (1988), discusses what has happened to the relation between the image and the real in the crisis of the postmodern where the discursive dualities subject-object, imaginary-real have imploded leaving the real blurred, creating a hyperreal, sustained by the media.⁸⁴ He suggests that we are less able to grasp the relation between the image now than ever before and that what we see is only simulation. In the hyperreal, the borders between real and image are blurred and the image has come to forego the real rather than the opposite. Images are preceding the real and have inverted the logic of the real. The images appear to refer to the real and seem to reproduce something that has been before them and this is the demonic quality of the hyperreal. It seems to be faithful to reality and this is when it is most diabolical.⁸⁵ The images are diabolical because they are deceiving, and because we meet them and interpret them with a confidence and a trust in that they are representations of the real. The images however, only resemble the real without representing it, just conforming to it and this conforming is deceiving. They seem to depict reality but have started to go before reality, anticipating and contaminating reality.⁸⁶ With film we find that they are often sold with the label 'based on a true story' deceiving us to think they depict reality. One example of this is the film *In the Name of the Father* (1994) where the story is bent into shape by Hollywood but becomes the lasting impression of what happened with the Guildford five. Daily life has become cinematographic, and not the other way around, and he turns to Coppola and *Apocalypse Now* in order to explain his statement that film has become war and that media is nothing less than a continuation of war.⁸⁷ In *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola works in the same way that the image works; the war-(just like

⁸⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images. The First Mari Kuttna Memorial Lecture*. (Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1988), p. 11.

⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 14, 16.

⁸⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor and University of Michigan Press, 2000 (1994)), pp. 59-60.

the film) becomes a trip, a technological and psychedelic trip, having the same ingredients of exaggeration, success and special effects. Just as *Apocalypse Now* is a test site for technology, power and method the Vietnam war was a test site for exactly those things for the Americans. The war became film in Coppola's version and the film became war with the same logic and the same overflow of technology. Hence the film is without distance and without a moral desire to provoke questions, which frightens but which is also a quality of the film. In this way the film becomes a mass spectacle and a fantasy but at the same time consecrates the war by being closer to reality than reality can ever be.⁸⁸

Film as a medium constantly works with simulacra, for example in *Titanic* (1998), James Cameron constantly lets the camera go from the ship on the bottom of the sea to the ship in the film where the love story is played out. Cameron's way of working with the wreck and the ship in the film makes us feel and believe that the ship in the film is the real ship whilst the ship on the bottom of the ocean is a ghost ship, a non real ship. Even if we all know the story of Titanic, that it is going to sink and that the real ship is somewhere on the bottom of the Atlantic, we are deceived by the images about what is real and what is not. Our perception of the real and the hyperreal is tricked and the real becomes the image and the image the real. In order to highlight the way film and media has started to forego the real Baudrillard uses the example of the events at Harrisburgh and the film *The China Syndrome* (1988). In Harrisburgh-the real event was preceded by the film *The China Syndrome* -the image. He asks what is the effect and what is the symptom: Is Watergate (the ideological argument) a symptom of the Network, the media (the informational image) or Harrisburgh (the real event) which in turns leads to the question if Harrisburgh is a symptom of the imaginary/the film (*The China Syndrome*). By this Baudrillard wants to show how there is no longer a succession of real to image, to the hyperreal.⁸⁹ Similarly in *Crash* the replication of famous car crashes and the rehearsal of one's own death becomes interchangeable from life itself. In the hyperreal the borders of what is real and what is simulacra have been so blurred and undefined that there are no longer any real, but only simulacra that follow each other in a chain of reactions. The real has, as Baudrillard says, been 'engulfed in a continuous implosion'.⁹⁰ In *Crash* there is an implosion of sex and violence where technology, sex and violence becomes inseparable and indistinguishable from one another with the help of a language that is highly

⁸⁸ Jean Baudrillard (1988), p. 18.

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 19-21.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 21.

functional revealing neither emotion nor intimacy.⁹¹ In the dialectic between reality and the image, the image has now taken over, and there is therefore nothing else than simulacra, our world is no longer real but has become hyperreal beyond categories of good and evil.⁹² In *Crash* this is enforced with the use of the photographs where Vaughn's lens reproduces every crash and every wound, preserving the moment as well as abstracting it showing that there are no secrets left.⁹³ Still says Baudrillard we naively continue looking, we remain searching for something that does not any longer exist because we are forgetting that the extermination has taken place. We forget, but since forgetting is dangerous and frightening we have to supply our minds with an artificial memory, a memory that in turn makes us forget.⁹⁴ In order to make a parallel and explain himself Baudrillard uses the holocaust as an example. He argues that we have forgotten the real Holocaust and what we are remembering is memories constructed by images, by the hyperreal. In this way the real is forgotten, has come to its end, achieving esthetics through nostalgia.⁹⁵ In a blunt way Baudrillard expresses it as the Jews being recycled not through the crematory but through the images and the soundtracks of films like *Schindlers List* (1997). We do not have any pure memories, uncontaminated by media, of the war so we are exchanging our real memories, or lack of them, with constructed memories of film and cinema. Along this logic *Crash* recreates events of death by staging car crashes and sexuality in an organisation of life starting in death, and Vietnam is only remembered through films like *Platoon* (1986). This means that these images/films manage to abolish both reality and fiction and hence create a world void of sensuality in *Crash* and of love in *Clockwork Orange*, built on hypertechonology without finality, neither good nor bad but a-moral hypercriticism.⁹⁶

Whilst reality disappears, life becomes cinematographic, a travelling shot as Baudrillard puts it. The image becomes more real than reality itself, and it no longer resembles anything else than itself, and has no other destiny than to repeat itself.⁹⁷ Even if cinema still has a mythological association and still carries an intense imagery, being the last myth of modernity, it changes and takes on a role that repeats and recycles, revelling in the absence of meaning.⁹⁸ In the last ten years of cinema we have been entering a new

⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard (2000), pp. 116-117.

⁹² Jean Baudrillard (1988), p. 23.

⁹³ Jean Baudrillard (200), p. 117-118.

⁹⁴ Jean Baudrillard (1988), pp. 23-24.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Jean Baudrillard (2000), pp. 118-119.

⁹⁷ Jean Baudrillard (1988), pp. 28-30.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 25.

era of film which is signified by films that no longer have any meaning, or point. Cinema copies itself and plays its own game, reproducing itself, its classics and its mythology. In the last years there has been an increasing number of these films, of which *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Natural Born Killers* (1999) and *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996) are a few. They are films that refer to earlier films that caricature film as well as reality, and make cynical interpretations of the postmodern era. These films are examples of film that has become a film of the film, and where the characters replicate other characters until they dissolve, leaving the film in the end as a heap of images simulating each other. As Baudrillard says, 'Too bad. We're in paradise. Illusion is no longer possible. It has always braked (sic) the real, but now no longer holds; and we are witness to the unfurling real in a world without illusions'. With this he welcomes and fears this new age of repetition, where secrets are no longer possible, and where the real has imploded, leaving us living the disaster we once saw as utopia. We have passed the Final Judgement without even realising it and what is left is the dream we had, our utopia turned sour, revealing itself for what it always was.⁹⁹ The apocalypse has then in a sense exhausted itself and with nowhere to go in the postmodern culture it turns in on itself, causing the narrative to disrupt, the images to break up and fragment. In film this expresses itself in the way the narrative becomes de-linear and the images refer to each other and themselves, repeating themselves without necessarily linking into the narrative. The film starts to be a film inside the film, or a film that is a film about another film. As an example *Apocalypse Now* is as much a film about Vietnam as it is the film about the trauma of making the film itself, actually expressed in *Hearts of Darkness*, the film about the film.

2:2:4 Language of the Apocalypse or how to Speak the Unspeakable

In contrast to prophetic literature, apocalyptic literature does not give its message in plain language but rather in symbols and codes that form a mystical and enigmatic prose. The message is veiled and hidden in parables and metaphors which can be seen as symbolic attempts to understand that which lies beyond the end of our life and the end of the world, providing ways to imagine the unknown.¹⁰⁰ The symbolic language used is diverse and extraordinary and even if there are several symbols that occur repeatedly in various texts there are also ones that only appear in one particular text.¹⁰¹ Apocalyptic literature can be

⁹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (London: Pluto Press, 1999 (1984)), pp. 71-72.

¹⁰⁰ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroads, 1984), pp. 214-215.

¹⁰¹ Leon Morris (1973 (1972)), pp. 36-39.

understood as a form of expression created by an ecstatic culture in which certain symbols and expressions seem coherent but which from the outside seem impossible to understand. The way the message is conveyed reflects the language and the form that the apocalypticist receives, making it disruptive and ecstatic, shedding light on the extraordinary mode of reception. The nature of presentation points towards the apocalypticist's personal experience that has not been rationalised or analysed, and which is written down in the form it was received. As a result many symbols are not explained and are left to the reader to interpret, which in turn hints at the possibility that the reader would recognise the particular genre and know how to interpret the text. On the other hand it could also mean that the style chosen is the form it was received in simply because the experience was too great to express in any rationalised and coherent form.¹⁰² The topic of the end could then be seen as a topic that attempts to discuss that which cannot be verbalised, making it into the literature of the unsayable, the literature that cannot be expressed. The most powerful image of this is probably found in Ezekiel where the prophet eats the scroll with the revealed word, possibly due to his inability to internalise as well as utter the word that is straight from God. This work also becomes difficult to digest, and for Ezekiel what tasted sweet in the mouth turns sour in the stomach. Revelation picks up this note from Ezekiel and in Revelation 10:8-11 the narrator is told to eat the book given to him by the angel, and that the book will taste sweet but turn bitter in his stomach. The sweetness of God's words which are internalised through the action of eating, shows the attraction of the apocalyptic word whilst the corrosive, and bitter quality shows the opposite of this attraction, namely, that ultimately the word of God and the apocalypse cannot be fully digested and understood. The internalising of the word is, however, necessary for the apocalypticist in order to reach any comprehension, yet it leaves him with the word undigested, resulting in an inability to speak and to utter the revealed word. A similar image is found in Kurtz's incomprehensible mutterings, or in the use of Nadsat in *Clockwork Orange*, as the speech of an elect few. Ezekiel and Kurtz depict what is central to the apocalyptic language, being a language directly from God and not mediated through any interpreter. They indicate the quality of the language as being evasive, terrifying and incomprehensible, as well as being impossible to repeat or paraphrase. As a result of the character of the language it has to be internalised in order to be understood, which is why Ezekiel

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 36-39.

attempts to eat the scroll and Kurtz's merges with the language in his attempts to act God's word out in the creation of his kingdom.

The imagery in *The Book of Revelation* is created through a literary language and is influenced by the contemporary society in which it is created. Bauchkman argues that these literary images cannot be read and understood without taking into account the visually and ritually driven society of which it was a part. The imagery used in the apocalyptic is created within a highly literary language which consciously works with references, cross references, parallels and contrasts to get its message across and convey a meaning of what the aim and essence of the narrative is. Revelation more than any other 'classical' apocalyptic work shows a strong connection to the power of images where the imagery saturates the narrative, is deeply engaged in creating verbal allusions with Old Testament stories, and echoes the mythological images from its contemporary society. For example, the serpent was used in the Roman Empire as the symbol for the primeval source of evil in the world or the invasion from east which was a real fear in the Roman Empire. These images should then be read for their theological meaning and power to evoke a response rather than literal descriptions or encounters. Seen in this way Revelation talks about contemporary scenarios and builds them up to apocalyptic proportions, casting them in Biblically elusive terms of plague, earthquakes and other threats that were real and threatening dangers to society. The point of the text becomes a way to evoke and explore the meaning of the impending divine judgement on the sinful world.¹⁰³ This approach to the text emphasises the way the writer of Revelation has developed his literary use of imagery into a distinctive mode of theological thought and communication. Seen in this light the metaphors can be interpreted and offer different perspectives on the events in the text. The city of Babylon is described as a harlot stripped and burned like a city in war. On the literal level the image is rather consistent but theologically it offers complementary perspectives on the meaning of Babylon's fall.¹⁰⁴ Similarly the contemporary apocalypse uses metaphors and allusions to describe and make wider claims, and in *Apocalypse Now* the image of the river journey can be seen as the journey into a man's soul but also into the heart of darkness where Kurtz and the moral abyss awaits. Similarly in *Crash* the crashed car takes on a deeper meaning as a site of deliverance and a tool for reaching a new life and identity that liberates the car crash victim from her circumscribed and narrow life.

¹⁰³ Richard Bauchkman, *The Theology of The Book of Revelation*, in Dunn, J.D.G. (ed.), *New Testament Theology Series*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 18-20.

Dream visions are frequently used in 'classical' apocalyptic literature as the medium through which the author has the message revealed to him. These visions are radically different from anything the viewer is used to, which makes them difficult to access and understand, often leaving the viewer confused and frightened as in Ezekiel. The vision is believed to be generated by God who through the vision delivers a secret message, but since the means of expression or 'talk' by God is alien and different it needs to be enveloped, explained, and translated by the apocalypticist. In order to unfold the arcane message the apocalypticist requires inspiration from God which enables him to decode the secret message given to him. The recipient of the message is however often unable to perform this decoding and needs help from the outside, as in the case of Daniel, the interpreter of dreams who himself was unable to understand the message, giving an indication of the inaccessibility of the message. The language of these visions is graphic, and due to the unusual language form the recipient of the vision conveys the message that the vision is something extra-ordinary. It is alien and of another reality, and the apocalypticist's perception is insufficient to understand the fantastic and incomprehensible, making the vision both impossible to comprehend and explain. This forced silence or inability to speak of what has happened or what he has seen/heard is used as a sign of the greatness of God.¹⁰⁵ What makes the apocalyptic vision different from the prophetic is that the message in the apocalypse comes straight from God, making the recipient part of the message, which stands in contrast to the prophetic message which always is mediated through the prophet.¹⁰⁶ Norman Brown discuss this destruction of the human language in relation to *Finnegan's Wake* and the apocalypse in the Qur'an and uses a quote by Seyyed Hossein Nasr to express what happens to the language in the Qur'an when met by the greatness of God:

It is neither like a highly mystical text nor a manual of Aristotelian logic, though it contains both mysticism and logic. It is not poetry although it contains the most powerful poetry. The text of the Quran reveals human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. It is as if human language were scattered into a thousand fragments like a wave scattered into drops against the rocks at sea... The Quran displays human language with all the weakness inherent in it becoming suddenly the recipient of the Divine Word and displaying its frailty before a power which is infinitely greater than men can imagine.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁵ D.S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1992), pp. 72-74.

This statement is also appropriate in order to express the specificity of the Christian apocalypse, or apocalyptic language itself, which breaks down and deconstructs human language. The greatness of God and the exceptionality of the mode of reception of the word of God is expressed here with the image of human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. This image portrays the inability of the apocalypticist to deliver his message, and do justice to it, using a human language that is insufficient for the greatness of the message and of God.¹⁰⁷

Among the Biblical apocalypses *The Book of Revelation* provides the lengthiest apocalyptic account as well as the most vivid imagery, and it can be said that Revelation prefers symbolic vision over other forms of revelation. Symbolic vision is an important component in the genre of the apocalyptic but in apocalyptic literature aside than *The Book of Revelation* other forms of revelation are equally important.¹⁰⁸ *The Book of Revelation* and its continuous referral to 'I saw' is something that makes it more accessible to artists and filmmakers who often have used imagery and metaphors from Revelation to illustrate their works. This has made Revelation the most widely illustrated book of the Bible, illustrated by a wide selection of artists from Bosch and Blake, and Coppola to Cameron. The Biblical apocalyptic literature depends heavily on vision, and in between these visions there are long narrative passages of prophecy (as in Daniel 11:2-12:4), and it is important to acknowledge that visions have occupied a central position among the revelations. It is not uncommon that these visions are revealed in a dream, as in Joseph's dreams, or as with Daniel. *The Book of Revelation* differs, however, in that the visions are not inflicted through any unnatural mental state, and it is the receiver who interprets the visions himself. The visions are more often interpreted by an angel (as in Ezra 10:38-54 or 12:10-36) or by a person with special talents (such as Daniel or Joseph) and the recipient is generally closed off from his own vision, with the exception of Revelation. Another difference between *The Book of Revelation* and other apocalyptic literature is that the visions are most often rather short, whilst in Revelation the vision takes up the major part of the book (Revelation 1:10-22:6). Here Revelation stands closer to the films discussed here, and these films could all be seen as longer, continuous visions in the sense that they focus on the apocalyptic scenario in itself, bypassing the apocalypticist and the frame narrative. There are, however, exceptions to this and films

¹⁰⁶ Leon Morris (1973(1972)), pp. 34-36.

¹⁰⁷ Norman O., Brown, *Apocalypse- And/ Or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley/Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 90-91

¹⁰⁸ Richard Bauchkman, (1993), p. 10.

including *The Rapture* and *Terminator* have short visions which are crucial in understanding how to read and interpret the films within their frame narrative. As an example the vision of the horsemen in *The Rapture* provides an insight into how the protagonist sees the end unfolding in a way close to the biblical account. In contrast the vision of the horses on the carousel in *Terminator 2* alludes to the Book of Revelation whilst depicting a more contemporary nuclear apocalypse. The short visions are most often part of pre-apocalyptic films that portray the time before the apocalypse, and through visions they give an indication of the disastrous future to come. Post-apocalyptic films focus on the apocalyptic time itself and the trial and tribulation of this time, excluding any frame narrative. Many Hollywood films would fit into the first category where the end makes itself known but has not yet begun, and where there is still hope for salvation in the form of an escape from the apocalypse, as in *Terminator* or *Strange Days*. The films discussed here belong to the latter category which depict different apocalyptic scenarios but which have often become ensnared in this apocalyptic moment as a result of an absence of salvation.

Another important trait that stands out in the reading of apocalyptic language is the dualistic style. The apocalyptic worldview works in set categories of good and evil, contrasting things in dualistic categories in order to highlight the sense of urgency. This style safeguards God's position and creates a view of the world that is rather simplistic in its view of the ethical division between good and evil.¹⁰⁹ This is seen in the 'classical' apocalyptic works as well as in most apocalyptic films and literature where the distinction most often is very clear. However, there is also an element of ambiguity in that often things are not what they seem in the apocalyptic which blurs the categories of good and evil, (e.g. in the film *Apocalypse Now* Kurtz seems both thoroughly evil and utterly moral.¹¹⁰ The dualism of apocalyptic literature has its extremes in the creation of the two worlds. The dualism exists on a cosmic scale and another, better world is always present. The world to come is positioned either above in the spatial domain, or in the temporal domain as the world that comes after the end of the present world. The latter form often takes the shape of a belief in two ages where the present is the age of the battle between good and evil, the time of the worldly and sinful, whilst the age to come is a world of righteousness and glory.¹¹¹ The age or the world we

¹⁰⁹ D. S Russel, (1992), p. 104.

¹¹⁰ Leon Morris, (1972), pp. 49-51.

¹¹¹ D. S Russel, (1992), pp. 105-9.

live in is perishable and temporal, whilst the world to come is imperishable and eternal.¹¹² In this dualistic worldview evil is just as important as good and it has to be explained. *The Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 1-36), for example, sees the presence of evil as a result of a rebellion in heaven where fallen angels consorted with women and taught them heavenly secrets. This means that sin is evil, originating in heaven, and is introduced into the world by angelic creatures. Supporting another view on the emergence of evil is Enoch who argues that sin was introduced by man, not in heaven, and it is this view that is most prominent in films where humanity is seen as causing its own disaster and judgement, as in *Bladerunner*. These books which originated out of the same tradition, keep very different ideas about the origin of sin and evil. Among apocalyptic literature it is probably the Qumran texts that supports the most dualistic world-view, and which extends dualism to the angelic world which is divided (just like humanity) into two camps that are in a constant battle with each other. The result is a conflict where human initiative has very little influence and the outcome is determined by God who will eventually dominate.¹¹³ This is supported by several apocalyptic films, in which the attempts made by humanity to save itself and the world seem futile. As a result trust is put in a hero with extraordinary powers, such as the terminator or John Spartan in *Demolition Man*, or the more human hero of disaster films such as *Volcano* (1997) or *Twister* (1996), who is enlisted to save the world or the community from the disastrous end. In films, like the ones discussed in this thesis, the hope for a hero or saviour has been lost. This results in either a relishing of the end itself, in a nihilistic and cynical celebration of the end as seen in *Crash*, or in an acknowledgement of the corruption and a-morality of the present and therefore an attempt is made to escape as in *Bladerunner*, or the a-morality is internalised as in *Apocalypse Now*.

2:2:5 Apocalypse as Ritual

Ritual is at the core of all religion, the framework that makes up what we call religion or religious worship. In a worshipping community ritual holds the community together and unites believers, strengthens and makes belief visual. For most Christian worshippers the most important ritual is the celebration of mass which is celebrated by believers everywhere and for the same reasons of belonging, worship, and devotion. Ritual or liturgy in the Christian context has its beginning in literature, in the text of the Bible and

¹¹² Leon Morris, (1973 (1972)), pp. 49-51.

¹¹³ Florentino Garcia Martinez (1998), pp. 166, 169.

is in its basic form literature that has turned into performance. Liturgy then is the performing of the text, the text taking on theatrical qualities and it is through this ritual that continuity and belonging is expressed. As Catherine Bell expresses the relation between text and ritual: ‘...ritual is an eminently suitable device to organise theoretical conversation that wishes to uncover cultural meanings through the interpretation of ‘texts’ that ‘reek of meaning’’.¹¹⁴ Ritual is a central concern to apocalyptic which in itself is deeply liturgical, referring back to the text, and the original event of the death of God, the crucifixion and the promise of a return of Christ. This quality has in contemporary apocalypses in film been emphasised, creating films that are thoroughly ritualistic. This ritualistic aspect is shown in the pathological repetitiveness of *Crash*, with its incessant repetition of car crashes and sex, where Vaughn sets the scene of death in the back of his car in the same obsessive way that the priest sets the table for communion. *Apocalypse Now* similarly focuses on the ritual of death where the animal is sacrificed at the same time that Kurtz is slaughtered, again making the connection between ritual, death and hope for a new beginning. These films, however, having lost their connection to hope and a new beginning become ensnared in rituals, pathologically repeating the end without ever reaching it, hence being caught in an apocalyptic moment. In sharp contrast to the ‘classical apocalypse’ what remains is the ritual of the end which becomes a pathological repetition of the end since the ritual no longer aspires to reach beyond itself. The heavenly city, the new beginning of the ‘classical apocalypse’ where ritual is no longer necessary is never achieved and the actors of these films are stuck in repetition.

The apocalyptic most often works consciously with the notion of history, linking the past, present and future together in order to see history as a meaningful whole where everything is part of God's game plan.¹¹⁵ Aim to see history as meaningful and having direction, the apocalypticist frequently uses past events, and rewrites them in the form of prophecy, thereby both explaining the past, and shedding light on the future in the context of God's involvement in history. As a result of this dwelling on the past, apocalypses are often detailed and clear about past events whilst the future and the time after the end are less known and well defined. In Revelation 21 the future is only marked with the ‘and I saw a new heaven and a new earth’ but the reader is told nothing about the new world and what it entails. This outlook makes the end a realisation of history according to a timetable of events which is only known by God. Yet it is revealed to the apocalypticist

¹¹⁴ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992) p 44.

¹¹⁵ D. S Russel, (1992), p. 87.

who aims to show the present as chaos and the future as order. As a result of this focus on history as a connected whole and a future that we know very little about, apocalyptic is more interested in theology than history. What becomes interesting is how to live and act in the end of time, and how to maintain the ritual and the bond to God and his plan with the world.¹¹⁶ This makes the apocalyptic a form of quest literature where the aim is to find the answers to what the future holds, to find a Holy Grail in the form of paradise. Apocalyptic film adopts this idea and develops it as a strong characteristic where a hero or messianic figure has to find someone, as in Willard's quest for Kurtz, or has to alter or reverse something, as the invention of the computer in *Terminator*. The quests that they believe will solve their unease are often in the Hollywood version quests that entail altering the course of history, but there are also apocalypses such as *Apocalypse Now* where the discovery of the Holy Grail or Kurtz leads to a deepened apocalyptic crisis. In *Crash* the scenario is again slightly different in that the quest has become a mean in itself and where the 'questers' have become caught up in a ritual, repeating the quest over and over again, making the quest the apocalyptic moment itself.

This focus on history as well as on theology is often expressed in the 'classical apocalypse' through the dualism of two ages which lends itself to ideas of good and evil acts as well as two ages in history defined by the two forces of good and evil. There is an essential characteristic in the dualism of two ages and Revelation encompasses both the present and what is to come, and the view is that only through the times to come can the present be seen and interpreted.¹¹⁷ This is linked to the theology of apocalyptic literature which aims at consoling the suffering and sustaining righteousness among the believing. The message that the righteous will be saved targets a group of people who consider themselves the chosen few and aim at sustaining their beliefs, giving hope rather than castigating the nominally religious and trying to change their sinful ways. The apocalyptic, like prophecy, is ethical teaching but targets a different audience, where the prophets attempt to change the sinful ways of the believers whilst the apocalyptic already has decided who is elect and who will be damned. As a result of this arbitrary election process there is no code of conduct that will secure salvation, and the righteous are instead only encouraged to continue living a good, devout life assuming that the reader already knows what the right kind of living is.¹¹⁸ This pre-destination of the apocalyptic

¹¹⁶ Leon Morris, (1973(1972)), pp. 57-67.

¹¹⁷ M.C. de Boer, 'Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology' in John J. Collins, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Volume 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 351-2.

¹¹⁸ Leon Morris, (1973(1972)), pp. 58-61.

leaves the person with only one option of repeating rituals which might offer some consolation whilst waiting for the end to arrive, as seen in the example of *Crash* or in Paul's encouraging words to the early Christians to pray and wait. The distinctive feature of apocalyptic literature is that it increases interest in the heavenly world, which is illustrated through the emphasis on the fallen world of the end and a promise of a better world to come. This division between the lost world and the world to come is further emphasised through the dualistic world view which creates a strict hierarchy among the heavenly domains as well as between the righteous and the doomed, this world and the world to come.¹¹⁹

The image of the messiah, referring to a person, anointed with oil is the messianic reference most commonly used in apocalyptic texts. It is, however, only in the 2nd century B.C.E that Jewish texts mentions a messianic leader, and it is not until the 1st century C.E. that messianism start to appear in Judaism in a consistent manner. There are several images of the Messiah and variations in content of what the Messiah is and what the figure entails. The most common belief is that a messiah should be of David's lineage, involved in delivering the people at the end of time, carrying out the role of a judge, defeating the nations and judging the wicked. Most texts seem to expect a messianic rule to continue after the end and it is only Ezra who sees messianic rule as temporary.¹²⁰ The lack of messianism in early temple Judaism could be seen as a result of the long rule by others which was regarded as natural, and as long as Jewish religion and custom was allowed it was not seen as a problem. The first authors to introduce the messiah were hostile to foreign rule and wished to change the situation. Daniel can be seen as an example of this but also Qumran and Song of Solomon bear witness to a resentment towards foreign rule as well as the native rule. They denounce the existing rule and introduce the hope for a Messiah and the changes his presence would provide. In the aftermath of the revolt against Rome in 66-70 C.E., messianism became more important and the messiah figure changes into a more human leader, and as a result the apocalyptic texts anticipate a little more exalted messiah than the non apocalyptic texts.¹²¹ In the period of waiting and watching that precedes the return Christians are to uphold ritual/ liturgy and await a return that originally was thought to be immediate but which has been postponed indefinitely. With time passing since the crucifixion without a return of Christ,

¹¹⁹ Florentino Garcia Martinez (1998), pp.179-180.

¹²⁰ James C, VanderKam, 'Messianism and Apocalypticism' in John J. Collins, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Volume 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1998) pp. 198, 225.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 226.

an apocalyptic Jesus becomes a challenge to the Christian faith, and whilst to the early Christians Jesus was expected to return very soon, this failed promise made theologians create new schedules for his return and theological conditions for this return.¹²² The image of the messiah is probably the most common one in contemporary apocalypses and has taken on characteristics of the messiah in 'classical' apocalyptic literature, but such images are most often of a character who displays more human characteristics than divine. We find him in the form of a larger than life character, like the *Terminator*, a machine striving to be human, as an antihero in *Bladerunner*, running away from the apocalyptic scenario. The messiah also come in the shape of a priestly figure in *Apocalypse Now* where Kurtz is the high priest with an apocalyptic reign incorporating the sacrifice of himself and the devotion of the new saviour in the form of Willard. Similarly in *Crash* we encounter the high priest Vaughn minister the communion in the backseat of his car, in the form of violent sexual encounters. And finally with Alex in *Clockwork Orange* we find the messiah, the priest, the educator and his disciples, who turn against him in his own moment of apocalypse.

¹²² Richard A Horsley, 'The Kingdom of God and the Renewal of Israel; Synoptic Gospels, Jesus Movements, and Apocalypticism,' in John J. Collins (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Volume 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 303-304.

Chapter 3

A Clockwork Orange

3:1 Stanley Kubrick and His Works

Stanley Kubrick was a filmmaker surrounded by many myths about his person and interests what is clear is that his interest was in the human condition, what makes us human, and the actions and events that change us. Many of Kubrick's films deal with the issue of man in conflict with his environment and with himself. In *Lolita* (1962), *Killers Kiss* (1955), and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) the characters look for love in their lives and relationships that have become stale or unresponsive. In *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and *The Killing* (1956) the topic is money and greed, and how it influences our lives. In *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Spartacus* (1960), and *Paths of Glory* (1957) the issue is mental as well as physical freedom. In his most famous films *2001* (1968), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *The Shining* (1980) the characters battle with a changing society as well as with themselves.¹²³

Kubrick had a preference for working with a literary source and most of his works are based on novels or short stories that he has adapted for film, with the exception of *Fear and Desire* (1953) and *Killers Kiss*.¹²⁴ He used the literary source directly in some cases as in *A Clockwork Orange*, or rewrote it into a screenplay that fits his vision, as in *Eyes Wide Shut*. In most cases the narrative was left rather intact and the filming is more of a translation of literary images to visual images where the literary tone remains for he considered his directing as a mere continuation of writing.¹²⁵ Kubrick came across Anthony Burgess' book *A Clockwork Orange* in 1969 whilst shooting *Dr Strangelove* (1964) and bought the rights to the script with the prospect of making a film representative of the new trends of filmmaking. At the time cinema was changing with the increase in youth films and a reformation in the way films looked, replacing earlier tamer films with full front nudity, profanity, drugs, sacrilege and political protest. *A Clockwork Orange* received an X-rating for its nudity and violence and quickly became somewhat of a weapon used in the debate about increased violence in the streets. The film received very varied reviews and the divided the critics who called it inhumane, a

¹²³ Paul Duncan, *The Pocket Essential Stanley Kubrick* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 1999), p. 7.

¹²⁴ Greg Jenkins, *Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaption; Three Novels, Three Films* (Jefferson North Carolina and London: McFarlane & Company Inc. Publ. 1992), p. 2.

¹²⁵ Greg Jenkins, (1992), p. 23-25.

porno violent sci-fi comedy, cynical and disturbing but who also nominated it for the American Academy awards.¹²⁶ In England *A Clockwork Orange* had a shocking effect on the community and the debate intensified when alleged copycat crimes started to occur, together with young men walking the streets dressed like the Alex and the droogs. Kubrick kept silent in the midst of the debate, but Burgess spoke out, defending the right of free speech arguing that ‘Neither cinema nor literature can be blamed for original sin. A man who kills his uncle cannot justifiably blame the performance on Hamlet. On the other hand, if literature is to be held for mayhem and murder, then the most damnable book of them all is the Bible, the most vindictive piece of literature in existence.’¹²⁷ Despite Burgess’ defence Kubrick withdrew the film in 1974, troubled by all accusations, stating that it would not be shown in Britain.¹²⁸ It was mainly the style of the violence that outraged the critics and the audiences who were shocked by how the characters seemed to enjoy carrying out the violent acts which were not directly condemned in the film. The joy of the violence in *A Clockwork Orange* was very different to violence in other films it was not usually unprovoked but heroic, or else it was evil but with an assurance that eventually the villain is killed justifiably. In *A Clockwork Orange* what seemed so shocking was the violence without provocation and the simple enjoyment of the characters that were depicted as neither villains nor heroes.¹²⁹ It is this ambiguity of the hero (the intelligent and sensitive character of Alex who at the same time is an antihero, without ethical boundaries) that makes *A Clockwork Orange* such an influential yet disturbing film. Kubrick’s words concerning *2001* are easily adapted in relation to *A Clockwork Orange* where he sees *2001* not primarily as a film but as a non-verbal experience, a visual experience that avoids being pigeonholed and hence manages to work on a level of the subconscious and the emotional. The meaning of the film is an entirely subjective experience and he wants to avoid devising a method or guidelines for interpreting the film. Instead he wants to leave that entirely to the viewer.¹³⁰

3:1:1 Kubrick’s Art of Adoption

¹²⁶ David Hughes, *The Complete Kubrick* (London: Virgin Publishing, 2000 (1972)), pp. 169

¹²⁷ Vincent Le Brutto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*. (New York: Donald E Fine Books, Penguin Group, 1997), pp. 368-370.

¹²⁸ Ibid, pp. 368-370.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 363.

¹³⁰ Eric Nordern, Playboy Interview: Stanley Kubrick. In Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: Univ Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Playboy*, Sept, 1968, pp. 47-48.

Kubrick preferred to work with adaptation, and in the case of *A Clockwork Orange* and *2001* he worked without a screenplay with only the novel as a starting point and inspiration. As a result, *A Clockwork Orange* is close to its narrative source and is more of a translation into image than a reworking of the material. This does not mean that Kubrick's work is unimaginative but rather the contrary and he preferred to see his directing as a continuation of writing making filmmaking a literary experience.¹³¹ As a filmmaker he was most interested in the inner life of the characters, a quality that he found more easily translated and more meaningful than being committed to the details of the narrative. In his films he is committed more usually to the greater narrative but argues that it is more important to be faithful to the meaning than to the letter finding it hard to justify the sacrifice of meaning for effect. Even if he in *A Clockwork Orange* is committed to the greater narrative lines he argued that books were more readily translatable when they did not deal with a linear story but with the psyche and emotional life of its characters. In the case of *A Clockwork Orange* Kubrick kept close to the narrative of Burgess' novel, but based the film on the American edition, omitting the final chapter where Alex grows out of his violent behaviour and dreams about settling down, an ending Kubrick found unrealistic.

Burgess defended the film and the right of free speech, but according to some biographers was not happy with the adaptation, which he argued did not conform to his intentions of the book as 'a theological dissertation on the way the state messes up free will'.¹³² Burgess who himself was a believer in original sin thought that one must first fall to be redeemed, something he felt that Kubrick had not taken into account. In the novel this is illustrated with Alex, initially seemingly innocent when he first meets the reader in the Korova milkbar, drinking milk as an image of innocence and impotence. When Alex later attempts to kill himself this is seen by Burgess as his fall which will lead to a regeneration, but which will come not through the help of the state, rather it will occur with Alex's own recognition of the value of his choices.¹³³ Burgess' intention to make Alex into a responsible regenerated individual is not taken on board by Kubrick who possibly found a regenerated Alex unlikely and optimistic. What is obvious is that the reading Burgess suggests is a far more positive or hopeful reading of the state of society and the future of humankind.

¹³¹ Greg Jenkins, (1992), pp. 23-25

¹³² John Baxter, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc, 1997), p. 257.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 257.

Burgess' novel shocked the audiences when it was published in 1962. He chose the title from the Cockney expression 'queer as a clockwork orange' (queer here not referring to homosexual) and created a book that fitted the title. He found the inspiration in the Mods and Rockers, the street gangs in Leningrad, and also in the Teddyboys, who wore costumes that modified Edwardian clothing. He got his ideas from the increasingly violent society in the sixties, with fights between street gangs and he imagined what it would be like in the 70s when the violence would have increased, and so as a result he staged the story in 1972. In order for the book not to become too dated he invented a new clothing style and had his gang speaking Nadsat, a pidgin version of Russian, heavily pregnant with literary references.¹³⁴ Nadsat was the suffix for teen in Russian and he constructed the language by combining English and Russian, with additions of slang and Gypsy bolognese, and hence created a language that would survive the changing time without becoming dated. When the book was published in 1962 Burgess was accused of destroying the English language and the critics as well as audience were far from appreciative of his experimenting with the English language. Burgess found the topic of violence urgent but difficult and several incidents were taken out of his own life. He says in his biography that he was constantly drunk when writing the book because he could not bear the violence and the memories it brought to him. The rape scene was particularly difficult for him since he modelled it on an attack on his wife that she suffered during the war when she was attacked by four American deserters, and lost her child due to the violence.¹³⁵ Burgess later saw the incident as a trigger to her mental and physical ill health.¹³⁶ Burgess book is not so much a narrative as an experience, something it shares with the film, and where Burgess used language to stylise the violence, Kubrick used speed and movement. Burgess confusing and surreal narrative retains its quality of being transitory and never rigid by Kubrick's way of making the violent movement resemble ballet, expressing beauty even when the action in itself is awful.¹³⁷ The surreal character and the morally ambivalent story of Burgess correspond well to the classical apocalyptic stories where the powerful imagery is brought to the reader through a strong and innovative use of language and images. The futuristic fiction is set in an apocalyptic time and culture where day to day living is what counts, and where any future has been made redundant. In *Alex* we meet someone shaped by

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 241-242. And Vincent Le Brutto, (1997), pp. 335-336.

¹³⁵ Vincent Le Brutto, (1997), pp. 336-337.

¹³⁶ Paul Duncan, (1999), p. 65. And John Baxter, (1997), p. 241.

¹³⁷ Vincent Le Brutto, (1997), p. 360.

living on the borderline to the end, and whose moral system and values have collapsed as a result of this. The apocalyptic tone is picked up by Kubrick who creates a film that is as visual as Burgess's prose and which shows life on the verge of the end, which is always present and yet not there. Kubrick emphasises the language as well as the otherworldly yet familiar imagery to create a postmodern apocalypse that responds to the challenges of the contemporary world and contemporary living.

3:2 Structure and Style

3:2:1 The Narrative

Most of Kubrick's films follow the literary narrative of a novel in terms of structure, something that is also true for *A Clockwork Orange* where Kubrick take over both Burgess narrative structure as well as the narrative voice of Alex. Kubrick's use of Alex as the narrator conforms to the use of a narrator in the novel, and the very beginning of the film sets the agenda for what is to come when Alex's voice introduces us to his world, sitting in the Korova milkbar. During this introduction it is made clear that Alex is the narrative voice, but the sequence also emphasises the imagery which frames Alex as the centre of the narrative with his intense stare into the camera. This use of Alex as the narrator who tells his own story in his own words brings the narrative close to the viewer/reader, letting the viewer become part of the story. In a similar way the classical apocalypse use a narrator in first person, bringing the apocalypticist and his attempts to put his own experiences into words closer to the reader.

A Clockwork Orange as a film as well as a literary narrative conforms in style and structure to the classical apocalypse, forming a narrative that is apocalyptic both in form and content. Like the classical apocalyptic of *The Book of Revelation* it is deeply engaged in forming a structure that is symmetrical and logical. The narrative of *The Book of Revelation* is structured around a central vision which is in itself symmetric, consisting in three series of seven incidents which correspond to each other in chapters 6, 8-9, 11.15-19.¹³⁸ This attempt to create symmetry and logical structure stands in sharp contrast to the content of a narrative that often is chaotic and disruptive. This situation is echoed in *A Clockwork Orange* which also has a structure and a symmetry that but a chaotic narrative and a disruptive language. The narrative of *A Clockwork Orange* is constructed as a narrative in two parts divided by the Ludvico treatment

¹³⁸ Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1985 (1982)), pp. 414-416.

which signifies a reversal in the story when Alex has been reformed. This two-part narrative is constructed by 35 narrative sequences that are structured around actions and their reversals. A narrative breakdown shows that *A Clockwork Orange* is structured around parallel incidents, where one action in part one is reversed and repeated at a later stage in part two of the film. A breakdown shows a structure of the significant scenes that are apocalyptic in their consistency of chaos. In segment 2 Alex beats up an old man, an incident that later is reversed in segment 25 where Alex is beaten up by the old man and his gang. Kubrick's manipulation of the scenes show the significant difference in the development of Alex and the first beating takes place in a black tunnel, intensely backlit showing Alex and the droogs as shadows, or as creatures of the dark carrying out their violent deeds. The reversal of the scene when Alex as a reformed character, unable to perform any violence, is attacked by the old man takes place in contrast in full daylight. This difference signifies the change Alex has gone through from his dark night time existence to a life in a society into which Alex attempts to be integrated. The next crucial parallel sequence in segment 4 shows the attack on Mr Alexander and his wife in their home where they are brutally assaulted to the upbeat tones of *Singing in the Rain*. The act is reversed in the segment 27-30 when Alex seeks refuge in the very same home and becomes the victim of a vindictive Mr Alexander. In both scenes the theatrical performance is emphasised, in the former scene through the vulgar vaudeville of Alex's dancing and singing and in the latter scene through a well rehearsed, theatrical act of revenge and vindication. Further in segment 9 Alex mocks and beats up his droogs to assert his authority over them and to punish them for their lack of sophistication and style. When the act is reversed in segment 26 Alex is assaulted by his droogs who have now become policemen, still as brutal and unsophisticated but now in a position of authority. The reversal of the droogs (becoming policemen and people of authority but still lacking in the cultural sophistication that Alex craves) is deeply ironic, showing that society is as much of a brute as are its criminals. The final reversal portrays Alex in segment 8 involved in a sexual act with two young girls, making Alex out to be the star acrobat enjoying sexual gratification and nameless sex that makes him feel potent. In the reversal in segment 35 Alex has gone through the Ludvico treatment and is made into a passive impotent man. His painful and pathetic attempts to touch the girl's breasts results in him falling to the floor in convulsions unable to perform a sexual act for which he still feels a desire. In order to highlight the contrast between the two scenes the earlier scene is played in fast forward making it into happy thoughtless vaudeville,

whilst the reversal is played in slow motion, indulging in the desire and the impotence of Alex's.

Kubrick constructs the narrative in such a way that it follows a fairy tale pattern as well as the pattern of an apocalypse, with a moral structure of reversals but without the ethical conclusion and the educating ending of the fairytale.¹³⁹ Instead of having a moral twist expected in a fairy tale, the film ends without a clear ending and a moral conclusion, at the same time it contains a very unlikely hero who does everything but learn and become a 'better' person from his experiences. Kubrick manipulates the traditional three-act structure of a narrative by the reversals and lets the narrative climax arrive in segment 28-31 that in turn leads into the final reversal when Alex again is restored to his former self. In this sequence the violence used to change Alex into a harmless creature through the Ludvico treatment is reversed by the self inflicted violence of Alex's attempted suicide. The outcome is the return of Alex back to his former self and a new life that is only hinted to the viewer. With Alex's last words, 'I was cured alright' the viewer is left at the point of *The Book of Revelation* 21 'and I saw a new heaven and a new earth'. The new beginning in Alex life is equally veiled and hidden as is the new beginning of Revelation and here the viewer/ believer can only speculate over what has been revealed. According to Kubrick fairy tales and myths are better equipped to express reality in today's society, than any realistic form of narrative and it is as fairytale or Apocalypse that *A Clockwork Orange* become a serious commentary on the state of society and human kind.¹⁴⁰

3:2:2 Language, Music and Movement

In a sense where *2001* ends (with the star child looking out) *A Clockwork Orange* begins, for it commences with the gaze of Alex as he sits in the Korova milkbar. The camera focuses on his eyes and then moves away to reveal the scene where replicas of women's bodies are turned into chairs, tables and milk dispensers. The underlying connection of the star child to a new beginning and a messiah connects to the end and to the antichrist, Alex who we immediately identify as a destroyer. The music, a distorted version of 'Elegy on the Death of Queen Mary' by Purcell, together with the interior and the cold stare by Alex helps to enforce the feeling of unease and perversion that is

¹³⁹ Mario Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 23.

¹⁴⁰ Penelope Houston, 'Kubrick Country' in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Saturday Review*, 25 December 1971, p. 114.

inherent in the apocalyptic.¹⁴¹ Kubrick's film is a tightly knit work where music, movement and language are intimately connected in a disruptive, disturbing narrative that can best be understood as an apocalypse that assaults all senses. For most viewers the music is mainly supporting and mood creating, but for Kubrick it takes on a deeper significance where the narrative in the film is interwoven with the music which gives clues to understand the film. The language of the film, Nadsat, works in a similar way being focused around sound rather than concept or meaning. It is a language that fits the futuristic and apocalyptic fiction of Burgess where meaning subversively works with the narrative and lets the meaning be shown to the reader through repetition and context, which like the language of the apocalypse is veiled and revealed little by little.¹⁴² Blake Morrison, in the Penguin introduction to the novel, sees the language as well as the narrative as prophetic, a description very fitting for the language in itself and its usage.¹⁴³ The use of Nadsat resembles slang and the absence of a glossary enforces the apocalyptic quality of the book where the true meaning of the word can only be understood through repetition and immersion into the narrative, just -as the apocalypticist is immersed or internalises the word of God. Like the apocalyptic language it is revealed little at a time, bearing the truth and unmasking the horrors of the end, and the reader can only read on, taking part of the unspeakable through the full participation of the experience of the end.

It is as an assault on the senses that the apocalypse is experienced, and similarly, the film of *A Clockwork Orange* makes use of all the senses to get its desperate message across. In this play of language, movement and music the narrative becomes subversive and diminishes the distance between reader/watcher and text/film. It was around Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie* that Kubrick created and organised the violence of the narrative. The aim was to make the violence resemble dance, making the movements and music correspond to the surreal narrative and the continuous movement between the cynical and macabre to the serious and horrific. The central violent scenes like the rape, the killing of the cat woman, the beating of the droogs are all set to music and were all arranged as movement to music and as a result they take on a quality that is found in

¹⁴¹ Alexander Walker, *Stanley Kubrick Director: Visual Analysis by Sybil Taylor and Ulrich Rucht* (New York/London: W.W Norton & Company, 1999), p.196. Earlier edition named *Stanley Kubrick Direct*, (Cunundrum Ltd, 1972).

¹⁴² Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 134.

¹⁴³ Blake Morrison, *Introduction. A Clockwork Orange* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p. ix.

dance pieces.¹⁴⁴ An example of this is given in the opening scene when Alex and his gang beat up an old drunk singing 'Molly Malone', with the droogs moving around in smoothly whilst performing a viscous attack on the old man to the music of violins and woodwinds. After the camera moves to another scene of violence showing a girl being raped by Billyboy and his gang to an upbeat version of Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie*. The scene is staged, taking place in an old theatre, where Billyboy's gang and the girl are set up as actors, and Alex and the droogs are an audience that becomes active actors. The scene is theatrical and parodic with the music changing to a waltz when Alex and his gang enter the scene to fight with Billyboy. The use of music peaks when the film passes from the realm of the surreal to the horrific, in the scene where Alex and the droogs enter the home with an inviting sign 'HOME', to assault the writer and his wife, after a race through the countryside. Alex rings the doorbell that chimes with the tune of Beethoven's fifth. The assault then takes place in a vaudeville form, with Alex and the droogs seemingly dancing around and committing atrocious acts to the happy tune of *Singing in the Rain*, with Alex marking the beat with his boot in the writer's stomach. The scene is not courtly as earlier at the beginning of the film but is rather a plebeian farce mixed with aggressive and stylised pop.¹⁴⁵ The scene is incredibly violent and with the use of music it becomes almost unbearable. After the attack, the evening is eventually rounded off by the tired and satisfied droogs in the bar where Alex hears Shiller's *Ode to Joy*, and his steps home are again accompanied by Purcell and culminates in passing a mural showing the dignity of labour. Finally at home his beloved Beethoven complements his fantasy of a woman being hung, people being crushed by a rockslide, and finally a volcanic eruption, marking the high point of his masturbation, and the climax of the evening.¹⁴⁶ The use of music language and image is again reminiscent of the 'classical apocalyptic' which is a similar attack on the senses and an experience that concerns the whole human being and changes her forever. Alex is like the apocalypticist, both assaulted and assaulting through the language, music and image that create a visual and musical feast of impressions. The apocalypse with its constant disruption of narrative, its visions and distorted narrative and language is well translated to *A Clockwork Orange*.

¹⁴⁴ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, *The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick* (Oxford: Roundhouse Publ., 3rd Edition, 2000 (1972)) p. 169.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 201-03. (1972).

¹⁴⁶ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, 2000 (1972)), pp. 172-73.

The music created by Carlos and Eldkin was crucial to Kubrick both for the story as for the making of a certain look and feel to the film. As a result of Alex's love for Beethoven and the ninth symphony Kubrick decided that he wanted classical music for the entire film. In order to make the classical music work with the futuristic and surreal look and feel of the narrative he decided to use electronic music to give slightly distorted versions of classic pieces. He wanted the classical music to be adapted to the futuristic scene, a contradiction shown well in the music shop scene when Alex picks up his record that stands in sharp contrast to the teeny-boppers choice of music. The girls are later involved in an orgy with Alex in his house to the very *William Tell Overture* he bought.¹⁴⁷ From the very beginning of the film, the music continues to play a significant role and follows Alex and illustrates what happens to him. When Alex is given the Ludvico treatment it is to the very music he loves, and as he is tortured the music is altered and distorted classical pieces. The use of music can be likened here to the eating of the scroll in Revelation and Ezekiel. The scroll, like Beethoven tastes sweet in the mouth, or is sweet in the ears, but turns bitter and corrosive when its true potential is revealed, making Beethoven a tool of evil that can only be associated with pain and death. Kubrick composes his imagery in line with the music and the images also appear slightly distorted. As an example he often holds the shot a little too long, creating a feeling of unease in the viewer. In the second part of the film Kubrick changes his use of low angles, used to give the subjects a quality of being elevated over to a straighter angle which results in a less elevated effect that emphasises Alex having become normalised and incorporated in society.¹⁴⁸ Similarly to the different way of filming, the music changes in the second part when Alex has been reformed and can no longer listen to the music he loved but is left with less potent pieces. When Alex meets Mr Alexander once again, the latter has been confined to the wheelchair as a result of the attack, and from the wheelchair he plots a political attack on the government, hoping to disprove their claim of having found a cure for crime. In revenge he plots Alex's suicide, which will show the government that they have been wrong, as well as getting his own personal revenge for his disability and the death of his wife. Through the use of Beethoven he encourages Alex to kill himself, but Alex is only badly hurt after throwing himself through a window. Alex is taken to hospital where he is spoon-fed by the Minister of the Interior who promises Alex all he can wish for, just as Satan offers an alternative to the promise of Revelation.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid 174

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Walker, (1999), p. 198.

Alex as the antichrist who is true to his sensibilities and his love of culture, is reunited with his 'lovely Ludvig van' in a final scene where two loudspeakers triumphantly play Beethoven's ninth. Alex last words of the film 'I was cured alright' are uttered as he fantasises about having sex with a woman in front of men in suits applauding him. The final scene indicates that evil cannot be avoided, just as the apocalypse cannot be avoided and that it comes in shapes we have not expected.¹⁴⁹

This usage of music makes the film very intense, and serves to confuse and contradict what happens in the scenes in which music is being played. The linkage of classical pieces and the slight distortion makes the music blend in with the surreal imagery and it helps to seduce the viewer. As in apocalyptic texts there is a familiarity, yet at the same time it is distant and unknown, and the distortion of the music serves this purpose of making it familiar yet different, giving the viewer contradictory messages. This use of slight distortion is common to apocalyptic work where things seem familiar but somehow altered, and where the world is the same and still other but where it is also impossible to tell what the difference is. As evil in the apocalypse is disguised as good, the beautiful movements, the music and the articulated and seductive voice of Alex disguise what is really happening and what an innocent face evil has taken. This use of music and movement together with slow-motion and speed enforces and heightens the surreal character of the narrative making the extreme violence watchable, cynical and ironic but also uncomfortable and horrific. As such the film can be seen as an example of watching the unwatchable and similarly to the classical apocalypse the imagery and language escapes our understanding and comprehension, and whilst we are appalled and horrified by the imagery we are also attracted and drawn to it. We are appalled and want to turn away from what is shown but at the same time we are unable to turn away, forcing ourselves to watch the truly awful.

Kubrick shot the film in and around London making use of the cityscape and the council estates that had started to grow up. In combination with the functionalistic architecture and the new housing projects Kubrick used a clothing style which was influenced by pop art and its use of the homogenous clothing of China and Soviet Union.¹⁵⁰ The houses of Mr and Mrs Alexander as well as the Cat Lady are bourgeois, attempting to look radically chic. The artworks influenced by the pop-art movement, displaying colourful and erotic artistic forms that together with the expensive and chic

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 219-21.

¹⁵⁰ John Baxter, (1997), pp. 253-255.

style portray art as chic at the same time as utterly pointless. The sleek and stylised look stands in sharp contrast to the flat inhabited by Alex and his parents which is the working class equivalent of the stylish bourgeois home, but which is best described as 1960's bargain basement chic. The flat is ugly with kitschy, cheap knick-knacks inhabited by Alex's mum dressed in a plastic mini-skirt (which is a size too small) and his dad in 1960's polyester shirt.¹⁵¹ The different homes point out the difference between the working class and the bourgeois where Alex's repulsion of his parents' lack of culture and style is underlined by his love of music and their lack of taste. The prevailing image is one of art objects without meaning or use value, which are present to establish social group status and style rather than a love for the art objects in themselves.

Art in the film is either functional, as in the Korova milkbar or a status symbol without any meaning. The intellectuals fill their homes with meaningless art, and in that context Alex represents a more romantic ideal of a use value in art, seeing art as part of seduction, and liberation of the soul, making art appreciated as something more than just as an objects. For Alex even violence becomes art and he makes the assaults into performances and aesthetic games. At the same time he sees music and art as a means in itself without ethical implications, and reacts against the music played during the Ludvico treatment which he believes is doing harm to 'Lovely Ludvig van' who himself harmed no one.¹⁵² Kubrick argues art has no responsibility to sustain morality but to depict what is already there, and to make life more enjoyable and endurable.¹⁵³ Art in itself is in this apocalyptic vision neither good nor bad, but an empty shell filled with what ever meaning we give it, and humans are not good or evil, just like art.

3:3 *A Clockwork Orange* as a Depiction of the Postmodern

A Clockwork Orange is my current favourite. I was very predisposed against the film.

After seeing it, I realised it is the only movie about what the modern world really means.

(Louis Bun□el)¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, (2000) (1972)), pp. 173-74.

¹⁵² Nils Hugo Geber and Torsten Manns, 'En urverks apelsin. Nils Hugo Geber och Torsten Manns diskuterar Stanley Kubricks manniskosyn i anslutning till hans nya film *A Clockwork Orange*.' In *Chaplin*, 114 No 3, 1972, Svenska Filminstitutet, Stockholm, p. 102.

¹⁵³ Philip Strick and Penelope Houston, 'Modern Times: An Interview with Stanley Kubrick' in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Sight and Sound*, Spring, 1972, p. 129-30.

¹⁵⁴ Louis Bun□el cited in Vincent Le Brutto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (New York: Donald E Fine Books, Penguin Group, 1997), p. 334.

The citation from Bunuel extrapolates on *A Clockwork Orange* as a film about the essence of contemporary society which is what Burgess hoped to express in his futuristic novel and what Kubrick throughout his career was interested in. The narrative about contemporary life and contemporary existence can be seen as futuristic and dystopian in trying to extract those characteristics of human nature that will survive in contemporary society. The imagined future is a bleak one with violence for kicks, punished with violence carried out by the state. It gives a depiction of a society where the keepers of the law are not very different from the criminals breaking it. The dividing point between whether you have the right to be violent is decided by the authorities illustrated by Alex's droogs who join the police force in order to enjoy their violent deeds without being caught. The film attempts to explore what happens to humanity at the end, when faced with either the violent chaos provided by characters like Alex, where the pacifying techniques of the Ludvico Treatment become an escape from the violence of the end. *A Clockwork Orange* as a futuristic apocalypse shows a chilling picture of the end where violence is the distinguishing trait of humankind, a trait that has been nurtured by the society that has produced this very humanity. Alex is insolent, egocentric and egotistic as well as authoritarian and a pleasure seeker. As an example of man at the end of its tether he is driven by that which gives him pleasure rather than greed or power. This celebration of pleasure as well as artistic sensibility that Alex displays is a result of him being the one to whom the secrets of the future have been revealed. He is the apocalypticist who has seen the truth, who knows that it is all coming to an end lives as if the end was near with no time for earthly matters rejecting his parents way of life in favour for his vision. For Alex the violence is for pleasure and beauty and it is in the violent acts he find both physical, sexual and mental release as well as an appeal to his aesthetic sense. The red blood flowing and the music playing together with his own physical capability of inflicting pain and injury is what he finds beautiful and rewarding and the power and authority it gives him are only pleasurable side effects. Alex knowing that this is the end lives accordingly, relishes in music and seeks pleasure in sex and violence and avoids that which is worldly like work (by Alex called rabbitering from rabbit/robot) which he finds demeaning and the meaningless collection of wealth or pretty polly which he resents. Hence the image of man at the end is one of a pleasure seeking individual, who instead of love or wealth seeks pleasure and where traditional moral values and religious or moral reward or punishment is of no interest.

3:3:1 *A Clockwork Orange* as a discussion about Human Nature

The narrative is presented on three different levels that are intertwined and parallel with each other. On the first level the film is a social satire on the use of psychological conditioning which shows how a man conditioned to be good is under all circumstances vulnerable. The idea that we should destroy all authority so that the man in his natural state of goodness can emerge is sharply criticised and seen as fallacy since all such efforts eventually fall into the hands of thugs and fails because of the imperfect nature of man himself. *A Clockwork Orange* succeeds in showing society as based on power that dissembles on both the political left and right, where neither side manages to stand over human nature or human desires. This breakdown can be seen in the light of the apocalyptic breakdown when political, economic, religious, and social structures cease to work. The second level that the film works on is as a fairy tale of retribution, based on the very structure of the story where the narrative works with actions and their reversals, and we meet the same persons before and after the Ludvico treatment. As in many classic fairy tales the central character performs an action over which we are secretly pleased, whilst the second time the action is performed it is reversed, and we fear for the character's life. Similarly, Alex titillates us at first because of his cleverness and outspoken attitude, but we are horrified when later the actions are reversed and our fascination changes to a fear for his life and we are left feeling guilty about our first response. The third level of the narrative is as a psychological myth constructed around a belief in human nature as naturally good, and Kubrick instead takes on the idea of an unconscious that harbours a human nature that is naturally flawed or naturally savage.¹⁵⁵ Alex, then, can be seen as born in his natural stage free and uninhibited, unlimited and unrepressed and it is as this free character that Alex performs his atrocities. In this context the apocalypse serves to unleash Alex's power and inhibitions, turning him into an apocalyptic individual heading for the ultimate end. The Ludvico treatment comes to symbolise the neurosis arising from the structures and limitations of our society where we are streamlined and conditioned into a certain behavioural patterns where our natural self is repressed.¹⁵⁶

The first impression of *A Clockwork Orange* is that it is a film dealing with human nature and its social conditioning. The narrative tells the story of how Alex is

¹⁵⁵ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, (2000) (1972)), p. 186.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 181-182.

mentally altered from having been prone to violence and criminality to becoming a placid citizen of the state. As such the film is a sharp criticism against all behavioural psychology attempting to alter the mind of 'misfits' to integrate them into society, asking the fundamental question whether this is an ethical way of treating people, and whether it is even possible to change someone's behaviour. Like many other of Kubrick's films *A Clockwork Orange* concerns itself with human behaviour as not being totally predictable and with a trait that makes humans fallible which is part of our very existence and hence inescapable.¹⁵⁷

At the beginning Alex lacks in conscience as well as in knowledge about history which he sees from a solipsistic point of view, converting great historical persons into his own private myth where they are equals to him. In a sense he is innocent in his egocentricity where the world revolves around him and he lives in a myth where he and great historic people are interconnected. This interconnectedness and conflation of time, place and situation is part of the apocalyptic scheme where these categories stop functioning and collapse, making all into equals. Alex is depicted by Kubrick as obsessively egocentric, a trait less emphasised in Burgess who lets him discuss socio-political matters and satirise the other characters' corruption. Alex demands to be able to look at the world from his perspective and to choreograph scenes for his own amusement, continuously satisfying his pleasure which always comes first and which indulges in the search for ecstasy of 'gorgeousness and gorgeosity of the flesh'. Alex's fantasy is like a child's, vivid and self-indulgent, where he finds release in the violent dreams which bring him to orgasmic states, just like the viewers subconsciously find a release in Alex, identifying with him and his confinement.¹⁵⁸ Alex's actions are fantasy or myth becoming performance and ritual. His vivid imagination informs his behaviour and makes him create a new life at the end, a life that does not look back but only exists in the present where the violent rituals of pleasure become a celebration of the end. Alex intuitively lives out his fantasies through his actions and his performances, taking every opportunity to experience pleasure. He lives as if the end were at hand and in so doing he fulfils what Paul asked of the early Christians in Galatians and Romans. They were asked to focus on their faith and to pray as the time was drawing near and to forget about worldly matters as well as religious details and rely on faith. For Alex the fall of Adam opened up infinite possibilities of how to live, and his life of chaos and violence

¹⁵⁷ Mario Falsetto, (1994), p. 13. This topic is part not only in *A Clockwork Orange* but also *Barry Lyndon* and *2001*.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Allen Nelson, (1982), p. 141.

becomes a celebration of liberty, and pleasure. It is a celebration of a libido, freed from constraints of the world and of 'prison religion' which will be made redundant at the end. For Alex the state of Eden before the fall was like a clockwork state where the mechanisms of sublimation are so persuasive that the conscious mind turns the body into a machine or robot. To be free from the constraints opens up the possibility of a decadent world, an a-moral world of pleasure seeking. In his futuristic vision Alex is like the tempting snake in Eden, illustrated by the pet snake Basil or the dancing Christs with balls, like the ones in his bedroom. Alex Christ is not one but plural, showing a plurality of faces, Christ the entertainer and hedonist who mocks the Christian belief in suffering and celebrates the triumph of body over spirit.¹⁵⁹

Alex is an abstraction, an embodiment of certain ideals about humankind. He is a hero in the aesthetic realm, he cares about beauty as well as he himself embodies the aesthetic in his well trained and supple body. He carries a knife in the fights, a weapon more sophisticated than the chains of the droogs, and unlike them emphasises cleanliness and solitude. He is the hero/antihero who follows his own path and convictions focusing on the two principles of surviving and of seeking pleasure. He seems cold and detached but at the same time consistent and morally superior in that he has a goal, and living is not living to any price.¹⁶⁰ He portrays the a-ethical ideal of the apocalypse, which stands outside moral categories. Standing outside ethical judgement he strives for an evaluation of life that values cultural sensibility and pleasure rather than monetary gain. His ethical code is set and his boundaries are well defined, and he finds the striving for pretty polly vulgar and demeaning. He steals only what he needs, and his fighting is clean and precise contrary to the droogs' dirty practices and indifference to cultural sensibility, music and beauty. He describes his love for music and his need for aesthetic in the Korova milkbar when he turns on his droog for being a brute and not being appreciative when one of the 'sophistos' sings *Ode to Joy*. Here the importance of music is introduced and Alex recalls the moment and how he shivered and felt like great birds had flown into the milkbar. The irony is that *Ode to Joy* being an ode to brotherhood, attracts Alex who is an insular individual and does not have a concept of brotherhood, and it is followed by Alex chastising his crude brothers/droogs. As a result they turn against him, and this is like Mark 13: 12, a warning for at the end when 'Brother will deliver up brother to death'. The former brothers turn against him,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 151-53.

¹⁶⁰ Nils Hugo Geber and Torsten Manns, (1972), P101.

knocking him down in order to let him be caught by the police and later also assault him in his defenceless state following the Ludvico treatment. Alex's relationship to his brothers and his despising of them as well as of his parents for their lack of cultural sophistication, and artistic appreciation, raises the question of whether art is good in itself if brutes are capable of being appreciative of it. Kubrick's message is that art has no ethical purpose, denying that there is a religion of beauty or that the beautiful makes good. Art effects us when it is illuminating or strengthens something we already feel, but it does not change us.¹⁶¹ Kubrick's view differs from Burgess in the sense that he is not as rigidly dualistic. He acknowledges that a utopian view of human goodness is dangerous as well as a fallacy and he rejects the notion that human nature can be rationalised and understood through the use of behaviourism.¹⁶²

3:3:2 Violence at the End

Kubrick wanted to make a film that aimed at understanding and communicating the characters' celebration of violence, instead of celebrating violence itself. As a result, the film seems to be shot from an outsider's perspective, like you are an onlooker, looking on from a window and neither a participant nor an entertained movie audience.¹⁶³ Many critics and audiences argued that Kubrick was not emphasising the ironic and satirical enough, and saw the film as encouraging violence and a lifestyle of a self-righteous, vicious punk, making Alex into a Charles Manson or Bonnie and Clyde.¹⁶⁴ *A Clockwork Orange* leaves little hope for the future and the only hope is with the violent Alex who bears similarities with Chaplin's little Fellow in his wittiness, gracefulness, energy, straightforwardness, and like the little fellow his targets are always the pompous, the hypocritical, and vindictive. One of the central themes in the film is the problem of free will, and the film can come across as celebrating any element of free will making its opposite, the repressive state even more oppressive than Alex violence.¹⁶⁵ The violence is portrayed like a joyful dance and as a result takes on a quality of being an adolescent celebration of youth, as well as of bodily movement and the free will that makes this violence possible. Alex and his boys can be seen as representing the violence that is existent in man since pre-history and which is part of natural selection in which context Alex becomes a survivor with his combination of intellect and violent behaviour. This

¹⁶¹ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 204-05, 208.

¹⁶² Thomas Allen Nelson, (1982), pp. 136-38.

¹⁶³ John Baxter, (1997), p. 256.

¹⁶⁴ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, (2000) (1972) P. 184.

image of the survivor in this apocalyptic era is one heavily influenced by modernity, and its values. The survivor, Alex, is violent, cunning and unemotional, a self made man who does not rely on anyone else, representing the values of the independent and unattached individual, so celebrated by contemporary society. As a result the depiction of man at the end is one of egocentricity and independence where the aim is to save oneself, enjoy oneself and not invest in human relations that will demand consideration. Kubrick's depiction of Alex as a representation of humanity under the pressure of the end is one that extrapolates on the traits that are already present in contemporary society where the self-sufficient survivor is one who benefits from the deteriorating situation, turning it into nihilistic pleasure.¹⁶⁶ *A Clockwork Orange* as a film asks provocative questions about human nature and its attraction to violence, but also provides us with role-models for our secret desires, and we find ourselves strangely attracted to Alex and what he does, at the same time as we are repelled.¹⁶⁷ The film suspends moral judgement, something that becomes necessary if the film is going to be watched at all, just like the apocalypse forces one to suspend traditional ethical values. The apocalypse displays arbitrariness and an a-ethical play with reversals of values where nothing is what it seems anymore. Christ becomes antichrist and what is unveiled is beyond comprehension, making the revealing part of concealing. In the end what is known about right and wrong sits on its head, and the usual codes for moral actions no longer applies which creates a situation of a-morality, where morals are suspended and no ethical system applies. In *A Clockwork Orange* the ethical code is suspended and made redundant because the situation is radically different and utterly urgent. This suspension of values follows the revealing of what is the end which Alex has taken part of, and which turns him into the messenger of the end and the antichrist. Only Alex who has looked into the abyss of the end understands its radical implications and lives accordingly whilst the chaplain pursues the prison religion of simplistic redemption and Mr Alexander takes revenge in the Biblical manner of an eye for an eye.

In several interviews Kubrick has compared the character of Alex with *Richard III*, seeing them both as characters that you fear and dislike at the same time as you are strangely drawn to them and to their world, making you identify with them and see from their perspective.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 182.

¹⁶⁶ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 198-200.

¹⁶⁷ John Hofsess, 'Minds Eye: *A Clockwork Orange*,' in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Take One*, May/June 1971, p. 107.

This conflict between using violence to form a 'better' person and a more obedient person, or letting a person execute pointless violence is at the heart of the film. The question of whether to be free and immoral, or caged and incapable of any immorality, is compelling.¹⁶⁸ In the wake of the end, and the impending apocalypse, it becomes the question discussed by the chaplain who fails to recognise in Alex the A-lex (outside the law) antichrist who is utterly immoral yet totally moral in his embracing of the end and the abyss which opens up beneath. The issue of free will then become the concerns occupying the chaplain and Mr Alexander who fail to recognise that A-lex is beyond free will and law as well as ethical boundaries. In *A Clockwork Orange* law and order is being upheld with means that make immorality impossible, and not voluntary, which also means that morality is made redundant. In the society outside the prison the Old Testament morality of an eye for an eye is still the rule and even Mr Alexander, the humanist, who has plotted a criticism of the government gives his ethical values and humanism a kiss goodbye, descending into violence. For Alex, the tables again turn and he becomes a martyr of the cruel government which now benefits more from imprisoning Mr Alexander who is seen as dangerous and subversive and more of a threat than Alex is with his random violence.

3:3:3 Non- relational Sexuality

The apocalyptic relationship to sexuality is set up through the introductory scene in the Korova Milkbar through the use of twisted female figure in bondage-wear, used as milk dispensers, tables and chairs. Sexual function has been exchanged for sexual extension and in the film it is people imitating the objects when performing sexual acts rather than the other way around. Alex's violent sexuality imitates the objects, putting Mrs Alexander in the position of the Korova women, and in his encounter with the Gat Lady this sexuality without function is underlined by her home being decorated with lifeless pornography. Her home is one of sexual art, but art that is sexually sterile, where sexuality has been entirely separated from function where real sex and real bodies have as little use as the art works she surrounds herself with. Sex and body here has become only form and the function has been entirely forgotten, and ironically it is eventually the environment that kills her. Alex crushes her skull with a giant phallus after a strange and threatening dance in which Alex threatens her with the 'very important work of art',

¹⁶⁸ Penelope Houston, 'Kubrick Country', in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Saturday Review*, 25 December 1971, pp. 110-111.

a giant penis, and the Cat Lady defends herself with the equally useless bust of 'Lovely Ludvig van'. This violent dance is the first time Alex is threatened by 'Lovely Ludvig van' and it serves as a prelude to the later scenes where Beethoven plays a significant role. The injuries of Alex's victim are never seen and instead of the traditional pool of blood Kubrick rapidly cuts over to a pornographic painting of a woman's-mouth, symbolising the screaming mouth of the victim, reminiscent of the fear and screams on apocalyptic paintings throughout history. The film then cuts over to the attack on Alex by his gang members who hit him with a milk bottle in an apocalyptic reversal of brother will turn on brother, after which they leave him for the police to find. Alex, stunned by the milk bottle reaches for the bust of Beethoven to comfort himself but trips over a saucer of milk left for the pets and is knocked out like a baby having suckled milk from the mothers breast like the innocent boy he is.¹⁶⁹

The depictions of women in the film are all non-personal and pornographic with their fixation on women's breasts and bodies that are overtly objectified. As an example stand the women in the Korova milkbar where models of women are positioned in sexually suggestive positions with milk jetting out of the breasts when a lever between the legs is pulled. In the meetings with real women it is the breasts that are the focus for Alex attention, and in the rape of Mr Alexander's wife her jump suit is first cut open to reveal her breasts before the rape is carried out. However as breast-obsessed as the images are, they are equally obsessive of the male sexual organ. In the fights there are jokes about injuring, grabbing, kicking each others yarbles, in the fight with the cat lady a giant phallus turns out to be Alex's chosen weapon and the codpieces worn by the droogs draw the attention to the groin area. Likewise the women are designed to draw attention to the male sex by their penis shaped lollipops, and Alex's snake Basil who seemingly is about to enter the pin-up girl's vagina.¹⁷⁰

Sexuality in *A Clockwork Orange* as well as in most of Kubrick's films is rarely between loving couples, instead it often shows the underside of sexuality giving a picture of violence, voyeurism and domination. In *A Clockwork Orange* sex is in the form of rape, of anonymous group sex at high speed, and warmth and love is reserved for the pet snake Basil. Sexuality is at the very heart of *A Clockwork Orange* but it is clinical, violent and voyeuristic when directed towards women who are victims, passive and un-personal without the wit and outspokenness of Alex. The films depiction of

¹⁶⁹ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 212-213.

¹⁷⁰ David Hughes, (2000), p.166.

homo-eroticism stands in sharp contrast to the detached and violent sexual relations with women and shows different but equally sexually charged power relation between the man and the boy. Alex's innocent strutting around in his Y-fronts in front of Mr Deltoid results in Deltoid's leering smile and covert threats, and signals the use and misuse of power. The bulging cod-piece is not physically violent but hits a note of insolence and confidence that takes on sexual imagery, and the teenage world of Alex is depicted as violent and merciless where the codpiece is used to show authority. In contrast stands the adult world of Mr Deltoid, the prison services and Mr Alexander who are authoritarian and abusive of power and authority where Mr Deltoid and the prison chaplain turns out to be covert paedophiles. Mr Deltoid threatens Alex using a seductive tone, touches him and eventually works himself up to sexual excitement in which he drinks from a glass without noticing the false teeth lying in it. The scene is of a different form of violence, authoritarian and misuse of power where Alex is suddenly seen as an innocent victim of Mr Deltoid's sexual perversion.¹⁷¹ The advances made on Alex by his post-corrective adviser, Mr Deltoid, the chaplain, and the fellow inmates depicts a homo-eroticism that is covert paedophilia and a misuse of power rather than the more directly violent sexuality directed towards women.¹⁷²

3:3:4 A Matter of Free Will

Man has been turned loose from religion and has hailed the death of his gods; the imperative loyalties of the old nation-states are dissolving and all the old social and ethical values are disappearing. Man in the twentieth century has been cut adrift in a rudderless boat on an uncharted sea; if he is going to stay sane throughout the voyage, he must have something to care about, something that is more important than himself¹⁷³

This quote from Kubrick shows his concern for contemporary life, and the lack of direction that the loss of traditional values bring and in Alex he has attempted to voice this concern. Alex comes across as a villain, a careless and violent individual who under the surface is the sophisticated and intelligent character with whom we eventually sympathise. The apocalyptic character of Alex has overruled the question, of who is the villain and who is the victim. Being a satire the film points out the complex question by making the prison chaplain a defender of ethical values but also as a hypocritical figure

¹⁷¹ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 209-10.

¹⁷² John Baxter, (1997), p. 250.

¹⁷³ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, (2000 (1972), p. 246. Originally taken from Paul Coursodon, *American Directors* (New York : McGraw Hill, 1982), p.141.

and a drunk who misuses his power. Adding to the complexity of the characters the ones we traditionally sympathise with are the ones who are revealed as having hidden agendas and who are hypocritical, whilst the despicable law-less figures such as Alex turns out to be the sensitive, and honest one. This brings us back to the apocalyptic and the morality or rather a-morality of the end. Here the notion of ethics and morals are equally complex and reversed, and at the core of the apocalyptic lies the moral that nothing is what it seems to be. This suspicion and revealing of its true self is expressed by Jesus in Mark 13:7 'Many will come in my name saying, I am he! And they will lead many astray' when he warns the disciples of false messiahs. The chaplain with his defence of ethical values turns out to be a hypocrite, the Minister of the Interior a corrupt official, and Mr Alexander comes across as vindictive, leaving Alex as the only honest and sensitive individual. In this apocalyptic reversal Alex is made into an antihero, an antichrist who does not avoid the end but faces it, and hurries it on, just as Derrida has called for in *Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy*. 'The end approaches. Now there is no more time to tell the truth on the apocalypse. But what are we doing, you will still insist, to what ends do we want to come when we come to tell you, here now, let's go, 'come', the apocalypse, it's finished, that's all, I tell you this, that's what happens, that's what comes.'¹⁷⁴

A Clockwork Orange has often been seen as a story about free will and the ability to choose, asking whether man can even be good if the possibility of choice has been taken away from him and whether he is still human without this ability. Alex chooses evil, but he takes the responsibility of choosing and he is thereby a person. Without this ability, as a reformed character, he is nothing, lacking his capability of violence and also the honesty and candour that were strong characteristics of his personality.¹⁷⁵ The violence that is directed toward Alex is depicted as so much more violent and brutal than the violence that he executes. It is a more calculated evil and a violence that is without passion, it is pragmatic and stripped of emotion. If Alex had been a bit less violent we might have seen it as unjust that he would suffer so much in prison, and if he had been worse we might have seen his treatment by the government as justified. By the mirroring of episodes and the reversal of the actions we put the violence into a context where the violence is mirrored in such a way that we continuously asks the question

¹⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy' in *Semeia*, Derrida and Biblical Studies Vol. 23, 1982, ed, Robert Detweiler (The Society of Biblical Studies, Baltimore), p. 95.

¹⁷⁵ Gene Siskel, 'Kubrick's Creative Concern', in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Chicago Tribune*, 13 February 1972, pp. 122-23.

whether it is justified and what aim it serves. The aim of the cool and calculated violence of the system is not to ultimately solve the problem of the emotive, passionate and random violence of Alex but is instead a part of the larger scheme of the apocalypse. The government with its pragmatic approach is a force of evil reminiscent of the terror executed by the machines in *Terminator: Judgement Day* or the systematic breakdown of the apocalypse. This leaves Alex as a Christ/antichrist who punishes randomly and arbitrarily as in Revelation 7.

For Kubrick the real causes of violence are grounded in society's framework and dependent on the pressures of original sin, unjust economic exploitation, and emotional frustrations, pressures that have oppressed man for a long time.¹⁷⁶ The subtext of free will and original sin is one where Kubrick attempts to deal with the fact that if we are given free will there will always be misuse of this freedom, something of which Alex is an example. Alex's life as well as his imagination are ultra violent. It is violence he seeks around him, he sees it in his dreams (where he dreams about western fighting), or in reading the Bible, seeing its imagery of violence and sex. His reading of the Bible is along the *via-negativa*, resulting in a negative theology that acknowledges the dark underside of the Bible and the revealed message of the apocalypse where sex, violence and war are at the core. In prison Alex reads the bible because he likes the scourging and crowning with thorns, and he imagines himself as one of Christ's torturers. He also fantasises about a Biblical orgy with sex with his wives, as well as about Old Testament battles, hence reminding us about the destruction and deconstruction of the Biblical text through the *via-negativa*. This complicates the relationship with the Bible and maybe Alex has understood the message of the Bible better than the chaplain who chooses to read it as a book about retribution and a moral code, and who has neglected the implication of the death of God, the killing of Christ. Alex, on the other hand, is in the company of visionaries like William Blake who acknowledge the radical implication of the crucifixion and of the apocalyptic message. To cite Altizer:

'Blake belongs to a large company of radical or spiritual Christians, Christians who believe that the Church and Christendom have sealed Jesus in his tomb and resurrected the very evil and darkness that Jesus conquered by their exaltation of a solitary and transcendent God, a heteronomous and compulsive law, and a salvation history that is irrevocably past.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Gene Siskel, (2001). Article originally published in *Chicago Tribune*, 13 February 1972, pp. 124-25.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas J J Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 182

The chaplain is among the Christians who 'have sealed Jesus in his tomb' and he is a defender of a faith that has mistaken the Christian message for rigorous law and sees instead of the promise of the end retribution and an apocalypse that never arrives. The chaplain as a preacher of the 'prison religion' to use Alex's words, is among the blind, the ones who cannot see that the end and judgement is already at work and in vain he threatens the prisoners of the fires of Hell. He as a representative of the church and of 'prison religion' fails to take the challenge of the end for real, and unlike Alex chooses to believe in a salvation history that has no end. Alex's violent reading of the Bible then is in tune with the ever present apocalypse, and the chaplain has not only misunderstood the message of the end, but also sided with a ever tortured and defeated Christ that cannot save.

The film as a statement of free will is one that defends the rights of free thought and free will even if it leads to a lifestyle that we cannot endorse.¹⁷⁸ 'Alex's adventures are a kind of psychological myth. Our subconscious finds release in Alex, just as it finds release in dreams. It resents Alex being stifled and repressed by authority, however much our conscious mind recognises the necessity of doing this.'¹⁷⁹ Part two of the film has Alex moving from artist and performer to victim and voyeur, and in this part Kubrick brings Alex down to earth, where he has to chose between the conditioning of the Ludvico treatment or the Hell and damnation of the chaplain. In the prison Alex's imagination takes a Biblical turn when he fantasises about the Biblical stories in the style of 'Biblical epics meets Marquis de Sade'. The religious imagery becomes more overt in this part of the film where an image of the crucified Christ with the crown of thorns is central. It not only recalls the happy Christs in Alex's bedroom but also points ahead to a scene of Alex strapped down in a chair with electrodes stuck on to his head like a crown, as the sacrificial Christ.¹⁸⁰ 'Prison religion cannot give Alex a sense of guilt but he recognises that it is through that he can reach power as well as a kind of physical freedom. The price is his free will without which he becomes a dutiful puppy, a perfect believer in 'prison religion', not only unwilling but unable to do violence.'¹⁸¹

If instead of looking at the story as a moral tale one looks at it from a psychological standpoint one can see Alex before the Ludvico treatment as the id. In a

¹⁷⁸ Paul Duncan, (1999), pp. 64-65.

¹⁷⁹ Stanley Kubrick in Norman Kagan, (2000) (1972)), p. 167. Cited originally by Judith Christ, *A Feast, and About Time*, New York: December 20, 1971.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Allen Nelson, (1982, pp. 155-56.

sense he is in all of us, and this brings us to the uncomfortable realisation that in spite of all the violence, we identify with him and emphasise with him.¹⁸² When making the film Kubrick read Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* in order to understand psychology as well as getting ideas for the Ludvico treatment. Skinner argues that man is made up of conditioned reflexes and Kubrick's aim was to show that man is more than his environment and heritage, an opinion voiced in the prison chaplain's words: 'when a man cannot choose anymore he ceases to be a man'. This leads to the conclusion that to take away a man's choice is not to redeem him but only to restrain him.¹⁸³ This form of brainwashing is part of totalitarian state practice making people operate like clockwork without them choosing to do so, and hence also without the joy to do so. It is when Alex is arrested and put in jail that the theological themes comes into play, and now the perspective shifts from Alex's victims to the perspective of Alex himself. In prison Alex meets the prison chaplain who utters the important words 'what is it going to be then?' The words imply that there is a choice to be made and that as humans we have the ability to make moral choices. For the chaplain the choice is between damnation or redemption, and in his sulphur smelling sermons, a life according to the Calvinist morality is a true Christian life. To take away the ability to choose is for the chaplain a sin against God and an offence since it makes the person unable of reaching, neither damnation nor redemption. As a result of his beliefs the chaplain attempts to discourage Alex from choosing the Ludvico treatment which would make him into a person of good moral but in a way that is forced rather than chosen.¹⁸⁴

In essence the Ludvico treatment is in many ways very similar to what the prison chaplain is trying to do, and he himself is trying his own Ludvico treatment in his fire and brimstone preaching but without much luck.¹⁸⁵ The argument between Dr Brodsky and the chaplain following the description of the treatment is one about free will, which the chaplain defends:

'Choice', rumbled a rich deep goloss. I viddied it belonged to the prison charlie.' He has no real choice, has he? Self-interest fear of physical pain, drove him to that grotesque act of self-abuse. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases to be a creature

¹⁸¹ Nils Hugo Geber and Torsten Manns, (1972), p. 103

¹⁸² Philip Strick and Penelope Houston, 'Modern Times: An Interview with Stanley Kubrick' in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Sight and Sound*, Spring, 1972, p. 129.

¹⁸³ Philip Strick and Penelope Houston, (2001), pp. 130-31.

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 214-15. Earlier Edition named *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (Cunundrum Ltd, 1972).

capable of moral choice...These are subtleties, like smiled Dr. Broadsky. We are not concerned with motive, with higher ethics. We are concerned with cutting down crime.¹⁸⁶

The brainwashing of Alex is then not brainwashing in the usual meaning of the word when someone is deterred of the old, and is given something new to believe in. For Alex no new values replace the old, something that would provide him with ethical reasons to avoid violence, but instead the lack of values renders him unable of performing violent acts but still with the desire to do so. Alex is still violent and harbours the same violent fantasies but is simply unable to carry them out. His desires have not changed at all and he is conscious throughout the treatment signing the form, and going along with it in order to be released. This means that the free will has not been taken away contrary to the chaplain's words, but Alex has simply been mutilated of his ability to perform that which he wants. The chaplain does not have to confront his own belief in free will as does Mr Alexander since he lives in the safe haven of his religion which is not only guarded by the religious structure but also by the prison walls and guards. Alex calls the chaplain's faith prison-religion and it is just that in the sense that it is a faith that does not need to be confronted by the life in the real world or a faith that has sealed Christ in his grave and made the apocalypse redundant.¹⁸⁷

3:3:5 To Watch the Unwatchable

There are two strains in the film underlying the narrative, art objects for art's sake, and art which does not save, does not have a purpose ethically against the ideals of the state. This relationship to art is replicated in the Ludvico treatment's selling point of 'it works', a belief in function over ethics. Alex seemingly having escaped the inhumanity of the prison is put in a world of white coats who are only deceptively different from the guards in the prison. The scenes showing the Ludvico treatment are extremely violent in a different way to the earlier violence, here Alex is in a straight jacket, his head clamped tight, his eyelids held open by lid-locks and music pumping into his ears. At first he enjoys the films he watches: 'it's funny how the colours of the real world only seem real when you viddy them on a screen'. Kubrick enforces here the feeling that

¹⁸⁵ Samuel McCracken, 'Novel into Film: Novelist into Critic: A *A Clockwork Orange*...Again', in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 32, No 3, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, 1973, pp. 428-429.

¹⁸⁶ Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* London, Penguin Books, 1972 (1962) p 99

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 431-32.

Alex is watching what should not be seen, or 'watching the unwatchable'.¹⁸⁸ Earlier Mr Alexander is forced to watch the rape of his wife, just as Alex later is forced to watch all sorts of violence and horror. In both cases they are forced to watch the unwatchable, to see that which cannot be seen and as a result they are changed. For Alex as well as for Mr Alexander the watching leads to a revealing of that which is concealed. They experience their own private apocalypse, which opens their eyes and makes them see what is there to be seen, just as the apocalypticist of Revelation watches the seven seals opening or just as in Ezekiel's vision the truth of society at the end is unravelled. Mr Alexander, blinded by personal grief, fails to see and is embarking on a personal vendetta. Alex on the other hand sees and finds out what is approaching and manages to become a player again and an instigator of the end revealed in his last words 'I was cured alright.' Alex undergoes the treatment that can be seen as a form of death in the form of loss of will, innocence and motivation, and it is only when he hears Beethoven in the context of the films shown that he reacts and shouts out 'it's a sin'. The doctors realising their success tell him to endure, and that the choice has been his all along. They argue that Beethoven needs to be sacrificed for the greater success, making art into only something of use-value, something which stands in sharp contrast to the earlier situation. The doctors do not know that what Alex sees is not what they think that he sees. His outrage is on the behalf of 'lovely Ludvig van' and not the violence that he is forced to watch. He finds that Beethoven who was lovely to him has turned into horror in the way of the apocalyptic message that tastes sweet in the mouth but turns bitter in the stomach as the depth of the message is revealed to him. Showing the success of the treatment to the Minister Alex is subjected to several temptations in the form of a half naked girl who sexually arouses him but who he cannot touch, and a man who humiliates him forcing him to lick his boots. When seeing the remarkable result the Minister is pleased and writes off the criticism of the chaplain with the argument that they don't care about higher ethics but are concerned with cutting down crime. It is irrelevant which way Alex becomes a good Christian and turns the other cheek.¹⁸⁹ Burgess (who all along found Kubrick's omission of the last chapter problematic) wanted Alex to be changed by his experiences, and made him respond to his moral awareness and longing for the domestic order, marriage and family. The conclusion is Burgess' belief that humans are part of a cyclical movement where the individual as

¹⁸⁸ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 216-17.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 217-19.

well as society moves from freedom to totalitarianism and good and evil as times goes by in a cyclical mode that makes one or the other always come back.¹⁹⁰ For Kubrick the last chapter did not fit into his vision, and to him belief in original sin is one of the building blocks of western society that makes man violent. The repression of original sin means that even if one is free in a physical sense one is caged mentally and by following this he creates Alex as free through providing the open ending of the film. Alex becomes an instigator of the end, an apocalypticist or an antichrist who is prepared to hurry the apocalypse on and free the apocalyptic Christ from his tomb.

3:4. Apocalyptic Visions

Kubrick's films are largely concerned with life and death and he sees our existence as an exercise in coping with our mortality. For Kubrick it is the realisation of our mortality that is behind mental illness and suffering, and as we grow we are becoming more aware of our mortality and the pointlessness of our existence and the evil of mankind. When we cease to be children, mesmerised by the world and see it for what it is, the only escape is by creating meaning and forging a sense of purpose to cope with the hostility of the world, and the indifference of the universe.¹⁹¹

The film could be likened to a sonata, which like the film/novel has three parts; exposition, carrying through, and repetition. In the case of *A Clockwork Orange* we could also look at these three parts as the judgement, the decent into hell and the fire, and eventually salvation (used in an ironic context). The exposition is placed in the 1970's in a state that is partially socially engineered with work service and unlimited consumerism. The state is on the brink of disaster, which is depicted through consumerism and its waste, together with graffiti and breakdown. Another sign of this decline is the violence toward old people, tramps and drunks, who are depicted as a burden for the society. Among young people the absence of creative work and meaning has lead to a violent society, where gangs rule. The young seem to have no ideals but only too much energy and restlessness, which make them violent and destructive. Their lack in ideology is apparent but their language reflects that they are still capable of identifying with a strong social system that they support by using their own home-made slang of Russian and English. Without an ideological or metaphysical system, violence

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Allen Nelson, (1982), pp. 134-35.

¹⁹¹ Eric Nordern, 'Playboy Interview, Stanly Kubrick,' in Gene Philips (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Article originally published in *Playboy*, September, 1968, pp. 72-4.

becomes simply a past time and an activity to use up one's energy.¹⁹² In relation to this socially engineered state in decline the ninth symphony represents for Alex being a rebel, a hero who rages against the Gods like Beethoven himself did through his symphony. To the tunes of Beethoven Alex takes on the image of Christ's torturer, as well as of the establishment. He rebels against the sedative, defeatist Christianity of the prison chaplain as well as the blinded lifestyle of his surrounding society that refuses to recognise that they are on the brink of extinction. The theme (on one level) is free will and the conclusion is that it is better to have free will even if it ultimately leads to sin than become a machine that does the right things but without conviction, joy or goodness of heart. In this premise also lies the biggest problem for Kubrick, that of making the despicable and violent unpleasant character of Alex into someone we emphasise with and feel is a victim in the latter half of the film.¹⁹³ The other theme is of Alex being the apocalypticist or the antichrist who has had the future revealed to him and the horror it brings with itself. Like Ezekiel he internalises his vision through forced watching where he cannot away. The music and imagery become part of him and effect his whole being. Like the 'seer' in the 'classical' apocalyptic he is unable to turn away from the horror of the visions and he is like the former mesmerised, frozen to a standstill forced to do 'watch' as Mark 13 encourages. The outcome is the same, they have both seen what is to come, the horror and absence that made Jesus restrained on the cross shout 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). Alex, like his forerunners are the mediators and recipients of the truth, of the apocalyptic revelation and as the speakers of truth they are punished. *2001* ends with the star-child staring into the camera just as *A Clockwork Orange* starts with Alex doing the same, the image of the star-child communicates anticipation for the future whilst the shot of Alex anticipates an evening of ultra-violence and nihilistic pleasure. Alex is very far away from the evolutionary process of the star-child which might suggest that Kubrick essentially says that things have to get worse before they can improve, connecting *A Clockwork Orange* to the idea of an apocalyptic breakdown followed by new life.

All Alex's victims are from the fringes of society - the tramp, the radical, the gang, and women, and by punishing them he also punishes himself. He commits the violent acts and takes pleasure in them, punishing the victims for their life style and attitudes that he considers wrong. By doing so he positions himself in the position of the

¹⁹² Nils Hugo Geber and Torsten Manns, (1972), p. 100.

¹⁹³ Alexander Walker, (1999), pp. 35-6.

other, the outsider who is not part of society. He himself is blind to this projection and in his own mind he is the one who (in his fantasies) is celebrated and loved. His childish egotism makes him desire freedom but at the same time he is utterly dependent on the affirmation by that from which he wants freedom.¹⁹⁴ Likewise the apocalypse poses a challenge to Christians which involves giving up the familiar security of a stable religious situation, a distant but safe God, and to seek freedom in the unknown aftermath of the apocalypse, which Paul encouraged the early Christians to do. However the new heaven and new earth can only be achieved through the apocalyptic breakdown of everything familiar and the loss of everything. And it is here that Altizer's criticism of Christianity is at its most radical. Christianity as it has formed and solidified has set out to avoid the challenge of an apocalyptic Christ, to avoid the abyss and the apocalyptic breakdown that would be its downfall. A Christian agenda true to its apocalyptic heritage would involve the admission of the apocalypse and the greeting of it because only through it and through the recognition that God died on the cross is a resurrection possible. The only road to a new heaven and a new earth is through the *vi-negativa* of the end, the horror, the violence and the reversal of values. And here Alex becomes a hero, a Christ/antichrist and agent of the apocalypse who has opened his eyes and his heart to this radical possibility. Alex in this race toward the end is active in approaching and effecting his own future and unlike the other characters who compliantly stick to their lives and their safe havens acts out a participation in the events of the end. The psychological term for the insanity that Burgess and Kubrick attributes to Alex is 'Alexanderism' or *agriothymia*, the desire to destroy nations, and it is exactly this that Alex does through his violent actions, and maybe also what Mr Alexander is hoping to do but fails. Alex's desire to destroy and the pleasure he finds in it makes him an Antichrist or possibly an avenging Christ figure who comes down with judgement over the blinded bourgeois who have failed to see what he sees. He is the seer the one who has his eyes wide open, literally so when put in his straight jacket, who sees the world for what it is without any blindfold in the form of a secluded and safe lifestyle. Alex stares into the camera as he stares at the films played for him and he sees the horror, watches the un-watchable without turning away, and he is punished for seeing what is real. Just as Ezekiel eats the scroll and that which is unspeakable and hence internalises the word and the truth, Alex sees with his eyes that which is unwatchable and internalises the truth that changes him. Alex has had his eyes opened

¹⁹⁴ Don Daniels, 'A Clockwork Orange' in *Sight and Sound*, 1972-1973, pp. 44-5.

and seen the horror of the end and hence exist in the suspension of traditional ethics that the apocalypse brings. In this time of suspended values he is left following a moral that is the very absence of morality, an a-morality, only revealed at the end. His moral behaviour is grown out of what he sees and knows about the end when all that is familiar, all ethics are suspended for a new order, a new morality which until revealed is hidden. Alex who has had the truth revealed to him then becomes not only the sole moral character but also a player at the end who acts according to a new moral code, limited to those who can see.

Chapter 4

Apocalypse Now

4:1 Taking it to the End - the Making of *Apocalypse Now*¹⁹⁵

In 1969 Francis Ford Coppola started to work on the project of *Apocalypse Now*, a film, which ten years later was received with much anticipation. Originally Coppola worked together with George Lucas and John Milius on the script but a couple of years into the project when Lucas moved on to film *Star Wars* and Warner Bros abandoned the project Coppola decided to make the film himself. In 1970 Coppola's film studio Zoetrope was nearly bankrupt and Warner Bros demanded that Coppola pay back hundreds of thousands of pounds that had been given to him as advances for several projects, *Apocalypse Now* one of them. In 1971 it became clear that the *Godfather* had been a success and in 1974 Coppola started the project of *Apocalypse Now* on his own, directing as well as funding a film that would be the most expensive ever made and which would leave Coppola in financial difficulty.¹⁹⁶

The search for a location for the film started in 1974 and with the American Ministry of Defence unwilling to support the film the use of American military equipment became a problem. In 1975 Coppola finalised a deal with President Marcos in the Philippines which gave him access to Philippine military equipment in exchange of payment of expenses and insurance. The deal seemed very good but was to give Coppola many problems when the Philippine helicopters that were used in scenes were suddenly called out to fight rebels.¹⁹⁷ In 1976 Coppola started to shoot the film in the Philippines, still without having found anyone to play the lead, Captain Willard. Coppola was still not satisfied after offering the role to several actors including Jack Nicholson and Robert Redford and trying others such as Harvey Keitel. Eventually he settled on Martin Sheen as Willard. He signed Marlon Brando for the character of Kurtz for a price that made a big dent in the budget. After hearing Dennis Hopper chattering away on the set he decided to change his role from Kurtz's sidekick to the Conradian character of the Russian, a role more fitting for Hopper.¹⁹⁸ Three weeks after arriving in the Philippines shooting started and when the Philippines was hit by a typhoon that

¹⁹⁵ This chapter was written before the video release of *Apocalypse Now Redux* and as a result it does not discuss the additional scenes in this Directors cut.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Cowie, *The Apocalypse Now* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000) pp. 1-7.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-16

destroyed the set, the film was already six weeks behind schedule and two million over budget. As a result of the typhoon the entire production was shut down until the set could be rebuilt, and in the meantime Coppola and his family returned to California. In Eleanor Coppola's *Notes* she recalls that during this break from filming Francis Coppola started to have doubts about the script (doubts that would chase him until the very completion of the film) and so he started to rewrite scenes. From then on he would constantly rewrite scenes, often shortly before they were about to be filmed causing further delays.¹⁹⁹

From the very beginning, the production of *Apocalypse Now* was fraught with difficulties, not only with funding, the time schedule and the screenplay but also Coppola's personal problems. The problem with the script resulted in multiple re-writes as well several possible endings and even with the filming finished Coppola was still not happy with the result and kept on making changes until the final cut of the film in 1979. When the final product was released in 1979 it was, however, clear that all the work had paid off and *Apocalypse Now* has gone down in film-history as a masterpiece.

From the sneak preview of the film in Los Angeles in May 1979 the film was received with conflicting opinions, and the critics focused on how much the film had cost and how self obsessed it seemed. The interest from the audiences on the other hand indicated that the film was a success and at the preview the audience was expected at 6.00 p.m. but arrived at 9.30 a.m. just to make sure a ticket could be bought.²⁰⁰ In response to the criticisms of excessive spending Coppola said in an interview with *Newsweek*: 'We made (the film) the way America made war in Vietnam...There were too many of us, too much money and equipment and little by little we went insane. I thought I was making a war film and it developed that the film was making me.'²⁰¹ This very self-centred attitude of Coppola's seemed to annoy the press and whilst he continued making parallels between his own life and the film (seeing himself as Willard on a similar journey),²⁰² critics wrote reviews that regarded him as self-obsessed. It was not only Coppola, however, who seemed to be personally involved and affected by making the film. Martin Sheen recalls in an interview in *Hearts of Darkness* the hotel

¹⁹⁸ Peter Cowie, *Coppola* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990 (1989)), pp. 118-119.

¹⁹⁹ Eleanor Coppola, *Notes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 68-89. And Peter Cowie, *Coppola* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990(1979)), pp. 118-119.

²⁰⁰ Jon Lewis, *Whom God Wishes to Destroy: Francis Coppola and the New Hollywood* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), p. 48.

²⁰¹ *Ibid* p. 50. Quote taken from Jon Lewis original text in Charles Michener 'Finally Apocalypse Now' in *Newsweek*, May 28, 1979, p. 100.

²⁰² Jon Lewis, 1995, pp. 50-51.

scene and how it affected him personally. He had been drinking all day, and according to Sheen himself, felt confusing at that very stage of his life. During the filming of the scene he had a nervous breakdown whilst the camera kept rolling. He later pretended that he did not remember anything.²⁰³ Eleanor Coppola writes about the scene:

The first layer of character Marty played was the mystic, the saint the Christlike version of Willard. Francis pushed him with a few words and he became the theatrical performer, Willard as a Shakespearean actor. Francis prodded him again and he moved to a street tough, a feisty street fighter who has been at the bottom, but is smart, knows some judo, is used to a scrap. At this point Francis asked him to admire his beautiful hair, his mouth. Marty began this incredible scene. He hit the mirror with his fist. Maybe he did not mean to. Perhaps he overshot a judo stance. His fist started bleeding. Francis said his impulse was to cut the scene and call the nurse, but Marty was doing the scene. He had gotten to the place where some part of him and Willard had merged.²⁰⁴

After finishing the scene it was clear that Martin Sheen had some kind of breakdown, he kept on singing hymns, preaching about love and God and hitting the side of the bed where he was lying. Eventually Sheen's wife, and oldest child, joined the Coppolas in an attempt to calm Sheen down, and he wanted them all to pray and confess their fears. Eleanor Coppola recalls the situation as 'being inside somebody, in his personal territory, with a man alone in his most private moment.'²⁰⁵ In terms of the film Sheen's breakdown was a crucial moment where the character of Willard emerged but it was also a moment which also led to the emotional distress of the actor. Martin Sheen's ordeal was not over and he later had a heart attack which almost killed him. He himself believed this was brought on by his lifestyle, for he was not in touch with himself or his spirituality.²⁰⁶ The making of *Apocalypse Now* had a great impact on Martin Sheen both physically and mentally, and Eleanor Coppola wrote at the time that the film was changing her, Francis and others involved in the film. In her diary it is apparent that the making of the film was a struggle which had much to do with Francis Coppola himself, and the stage of his life. In an interview he said that it did not matter what film he was making, it would have turned out the same whatever script he was filming because the film was about him on one level.²⁰⁷ During filming, Coppola (according to his wife)

²⁰³ Interview with Eleanor Coppola, in *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmakers Apocalypse*, Zoetrope Films 1991.

²⁰⁴ Ibid

²⁰⁵ Eleanor Coppola, *Notes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 103-105.

²⁰⁶ Peter Cowie, 2000, pp. 93.

²⁰⁷ Eleanor Coppola. 1979, p. 284.

turned more and more into Kurtz and became increasingly obsessive about his film. Coppola compared his own life to the film and a memo to his crew at the time underlines the fact that he was slightly unstable and paranoid at the time. He saw himself as a tragic hero and that everything that went wrong at the set and in the-making of the film as fate rather than having practical and emotional reasons. He says in the memo that Zoetrope (his film studio) is equal to him and his work and that the headquarters is wherever he himself is situated. He even argued that his disregard of money matters was his major strength and did not contest the exaggerated rumours that the film costs were utterly out of control. He ended the memo telling his staff that he was now Francis Coppola, having dropped the Ford since a man with three names was untrustworthy. He also made references to how he saw himself as a hero saying: 'Euripides, the Greek playwright said thousands of years ago: 'Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes successful in show business.'',²⁰⁸

On the personal level the film had repercussions, and the marriage between Francis and Eleanor suffered from too intense work as well as from Francis' affair with another woman. For Eleanor Coppola she found that her husband became increasingly like Kurtz, that he changed and went through phases as the film developed. During the making of the film his demands and lifestyle became increasingly extravagant and he ordered everything from frozen steaks and fine wines to hi-fi equipment from California. This extravagance was a worrying trait for his wife who was under increasing stress because of the failing marriage as well as the economic burden of the film. Eleanor Coppola criticised her husband for his extravagances in a fax sent to the production team. Her point was that he was creating his own Vietnam with his extravagant habits, and was creating the same situation that he originally had hoped to expose in his film. She accused him of making his film in the same way that the Americans fought the war in Vietnam, with his staff following his whims arguing that he was turning into Kurtz and taking it all too far. She expressed what many critics also thought, in her words: 'I think Francis is truly a visionary, but part of me is filled with anxiety. I feel as though a certain discrimination is missing, that fine tuning that draws the line between what is visionary and what is madness.'²⁰⁹ *Apocalypse Now* is as much an interpretation of Conrad's novel, a film about Vietnam as a journey into a man's mind. This first level of reading the film as a filmmaker's personal apocalypse adds a

²⁰⁸ Jon Lewis, 1995, pp 53-54. Quote from Coppola Memorandum p. 196 (Coppola misquotes and the original by Euripides which is 'Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes mad'.

dimension to the film.

The film was for Coppola his own apocalypse, his own journey into the darkness and the horror. It was a journey of self discovery that is at the centre of the personal apocalypse where as much as is revealed about the end of the world is revealed of the end of one's own life and being. For Coppola the film wrote itself and became increasingly indistinguishable from himself as he merged increasingly with the character of Kurtz. He became obsessed with the film and was divided between the belief that the film was a masterpiece or that it was a total failure. The film depicts an internal apocalypse in Willard's journey up the river as well as into a man's madness where he finds part of himself, and on another level it reflects a personal apocalypse of its maker. Coppola was in emotional and creative chaos as he was involved with two women who he felt were encouraging him and making him feel able to create the film he wanted. He claims he was emotionally fragile and vulnerable, needing reassurance to complete his vision. Eleanor Coppola depicts the issue as going to the heart of darkness on every possible level of your life and not having any idea of what is happening and where you are going.²¹⁰ This illustration indicates that the film can be seen not only as a journey up a river or into a mad man's mind but into the soul and mind of all and everyone. This first level of the film where the apocalypse can be read is the making of an apocalypse which also becomes a personal apocalypse for those involved. Coppola experienced the psychological, emotional and physical disintegration that is associated with the apocalypse personally. This was due to paranoia, the merging of himself and Kurtz, and the physical strain that was the result of stress and life in the Philippines. Likewise, Sheen experienced his own personal apocalypse, not only because of his mental breakdown but also through the drugs and the heart attack which almost claimed his life. With its practical as well as emotional difficulties, the film effected all involved in the making and became an personal apocalypse for Martin Sheen, Eleanor Coppola and Francis Coppola alike where they all had to face their own dark sides as well as witnessing and recognising the darkness in others.

4:2 War on Film - War as Spectacle

War has been a favoured topic of film from the very beginning and has been represented in various genres from documentary to science fiction. One early example is Welles'

²⁰⁹ Eleanor Coppola, 1979, pp. 176-177.

²¹⁰ Peter Cowie, 2000 p. 93.

War of the Worlds, which today seems a bit tame in the comparison to the last 20 years of war film. Today, war as shown on the silver screen has become a spectacle that both engages and distances the viewer. Through the use of technology and the ever growing budgets of Hollywood productions the possibilities are endless, and the effects spectacular. The genre of war film has developed with few exceptions into a spectacle where the fantastic and seductive is at the core. We get used to seeing people and property blown up, soldiers and civilians shot, dying in puddles of blood, life being wasted or saved in savage ways. War on film, as a statement of art, is problematic because its attempts to portray the real war as fought everywhere and nowhere.

To make art of people dying might seem baroque, and it is necessary to go beyond an often simplistic narrative and interpret the powerful imagery that at the same time is an artistic expression that attempts to depict 'reality'. In *Apocalypse Now* many images can be found that are fantastic, spectacular and stunning as well as works of art in their own right. The scene of the napalm bombing of the forest is a memorable one, the slaughtering of the water buffalo and Kurtz another. These images are seductive and stunning and this spectacular imagery serves to disconnect the image from the narrative and from the horror, the atrocious acts played out on the screen. In watching the spectacle of war we all become a little disconnected and seduced, and through this distance we are able to watch what is truly awful. David Freedberg discusses this response to art in *The Power of Images* and makes a division between an initial emotional response and a secondary critical response. I would like to argue that in front of the horror of war we all suspend with our initial emotions and become art critics, paying devotion to the spectacle.²¹¹ When we are positioned in front of a film that makes us emotionally engaged, uncomfortable, disgusted, or embarrassed we distance ourselves and rationalise our response which as a result becomes intellectual rather than emotional. This disconnection to the narrative as well as to our selves is a trademark of the apocalyptic where the narrative gives way to images and hence becomes secondary. The comprehensive, logical and linear narrative is not of much interest to the apocalypse which in itself is neither comprehensible nor linear but stands outside traditional narratological components. The imagery enhances this discontinuity by creating images that are fantastic and spectacular but also evasive and difficult to capture and interpret. This elusiveness is inherent to the apocalypse and the images always move ahead of the text, avoiding an interpretation which would domesticate

them by binding them to time, reason and situation. The apocalyptic imagery of *Apocalypse Now* is in the line of the apocalypse, fantastic and unimaginable and is distinct because not only is it a-ethical, but also it is displaced and disconnected. An example is given in the scene of Kilgore's attack on the beach where the helicopters descend on the village accompanied with classical music in order to secure a space for Lance to surf. The idea of surfing as people are being killed stands outside ordinary categories of ethics, placing the Californian leisure activity in an extreme and ultimately other situation. The spectacle of the bombing of the forest, Kilgore's theatrical performance, and the film teams encouragement of 'pretend you are fighting' heightens the feel of surrealism and ethical confusion, creating an apocalyptic situation where nothing is as it seems, but hidden and distorted.

On one level *Apocalypse Now* is best described as spectacle which could be a depiction of any war, any place, any time. The making of the films themselves resembles warfare on several levels. On one level there is the intrusiveness and violence inflicted upon nature and culture, and on the economic level thousands of dollars were literally burnt up in the jungle and spent on the latest technology as well as on an excess of food, wine and entertainment. As Baudrillard commented:

Coppola made his film the same way the Americans conducted the war—in this sense it is the best testimony—with the same exaggeration, the same excessive means, the same monstrous candour—and the same success. War as a trip, a technological and psychedelic fantasy, war as a succession of special effects.²¹²

Baudrillard's critique hits home, and Coppola's vision was to show the excess of Vietnam, the children going to war, the drugs, and Vietnam as a playground for technological advances. For Coppola the film became what Vietnam was for the US, a drawing board for new ideas of film-making and warfare, the test site of new technology.

The film offers many scenes that express the excess of war as well as the excess of the film itself. One of the scenes that most clearly shows such excess is the absurd but very possible scene of the Playboy Bunnies appearance to entertain the soldiers. In the making of the film itself the party to celebrate 100 days of shooting the film plays a

²¹¹ David Freedberg, 1989), pp. 16-17, 22.

²¹² Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1988), pp. 16-17

very similar role with a girl in bikini jumping out of Coppola's cake.²¹³ Another scene of excess is when the entire set is blown up at Kilgore's attack. The scene was shot several times and each time hundreds of thousands of gallons of petrol was burned up. Not only money is spent and wasted in the making of war film but nature is also effected and there is almost always a coupling of war and the death of nature. In *Apocalypse Now* this can be read into the imagery of the burned land after Kilgore's attack. Nature is shown as thriving, being burned and dying, imagery that is produced by exactly that savage action. However in *Apocalypse Now* nature is also seen as thriving, suffocating and dangerous in scenes like when Chef and Willard comes across a tiger or when arrows are thrown from a dense jungle. The making of war film then becomes highly ethically questionable, the destroying of nature, the excess of technology and money as well as the questionable politics of filming in the Philippines with the help of its president.

4:2:1 *Apocalypse Now* as War - More Real than the Real War

When watching war on film one of the issues often discussed is realism and the question of how close the depiction of the war is to the 'real' war. I would like to argue that the Vietnam war portrayed by films such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Deer Hunter* and many others is more real than the war itself and our perception of Vietnam is more colored by media and film than by the actual event. Baudrillard, discusses the relation between the image and the real arguing that in the postmodern era the real has been blurred and confused which has led to a hyperreal, which is sustained through media.²¹⁴ The result is that we are now less able to grasp the relation between the image and the real than ever before, leaving us with a perceived reality that is so blurred with fiction that the two become inseparable.²¹⁵ The media image and our own memory or perception hence merges, forming an image that is not real but not false either, an image Baudrillard calls hyperreal. The images appear to refer to the real, seemingly

²¹³ Eleanor Coppola, *Hearts of Darkness*, 1991.

²¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, 1988, p. 11.

²¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard even goes as far as saying that the Holocaust did not happen and he argues that the Holocaust only exists as a media event now when the real memories have faded and have been substituted with artificial memories. This is not to say that he denies that the historical event of the Holocaust did not happen. He argues that media and real has become so blurred that it is impossible to tell what is real and what came first. He uses the example of the Harrisburg disaster to support this where the media event, the film the China syndrome actually preceded the actual event. See Jean Jean Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 49-57.

reproducing something that has been before them, and this is the demonic quality of the hyperreal, which seems to be faithful to reality when it is most diabolical.²¹⁶

In relation to Vietnam it is Coppola's depiction that ultimately colours what we think we know about Vietnam and what is perceived as real whilst the actual Vietnam is forgotten. This is what lies behind his brandishing of images as diabolical which replace the 'real' images as well as the 'real' memories, and create a reality that is a media event. The images are deceptive and seductive and through the exchange of our own memories and the hyperreal, personal memory is made redundant, an issue that lies behind the complexity of Vietnam itself. For the soldiers who were present and part of the Vietnam war the spectacle of the media war is so persuasive that the memory that remains is a memory blurred with a media image. This makes the actual memories of Vietnam redundant and leads to the loss of self, identity and individuality that is integral to the apocalypse. The images seem to depict reality but have started to move ahead of reality, anticipating reality and contaminating it, making the real Vietnam the one seen on the silver screen.²¹⁷ History then has become the most important myth for cinema and efforts to come closer to real history disappear and are replaced by a cinematic depiction.²¹⁸

Baudrillard sees parallels between the conformity of the images and the conformity of the masses that are happy to be lead and comply with the models offered. He also sees a parallel to war and daily life, daily life has become cinematographic and not the other way around. He turns to Coppola and *Apocalypse Now* in order to explain his statement that film has become war and that media is nothing less than a continuation of war.²¹⁹

The real war was conducted by Coppola in the manner of Westmoreland. Leaving aside the clever irony of napalming Philippino forest and villages to recreate the hell of South Vietnam, everything is replayed, begun again through cinema, the Molochian joy of the shoot, the sacrificial joy of so many millions spent, of such a holocaust of means, of so many difficulties, and the dazzling paranoia in the mind of the creator who, from the beginning, conceived this film as world historical event for which the Vietnam war would have been no more than a pretext, would ultimately not have existed—and we cannot deny it: in 'itself' the Vietnam war never happened, perhaps it was only a dream, a baroque dream of napalm and the tropics, a psycho-tropic dream, in which the issue was not politics

²¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, 1988, pp. 12-13.

²¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 14,16.

²¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 43-48.

or victory but the sacrificial, excessive deployment of a power already filming itself as it unfolds, perhaps expecting nothing more than a consecration by a super film, which perfects the war's function as a mass spectacle.²²⁰

The exploitation of the topic together with powerful imagery colours our imagination and memory, making the film more real than the real event. In vain we search for a memory that no longer exists because our own memories have faded and we forget that the 'real' extermination has taken place. We forget, but forgetting is dangerous so in order not to forget we have to supply our minds with an artificial memory created by film and media, a memory that in turn make us forget what actually happened.²²¹ Historical events like Vietnam are really forgotten Baudrillard argues, and what we remember are memories constructed by the images of the hyperreal/medial which aims at achieving aesthetics through nostalgia.²²² War film is a nostalgic genre that constructs both history and future influencing the way we remember and the way we will assess the future. This leaves us with the war in Vietnam as an apocalypse in itself, not only an apocalypse of war but also of the loss of memory and identity. War is always internal to the apocalypse and war in itself is an apocalypse, an end, and a horror. This level of the apocalyptic in *Apocalypse Now* deals with the horror of war where the actual war is an apocalypse to the ones involved. It is an apocalypse on all levels of society, with the breakdown of infrastructures, relationships, as well as the destruction of nature and traditional values. The apocalypse of war as depicted in *Apocalypse Now* is one that not only tears society apart but which challenges the inner life of the characters and depicts the central theme of apocalypse as brother turning against brother. War as the apocalyptic event in Revelation is seen as peace being taken away from the world, resulting in men killing one another. It is this absence of peace that is depicted in *Apocalypse Now* where the enemy is always hidden, never visible and both absent and present. The enemy is always present, inflicting pain, and fear but never seen or heard and this makes him truly into an apocalyptic enemy who arrives as a thief in the night. In the film we never see the enemy, his presence is merely felt and only present through the absence as in the scene at the bridge where soldiers are shooting blindly into the dark or when sticks are thrown at the boat from a thick and unconquered jungle.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 2000, pp. 59-60, and Baudrillard, 1988, pp. 16-17.

²²⁰ Baudrillard, 1988, pp. 17-18.

²²¹ Ibid, pp. 23-24.

4:3 *Apocalypse Now* and the *Heart of Darkness*

Coppola's adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* was met with both anticipation and disbelief, partly because several directors had tried to film Conrad's novels with little success. One of the reasons for this is that the adaptations have tended to focus on the subtle characters and the dialogue, resulting in films emphasising the theatrical and psychological dimensions whilst abandoning a cinematically effective plot. Partly this is also due to Conrad's style of writing, which expresses the inner landscape of the characters rather than the outer landscape as well as the careful literary images that he constructs. The sentiment at the time of the release of the film was that the first half of the film was excellent and the latter mystical and banal. The reviewers seemed to have been rather united in the view that as a film about Vietnam Coppola had succeed, but as an adaptation of Conrad's work the film was seen as weak and obscure without a comprehensible ending. The disintegration of the film towards the end was blamed on the literary source and the attempt of making an adaptation of Conrad at all, was seen as Coppola's pitfall.²²³

In the debate of how truthful the film is to *Heart of Darkness* many critics pointed out that the credits do not mention Conrad and this has been taken as disrespectful by many. In terms of how much the film is a depiction of Conrad's book I would like to argue that Coppola has adapted the story to his contemporary setting, and keeping the main storyline whilst details have been treated loosely. The introductory and closing scenes aboard *Nellie* on the Thames in Conrad's novel form a frame that Coppola has not taken into account. Coppola's tale is not a retelling of Conrad's story as much as it is a moral tale just like Conrad's story, and as such it is close to its original, creating a morality tale that is disturbing as well as provoking. So in the sense, concerning the essence of the tale, Coppola is not disrespectful but rather pays homage to Conrad. In Conrad's novel the story begins with the end with Marlow telling the story, and so too in Coppola with Jim Morrison's words, 'this is the end, beautiful friend'.²²⁴ The use of the Doors music and lyrics frames the story in a similar way to Conrad's storytelling on the *Nellie*. Jim Morrison tells his story of the end, letting us know that it will be a wider story of the end. In this way Coppola manages to bridge the time and culture gap between Conrad and the contemporary viewer and creates a film that is not as far from

²²² Ibid, pp. 24.

²²³ Holger Bachmann, 'Hollow Men in Vietnam: A Reading of the Concluding Sequence of *Apocalypse Now*,' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Oxford University Press for University of St Andrews, Vol. 34, No 4, 1998, Pp 315-316.

the novel at all. The story is similar and the changes are due to an attempt at modernising the novel. As Conrad had written a novel criticising colonialism Coppola makes a film uncovering the reality of war. Coppola's film is successful in denouncing war in its eerie and violent scenes of warfare and life in a war zone. It is as a metaphor of war in general as well as of deeper psychological processes. As a result of this the novel and the film corresponds very well with each other, Conrad using colonialism in Congo, Coppola America's war in Vietnam as the metaphor for a psychological drama and a journey into a man's mind. This symbolic journey into the psyche results in questions of morality and ethics as well as a survey of the darkness and evil of humans as well as humanity. Coppola's film is then not a shallow adaptation of the novel but an adaptation that takes into account the metaphorical character of Conrad's work.²²⁵

4:3:1 Conrad's Narrative and Coppola's Vision

In a comparison between film and novel the question of realism needs to be addressed and the issue has been discussed by several critics who are relatively united in their criticism that Coppola's account does not focus on a realistic depiction of the Vietnam war. Frances FitzGerald notes that the setting of the film in Vietnam and Cambodia is problematic since there is no river that can take you into Cambodia from Vietnam. The Mekong river connects the two countries but from Vietnam the river runs upstream, over the mountains, to Cambodia which makes the idea of sailing up river impossible. The geography portrayed in the film is flawed, and Kurtz's Montagnard army is placed in a Cambodia that is rather flat and without mountains. As a result of the depiction of Vietnam on film by Coppola and others, Vietnam has become an abstraction and more a symbol than an actual place.²²⁶ Vietnam as we know it is then a hyperreality that has little to do with the actual place and war. The many films about Vietnam have created a country, a people, and a war that is more real than the actual war once fought there. Our perception of Vietnam has then very little to do with the actual Vietnam but is a fiction or a hyperreality that has taken over and become more real than reality itself. In retrospect Coppola has created a Vietnam experience that has become so persuasive that it overshadows the actual experience of Vietnam as well as influencing this experience. I would argue that realism is not what Coppola is setting out to portray. Instead he is

²²⁴ The Doors, *The End*, 1967.

²²⁵ Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 317-318.

²²⁶ Frances FitzGerald, 'Apocalypse Now in Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies,' in Mark C. Carmes (ed.), *Past Imperfect: History according to the Movies*. (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 284-287.

attempting to portray the inner landscape of the characters and of the apocalypse that is at the centre of war as well as the jungle at Kurtz's temple. The setting of Conrad's novel is similar in this sense and even if the novel is set in Congo it could, like *Apocalypse Now*, be anywhere and anytime. The location is not essential but serves to create a backdrop for the more important inner explorations of the soul, the heart of evil and of the apocalypse, the 'interior' which is everywhere.

Conrad's story is even more disconnected from a geographical place than Coppola's and *Heart of Darkness* only mentions the fact that it is somewhere in Africa which underlines the everywhere and nowhere setting of the apocalypse, revealed and concealed simultaneously, only revealed in signs read by a few. The reader is simply not told of the name of the country, nor of the river, something that makes Conrad's location highly metaphorical. His descriptions of the place serve only to heighten the feeling of a metaphorical place, anywhere and nowhere, which gives an evocative focus to the story.²²⁷ Coppola uses the location of Vietnam in a similar way that Conrad uses Congo, as a metaphorical place where western civilisation and morality disintegrate in relation to the other. In the beginning of the journey we are told that the story starts in Saigon and the river that Willard is sailing up is the river Nung. After this we are given sparse geographical detail, which ends after the entrance to Cambodia, symbolised by sailing under the Do Lung bridge. After this the geographical details are omitted, making Willard's journey classified and secret, on the level of the plot - a journey the destination of which is not revealed to him as a whole but only in part. This concealing of the location and destination emphasise the apocalyptic quality of the journey where the destination is only revealed through signs a little at the time. The entrance into Cambodia is marked with a scene of a crashed airline and a crashed helicopter, and at the last bridge Marlow encounters American soldiers fighting a battle with technological weapons in the dark against an unseen enemy. On entering Cambodia the boat is attacked with spears and arrows marking how technology is exchanged for the savage and primitive. Similarly it is the primeval and uncivilised that threatens in the forest around them, which is experienced first hand by Willard and Chef when they step off the boat for the first time and are threatened by a tiger. The danger they meet is not from the war but from nature, the forest, the primeval rather than the technological. In a similar fashion Conrad makes his transition from the colonial and civilised to the

African wilderness and civilisation which resists a westernising of values and which suffers under this very morality.²²⁸

The entry to Cambodia marks the entrance into an apocalyptic that is primal, urgent and concealed. The fight in the dark is one with an unseen enemy, which has ceased to exist. The chaos of the war and the shooting into the dark show an apocalyptic enemy that is as much on the inside as on the outside, where the enemy might not be present at all but might be one of the American soldiers themselves. Coppola's film is about Vietnam on one level but it is also a film that makes wider claims that comments on the human capacity for violence and atrocity. It depicts war and violence in a general way, thus making it the domain of modern man himself, showing his ability as well as fascination for the abominable. In this sense the violence is voyeuristic, incorporating the thrill of war that we all feel, a trait that Coppola argues is necessary to make an effective anti war film.²²⁹

From passing the bridge the film becomes increasingly disconnected but this should not be seen as a fault, as have many critics, but as a close reading of Conrad that follows the disruptive and disconnected narrative of the apocalypse. Coppola diverts from Conrad's text in many details but keeps close to the essence and overall structure of his tale. A comparison between the two narratives show many differences, for example in the film Kurtz is cut off by the military but in the novel he leaves the company as a result of his own conviction. Also for Conrad the issue that brings Marlow up the river is the worry over whether Kurtz is dead, not that he is running amok in the jungle. Conrad creates the suspense in the novel through the journey and the anticipation of meeting the legend that Kurtz is painted out to be. Coppola on the other hand makes it clear from the beginning that Kurtz is a former hero but also someone who has gone insane.²³⁰ In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad balances the idea that the God like status has corrupted Kurtz together with imperial rule which has made him disillusioned, and it is through this conflict that the moral of the story is constructed. The relationship between oppressor and oppressed is depicted by Conrad in such a way that it is plausible that the oppressor finds the source of evil in his victims and becomes absolved by the evil of the victim. The idea of the man of high ideals 'goes native' and

²²⁷ Roumiana Deltcheva, 'Destination Classified: On the Transformation of the Spatial Forms in Applying the Narrative Text to Film (The case of Heart of Darkness and Apocalypse Now),' in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, Vol. 23, University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 754

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 757.

²²⁹ Patrick Chabal and Paul Joannides, 'Copping Out with Coppola' in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. XIII Number 3, 1984, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 190.

becomes even more cruel than the savages themselves is substituted in Coppola for the all American hero and family man who has abandoned American values all together. Where Conrad creates his moral centre around the imperialist situation, Coppola shows the a-morality or morality of Kurtz as someone who has abandoned the American dream and the American way or possibly taken that very ideal too far,²³¹ and as an apocalyptic visionary has seen into the future which is one of suffering and death. Kurtz has become the unlikely saviour of his people, but a saviour that is a Christ/ antichrist with an apocalyptic agenda.

4:3:2 The Narrative

Most literary narratives that are transformed into film are attempts to bring the audience closer to the world of the narrative, by making the motifs, and situations more universal and easier to relate to as well as naturalising the spatial and temporal parameters. In making a film from a novel, like *Heart of Darkness*, this is difficult since the narrative does not conform to a traditional linear narrative but has a metaphorical dimension underlying the text, which is not easily transformed into image. As a result of the complexity of Conrad's narrative Coppola has undertaken a re-interpretation of the narrative rather than a transformation of the story into images.²³²

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a *bildungs-roman* that presents an internal and external darkness, as well as utter chaos where the voyage up the river merges with the journey into the soul. The narrative is framed by a narrative voice, a prologue and epilogue forming a frame narrative, common to the 'classical apocalypse'. The narrator is unknown and tells a story which was originally told by Marlow, blending his own voice with Marlow's and making us forget that the story is narrated, and instead it becomes a story spoken in Marlow's own voice. Similarly Coppola uses the camera to tell Willard's tale and it is in the narratological structure that the similarities between novel and film are the greatest. The story about the journey into darkness is timeless, ongoing and unchangeable, which Conrad recognises in Marlow's words: 'When the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago...to face the darkness.' Implying that the journey into the darkness, the unknown always is the same whether it is the

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 191.

²³¹ Ibid, p. 192-193.

²³² Roumiana Deltcheva, 1996, pp. 753-754.

Romans coming up the Thames, the English travelling up the Congo or the Americans going up the Nung.²³³

The two stories are radically different in terms of content but in terms of narratological structure they are very similar, starting with a meditative note in which the protagonists indicates that the events have been a life changing event. The narrator who speaks in the first person is the mediator who is both present and absent in the story. From this we are moved into a expository mode where the protagonists explains how he came to take the journey which would lead him to the heart of darkness, to the encounter with Kurtz. The moment of the meeting is marked through a change in narration and a shift from darkness to light. Conrad abandons the frame narrative at this point when Marlow, on the *Nellie*, starts his tale at sunset and in the next instance we are transported to a brightly lit, hot and chaotic Congo. Similarly in *Apocalypse Now* Willard's story starts in the darkened hotel room where we are given the details of the mission, only to be transported suddenly in the next part of the narrative to the brightly lit, hot and dusty battle on the shore of the river.²³⁴

Both works feature two journeys, one literal up the river and one metaphorical into the human psyche and its capacity for evil. Coppola follows Conrad's structure relatively faithfully but with many re-interpretations of the content, being very aware of the potential problems with an adaptation of the novel. He argues that his film was made to be more of a whole experience than a movie and through this method he hoped to get closer to the heart of Conrad's story. He wanted to start it as a narrative, a story up the river but as it went on the story would become less important and the experience more important. In this frame of mind he made an ending that is less a resolution and more of a reflexive mythological consideration. He wanted an ending that reflected the film as a whole, not a dramatic clear-cut closure but an exploration of human desire and capacity. As a result the film starts out as a grand war epic and as an action adventure and moves to a battle takes place in the mind rather than on the battlefield.²³⁵

From a narratological view the text offers two locations as well as two stories. One on the river boat *Nellie* at the Thames and the other in Africa. The narrative of the sailors on the *Nellie* frames the story in which Marlow reminisces about his excursion to Congo. The story told by Marlow is consciously vague in terms of geographical

²³³ Linda Constanzo Chahir, 'Narratological Parallels in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*,' in *Film Literature Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No 3, 1992, pp. 181-182

²³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 182-183.

²³⁵ Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 318-319.

setting and historical time in order to underline that there is another level underlying the story which places the story in anyplace anytime. In contrast the frame narrative is factual and detailed informing us of location, time, surrounding and situation. From this detailed description we are moved on to Marlow's stories who remembers his earlier journeys. His memories have a factual tone and geographical and temporal hints are given as the story progresses. We are told about sea-journeys and locations but when we enter the centre- narrative of the journey into the heart of darkness the style of narration changes. The narration becomes vague and elusive indicating that this particular journey is different and a journey that has wider implications than the others. The only references we are given is that the river is big, and that it on the map looks like a snake uncoiled. At the same time it is taken for granted that we know where the setting is in references 'when I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap'. By employing this double standard in telling his story Conrad heightens the spiritual significance of the river journey. The structure of the two stories juxtaposes them against each other, and the narrative technique of the centre narrative helps the over all story become vague, indeterminate and ambivalent, making it transcend time and place, hence locating it any-where and any-time, as well as every-where and every-time.²³⁶ It is in the light of this we can see how Coppola make use of Conrad's narrative by using, or rather, responding to Conrad's method of telling a narrative. Coppola's story responds to Conrad's technique and follows the same elusive and tentative narration. The journey is at the centre and becomes the most important, and it effects the people involved. The style of the narrative is very similar to the one of the 'classical apocalypse', which also is surrounded by a frame narrative which is more detailed and defined. An example is the Book of Daniel, which tells us about Daniel and his life in the frame narrative but changes its tone when entering the apocalyptic vision. In *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, as in the 'classical apocalypse' the style changes from being detailed and well defined to being elusive and disruptive where the imagery is emphasised over the narrative, making the text more imaginative and detached as the narrative dissolves.

Both men receive their assignment far away from the end of their journey. They have to travel to reach the start of their journey that is not accounted for and about which we know little. They are both supposed to travel up the river for the company and relieve Kurtz from his position. In Conrad's case the commodity and trade under threat

²³⁶ Roumiana Deltcheva, 1996, pp. 754-756.

is ivory, which in Coppola has been exchanged for the equally devastating trade of war and of political/ military relations.²³⁷ The journey is divided into three sections marked by three stops along the river where the protagonist learns something new, as well as having an encounter with the other. Each stop adds depth to the story and brings the crew on the boat closer to the heart of darkness and the discovery of the darkness inside. These stops can be seen in the light of Revelation where the opening of the seals has a similar function of teaching the 'seer' something new as well as revealing a little more of the full impact of the horror at every opening/stop. The first stop in Conrad's account is at the mouth of the river where Marlow encounters colonialism at work for the first time. The location is described as other, alien, hot and dirty, where everywhere enslaved black people work until they die. It is the site of the horror of imperialism and an introduction to the white as well as the black Africa. From this point Marlow travels over land to the central station where he picks up his boat and where greed is the agenda that rules life. In *Apocalypse Now* the two first stops follow rapidly upon each other. Willard meets the air cavalry at a burned out village where the American soldiers finish off the last surviving Vietnamese soldiers. At the village Willard encounters a similar violence and evil that Marlow saw at the start of his journey at the station. Under the lead of Captain Kilgore the soldiers take over the village, killing Viet Cong and civilians indiscriminately, marking the dead bodies with cards to take credit for the killings as well as showing contempt for the Vietnamese. Willard meets Kilgore whose attitude and person he seem unable to either despise or respect, but comments on the fact that it is people like Kilgore who walk away from the war without outer and inner wounds. Kilgore agrees to take Willard to the beach where Willard will commence his journey by boat. The site is a village held by the Viet Cong but chosen by Kilgore because it is a good place for surfing of which he is a great fan, and he also wants to see Lance (Willard's crew member) surf. The decision leads to the bizarre and utterly imperialistic gesture of siezing the village, bombing it to pieces for no other reason than for the American soldiers to have a good surf, manifesting the care-free, anything goes, individualistic, American culture. Or in apocalyptic terms, the gesture becomes one of a-morality particular to the end where traditional ethics are dissolved and the action of surfing becomes part of the framework of apocalypse when actions take place without underlying plans, seemingly disconnected from the overall narrative.

²³⁷ Linda Constanzo Chahir, 1992, p. 183.

Both narratives permit the approach to Kurtz's compound (the third stop) be undertaken in fog, creating an eerie atmosphere. They are attacked by Kurtz's men throwing little sticks, and when firing into the fog the sticks turn to more fatal spears. The helm's man is killed as a sign that on entering the heart of darkness there will be no one at the helm. The first person they encounter and who greets them is the mad Russian in Conrad's story, and who in Coppola's version has become a rambling, insane American journalist. This encounter is often found in classical mythology where a guide often shows the way into the mystical and mythical. This guide, like the Russian and the journalist, never himself enters the mythic realm and never makes the spiritual journey himself but is forever an outsider, closed from true understanding. In both narratives the guide never reaches understanding but has deified Kurtz and worships and fears him. Kurtz is a man made divine through bloody rituals that have made him godly in the natives' eyes, and as a result they too worship and fear him and his power. In Willard's case the severed heads littering the site are an indication of these rituals, and as the camera lingers on a copy *The Golden Bough*, the realisation is made that heads are only the beginning of the deeper horror that is the apocalypse. The rituals are never elaborated upon in *Heart of Darkness* because of the excess of horror that is involved in them. Instead the part of *The Golden Bough* which concerns human sacrifice is cited indicating the extent of the horror.²³⁸

4:3:3 The Characters

4:3:3:1 Kurtz, Marlow, and Willard

Grieff points out that the most pervasive moral issue in *Heart of Darkness* involves Conrad's belief that there is a proportional relationship between a man's endeavour and the quality of his being. Conrad argues that through work and craft man is not simply working for his living but is also creating his self, his identity and self-worth, and when he fails he erodes his self to hollowness. It is this hollowness that is at the heart of Conrad's moral tale and which provides one key to understand Marlow and Kurtz. For Conrad, Marlow is the accomplished sailor who has perfected his trade, and through the idea of self that his work gives him, he has been able to form an identity that until meeting Kurtz has been settled and stable. Kurtz resembles Marlow in taking his trade seriously but he has no focus and he is a jack of all trades. His life and self is not defined by a strong identification with one focus and he is a disparate character without

²³⁸ Ibid, pp 185-186.

a centre and Marlow points out that it is impossible to tell Kurtz's profession because he is everything. Unlike Marlow he does not have a centre, and whereas Marlow approaches his trade as an artist, craftsman and lover, Kurtz is passionate but not necessarily very good at any of it, or else he is too fleeting to see anything through.²³⁹ Also in Coppola's film the idea of profession as self-defining is at the centre of the self-understanding of Willard's crew as well as of Kurtz. In the film these roles seem reversed at first glance and it is Kurtz who according his dossier seems to be the solid and reliable person. According to the dossier Kurtz is outstanding at what he does, a good soldier and officer, and he has dedicated his life to his work. In contrast Willard seems to have lost not only his wife and dignity but also his motive and aim in life. He seems corrupt and fragmented in professional terms and the question that arises is whether he is an accomplished soldier or just a hit man. In the film Kurtz detects this insecurity and he asks Willard if he is an assassin and proceeds to ignore his answer by telling Willard that he is just an errand boy. Further on their roles and endeavours become even more blurred when they are both bewildered in the face of the future and their place in it which leads to a confusion of identities, as Willard becomes increasingly similar to Kurtz. Eventually he merges so much with Kurtz that Kurtz's army is ready to accept Willard as their leader after he has killed Kurtz and has the option of becoming the incarnated Kurtz. Kurtz's camp is a place of anarchy, as his soldier regime has been exchanged by an apocalyptic chaos where torture and executions are the favourite activity. Kurtz from being the professional of the dossier emerges as the man who has gone insane. Willard himself, offers little improvement to the moral standard, and we see him kill the girl on the Sampan simply because the encounter was a diversion of his course, and killing Kurtz because it is his order. Willard's actions are more closely described as an absence of moral and his only possible moral actions concern those he did not perform but should have such as taking over Kurtz's rule or calling in an air strike.²⁴⁰ Here Willard is similar to Kurtz, whose kingdom is not ruled by a firm hand but by a leader who allows his people to act according to their desires.

Conrad's book has no moral centre and Marlow's lesson is that existence has no moral heart. Marlow does not emerge from his journey with his ethical system intact, in fact he has become a new man, estranged and isolated. They have both encountered evil

²³⁹ Louis K Grieff, 'Soldier, Sailor, Surfer, Chef: Conrad's Ethics and the Margins of *Apocalypse Now*,' in *Film Literature Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1992, pp. 88-89.

and the darkness that is at the heart of the apocalypse. They have looked down into the abyss of the apocalypse where nothing is what it seems and where ethical values are reversed according to an apocalyptic logic. At the centre of darkness is a moral abyss where morals are deconstructed and reversed into that which ultimately stands outside morality. Kurtz's morality of the end stands in the line of apocalyptic randomness and implodes through the force of the absence of God. Kurtz is the apocalyptic hero, the Christ/antichrist who looks into the abyss of evil, the absence of God and who acts accordingly and as a result, and like Christ on the cross he must die. Willard emerges from killing Kurtz increasingly confused and altered, making it impossible to go back to life as it was, with the option of continuing Kurtz's apocalyptic reign. Willard has confronted the darkness of Kurtz as well as of himself and realised that he has part of this darkness inside.²⁴¹ In Coppola's version we find the two moral figures sacrificed, one impaled on a spear the other decapitated. Being the only ones showing strength of spirit, imagination, belief and human decency they move towards a brutal death where their lives are taken as arbitrarily as the 'classical apocalypse' claims its victims. Those spared are Lance and Kilgore, the two surfers who are hollow to the core with an absence of ethical values or any interest outside themselves, and so they are untouched by the horror. Lance is shown wandering off in a trance through all dangers and Kilgore walks around whilst shells explode next to him, seemingly unaware. Willard commenting on this randomness and unawareness of Kilgore's, sees him as protected and is sure to escape the war without a scratch. The hollow men are the survivors of the apocalypse as randomly spared as others are sacrificed.²⁴²

4:3:3:2 Chief and Chef

The moral conflict between being a good craftsman or a hollow man takes place not so much between Kurtz and Willard but among the other characters. The characters of Chief, a black man who is presented as controlled and self-restrained is juxtaposed with Chef who is his opposite, a white southerner, a saucier who is nervous, emotional and neurotic. In this couple Marlow's ethical side is recreated, his serious workmanship, hard discipline and artistry, and in Coppola's film they display some of the characteristics reserved for Marlow in the novel.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 89-90.

²⁴¹ Linda Constanzo Chahir, 1992, p. 187

²⁴² Louis K Grief, 1992, p. 97

²⁴³ Ibid, p. 91.

Several parallels have been made between the black helmsman of Chief and Conrad's black helmsman, however, this is almost entirely based on the manner in which they die as well as on their race. Coppola's helmsman is, in reality, very different from Conrad's in that Conrad's man dies as a result of the disengaged way he goes about his job. In Coppola's case the helmsman is restrained and keeps a hard handle on his boat and the spear which kills him is almost an ironical comment on the only time chief loses his self-restraint and rages. Conrad's helmsman is as disconnected as Coppola's is attentive and proud, taking pride in his work and going about it with seriousness. It is in chief who utters the words reserved for Marlow in the novel:

Chief: 'Can't see nothin' We're stopping.'

Willard: You're not authorised to stop this boat.'

Chief. 'I said I can't see a thing, Captain. I'm stopping this boat. I ain't risking no more lives!'

As we can see the responsible character who takes on Marlow's role is Chief who several times throughout the film shows care for his crew as well as sensibility, and as in *Heart of Darkness* the good man and the good craftsman are inseparable.

In comparison with Chief, Chef is a more complex character, both spiritually and professionally. He was a chef in New Orleans before being drafted and signed on to become a chef in the army but the army cuisine hurt his aesthetic side, making him volunteer to be a radio man, which in turn brought him to the front, where he works as a machinist. Chef represents the artistic core of Marlow, the not exact science but the sensual side. Chef is escaping from the army's bad and ugly cooking, and along the river journey, and he becomes obsessed with finding mangoes in the jungle. The mangoes become sexualised and sensuous, and exist only in his imagination where they become symbols for the beauty and sensuality that the war is void of. Chef becomes a moral entity in his hatred for the ugly, for the war and the corruption of beauty that the war is. He is the spiritual individual who argues that good and evil are shades-and not definite entities, and he argues for humans to have souls. As a result of his conviction and his moral stature he volunteers in the fight against Kurtz who he sees as essentially evil, a quality he did not earlier believe existed, and he is killed as an innocent victim.²⁴⁴

4:3:3:3 Clean and Lance

²⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 91-92

Clean is, as his name suggests, clean or innocent, not more than a child. In his ignorance and fear he starts the shooting at the Sampan which results in the killing of an innocent family, an action which is a consequence of what the war and the army has done to him. He stands in sharp contrast to Lance and Kilgore who deal with the war in an equally immature way but who survive through their approach, whilst Clean becomes a victim of his innocence or childishness. Lance and Kilgore in contrast approach the war as an extension of America and at every possible moment they attempt to recreating America and its culture, whether it is in Kilgore's surf-party, and all American barbecue, or in Lance's water-skiing, surfing, loud music and drug taking. Lance is the unreliable and irresponsible beach-boy who has been forced into uniform, and Kilgore is a parody of a soldier with a swagger and a nihilistic cruelty. As different as they are, they are both hollow and empty and they recognise this in each other, depicted through their mutual passion for surfing. They meet in the aftermath of the battle and at recognising Lance, Kilgore abandons his humanitarian act of giving water to a dying Vietnamese soldier for the enjoyment of meeting a fellow Southern Californian surfer. They are both stereotypes of America, the surfer and the American loner with his Stetson hat, both survivors because they do not let the war touch them, and retain their American identity throughout. They are images of Conrad's and T.S Eliot's hollow men who survive the ordeal of the war and walk out of it unhurt as a result of their shallowness. By attacking the village he is able to satisfy his whim of seeing Lance surf, and also this attack enables him to put the boat down, making Willard's mission possible. The site and the attack do not have any real military purpose but is only for the enjoyment of the few initiated, and so the victory is an image of his moral blankness. The battle and the war are shown as devoid of morality, neither moral nor immoral but rather an event placed outside morality and an ethical code as a true apocalyptic event. The battles are pointless and the victims faceless, and in this moral void Kilgore attempts to recreate a little America based only on the shallowness of stereotypes. In comparison with Lance, Kilgore recreates his America in the midst of destruction with his exclamation 'I love the smell of Napalm in the morning. It smells like victory.' This marks his moral blankness as well as his belief in America. Lance on the other hand starts out as the all-American surfer but changes during the journey, becoming more primal, just like the Cambodian tribesmen they meet at Kurtz's compound. He becomes increasingly primitive and less communicative, spending his time tripping, painting himself and staring blankly into the forest. As he 'goes native' and descends into his own

shallowness, he also lets a gentler side emerge in his relation with the puppy which he takes care of. In the end he is the only one that has not harmed anyone, and in arriving at Kurtz's camp he finds a playground for his hollow soul where he finally stops playing soldier and starts playing with the children.²⁴⁵

4:4 Ritual and Myth at the End

At Kurtz's compound all images comes together and become concentrated, an earlier neutral shot of an ox reappears in the scene when an ox is sacrificed. Likewise the character of Kilgore can be seen as juxtaposed with the equally bald Kurtz, one representing the external horrors and the start of the journey, the other the internal horror and the end of the journey.

In Coppola's version we see Willard sailing away, leaving us not knowing where he is going or what the conclusion of the story is. In Conrad's novel on the other hand the story continues with Marlow going to Brussels to meet Kurtz's fiancée, an ending that gives a moral to the story. Chabal and Joannides argue that the ending leaves the film without the moral, thematic vitality or dramatic coherence that the novel has. They argue that this leaves the film without impact because Willard sails away, the corruption has been stopped and ritual sacrifice taken place but the moral is absent.²⁴⁶ This reading does not take into account the apocalyptic understanding of the film, which can be read as an apocalypse that is deeply moral yet a-moral. Coppola reverts to anthropology in order to explain the killing of Kurtz. He does so in the tone of the myth the self-destroying god. Chabal and Joannides see this as a weakness in Coppola's account however I would like to argue that Coppola's film should not to be judged as a parallel to Conrad but as a reverie on war or a psychological drama unfolding in Willard's head. The Vietnam war is used only as a pretext for mans violence towards others and towards himself and what Coppola depicts is his own Guernica as well as the Armageddon of the apocalypse.²⁴⁷

4:4:1 Death of Nature as a Mythological Theme

One of the greatest myths in war film is that of the unseen enemy, who has to be eliminated and hence the most important ritual or quest is to kill this very enemy. The ritualistic aspect of killing in often follow a stereotype that de-personifies the enemy

²⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 93-94.

²⁴⁶ Patrick Chabal and Paul Joannides, 1984, pp. 194-195

and which thrives on an idea of the 'other' who is alien, a-moral and unknown-known hence, justifying the atrocious acts. In Coppola's film there are two parallel quests, Willard's quest of finding and killing Kurtz who's own quest of building utopia or the apocalyptic dream has failed. For Willard, however, the task instead turns into a journey of self-discovery and in fulfilling his quest or order he is no longer the same man.

The parallel of killing and the death of nature are pronounced in *Apocalypse Now* where they assume mythological significance. In order to unwrap the many images and symbols in the film it is necessary to consider the influence of Eliot and Conrad on Coppola. Coppola himself argues that T.S Eliot kept challenging him throughout the making of the film and Eliot's *Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land* are crucial to the reading of the film.²⁴⁸ The use of Eliot is not a coincidence, but a conscious choice made by Coppola. Eliot himself was familiar with Conrad's works and for him both *Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land* were intimately connected to *Heart of Darkness*. *Hollow Men* begins with an epigraph stating 'Mistah Kurtz -he dead' and allegedly Eliot also wanted an epigraph reading 'The Horror, The Horror' for *The Waste Land*.²⁴⁹

Through Eliot the jumbled and incomprehensible ending of the film can be understood in the light of mythology which allows the random images fall into place. *The Waste Land* argues that quest for spiritual renewal in the contemporary world without transcendental values is pointless and futile. For Eliot the work was an investigation into the dark side, which meant a confrontation with issues he found difficult, and he himself likened it to looking into the abyss.²⁵⁰ The failure of the quest for spiritual renewal is the background of not only *The Waste Land* and *Hollow Men* but also of *Heart of Darkness*. In *The Waste Land* the quest is seen as futile, in *Hollow Men* it has already failed and in *Heart of Darkness* the quest for morality and ethics is failing in the face of evil and death. In *Apocalypse Now* the original quest of terminating Kurtz is exchanged for a journey of self-discovery where Willard enters his own dark side and discovers something of Kurtz within himself. Thus the film features two journeys, one literal up the river, and one metaphorical into the human psyche, into a man's soul.²⁵¹ In Coppola's vision it is Kurtz's quest that has failed for his utopia has turned into a

²⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 196-197.

²⁴⁸ Tony, Chiu, 'Francis Coppola's Cinematic 'Apocalypse' is finally at hand,' in *New York Times*, 12/8 1979, Section 2, p. 17

²⁴⁹ B. Rajan, *The Overwhelming Question: A Study of the Poetry of T.S Eliot* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1976), p. 41.

²⁵⁰ Cleo McNelly, *T.S. Eliot and Indic Traditions* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 195-196.

²⁵¹ Roumania Deltcheva, 1996, p. 756. For more information on the journey and the structuring of the narrative see Deltcheva's article, Roumania Deltcheva, 1996

nightmare. Like Jessie Weston's fisher king he must be replaced by a new quester, namely, Willard. In the light of history, Conrad's colonialism, Eliot's disbelief in the contemporary and two world-wars this task of regaining humanity and morality is seen as futile and with Coppola giving his view a few decades later the prospects are even bleaker. This disillusion with humanity in *Apocalypse Now* is depicted in scenes such as that in which Kilgore attacks a Vietnamese village to the tune of Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyrie*. Another example is how he marks the bodies with cards, just like in *The Waste Land* the 'wicked pack of cards' becomes a symbol of the perversion of the process of receiving knowledge.²⁵²

4:4:2 Reading *Apocalypse Now* through Eliot

Reading *Apocalypse Now* through Conrad and Eliot bridges the temporal gap between *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*. It also provides an understanding of what seems to be the unintelligible ramblings by Marlon Brando as Kurtz. The key to reading the ending of the film is given at the arrival at Kurtz's compound when Willard's party is welcomed by the photographer played by Dennis Hopper who states that one does not talk to the colonel, one listens. He then adds a line from T.S. Eliot, 'I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas.'²⁵³ The strophe points out the insecurity that the journalist feels in front of Kurtz, who he sees as a great man, but the poem also points back to Kurtz who originally read it to the journalist, giving an indication of Kurtz's self-image. The poem is a key to understand him as a man growing old and who knows that his life is coming to an end. In Conrad's description of Kurtz in particular and modern man in general, he states that the wilderness can echo loudly within him since he is hollow to the core²⁵⁴, to underline the connections to Eliot, Coppola also lets Kurtz recite Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men*.²⁵⁵

Coppola uses Eliot to bridge the gap between himself and Conrad using the images that Eliot provides in his poem. The stuffed and hollow men, like Stetson in *The Waste Land* or Kilgore wearing a Stetson in *Apocalypse Now*, are representatives of contemporary life and an image of the despair felt about the ethical weakness in the world, a despair that is stronger than the hope of renewal.²⁵⁶ For Eliot the hollow men

²⁵² Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 324-325.

²⁵³ Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' In *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, (London, Faber, 1969), P. 52.

²⁵⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Books, 1983 (1902). P. 83.

²⁵⁵ Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 320-321.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 323-324.

have lost their belief in meaning, and they are the men trapped on the banks of the river of 'death's dream kingdom', not daring to cross to 'death's other kingdom' where they can be delivered. Similarly Kurtz is trapped in his kingdom without escape, in a world he has created where death prevails and the absence of God opens up the abyss of the apocalypse. Eliot's lines in *Hollow Men* where they are described as 'shape without form shade without colour'²⁵⁷ parallels Conrad's description of Kurtz as 'a vision of greyness without form,'²⁵⁸ an image easily comparable with those of Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* where he hovers in the shadows, large, undefined and dressed in black.

Eliot not only describes the shallowness of contemporary life but also points out the horror of the situation by referring to the stuffed and hollow men who dare not dream and who are paralysed, unable to change their situation. Like Kurtz they are in a situation of horror. Kurtz's horror is that he has to face his madness and take on the both genius and horror. The hollow men are steeped in guilt and emptiness but without power to change and hence without hope for redemption.²⁵⁹ Eliot's conviction was that one did not need to visit Kurtz's kingdom to find the moral depravity, one need only look around to find the hollow men, something that seems to be supported by Coppola.²⁶⁰

Coppola fuses Eliot with Conrad in his film to show the nightmare vision that Conrad depicts. Coppola's Kurtz rules his Montagnard tribe on the bank of a river, just as Conrad recalls the 'tumid' river and just as Eliot lets his Hollow Men live on the banks of a symbolic river. In the *Hollow Men* the river prevents the men from redemption in that they cannot bring themselves to cross it. In the film, Coppola intensifies this by lining the river with heads and corpses, letting Kurtz be the ruler in a temple with stone idols hovering over him. Any hope of redemption is severed, and just as there is no bridge across the river there is no hope for Kurtz's kingdom where there is an absence of morals, it is an amoral abyss and an ethical void. This vision is easily comparable with that Eliot gives of Death's Dream Kingdom which is separated from the real world by its symbolic river and where the Hollow Men live, and stone images are raised. It is in this kingdom that Kurtz rules. He is depicted as an image of humanity that has surrendered to moral debasement, facing nothing other than ethical stagnation. This moral stagnation and depravity in Coppola's film is expressed by the journalist

²⁵⁷ T.S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men' in *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1936), pp 56-59 (56).

²⁵⁸ Joseph Conrad, 1983 (1902)), p. 113.

²⁵⁹ T.S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men' 1936, pp. 56-57.

who in his last speech, links Conrad and Eliot together. 'This is the way the fucking world ends, look at this fucking shit we're in, not with a bang but with a whimper, and with a whimper I'm fucking splitting Jack!' ²⁶¹ The last scenes of *Apocalypse Now* echo the Lord's Prayer, and the interrupted ending of Eliot's poem indicate the lack of redemption for modern man who has turned the world into a place paralysed by the lack of values. And it is this lack of values or reversal of values that is at the centre of the apocalyptic end. The moral void reveals an abyss where redemption is gone and one can only stare down into the abyss that is the apocalypse, the death of God.

4:4:3 The Killing of Kurtz

From then on Coppola turns to *The Waste Land* and anthropology to explain the killing of Kurtz, and he does so following the myth of the self-destroying god. When Willard rummages through Kurtz's things in the temple, the camera focuses upon family pictures as well as two paperbacks, Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. By showing these books Coppola not only gives a clue as to how to read the film but also refers to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which according to Eliot himself was influenced by Weston's exploration of the Grail legend and by Frazer's references to vegetation ceremonies. ²⁶²

The killing of Kurtz can be seen in the light of the mythical background of Eliot's poem about the quest for the Holy Grail, a ritual of fertility featured in Frazer and Weston's works. Kurtz is not only a merciless killer and an agent of the apocalypse but has also become something of a God to the people that surround him. In Chef's words, 'What the man's set up here is fucking pagan idolatry!' ²⁶³. At the compound we first see a reference to the title in the inscription 'Our Motto: Apocalypse Now'. ²⁶⁴ For the people at the compound the end has come in the Armageddon staged by the demiurge Kurtz, just like the Armageddon for the Vietnamese people come in the shape of helicopters playing Wagner. Kurtz is the God that according the myth of the Hanged God has to die in order for renewal to take place, just as in the myths of Osiris, Tammuz and Adonis. ²⁶⁵ He is the apocalyptic Christ that has to be killed for the resurrection to

²⁶⁰ Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 322.

²⁶¹ My citation from *Apocalypse Now*.

²⁶² T.S. Eliot, 'Notes on the Waste Land,' in *Collected Poems 1909-1935*. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1936), p. 78.

²⁶³ My citation from *Apocalypse Now*.

²⁶⁴ My citation from *Apocalypse Now*.

²⁶⁵ James Frazer, *The Illustrated Golden Bough*, abridged version ed, Mary Douglas (London: Macmillan Limited), pp. 122-135.

take place. It is a Christ close to Nietzsche's *Antichrist* who is a man who does not subscribe to the concepts of guilt, punishment, and reward and who does not engage in faith, but only in actions. Nietzsche's historical Christ rejects the idea of sin and repentance, and believed that the way of actions rather than faith is the evangelical way of life which is divine in itself, closing the gap between man and God.²⁶⁶ This is the Christ who reveals what is to come and what is at stake, just as the dog in *The Waste Land* digs up the corpse that has been buried last year and uncovers the truth. Eliot uses the dog as an image of God and refers to the Dog Star Sirius, which in Egyptian mythology was a sign for the rising Nile, which brought water and new life after universal death. In this context Coppola places Lance's dog which can be seen in the light of an encounter with God, who is the new beginning, but the dog becomes the very reason for the massacre and thereby plunges the story into despair and hopelessness.²⁶⁷

The ending scene features Willard's ritualistic killing of Kurtz, paralleled with scenes of a ritual sacrifice of a water buffalo which is ritually slaughtered outside the temple by the tribal men and women. After the murder Willard steps outside and is received as the new leader by the people, a challenge from which he escapes by leaving with his boat. This ending is best explained in relation to the man/God that has to be sacrificed, just as Christ has to be sacrificed for humankind. Kurtz has become a man/God worshipped by the natives, as well as his own men, and he has brought with him the cruel rule of modern man. What follows is a spiritual draught, a horror which can only end by killing the God and the resurrection of a new God. In Frazer the old, dying God has to be killed when he shows weakness, in order for life to return and nature to be rejuvenated.²⁶⁸ In the film Willard comes from the water to bring death to Kurtz who is waiting and expecting that the former will become the new God to succeed him. In Willard's words: 'I felt that he was up there, waiting for me to take the pain away. He just wanted to go out like a soldier- even the jungle wanted him dead, and that's where he took his orders from anyway'²⁶⁹. Kurtz is aware that he has to die and regeneration will take place with that. Just like the South Asian mystic king of Fire in Frazer's book, Kurtz is not allowed to die a natural death but has to be stabbed. In Frazer's words, 'The man-god must be killed as soon he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor

²⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Antichrist'. In *The Portable Nietzsche*. (London, Penguin. 1954) pp. 608-609.

²⁶⁷ Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 327-328.

²⁶⁸ James Frazer, 1978, pp. 102-103

²⁶⁹ My citation from *Apocalypse Now*.

before it has been seriously impaired by the threatening decay'.²⁷⁰ In this way Kurtz's reign has come to an end and nature calls to him to end his life and let nature be rejuvenated.

Coppola lets Kurtz's awareness and willingness to be slain and replaced known by letting him recite the poem *Hollow Men*. The poem tells of a man of straw that is burned at Guy Fawkes night, a ritual which is connected to the fire festivals when a straw man is burned as a sacrificial representation of the vegetation spirit.²⁷¹ In this context Kurtz's wish to die can be understood, he is ill, his powers are abandoning him and in Eliot's words he wants to have that 'final meeting/In the twilight kingdom'.²⁷² The fire imagery in the film would then be put into context of the purifying and regeneration fire that Kurtz is awaiting. The only hope for Kurtz and the dying king to escape the moral purgatory is to burn like a straw man, trapped like a hollow man and die a death that will deliver him from the perversion he surrounds himself with. This way Kurtz could also be made into a scapegoat- he is the one who has taken war too far and who is to be sacrificed for the redemption of all.²⁷³ This reading is in tune with an apocalyptic reading where the apocalyptic Christ/antichrist has to be killed. Kurtz, the Christ/antichrist who stages his apocalypse in the jungle has to be sacrificed for regeneration to take place. In his killing, Kurtz and Willard are most alike, merging the old apocalyptic Christ with the new Christ of the resurrection. However, after looking into the abyss and facing the death of God and of Kurtz Willard does not take up the challenge of becoming Kurtz's successor, but looks out in the darkness and decides not to. Instead he takes Lance with him and they leave, and here Coppola diverts from Eliot in that the twenty-first century knights of the Grail have failed. For Coppola there is no possibility for redemption or a solution. Kurtz waited for Willard to give him salvation but in contrast to Eliot's hope for modern man, Coppola cannot see Willard's mission succeeding in the contemporary world of which Kurtz is a representative.²⁷⁴ For Coppola humanity has become the god of destruction for which there is no cure. There will be no resurrected Christ, no new king, as the hope for regeneration and of Revelation 21 has died. On looking into the abyss Willard has not only seen the death of God and the void but also the loss of hope and spiritual renewal. In this light Willard's neglect to call in an air strike makes sense. There is no hope, and by not eliminating

²⁷⁰ James Frazer, 1978, pp. 102-103

²⁷¹ Hugh Kenner, *T.S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*. (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 160.

²⁷² Eliot, 'The Hollow Men' in Eliot, 1936, pp. 56-59 (58).

²⁷³ Holger Bachmann; 1998, pp. 328-329

Kurtz's compound (burning the straw man i.e. Kurtz) the American army generals will have to face the guilt and the moral degradation for which they are ultimately responsible, and acknowledge the inability of contemporary man to save himself.

4:5 *Apocalypse Now* as an Apocalypse

The film ends as it begins, with the Doors playing *The End* which indicates that Coppola sees the postmodern apocalypse trapped in a moment without hope of renewal. In his film nothing is achieved, there is no hope, and the hollow men are caught up in going around the prickly pear over and over again to use Eliot's image.²⁷⁵ In this depiction of the End there is no Revelation 21 and no new heaven and new earth but only more of the same, only repetition. The hope for salvation and redemption is non-existent and with Kurtz dying with his last words 'The Horror, The Horror!' he indicates that there is no afterlife, no paradise, awaiting either Kurtz or Willard who both are forced to see the end in the face and realise its shallowness.

The apocalyptic as imagined by Coppola thrives on a Biblical and cultural heritage of the apocalypse. It has a freedom from the Biblical literature and theology that serves to make Coppola's apocalyptic more convincing in that it takes the challenge of a contemporary apocalypse for real and is not restricted by a Christendom that has closed Jesus in his tomb and not taken on the challenge of the death of God. By his freedom from the sources he attempts to create his own contemporary apocalypse that responds to the times and echoes the postmodern fear of non-existence and the absence of God. Coppola addresses the temporality of contemporary life, acknowledging that one of the greatest fears of modernity is its death. The statement about the end is not an encouraging one with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, but a cynical and hopeless statement about the postmodern society where nothing lasts and everything is repetition. Bauman acknowledges that in the postmodern society nothing is seen as everlasting, nothing is built to last, families are not seen in the perspective of lasting for generations and our own life as well as others is seen as temporal. This acknowledgement of the temporality of society and humanity leaves us with an end that is an actual end and not the new beginning of the classical apocalypse hence leading to a rehearsal or repetition possibly even celebration of finality. The acceptance of our insignificance and finality Bauman argues can be seen in architecture, recycling and

²⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 330-331.

²⁷⁵ Eliot, 'The Hollow Men,' 1936, pp. 56-59 (58)..

attitudes to families. We are not longer concerned about maintaining the family line, build monuments, and make a mark in history, but instead focus on the moment, recycle, and use renewable resources, in order not to leave a trace of ourselves.²⁷⁶ For Coppola there is no afterlife, no paradise and no rebirth but also there is nothing worth saving, and as a result his apocalypse is caught up in the end repeating and reliving itself it over and over again. Kurtz dies but meets no redemption, only horror, and there will be more Kurtzes following him as there will be more hollow men, unchangeable and caught on the banks of a river.

As a contemporary apocalypse *Apocalypse Now* is more than simply imitation, or a representing of the 'classical' apocalyptic. Neither does it echo theology, but instead it attempts to make theological statements about the state of society at the end. Being an apocalypse representing a postmodern society it makes fundamental theological statements which are at the same time disillusioned and hopeless, turning the apocalypse into something ongoing that cannot end or find a resolution. According to *Apocalypse Now* we are already in the apocalyptic moment and that very moment seems to be spiralling out of control eternally, repeating itself over and over again in a lack of resolution.

And it is at the end of the film that the title has significance. It suggests an apocalyptic, just like *Hollow Men* with its; 'this is the way the world ends...' ²⁷⁷ and *the Waste Land's* designation of an urban apocalypse. The apocalyptic expressions and format are for both Eliot and Coppola a way of expressing that which is beyond rationality, and their works express a contemporary apocalypse closely related to the fears of their own eras. Where Eliot is more hopeful for humanity Coppola is disillusioned but they have in common the way their works attempt to say the unsayable and address the deepest fears, creating a mythology of the end that gives answers to contemporary fears. The function of the ending in Eliot's poem as well as in *Apocalypse Now* is to create a contemporary mythology that follows a tradition of apocalyptic literature which is part and parcel of mythical experience.²⁷⁸ Coppola's film (which at its release was seen as an incomprehensible mistake) has become one of the most popular films in film history giving a view on, and a mythological grounding to, the state of affairs in our times. And it is here the success of *Apocalypse Now* lies namely in

²⁷⁶ Zugmunt Bauman, Public Lecture at Akademiska Foreningen, University of Lund, Lund, Sweden, June, 2001

²⁷⁷ Eliot, 'The Hollow Men,' 1936, pp. 56-59 (59).

²⁷⁸ Holger Bachmann, 1998, pp. 331-332

attempting to create a myth that addresses the fear of temporality and the state of society at the end.

Chapter 5

Crash - a Postmodern Apocalypse

As a film-maker David Cronenberg has paid much attention to the human body in communication with technology, revealing the more physical sides of this interaction. Few are the women who have not cringed when watching the gynaecological devices in *Dead Ringers* (1988) and many have been intrigued as well as disgusted by his fascination for bodies in *Naked Lunch* (1991) and *Crash* (1995). JG Ballard says in his 1995 introduction to the novel that it is 'an extreme metaphor for an extreme situation, a kit of desperate measures only for use in an extreme crisis'.²⁷⁹ This situation of extreme crisis is the postmodern, and the ability or possibly inability of the human to conform to this new age and the coexistence with technology that it entails. Ballard as well as Cronenberg could be seen as having extracted the essence of what they see in life and distilled it until the only thing left is the paranoia and pathology of the crumbling identity of the postmodern subject. The extreme situation referred to by Ballard is the postmodern situation which is a time characterised by a breakdown of identity, a situation that can be compared to the time in which *The Book of Revelation* was written and the fears and insecurities it reflects. *The Book of Revelation* was written in a time of conflict and change when Christianity threatened the old concepts of the world with a new outlook on history and time, and when political as well as religious conflict characterised the era. *The Book of Revelation* is written in early days of Christianity when the belief that Christ was coming back to change the world and establish paradise on earth was still a persuasive one. It is a piece of literature formulated in and by a society of social, political, philosophical and moral breakdown or redefinition, and it stands between and bridges the two eras. Similarly *Crash* is born out of a situation of changes and anticipation of what these changes might bring. The breakdown reflected is the postmodern one which is a breakdown of the mind, born out of philosophical and political debate as well as a redefinition of ethics and history as such, and hence displays much of the cultural and religious distress that provoked *The Book of Revelation*. Postmodernity is, however, born out of a violence and of changes that make us seem powerless, changes that Baudrillard refers to as a world run out of control. According to Baudrillard the fear of the end, or the panic over an ending millennium is a sign that history, future and present does not exist. There is no living memory of

history and our artificial memory merges with actual history, making it impossible to tell real from fabrication. The future does not exist since we have left reality behind, and we live in the hyper-reality of media that reports events and creates both history and our lives.²⁸⁰ Contemporary times are characterised by the same breakdown of borders and concepts as witnessed in the early Christian period, and a rewriting of history and reconstruction of identity results in civil war as well as in a new concept of history and the historical/human subject. What Ballard is trying to depict is the marriage of reason, technology and the nightmare of the 20th century. It is a union that has destroyed our concepts of philosophy, history and time as well as of our selves, our subjectivity and the society we live in. It has created an even more ambiguous world with new opportunities as well as a new paranoia.²⁸¹

5:1 Narrative Versus image - The Written and the Visual

5:2 The Written Versus the Visual in *Crash*

When Cronenberg first read Ballard's novel he believed it would be impossible to transfer it to film. The novel itself appeared to him as obsessive as the characters in it, and he did not believe he could transfer this quality to the visual medium of film. When he finally decided to make film out of *Crash* he stripped it of much of the porno-philosophical passages as well as the elaboration on the London City landscape, and in doing so he created a film that is sparse of any explanation or elaboration. This minimalist handling of the material serves to express exactly the obsessive character that Cronenberg feared would not be possible to transfer to the visual medium. According to Ballard, Cronenberg has taken the film further than the book, made it more detached, more mechanical, and manages thereby to be in many ways independent from the original novel.²⁸² Ballard's statement is right in seeing the film as a continuation of the novel, and when dealing with depictions of alienation and disconnectedness Cronenberg is a master, using a sombre and unemotional gaze. In translating the pathology and the apocalyptic sentiment of the novel, and of Ballard's language Cronenberg has focused on the disconnected characters as well as on the surface. As a result he has created images that are disruptive and that carry the same pathological and obsessive quality as Ballard's novel. The film works with a hardened

²⁷⁹ J.G. Ballard *Crash*, (London: Vintage, 1995 (1973)) Introduction.

²⁸⁰ Chris Horrocks and Zoran Jevtic, *Baudrillard for Beginners* (Cambridge, Icon Books, 1996), pp. 167-168.

²⁸¹ J.G. Ballard, 1995. introduction

²⁸² Roy Grundmann, 'Plight of the Crash Test Mummies: David Cronenberg's *Crash*' in *Cineaste*, 1997, p. 24-25.

and solidified surface which creates a distance between itself and the viewer, yet the images are alluring and compelling drawing the viewer in and rejecting access at the same time, a pattern similar to the constant revealing and concealing of the apocalyptic text.

In *Crash* as in *The Book of Revelation*, it is image that is in focus and vision is promoted as the main form of communication, making the image rather than narrative the chosen vehicle of the apocalypse. Cronenberg sets the agenda of image versus narrative immediately by introducing his film with a strong and very voyeuristic image of Catherine bent over an aeroplane, exposing her left breast to the metal body of the plane in total silence. This image seems torn out of its context, out of the narrative, and gives the effect of the viewer being plunged into the story. In *Crash*, as in the Biblical apocalyptic, it is the construction of images that lies in the foreground, leaving the narrative in the background. This results in a film that works very much on the surface, depicting flat images which work on a symbolical and metaphorical level. In the literary form the outcome is a language as pregnant as the language of Book of Revelation where words are used in abundance to create visual images and a pacing that leads you through a landscape of images. To a large extent the genre of apocalyptic literature is dependent on verbal images that are almost impossible to realise and it becomes a narrative form that subverts the narrative as such.²⁸³

Ballard and Cronenberg create a ritual of great crashes and a language of liturgy and transcendentalism, and it is as such that the film needs to be read where the repetitive crashes and the actors' willing sacrifices aspire to something greater. In a similar way *The Book of Revelation* has a different perspective, a divine perspective where its message is revealed and concealed through a language and imagery that refer to greater mysteries.²⁸⁴ The contemporary apocalypse of *Crash* could be seen as possessing a similar logic where the narrative and the images do not make sense to the reader, what is needed is a perspective from above to see the grand scale of things. Ballard and Cronenberg reach their goal of depicting postmodern society and postmodern identity in different ways. Cronenberg does it through the use of surface and repetition, as well as sweeping images over the city and the motor-ways in which we see nothing except technology and concrete. The camera sweeps over the endless car

²⁸³ Iain Sinclair, *Crash, David Cronenberg's Post-mortem on J.G. Ballard's 'Trajectory of Fate'* (Bfi Modern Classics, Bfi Publishing, London, 1999) p. 44.

²⁸⁴ Richard Bauchman, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, in Dunn, J.D.G. (ed.), *New Testament Theology Series*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 18-20.

queues, and the only face we see is our own since the camera does not penetrate those car windows or the concrete buildings. The world he portrays seems to consist only of the one-dimensional film characters and a dead and hardened surface. Ballard achieves that same effect of disillusion in the novel with his language that is fast and flowing constantly, ushering us to move on. The many passages of descriptions of the city landscape, the body and the car are detailed, medical, and technical. They express a pathological interest in detail, describing the essence of contemporary life and hence they create a focus for the minimalist image and narrative that resembles the Laconic style of the Bible. Ballard retires into the head of his main character and describes with his eyes what he sees, which is a circumscribed view that only picks out the crucial. It is in James' head that we as readers, see what he sees, make the connections he does, and more than anything leave out anything that does not fit into his twisted merging of sexuality, technology, death and transcendence.

The literary images used by Ballard, and Cronenberg's minimal and distilled images have their similarities with the characteristics of *The Book of Revelation* in the sense that they are carefully constructed showing only surface whilst referring to something more. In *The Book of Revelation* these metaphors come alive in that they refer forward to a vision of Revelation 21 and 'then I saw a new heaven and new earth'. In contrast in *Crash* the hope and promise of Revelation 21 is gone and the images instead become only self-referential. The similarities lie in the style as they are piled on top of each other in a lengthy vision that denies the interpreter access at the same time as it invites that same interpreter.

Cronenberg has made a film that, like most of his films, violates the way in which we look at love, sex and relationships and he argues the main function of contemporary art is to do violence to the safe cocoon we have created for ourselves.²⁸⁵ By violating our understanding of relationships and society Cronenberg creates a world of obsession and destruction as the only way to express emotion and possibly even love. The novel with the added explanations and elaboration on the character's behaviour, and the scientific exploration of crashes, cars and crash victims, becomes more obsessive and pathologic in its character than the film. The descriptions and elaboration usually needed for a comprehensible narrative are all present but through the use of the scientific language in combination with the unusual narrative structure the novel becomes disruptive and defies every categorisation just as *The Book of Revelation*. The

film similarly denounces the usual form of film narrative. The language helps in doing so by being minimalist. Silence together with James' gaze limits the viewer's understanding. The film is repetitive, has a pornographic style which is used by Cronenberg to express the obsession of both the film and the characters. The film is minimalist and lacks the elaboration of the book, and the pathology or obsession that is expressed is cold, dull and bored and lacks the feverish excitement of the book. Through this, to a larger extent than the book, Cronenberg's film might be a comment on postmodern society's complacent attitudes, lack of communication and excitement, but it is less a comment on the hyper-reality that has become more real than reality itself.

Grant calls Cronenberg a literary filmmaker who creates in *Crash* a narrative that explores the limits of what engenders it, adapting the critical role of the artist, criticising the forms of contemporary life. In *Crash*, as well as in his other films, Cronenberg explores the condition of the artist who persistently tries to explore and explain the condition of art to transform failure and death.²⁸⁶ This description is fitting for Cronenberg who explores the limits of human existence, endangered by itself. *Crash* is a deeply nihilistic film and a comment on society's obsessions with technology and sexuality, and Grant's argument that the film does not yield to a specific morality stance has its roots in the apocalypse that Cronenberg tries to portray which in itself stands outside categories of morality.²⁸⁷ However I do not think Cronenberg so much takes the role of the critical artist, making a social comment, as Grant seems to believe. Cronenberg describes what he sees and philosophises on its extremes, thereby making a comment which is deeply nihilistic in its refusal to make any judgement or statement. Morality is not a consideration in Cronenberg's *Crash* that places itself outside morality, defining itself as a-moral rather than in categories of moral/immoral. Just as the apocalyptic does not yield to one set moral stance *Crash* positions itself outside morality, an a-moral position that emerges in the absence of ethics or the apocalyptic reversal of ethics. *Crash* is truly apocalyptic in the sense that it is a tale, an image of our contemporary time, and this apocalypse happens at this moment making, interpretation very difficult. *Crash* comments on the now and does not look behind or in front of itself. There is no new beginning, no Revelation 21 with its 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth...' because for the apocalyptic of *Crash* there is only now.

²⁸⁵ Roy Grundmann, 1997, p. 25.

²⁸⁶ Michael Grant, 'Crimes of the future' in *Screen* 39:2, (Summer 1998,) pp. 182, 184.

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sacrifice with that of the crash victim sacrificing herself for postmodern society.²⁸⁹ Following this line of thought, the devotion of Christ on the cross stands in the same line as the devotion to other road crash immortals, including James Dean, John F. Kennedy and Princess Diana, expressed in Vaughn's words 'James Dean died of a broken neck and became immortal.'²⁹⁰

The theme of conversion culminates in the attempts to convert and connect Catherine to themselves and the elect community by involving her in their crashes. She stands outside and is not initiated, does not have the mark of the car, and she longs for this initiation or baptism into the new culture or the new life from which she is shut out. In his attempts to involve Catherine, Vaughn continuously tries to force her off the road. After her initial fear, the chase becomes part of her life and when Vaughn dies James takes over this task. Both he and Catherine seem to long desperately for her initiation and James fantasises about her crashing and becomes more aggressive in his chase and at the same time Catherine becomes part of the game because she desires the new life and wants to be part of James' life again. In Catherine's longing for the new life the film probably come closest to any form of identification or empathy. She is left-out and she is closed from the life James is living. She has lost her sex appeal and attraction and is desperate to be able to feel and to take part in the new life the crash-culture has to offer. She eventually comes close to being injured as she is run of the road by James but escapes unharmed, and her husband consoles her with the words, 'maybe next time'.

5:3:1 *Crash* as a metaphor for the new life

One of the first scenes in the film depicts James inattentively driving his car at the same time as he is trying to read a script. It is a scene of irritation and stress, depicting the typical busy careerist professional, attempting to do two things at the same time. The film starts with this image of detachment and emphasises it throughout the whole film. James is detached from his surroundings, from his driving, and he is irritable and not in control. When the crash takes place it all happens very quickly, in a burst of action. He attempts to gain control of the situation and then it all just stops. The scene seems very authentic, probably as a result of Cronenberg's use of speed rather than slow motion in the crash scene and the slower pacing straight after the crash. After the crash the attention to detail returns together with a slower pacing, and the camera focuses on Dr

²⁸⁹ J. G Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (San Fransisco, V/Search Publications, 1990), pp. 22-23.

²⁹⁰ *Crash*, dir David Cronenberg, 1995, My citation.

Remington's passivity, then frenzy as she tries to release her seat belt. James, immobile in his car, stares at the dead man and the bruises that start to appear on the body and hand in front of him, where the imprint of the car logo is forming. James stares at Helen with a voyeuristic gaze, as she is trapped in her car, solid and motionless like a Madonna, with her breast uncovered. The scene gives an air of beginning and rebirth, of starting again with great changes taking place. In the novel this air of detachment is achieved by different means, one of which is through Ballard's reaches quickly paced language and the long, detailed descriptions which are matter of fact, conveying neither emotion nor emphasis. James drives and he crashes. The narrative voice describes how he loses control of his car. The description is detailed and moves along quickly, but is unemotional and without passion. The descriptions in the novel are as rich as the ones in the film, portraying the blister appearing on the dead man's hand, Helen who is in shock has urine trickle down her legs. The crash scene is isolated in the novel by its detailed description and pacing, and in the film by the close up and the stillness and silence of the scene that mesmerises and tricks the viewer into becoming the voyeuristic eye of the camera.

In both the film and the textual representation of this scene it is the stylisation of violence that isolates the scene and makes it powerful. The isolation of the scene of the crash as well as the emphasis on the changes that take place in relation to the accident point in the direction of reading the scene as one of rebirth. After this encounter with death James and Helen are linked forever without any possibility of going back to their ordinary lives. Something fundamental changes in the car crash and the old life is no longer possible or even desirable, and the characters are born again into a new existence, just as the newly converted is born again through baptism. The baptism of James and Helen is one not by the water of life but by the technology of death. Just as the Christian baptism ritual marks the entering into an elect community by marking the baptised with the cross on their forehead, mouth and heart, so the characters of *Crash* are marked with cuts and bruises through their initiation ceremony, and these are the marks of the car and of their new life.

In *Crash* we find James in the hospital becoming more and more obsessed with cars and the traffic. On one of his first trips out we encounter him sitting in his car at the car compound. The car is now dead, used up and scrapped but it is also a site of pleasure, remembrance and devotion, where the transformation into the new life and the new crash -identity is being remembered and celebrated through the constant flow of

semen over its interior. By getting a new identical car to the old one he both celebrates the wreck and resurrects it, and the living technology (in form of the non crashed car) is adored for its potential to become an intricate part of sexuality and violence. This new pleasure, and its focus on the car and its technology is well expressed in this citation:

As we drove along Western Avenue I wanted her body to embrace the compartment of my car. In my mind I pressed her moist vulva against every exposed panel and fascia, I crushed her breast gently against the door pillars and quarter windows, moved her anus in a slow spiral against the vinyl seat covers. Placed her small hands against the instrument dials and window- sills. The junction of her mucous membranes and the vehicle, my own metal body, was celebrated by the cars speeding past us. The complex of an immensely perverse act waited upon her like a coronation.²⁹¹

The lengthy, elaborated and detailed descriptions of cars, car technology-focuses on the relationship between the car and the human as well as on the imprint of people on the cars they drive and the cars they get injured and die in. The crashed car has a strong ritualistic significance and time after time the film returns to the car compound which is a place for remembrance, for devotion, for sensation and for sex. It is in the compound where James and Helen meet again. James looks up and sees her arrive, and she also embarks on a reminiscent journey and also tries to come to grips with the new life she has become part of. She does the same reminiscent movements, as she touches the blood-splattered bonnet on which her husband died, letting her gloves touch the broken pieces of the front of the car. As the technology of the car is celebrated the crashed car takes on an extended meaning, corresponding to the bodies that have crashed and been altered. Both car and human body have been born again as desirable objects because of the imprints of each other. In a subculture where the fertilising event is the crash the crashed car becomes a machine that has fulfilled its purpose and which can be worshipped as the site of deliverance.

According to Baudrillard the classical perspective on technology is to see it as an extension of the body, a sophistication of the human being to make her equal to nature and make her able to invest in nature. Seen in this light the baroque metaphor of *Crash*, and the car, becomes the mortal deconstruction of the body where technology no longer is the functional means for something, and has become only an extension of death.²⁹²

²⁹¹ J. G Ballard, 1995 pp. 112-113

²⁹² Jean Baudrillard, 2000, p. 111

Seen in this way Baudrillard interprets the technology of the car as something that has transcended its pure functionality as a means of transport and has been given a new purpose of being an extension of death. This purpose gives the car a new significance as a metaphor for how we live our lives, as living towards death. In this way the crashed and scrapped car becomes a celebrated object which has fulfilled this new purpose of technology. Similarly the car is no longer the appendix to domestic life. The private and domesticated universe does no longer exist and there are only incessant figures in circulation. The accident is, therefore, no longer the exception but has become the rule, and it is the accident that gives form to life in *Crash*. Love, sex or procreation, has been reduced to unemotional and mechanic sexuality and a non-productive penetration of the world through motorways and tunnels inside the protective shell of the car.²⁹³ The metaphor of the car also becomes a metaphor of the quickening futures of our lives according to Baudrillard.²⁹⁴ The cars move in high speed on the motorways and are most often completely separate and disconnected from each other, only occasionally meeting in the violent but life changing event of the car crash. People live their lives separate from each other, moving at higher and higher speeds. Their lives have become increasingly separate and private, and the time they meet is for sex, or maybe as *Crash* suggests, it is the life changing event of the car crash which brings them closer to each other and to the end. The crashed car is the metaphor, then becomes the metaphor of a life that has come to a halt that has been forced to slow down and stop in order to start interacting again. In this way the people are born into a new life of interaction and appreciation and pay devotion to the car that made this possible. Similar to *The Book of Revelation*, the speed of the images races at the speed of the car, and the world going wrong does so at a rapid pace, and images are thrown at the reader/viewer like the images you hastily pass on the side of the road. When the crash finally takes place, everything changes and new life starts. In revelation 21 where everything is again new, slowed down and followed by the promise of 'then I saw...' in *Crash* it is only followed by another build up, and another crash leading to nothing.

If the initial crash is seen as the beginning of something new, a new life and a new hope, the comments made in both the film and the book about the increase of traffic should be put into the context of a new beginning. Both James and Helen comment on the traffic when they once again venture out on the roads. They suddenly see the traffic,

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 113

²⁹⁴ J. G Ballard, 1995, introduction.

the cars and the motorways anew and find the traffic increased, heavier and more intense. They also seem to think the traffic is there for a reason, gathering for a big event and it is with anticipation they wait for this reason to be revealed. They are fascinated and slightly afraid of this development but excited at the same time because they are starting anew and building their new life for themselves as they venture once again into the increased stream of traffic. Following the thesis that somehow baptism or initiation into new possibilities and hope takes place in the crash, resulting in a new life and existence James and Helen's first visit to the car compound becomes a central scene. Seen in this light the disturbing moment when James reaches for the rear-view mirror without finding it emphasises a new beginning where there is no looking back now, only looking ahead for the new life has started and there is no return to the past. This parallels the new life of the early Christians after the crucifixion which meant there was no turning around, only a wait for his return and the apocalypse with its promise. In the mean time they could only celebrate the new beginning and remember the promise. Here Cronenberg has created a moment, which signifies the end of the old and the beginning of the new, similar to a conversion experience when a new life starts. James sits in his car, reminiscing about the past, letting his hands explore the interior of the car and releasing a flood of memories. He touches the interior and lets his hands feel around and remembers the things that have passed, but he does this in a way that is not regretful but is forward-looking as an era has ended and a new one has started.

5:3:2 Born Again, the Crash Victim in Hospital

In Ballard's novel and Cronenberg's film the crash marks the beginning of something new. It is the near death or death experience that opens up the possibility of a new life, of being born again into a new existence. In the narrative the crash signifies the beginning and whilst in hospital James and Helen slowly start to realise what their new life consists of. Following Baudrillard's interpretation of *Crash* the accident does no longer belongs to the order of the neurotic, signified by the repressed residual and transgressive. Instead it is the instigator of a new mode of non-perverse pleasure, and a strategic organisation of life that starts from death.²⁹⁵ This is a significant trait in the novel as well as in the film, and James in particular becomes increasingly focused on the crash and its implications. His and Helen's new lives start with the shared experience of the crash that becomes part of their entire existence. From now on their

lives are all arranged around the crash experience, their jobs starts to loose their significance and sex becomes totally dependent on the car. Helen even starts a new job at the crash-test laboratory and James looses his ability to have sex outside the car or without the mimicking of earlier sexual encounters that have taken place in cars. Their entire existence has taken on a new meaning and aim which are totally dependent on technology, and the sensibilities of their born again experiences.

Baudrillard describes the technology of *Crash* as shining and seductive and at the same time dull and innocent. It is seductive since it has no meaning, simply mirroring bodies making body and technology interchangeable, inextricable.²⁹⁶ Whilst being in the hospital this seductive technology becomes apparent and its power to support and alter life is made clear. There we encounter the life supporting technology that alters and creates the new body and which seduces James into submission to the new order. The metal braces around James' legs look like something of a torture device but which are necessary not only for his healing process but for the project of merging metal with flesh. His body is merged with metal and big braces and screws are screwed into his bones, making his body one with the technology that supports it. James interacts with this technology, the braces and crutches, making them a part of himself. The supportive technology not only mends the characters physically but also makes them stronger than they really are, supporting them and becoming part of them. In a peculiar way death and sex are read on the same level as the body, without metaphors, sentences and phantasms.²⁹⁷ Ballard and Remington are simply being reinvented as human beings - born again into a new body that barely resembles the old, but is transformed through its interaction with technology. They become hybrids and their identification from then on is with other hybrids, other crash victims whose bodies have been altered and whose minds are reborn. They have become a new elect community, which is highly exclusive. They have become a sub-culture and a community of the new born who see themselves as the future and who have seen the future through their experiences, and aim to proclaim their message. They could be seen as being born again Christians creating a new church prophesising about the end and future of their community. In the novel James talks about this new discovery which involves a new sexuality and a new appreciation of death as a way to life, and it is in this rediscovery of a sexuality and of his own body that he sees new sexual possibilities.

²⁹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, 2000, p. 113

²⁹⁶ Ibid

This obsession with the sexual possibilities of everything around me had been jerked loose from my mind by the crash. I imagined the ward filled with convalescing air-disaster victims, each of their minds a brothel of images. The crash between our two cars was a model of some ultimate and yet undreamed sexual union. The injuries of-still-to-be-admitted patients beckoned to me, an immense encyclopaedia of accessible dreams.²⁹⁸

A little later on in the novel James comes to terms with his predicament. He talks of guarding his orifices, suggesting that he feel reduced to something else, a thing, and a new breed that has to guard himself. After his first sexual sensation brought on by the nurse washing him and his fantasies over whether she can see the imprint of the car on his body, he starts to become more active and used to his new altered body. He starts to walk around the ward making errands for the nurses and slowly let his euphoria take over from the initial guilt he felt about killing a man. He starts to see his body and life in a new perspective:

The crash was the first the only real experience I had been through for years. 'For the first time I was in physical confrontation with my own body, an inexhaustible encyclopaedia of pains and discharges, with the hostile gaze of other people, and with the fact of the dead man...I had felt a vague sense of unease that the gruesome climax of my life was being rehearsed years in advance, and would take place on some highway or road junction known only to the makers of these films.
299

For James the experience has given him a new life which is a rehearsal of his own death and in this living towards death he finds meaning.

5:4 Sexuality as Pornography

Ballard sees two main lead motifs in the 20th century; sex and paranoia, which he aims to explore. The debate around Cronenberg's filmatisation of J.G Ballard's *Crash* has to a large extent revolved around the motif of sex but has failed to explore and recognise the paranoia connected to and implicit in the depiction of sexuality as pornography. The film has a pornographic style following Ballard's book, which he himself wanted to see as the first pornographic novel based on technology.³⁰⁰ Its narrow focus on almost

²⁹⁷ Ibid

²⁹⁸ J. G. Ballard, 1995, p. 29.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 39

³⁰⁰ Ibid, Introduction

exclusively sex and technology can easily be mistaken for exhibitionism and a search for shock-value and not for the obsessiveness and paranoia that both Ballard and Cronenberg are eager to communicate.³⁰¹

The association with pornography lies to a large extent in the monotonous and repetitive style of the film where one sex scene follows another, one crash after another, causing the audience to feel uncomfortable and uneasy about what they are seeing. Cronenberg responded to the accusation of *Crash* being pornographic by saying that audiences are not used to seeing one sex scene after another on screen if it is not in a pornographic film, in which case they would demand it, and he wants to play on this irony.³⁰² This pornographic character is, in a twisted way, one of the major strengths of the film which does not have much of a traditional narrative or plot, no real ending and characters who are depicted in a ways that make them difficult to identify with.³⁰³ The style goes against the grain of Hollywood film which leaves the audience with a sense of distortion and unease. Similarly, the genre of apocalyptic plays on the same themes of repetition, incomprehensibility and image over narrative. The narrative structure of apocalyptic is disruptive, the plot disparate and broken up by endless references to incomprehensible images and metaphors in a way similar to how Ballard and Cronenberg use vivid yet circumscribed images of technological devices, sexual encounters, and elaboration on the landscape. These restrictive and unavailable images are a strong trait of the apocalyptic text as well as the unapproachable characters that are portrayed in a way that makes them close yet distant, avoiding our grasp and identification

Sexuality and technology are the grounds on which this film rests and it is on these grounds that it has received its criticism. In an article by Grundmann the issue of sexuality is explored in depth. He argues that for a film so pornographic in its character which explores the boundaries of sexuality and criticises bourgeois views of sexuality, its concept of masculinity and femininity is very traditional. Grundmann sees the novel as a heterosexual author's ways of negotiating with his own homosexuality, and the critical edge that the homo-erotic encounters could have is removed by references to James who was on drugs whilst engaging in sex with another man.³⁰⁴ The film takes the homoerotic theme further, pushing the boundaries back even more by allowing the

³⁰¹ Interview with Cronenberg in *Film Quarterly*, 1997, p. 19.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 20

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Roy Grundmann, 1997, pp. 26-27

homosexual tendencies from the novel to be explored in more depth. In lingering more on the homoerotic tension between Vaugan and James and supplementing it with encounters between Helen and Gabrielle the film comes further to accept homosexuality. However the film remains a man's account of male desire as well as giving an account of the male voyeuristic gaze which even makes the sexual encounter between Helen and Gabrielle awkward and forced, expressing coyness rather than female jouissance.³⁰⁵

5:4:1 A Desire Leading Nowhere

The issue of sexuality and pornography is a central theme both in Cronenberg's film as well as in Ballard's book, it is, however, not foremost a criticism or explorations of sexuality as such but a wider discussion on life in proximity to disaster. Sexuality or pornography is at the centre and is used as a vehicle for expressing the deeper issue of human estrangement and exploitation, as well as being a metaphor for the extreme situation about which Ballard speaks. Pornography is only a form adopted by Ballard who describes his novel as the first pornographic novel based on technology and wishes to see it as such since he believes pornography to be the most political forms of fiction, expressing how people use and exploit each other.³⁰⁶ The agenda is set right away in the opening scenes of the film when Catherine is being penetrated from behind, anonymously, in an aeroplane hangar. In the next scene, at home, Catherine lifts her dress for James in an exact reproduction off the earlier scene only that they are now on the balcony and they tell each other about their earlier encounters. It is a disconnected and disengaged sexuality, she does not come and he only ejaculates and the scene express no pleasure, release or desire.³⁰⁷

The film expresses alienation, and the collapse of values, ideas, and morality as well as of the narrative itself, which is deconstructed through repetition and imagery. Sexuality in *Crash* is detached, cold and sometimes even brutal but at the same time sombre and pensive which makes offence at the scenes difficult for viewers. Sex is depicted in a distant way evoking more desperation than lust or desire, and even though *Crash* was banned because of the explicit sex-scenes, as a viewer one is struck by the lack of sex and lust. Sexuality and its proximity to death as an exploration of the human psyche might be a way to explain Vaughn's and his follower's attitude towards their life

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ J.G Ballard, 1995, Introduction.

and their actions. The actors seem to watch themselves and observe their own reactions rather than interacting with their sexual partners. The sex-scenes are repetitive and follow upon each other in an endless series of ritualistic encounters. The Ballards have sex with various partners only to later meet up for their marital sexual encounter and repeat and rehearse their experience from the earlier encounters. The sexual encounters are stripped of emotion and portray sexual relationships and encounters in a more emotional way, yet more pathological. Vaughn is described as violent, Catherine as concerned and whimpering, and James describes his arousal in a laconic style with only a glimpse of excitement. Through this bare depiction sexuality becomes blurred and uncomfortable and the willingness to feel and to lust is overshadowed by the ever present self- destruction and self-denial, which emphasises the pathology of a society that is heading head-first towards its own destruction. In comparison with the novel, the film does not communicate that same compulsive behaviour but rather communicates the disconnection, navel-gazing and egoism of a society that has become used to living on the verge to disaster. Cronenberg allows the paranoia to come together in an endless and obsessive series where the Ballard's cannot or simply are too jaded to reach out and connect to each other in ways other than their sexual experiences with others, repeated for and with each other. The desire portrayed is a postmodern desire. Desire, not for romance, love, truth and beauty but rather for simulation, division, perversion, alteration and ultimately death.³⁰⁸

Among the many metaphors used in *Crash* that of bruises and cuts has to be the most important. The wounds become sites of adoration and pleasure and the reader/viewer is forced to return to them over and over again, in the encounters with different characters who marvel and adore them. At the hospital Vaughn sets the agenda whilst studying James' body, tracing his scars with his finger, examining the braces and revelling at his collection of photographs. Later James' adoration over Catherine's bruised body, Gabrielle's body merged with metal and finally over Vaughn and his deep cuts, show James repeating Vaughn's adoring examination and his marvelling at his new found pleasure.

The car and the traffic are the other main metaphors used. The traffic comes to symbolise the change in people, for when they are reborn they pay more interest to the traffic and start to see it in a slightly mystical way. Both Helen and James have the

³⁰⁷ David Cronenberg Interviewed by Chris Rodley, *Sight and Sound*, vol, 6, no 6, 1996, p 10

³⁰⁸ Creed, Barbara, 'Anal Wounds, Metallic Kisses' in *Screen* 39:2, Summer 1998, p. 175.

feeling that there is more traffic and that the cars are there for a reason, gathering for an event. They start to interact with the traffic, as they are drawn to the car compounds, and their exploration of motor-ways and junctions takes on a new significance. They are seduced by it and pay their devotion and respect to it. Vaughn's car, an American Lincoln, becomes central to the story and takes on a special significance, for the car in which John F. Kennedy was shot was the same model. Thus Vaughn's car symbolises another historical car crash which makes it into a site of worship. The car is huge, it roars, Vaughn drives it aggressively and without any care and it is a weapon in his hand as well as the place for his violent sexuality. Catherine's first reaction to the car is to liken it to a bed. During her intercourse with James she fantasises about the women Vaughn has copulated with in the car, and how the car must smell of all the sexual activities. Her fantasies are later on carried out when she becomes one of the many women being fucked in the back seat of the car, acting as a vessel for Vaughn's aggressive sexual energy. When James starts to drive the car he does so in a more gentle way at the beginning and realises that he can effect the sex going on in the back seat depending on the way he drives. This makes James part of the sexuality and an actor in Vaughn's play, and Vaughn becomes increasingly involved in James' sex life. Catherine fantasises about him whilst having sex with James, and James eventually having sex with him. James becomes a part of Vaughn's sexual encounters by being the driver and the spectator to what is played out in the back seat. James watches and learns and is driven to experiment on his own, creating his new sexuality as a result of his encounter with the puppet master.

This new sexuality, born out of the experiences of crashes and car technology, is described as being all in the mind and in a sense it is new, other and separated from physical experience and in this sense exists all in the mind. This is elaborately described in an incident when James loses control of his car as a result of revisiting the crash site in his mind as well as in the physical reality.

Clearly unaware that we were moving towards our original meeting ground...Trying to control the car, I pressed the head of my penis against the lower rim of the steering wheel. The car swept towards its first impact point with the central reservation. Marker lines unravelled diagonally below us and a car's horn blared faintly from behind my shoulder.

The drifts of broken windshield glass flashed like morse lamps in the sunlight. Semen jolted through my penis.³⁰⁹

The book describes this incessant revisiting of the accident sites as something far more obsessive than the film does. In one incident James once more loses control of the car, as a result of him becoming aroused when getting close to the accident site. In both film and novel a strong image is given of James's excitement in coming close to the site, and letting go of his inhibitions. In the film the incident is not elaborated upon and James simply loses control which lessens the pathological sentiment of the scene and fails to recognise the importance of the site as a sacrificial site. Later on in the film, after the near crash-experience, James and Helen are having sex, this is later replicated with Catherine as a celebration of the close encounter with death. James' new life, in communication with technology, carries the trait of a sexuality that has merged entirely with technology and become as detached from its romantic notion as possible. Between James and Catherine sex becomes tender and closer whilst with others it becomes changed in other ways. The vagina and the breast are not the only areas that attract his attention, but now the scars and the bruises offer new sexual possibilities, new surfaces and orifices.

5:4:2 The Communion of Human Flesh and Technology

When *Crash* was first released Bertolucci called the film 'a religious masterpiece', a statement based on the sacrificial and sacramental character of the film. The characters, according to Bertolucci, are Christ-like. They sacrifice themselves in violent crashes to explore the limits of existence, sexuality and humanity in the search for meaning and fulfilment so we do not have to.³¹⁰ Along this line *Crash* entertains devotion and romanticism of the wound, and the battered bodies are reminiscent of devotion to Christ on the cross and the wound culture that is always present in Christian devotion. The wound celebrated and worshipped in Christianity becomes another orifice for sexual devotion and adoration in *Crash*. Following this the car is not celebrated as an extension of the man's penis or wealth but as a result of its unique capability of merging and forming human flesh, altering the body.³¹¹ According to Baudrillard, the reborn body of technology is submitted in the new era to the mark of technology symbolised by the cut

³⁰⁹ J. G Ballard, 1995, p. 74

³¹⁰ Interview with Cronenberg in *Film Quarterly*, 1997, p. 17

and the scar. These wounds become the symbol of this new use and aim of technology, a technology of death. In *Crash* the scars with the mutilation and the death, are celebrated as liberating. It is a celebration of the human body in the hands of technology.³¹² The reborn body is no longer celebrated for its part in production and labour, it opposes this by valuing itself as an anagram of mutilation. Baudrillard merges technology with human existence and the human body thereby creates a new order and a new human being. This project results in a bodily abstraction and human organic design that explore the possibility of both violence where death is implicated and for a new body completely fused with technology. This should not be confused with a perverse aim for violence but should be considered as a distortion of what the human body and sexual pleasure mean.³¹³ A connection can be made to the resurrected bodies of the last judgement which has been the focus of much apocalyptic art and literature which has asked the question if the resurrected body is a perfect body or one with its former pains and troubles. The artist Luca Signorelli (1450-1523) display the tormented bodies of the Apocalypse in *The Damned* and the muscular capable bodies in *The Calling of the Elect into Heaven* and show a relationship between the body and the apocalypse that is dependent on the judgement of God. As Tina Pippin points out the apocalypse is a path of bodily pain, of suffering and it is a pain that is sexual where the bodies of the Last Judgement are tortured and violated on their way to eternal bliss.³¹⁴ In Cronenberg's vision the absence of God gives rise to a resurrection through technology which perfects and alter the body but a transformation which similarly to the 'classical apocalypse' is through sexuality, violation and pain.

Gabrielle is a good example of what Baudrillard imagines when he discusses the merging of technology with the body. She is depicted in the film almost as an android. She never speaks, and her body is a complete merging of technology, metal and flesh, as it has a strange quality that combines hard steel with the softness of her flesh. Her smile is shy and she never looks straight into the camera, thus giving a demure depiction of herself. Her entire life has been changed by the crash and has found a new life and identity in this merging of metal with her body. In the novel the first description of her is when James sees her for the first time, and she is described according to his newly developed idea of crash-beauty which results in an image that emphasises her

³¹¹ Barbara Creed 1998, p. 176-177

³¹² Jean Baudrillard, 2000, p. 111

³¹³ Ibid, p. 112.

changed body. Her cuts and scars are described in detail as well as the functions of these scars and indentations for the new. This fascination is highlighted in a strong and uncomfortable scene in which James fucks a scar on her leg and explores her altered body with his voyeuristic gaze. In the narrative the sexual explorations are taken to their limits as James touches her body, tracing the scars and the cuts with his finger and ejaculates in her scars. It is also here he starts to express his wish for Catherine to be able to join him in the exploration of this new sexuality and he visualises her crippled and altered.

Each mark or scar is an artificial invocation and only the wounded body exists symbolically - for itself and for others, and only through sexual desire do these bodies have a possibility to exchange these signs. As a result interest is lost in the usual sexual openings which are nothing in relation to all the new possibilities and artificial openings to which technology has given birth. Sex itself is only the specialised definition of all the symbolic and sacrificial practices to which the body can open itself through artifice technology, through the simulacrum, the accident. Baudrillard argues that sex in *Crash* is nothing else than a privileged signifier and some secondary marks - nothing in contrast to what the body is capable of in its relation to technology.³¹⁵ *Crash* aims at expressing some of what the body is capable of in communion with technology, and it is an image of sex that is strictly designed and re-invented but without any sweat or lust. The carnality of the sexual act has been exchanged for a sterilised and designed activity the focus of which is rather to pay devotion to the technology that has given birth to it than to give birth to anything physical or emotional. As a result there is no sexual intimacy of language in *Crash* but a functional language reflecting that sex has become a super-design articulated according to pleasure that does not result in orgasm only in discharge.³¹⁶ The language reflects what has taken place with the body, it reflects the new design, and just as the creatures of *Crash* escape us (being a merger of human and non-human) the language becomes evasive. Ballard describes in detail braces, scars, medical devices that support the bodies and the imprint of technology on the body. We can visualise these new altered bodies to a certain extent but they escape us when trying to interpret them and visualise them. The wounds and the scars become a basis for a sexuality that is no longer phallic or vaginal. It is not primarily the genitalia that is

³¹⁴ Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies, The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 192-199, 126.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

joined together in intercourse but the scars and dents created by the imprint of technology. This new sexual union is expressed by James:

Each of her deformities became a potent metaphor for the excitements of a new violence...Gabrielle turned in her seat, revolving her body around me so I could explore the wounds of her right hip. For the first time I felt no pity for this crippled woman, but celebrated with her the excitements of these abstract vents let into her body by sections of her own automobile.³¹⁷

In *Crash* Ballard invents an altered sexuality for altered bodies that has been united with technology in an embrace of what the world has come to. Ballard's descriptions are persuasive and take the theme much further than Cronenberg does. Ballard explores the sexuality and the bodies he invents in a deeper fashion, possibly as a result of his language his images are more free than the actual images Cronenberg works with which tend to become more stylised. The result is, however, a new breed expressing a sexuality that is no longer private and suppressed but which becomes interactive with its surroundings and the world to come. This is expressed in a scene when Gabrielle wipes semen over the dials and controls in the interior of the car as if baptising it in to this new life of sexual opportunities and possibilities. This expresses what Baudrillard means when he says that technology is never grasped in any situation other than in the car accident where the violence to the body and to technology is fully realised. There the technology can be traced or read on the body. Metal gives its imprint and opens up the possibility for a new sexuality.³¹⁸ The car and the crash alter the body, creating a new sexual identity and making an imprint on peoples' life as well as on their bodies. Gabrielle submits to this new order as she wipes the semen over the dashboard after the sexual act, acknowledging the connection between the new sexuality, the new life being born and the technology making it all possible. Sexuality is then a violent and disconnected activity that has its similarities in the apocalyptic account where sex is fornication and desire absent.

5:5 *Crash* as an Existential Love-Story

Grant argues that the crucial centre of the film is the imaginative effort involved in apprehending it and its movement towards failure and death, and along these lines

³¹⁷ J. G Ballard, 1995, p. 175, 179

Cronenberg describes his film as an existential love-story.³¹⁹ Ballard on the other hand makes a greater claim when he proclaims that the task for the writer has been reversed and is no longer to write fiction but to write reality.³²⁰ This project is, however, a task in which both Ballard and Cronenberg are involved, but for Cronenberg it has not become the driving force even if he does play with issues of reality and fiction. In particular, his latest film *Existenz* has a narrative and story-line that discusses reality, questions what reality is as well as whether it is something worth striving for. Ballard writes about reality in *Crash*. He condenses what he see in life and writes about it, thereby coming very close to the genre of apocalyptic which in many ways is a version of reality seen from a particular perspective. For Ballard the apocalypse of modernity is here and he writes what he sees, and similarly the apocalypse was already there and yet to start for the writer of Revelation.

James and Catherine have lost their ability to express and feel love in their mundane life, they are dead within, indifferent rather than in search of excitement or meaning. *Crash* forces on us an image of a relationship and a life that has lost its meaning and goal. Catherine and James are described as two people who have become jaded and indifferent to each other as well as to themselves. They are depicted in a cold and metallic way, always directing their gaze inwards rather than at each other. Sex takes place in a monotonous way, always from behind, never meeting the gaze of the 'other'. Self-reflection as well as reflecting on the 'other' has been replaced with blindness. They have stopped seeing, reflecting and have become blinded by their own indifference and emptiness. Through their involvement with Vaughn they start to feel their way through their experiences. Their reflection is constantly directed inwards and is deeply autistic. The reflection can not be spoken of and has no language. This inability to speak, to verbalise, is expressed in scenes such as that in which Catherine is lying naked on the bed displaying her bruised body after the rape, whilst James explores her bruises and cuts in eager but silent excitement.

5:6 The Sacred

5:6:1 The Prophet or High Priest

The image of the prophet or high priest is one that occurs over and again in seeing *Crash*, not only in the way Vaughn speaks and acts but also in the way he collects his

³¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, 2000 p. 112.

³¹⁹ Michael Grant, 'Crimes of the future' in *Screen* 39:2, Summer 1998, p. 184.

followers. He makes initial contact with them and they are drawn to him because of the way he makes them feel and the new life he offers them. In addition, the character of Vaughn is similar to that of the prophet in the way that he is solitary, always alone even when he is among people. People are drawn to him but not in interaction with him rather in adoration and attraction. This image of the untouchable high priest or prophet yields somewhat in the scene when Vaughn is being tattooed and he sees his tattoo as a prophetic tattoo. It is ragged and ugly- it is a car crash in itself, a machine, a model of something, maybe Vaughn's idea of what is to follow. Vaughn wants, maybe even needs, James to have a similar tattoo, a similar mark that binds them together, and James agrees and is marked with the mark of his mentor. This is the only time Vaughn really shows a need for another person, and it is after this scene of vulnerability that James has intercourse with him. The sexual union between Vaughn and James is the only scene when Vaughn is not the active partner of the sexual union and it is a scene of vulnerability and submission. It is depicted as a very tender scene, but also one that obviously stirs Vaughn more than it does James. In a way these two scenes put together become a rite of passage but also scenes of change and alteration. Vaughn knows that he is approaching his own death and at this last meeting with James wants to hand the mission and prophetic role to James. Vaughn introduces James into his new position as priest by taking the submissive sexual role, while James plays the active role of the priest. Throughout the narrative Vaughn develops as a more striking character, he increasingly becomes a man with a mission, wanting to deliver a message. During Vaughn's last days we have the image of how he fertilises every surface of his car with his semen through sexual acts. He also starts to inflict wounds on himself, resembling the stigmata wounds and the imprints on Christ's body. His body becomes more and more scarred, and his semen is spread over the car that inflicts these wounds, and he becomes increasingly self-contained and less interactive. The images of Vaughn during these last days of his life bring to mind images of hermits and pilgrims who inflict the wounds of Christ upon themselves in devotion. He finally meets his death in the film when he chases Catherine and drives over the fence and crashes into the bus. In the book it is only a chase that is half-hearted and Vaughn is more concerned to show how James to go about his mission rather than being an active threat to James and Catherine. The chase increasingly becomes habitual and pathological. It is no longer only Vaughn searching out his victim but James and Catherine also begin searching for Vaughn in

³²⁰ J. G Ballard, 1995, Introduction

order to be chased. In the novel, this intense last period is followed by a silence from Vaughn who has left his car at James' garage where it is slowly falling apart and disintegrates. The car is left here for some time, and ten days later Vaughn steals and crashes Catherine's car whilst he is attempting to fulfil his Elisabeth Taylor crash. In contrast, in the film the intense last days culminate in his crash when he chases Catherine, making her and James part of his death.

5:6:2 Ritual and Sacramentality in *Crash*

Cronenberg claims that he has rejected ritual all his life as well as any traditional religious expression. However, even if he denounces institutionalised religion he does believe that every artist attempts to give meaning to meaninglessness, which is also the core of most religions. Whether or not Cronenberg sees himself as a religious filmmaker *Crash* is a film with a sacramental character which depicts the communion of its characters with technology, accidents and otherness. The characters are extremely disconnected from each other as well as from themselves and they only experience connectedness and meaning in the 'fertilising event' of the car crash. Through the crash and in the proximity to death they experience life. The crash transforms them and liberates them from the self and the oppression of normative society in a way similar to how the apocalypse releases the believer from the everyday concerns. The boundaries between the self and the other are dissolved in this 'fertilising event' and they are equals close to death, where otherness and disconnectedness dissolve and facing the end all are equals.³²¹ This willingness to belong is part of the 'meaning' Cronenberg is trying to explore, it is a search for meaning in a world that seemingly has been emptied of meaning. As a film *Crash* has a sacramental character and the crash aims at being a mediator between the human and the transcendent, trying to lift the characters out of mundane existence, transcend their ordinary life, and make them experience something greater than themselves. The characters sacrifice themselves in car crashes that are staged to become history. Vaughn elaborates on this when he explains the power of the car crash as a fertilising event which releases the sexual energies of the dead and dying people and fertilises the world with this energy.

In *Crash* the site of the car crash becomes the site of sacrifice repeatedly revisited. These sites have a particular standing, and the characters visit them to remember and to celebrate their new lives by ritually acting out sexual encounters in their cars. As a film

Crash uses repetition to underline its obsessive and sacramental character, something that Ballard comments on when he discusses the crash as a profane version of mass. Repetition, remembrance and celebration of the new are at the heart of *Crash* as well as in the Christian celebration of mass. Both events aim to fulfil and transcend themselves, something expressed in the compulsive scenario of an act planned and executed, repetitively, over and over in order to worship a memory and a promise.³²² Both acts are also a substitute for the new life that starts from death with the return of Christ or in the case of *Crash* the final car crash. In the film, the car crash is constantly followed by sex, followed by a crash, followed by sex. Catherine or James repeat previous encounters with their temporary lovers, as a moment of remembrance. The sexual encounters replicate each other in the same way as Vaughn replicates famous crashes. The film becomes an endless repetition of sex and crashes, intertwined in an obsessive search for the ultimate crash, the ultimate sexual experience. The film is deeply ritualistic, sex and crashes replicated and repeated, performed as rituals over and over again, aiming to reconstruct, remember and celebrate. Every crash is a rehearsal of the real event, the final crash and every crash is reconstructed and later played out in Vaughn's car. It is in his own car that the celebratory event takes place, in the repetition of the crashes just witnessed where he arranges women in the positions of the victims of earlier car crashes whilst having sex with them. Through this endless repetition and the use of the women as mannequins for his own desire the imagery leaves the reader with feelings of discomfort and distrust. Vaughn becomes a puppet master staging car crashes, accidents, imaginary wounds and death in the back seat of his car. He becomes the high priest preparing for mass, setting the table for the communion and the big event. He is reminiscent of the priest who celebrates mass as a memorial of Christ and who repeats the 'last supper' endlessly every Sunday. Similarly Vaughn sets up or stages his crashes in a willingness to sacrifice himself, and lets his fertilising energy be released in the crash. He needs to die to make the world live just as Christ needed to die. He sets up his crashes in a deeply ritualistic way and creates a sacrificial and sacramental act that is both reminiscent and life giving, and the death of the crash victim in the film assumes the function of the death of Christ. It serves to release the living, giving them life that is living towards death or towards an apocalyptic ending. The similarities with the celebration of Christ in communion is striking, both acts are equally reminiscent and

³²¹ Interview with Cronenberg, 1997, pp. 14, 17

³²² Michael Grant, 1998, p. 182.

life giving as well as pathological in their repetitiveness. However the crash fails to be a sacrament and becomes only a ritual since it does not point back to an original grand event or point forward to any fulfilment of this grand event. The sacramentality of *Crash* is only in the event itself and the lack of connection to any wider divine scheme denies its full realisation as a sacrament. The death of Christ was needed to save the world and hence it is also connected to the apocalypse and the return of Christ. In *Crash* no such return is possible since the end itself has become the celebrated event.

Prostitutes play a significant part of the rituals Vaughn has created in and around his car. He uses them or their bodies to replicate and rehearse car crashes, and arranges them in the back seat of his car whilst James drives, turning them into sacrificial lambs. He arranges them, stages the crash and turns them into the crash victims. They are the recipients of his violent sexuality, those on whom he lives out his rites. Not only prostitutes but women as such play a special role as mediators between the car and Vaughn or James. The women are arranged in positions that mirror the position of the crash victims' bodies. They are arranged in a way that their bodies reflect points of the car, and the vaginal mucous and the semen mark the car in adoration and devotion of the vehicle of deliverance. This is reminiscent of the role Mary plays as the mediator, and also of the woman clothed with the sun in *The Book of Revelation* who is hunted and made to submit.

The character that first takes the pathology of sacrifice to its conclusion is Seagrave. His accident should be understood within the framework of sacrifice and transcendence and he lives Vaughn's dream fully. He becomes fully absorbed in his own mind and new existence to live towards death, and stages his own masterpiece that will be his ultimate crash, the end. Seagrave lives out his fantasy fully, and sets the agenda for what is to come. The scene is discussed in the tone of a myth and is given a romantic quality with its connection to and reconstruction of the Jane Mansfield crash. The scene is filmed in an extremely theatrical and powerful way, bearing a great resemblance to a renaissance painting. The smoke, silence, lights, and the fog make the image beautiful in the midst of horror. Every detail is staged, and together with the silence at the scene the image becomes embedded in a beauty and a mystique that makes it very strong. In the novel the focus is rather on the dynamics among the people watching the scene which gives an insight to how pathology works. The text describes how the onlookers becomes sexually charged and take comfort in touching and groping each other whilst they watch people die.

One of the strongest, most ritualistic as well as and most disturbing scenes is set in a night-time car wash where Vaughn is having sex with Catherine as a celebration of the crash they have just seen. Catherine is like an immobile doll, being pulled around and arranged in various ways, she is not an actor only a vessel. Vaughn arranges the two of them in the position of the crash victims they have just seen and carries out his aggressive sexuality whilst her husband watches. James keeps putting coins in the box to keep the car-wash going, and thereby makes the rape continue (only stopping when Vaughn is too exhausted to continue actions) and this turns James into a voyeur, hence assuming Vaughn's previous role. In the film they drive away and silence descends over the scene again. Catherine's passivity makes her into nothing else than a vessel. Vaughn carries out his ritual and she is the goblet to carry the fertilising fluids. The scene can also be seen as a purifying ceremony marking a new beginning for Catherine or a baptism into a new life towards death. After the encounter James travels with his hands over Catherine's body, recalling Vaughn's hardness and aggression and is aroused by the marks made by his mentor. He thereby becomes another offender, an extension of Vaughn who only mimics the master's behaviour as he learns to be a disciple.

The film and novel are ritualistic rather than liturgical. Liturgy has a cultural and religious background and at the same time is both reminiscent and also forward-looking to the new age that is yet to come. The sense of origin is strong in the rhetoric of the sacrament and this sense is lacking in *Crash* for there is no before or after, only an endless now. Ritual becomes a simulacrum and a repetition mimicking earlier events and replicating them without connection to an origin or an aim. The arranging of bodies points back to the crash, but in turn points to nothing and the sacrament is performed for the benefit of remembrance as well as devotion. The ritualistic element in *Crash* works on the surface and has replicated the pathological repetitiveness of a sacrament but does not become a mediator to the divine. In *Crash* no mediation takes place only repetition that plays on the surface making the film deeply ritualistic and maybe even liturgical but it fails to become a sacrament since it fails to point forward to a new beginning.

5:7 The Apocalypse of *Crash*

5:7:1 The Voyeuristic Lens of the Camera

These sexual encounters in Vaughn's car have a voyeuristic element not only in the staging of crashes and sex but also through Vaughn's photography. The photographs

Vaughn takes of these victims heightens the voyeurism by the presence of the camera which adds a level of seeing as well as freezing the moment of impact, death and release of energy. The photograph plays a central role in *Crash* and is introduced by Vaughn who begins to take pictures of James and Helen in the hospital, and continues throughout their recovery stopping only when they have healed. Vaughn follows James and Helen and reproduces their actions and sexual encounters through his lens, just as the new parent follow the early steps of a child and as the child becomes older and more independent the photographs become fewer. He is their mentor and teacher, and follows them until they are able to manage without him, just as Paul follows the early Churches, preparing them for a time when he is gone. The camera becomes a trigger in Helen and James' relationship for sexual excitement and is always a part of their sexual encounter. When the camera is gone, together with Vaughn's interest, they too lose interest in each other. Their desire and excitement is mediated by the presence of Vaughn and his lens and he produces visual images of them, thereby creating their lives and their recovery through his lens, as well as guiding them to independence. When James finally visits Vaughn's house he sees the photographs of himself and others in Vaughn's project, and he finds it exciting as well as repulsive. Vaughn watches everything through his lens. Through the use of the camera he manages to circumscribe the image and focus on what is important to him. Events and characters only seem to have a reason or an existence when he looks at them through his lens. They are then magnified and reproduced, taken at a moment of time when life changes forever for the person involved. The photos are impersonal and clinical and it becomes evident that it is not the person that interests him, but what the person can become in his/hers communion with technology. The photographs are central in the creation of Vaughn's collection and in his wider project. The images of victims and the part of the car that has caused a specific injury are circled together with the body-part injured, with Vaughn's added remarks in the margin. Part of Vaughn's project is to show people such images (and this allows people to indicate the injuries they desire) as well as those of people who have not yet crashed. He thereby maps the desire for possible injuries, elaborates on the fantasies and makes the crash culture visible as well as accessible.

According to Baudrillard cinema has become inseparable from the photograph, which is clearly expressed in Cronenberg's film. Everything is reproduced through Vaughn's lens but it is without depth, only surface. He collects the photographs both for his great encyclopaedia of injuries and to use for the great last rehearsal, the last replica

of crashes. Baudrillard means that Ballard's universe wouldn't be anything without its hyper-real connection and only through the reproduction, the unfolding of the visual medium can a fusion of technology, sex and death be produced.³²³ The photograph is then not a medium or a representation but a supplementary abstraction of the image of the original event of the crash. It is no more a medium than the body or technology, they are all simultaneous in a universe where the anticipation of an event coincides with its reproduction- the real production.

Cronenberg emphasises this through a use of the camera that emphasises the contrasts creating a cold and solid image. The characters are pale; the inside of the car is dark and the light in which they interact has a metallic glow, like the reflections of the cars a metallic glow. With the use of images and contrasts, Cronenberg creates a film that is only surface with the and through that the disconnectedness is underlined. In Cronenberg's film there is nothing except surface, and according to Baudrillard this signifies the lack of depth in contemporary society. The world has come to such a state according to Baudrillard that the only thing it can do is to symbolise itself. When one level of reality is peeled off another identical layer is revealed. Hence the real as shown by Cronenberg in *Crash* becomes more real than reality itself.

The detailed descriptions of sexual acts, crashes, the landscapes are made in a way that could best be described as autistic as well as obsessive. The reader/viewer is forced to follow the descriptions that are visualised but fade and escape again because of the disruptive pattern of the narrative. The images are played out on the screen as well as in the mind of the reader who cannot escape them since they give the reader an abundance of information and detail that force the reader to see all things. Whilst the reader is given this abundance of images the latter are also withdrawn and defy the reader's interpretation, and what is left are scattered images that are extremely visual but which refuse to form a comprehensible whole. Hence a surface is constructed without depth since all connection is lost between the images, and they resemble a mad dream or an apocalyptic vision. Ballard creates a feeling of unease and pathology with his images, a feeling from which there is no easy escape because of the visuality given by the images as well as their evasiveness, a quality inherent in apocalyptic.

Cronenberg sees the tension between reality and the idealised life as central to the film and he claims that in the film fantasy or idealisation takes precedence over reality and gives it its form. His characters embrace reality and take it further, thus entering

³²³ Jean Baudrillard, 2000, p. 117

fantasy. In this way the film gains a transformative power that can transcend reality, embrace it and take it further. A hyper-reality is thereby created that makes the present become what Grant calls 'crimes of the future'.³²⁴ As well as dealing with reality and mimicking reality the 'classical' apocalypse occupies itself with time and could be said to stand outside time. It has a perspective of time and history which does not correspond to the way contemporary society sees and understands time and history. It could be said that the apocalypse stands outside time and history but it is also strongly connected to the notion of time since inherent within it is the disruption or the end of history and it portrays an event outside time, and human history. Similarly in *Crash* the aspects of time have been dissolved. We do not get any time or place reference, so that events are disruptive and disconnected from the governing principles of reality. *Crash* is a metaphor for contemporary society and without its references to either time or place it could be anywhere at anytime, which brings us back the idea of the apocalyptic as already here but not yet.

Everything becomes hyper-functional in *Crash*, where the functionality devours its own rationality because it does not acknowledge dysfunction. It is a radical functionalism that reaches its limits and transgresses them and hence becomes once again a fascinating object, neither good nor bad but ambivalent. Following this logic *Crash* also becomes hyper-criticism since it is not critical or does not pass judgement, in contrast to the old order and old world.³²⁵ The real and the metaphorical is mixed up and merges and the differences between them dissolve and when interpretation is attempted they seem just as elusive as the images in the film. This merging of the metaphorical level and the level of the real is a defining trait of the hyper-real as well as of the apocalyptic. The levels become so merged that it is difficult to distinguish one level from the other and the whole idea about reality plays out its role. In the apocalyptic the language disintegrates and falls apart as soon as an attempt is made at interpretation. In a similar way the images of film disintegrate when the question is asked - is the real event and what is the film? According to this logic photographs construct themselves from the real but when they have finished their task the real is gone and what has taken place is a move from the real to the artistic to the constructed. This is also the way in which Vaughn's photographs work. They depict a scene that is gone, an event that has passed, and seen in this light his obsessive attempts to re-visit the original event and the original

³²⁴ Michael Grant, 1998, p. 183.

³²⁵ Jean Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 118-119

image by staging the crashes over and over again becomes surfaced and empty. The moment will always have passed and every replication of the original event empties the original event of its meaning.³²⁶

5:7:2 Language Reassembling Images

Comparing the language and structure of *Crash* with the language and structure of 'classical' apocalyptic writings might be the point where the similarities are the greatest. The creatures and demons of apocalyptic writing might not bear a visual resemblance to the creatures in *Crash* and the story line is not the same. *Crash* is not to be read as a comment on *The Book of Revelation* but as a contemporary apocalypse where the horrors and fears of the postmodern era are expressed and elaborated upon. The similarity with the 'classical' apocalypse does not so much lie in content, but in the style and structure. The characters of *Crash* are invented in a three-dimensional, yet surfaced way. They are only surface and texture and do not reveal depth or content. They are frightening in their inaccessibility and are cartoons rather than images of feasible characters, just as the 'classical' apocalypse portrays creatures that we are unable to visualise. At the most the images lend themselves to our imagination and we create something, which bears a resemblance to what we have read. Still the apocalyptic creation escapes us in its multifaceted appearance where it gives an abundance of detail but the creation refuses to be revealed and made comprehensible as something we can relate to. The creations of apocalyptic writings are merged together by images from various dimensions and described as very mechanical but since they are not described as anything we can relate to they escape our interpretation and understanding.

The images given to us by Ballard and Cronenberg bear strong similarities with the Biblical apocalyptic accounts. The images are vague and evasive at the same time, as they are strong and persuasive. They slip away from interpretation and are difficult to grasp because they concern that which is outside our existence and our understanding. The apocalypse simply escapes the attempts of interpretation and leaves us with a feeling of discomfort. We can interpret them on one level but there is always already another level revealing itself to us whilst we are reading. The images are highly visual and created through a rich, detailed and direct language in the same style as *The Book of Revelation* composes its story. The surface in both *The Book of Revelation* and in *Crash* is enhanced through the lack of a strong narrative. There are traces of narrative but it is

³²⁶ Michael Grant 1998

not a comprehensible one, or one that carries the text, instead the narrative falls apart and becomes evasive leaving the images to communicate the message.

Grant sees *Crash* as an evocation of religious iconography that highlights the failure of the evocation itself, to communicate with the tradition as well as to speak with the voice of the individual. The film uncovers the split between individual experience and the traditional context that served to make sense of that experience. The film does not express how the individual overcomes isolation, but how isolation is shared by the community, and *Crash* portrays a community of detached and isolated individuals who can neither save themselves nor the world. Following this religious impulse of *Crash* as well as of modern art the aim becomes according to Grant, not to save the world out of love as taught by Christianity, but to save love until the world becomes responsive again. Art can then only express reactions of embarrassment, disgust, impatience and excitement without releasing these emotions and can only offer silence without serenity. Accordingly art, and in this example, *Crash* becomes an expression of isolation and non-communication, obsessively expressing the postmodern subject's problem of isolation.³²⁷ Grant's point of how *Crash* explores isolation corresponds to *The Book of Revelation* where the characters are totally isolated and cannot reach out to one another. However, I believe *Crash* does not aim to reach out or overcome isolation but is resigned to the fact that the world is a place of isolation. There is no hope in *Crash*, no new beginning. The only thing seen is an endless future of car crashes and of reinventing the body but not to transcend the body or the world as such. In *Crash* there is only nihilistic repetition and salvation is not at hand and it depicts the apocalyptic moment which has become ever ongoing, repeating itself in its inability to break out and aspire for a new beginning. In *The Book of Revelation* release eventually comes with chapter 21 with 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth...'. This moment does not arrive in *Crash*, which has no reference to the future but has made the future redundant in repeating the fertilising event over and over again, fertilising nothing.

Towards the end of Ballard's text the images become increasingly forceful and we re-visit them over the last pages of the book. In the film the imagery becomes increasingly intrusive and quickly paced, and it bears similarities with Revelation 20 where the images are repeated and revisited. Here Ballard collects the important metaphors and ties them together before the story can move on. In these last scenes we are back again at the car compound to which Catherine and James have gone to pay their

respects to Vaughn. They have sex and smear the semen over the cars they pass on their way walking through the compound. In the film as well as in the book this is followed by James starting to follow and chase Catherine, taking over from where Vaughn left off, carrying on the chase, the fertilising and the new life, and reaching it through his actions. He retires further into his new existence and identity and the film ends with Catherine crashing without being hurt, but the novel ends with James' realisation that he is planning his own death. The end image in the film of Catherine crying because of her lack of injury emphasises that she is still not part, still an outsider and still not delivered to the new life which James is taking to new heights in pursuit of his and Catherine's death.

The images in *Crash* are frozen and solidified. The apocalypse of which *Crash* is an image, is a death of the metaphor where the images have stopped working and referring to something outside of themselves. In *The Book of Revelation* metaphors can be read on several different levels and they constantly refer to something outside themselves. Austin Farrer sees *The Book of Revelation* as a rebirth of images and a reconstruction of the metaphorical tradition.³²⁸ *The Book of Revelation* creates metaphors that go beyond themselves and which are reborn in the text. Apocalypse in the classical form is the rebirth of images preparing for the return of the high priest. In contrast the apocalypse of *Crash* does not give any rebirth to images but offers crumbling, dying or even dead metaphors. The metaphors refer to nothing, neither to any new promise nor to any great event but only to themselves and become repetitive and empty. The metaphors are stuck in their own order and are incessantly self-referential, incapable of moving beyond themselves. In *Crash* nothing is new or reborn, everything has become a simulacrum and this might be the strongest difference between the genre of apocalypse and the postmodern apocalypse of *Crash*. There is no sex only the mimesis of sex and there is no real death only the replication of it. The film as well as the novel become nothing more than an empty shell.

5:8 Domestication or Apocalyptic

Crash is a comment on the 20th century world in which we live and it's self-referential existence. Iain Sinclair argues that *Crash* 'belongs to a climate of pre-millennial boredom. It's a novella of the last days. It has to run for ever (sic), hours, and hours of road footage, centuries of sex without fertility or climax...Post-surveillance anti-drama.

³²⁷ Ibid P 183.

³²⁸ Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. Johns Apocalypse* (London, Dacre Press, 1949) -

The death of excitement.³²⁹ The film expresses a deep estrangement that has stopped being self-reflective, and existing has turned into a jaded boredom where the simulacra merges with the actual and becomes interchangeable. On one level *Crash* is a film about sex and car crashes but it does not have anything to do with eroticism. Sexuality is medical, cold and detached. The language used is technical and medical, stripped off any sensuality or eroticism. *Crash* is de-sexualised or hyper-sexualised as Botting and Wilson choose to call it. Its preoccupation is with vehicles and sexuality as well as the sexual energy or charge emanating from the disaster of the car crash. Sex, in *Crash* becomes the equivalent of a car crash, appearing where we can no longer speak, where language and categories fails. Through *Crash* Cronenberg fulfills his desire to speak the unspeakable as well as show the unshowable and his film is one that explores the limits of sexuality, of society and desire.³³⁰ The humans become merely the victims of the auto-sex, victims who eroticise themselves and their wounds, becoming the martyrs of modernity.³³¹ These martyrs of modernity become immortal through the photographic image. The image is what the postmodern subject refers to in order to verify its existence as well as the death of the crash victim.³³² In the end the crash has in the end to be photographed in order to have happened. The photograph becomes proof of a moment of time, a moment when the subject becomes the other, transformed ultimately to image.³³³ The human subject is brought out of his/her subjectivity at the moment of the crash and becomes an object of the lens, the voyeur who reduces him/her to 'other' at the same time as the subject merges with metal and technology and actually becomes something 'other'.

In *Crash*, what is seen is 'a pornography of scars', that fails to involve leaving the viewer either cold and detached or disturbed and uncomfortable to the extent that watching becomes unbearable.³³⁴ This is part of a larger concept of the apocalyptic of which *Crash* is part. One of the differences in *Crash*, compared with many other violent and futuristic films is what underlines the apocalyptic trait of the film, namely, its style and metaphors used to portray a future of a cold disconnected society on the verge of psychosis. It is metal, burned rubber and rusty tin sheets that become a metaphor for the future. The future and the end is for Cronenberg metallic and where people have

³²⁹ Iain Sinclair, 1999, P 57

³³⁰ Chris Rodley, 'Introduction', *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* (London and Boston, Faber and Faber, 1993 (1992)) p xvi

³³¹ Scott Wilson, and Fred Botting, 'Automatic lover' in *Screen* 39:2, Summer 1998, Pp 189-190.

³³² Ibid, Pp 190-191

³³³ Ibid,

stopped interacting, to give and receive pleasure the only communication is with technology which converses with the body, sustaining and altering it.

At one point Ballard refers to the contraceptive cap as the dead machine in contrast to the living and fertilising machines of the car technology. It is an interesting reference, which marks the form of new life that Ballard imagines. He contrasts the dead machine that prevents life and the living and fertilising machine of the car, which in his logic does not kill but gives rebirth to a new way of living. Sex becomes the non-fertilising event because fertilisation never takes place but is hindered by this dead machine. Along these lines the crash then becomes a fertilising event and an event that brings life into the world when it frees the sexual desires and tensions of people engaging in the crash. The crash does not give birth but is the rebirth into a new existence that is connected to living in the era of technology and death. A rebirth to a new existence, a new life a new morality and a new order where the old rules do not apply and where human kind becomes fulfilled.

The contemporary apocalypse of *Crash* deconstructs the 'classical' apocalypse, it is the crash of Biblical apocalypse. The 'classical' apocalypse is based on metaphors that have a reference point in front of them in the return of Christ, as well as behind them in the connections with the tradition and the texts referring to a messiah and a new era. The metaphors of the 'classical' apocalypse and of Revelation point to a place outside themselves, referring to something outside which offers the key for interpretation. The contemporary apocalypse on the other hand does not do this. The postmodern apocalypse of *Crash* does not point to any before or any future and the only thing existing is the now - the now which is in the apocalyptic moment. The metaphors do not refer to anything other than themselves and they have died or been frozen stripped of meaning and referentially. Thereby *Crash* becomes a postmodern apocalypse that does not go anywhere but which has stalled, caught in a spiral of endless car crashes and endless modification of the body. *Crash* as a contemporary apocalypse reflects the negativity and nihilism which Ballard and Cronenberg sees in our contemporary world. There is no Revelation 21, no alpha and omega, no saviour only more of the same, an endless repetition.

³³⁴ Ibid, P 189.

Chapter 6

The survival and transformation of the apocalypse

The Apocalypse of Revelation greets the reader with an urgency stating that the time of the end is imminent, already here, but not yet, and this 'open endedness' of the apocalypse is what has made it into a strong political, mythological and religious force in cultural history. The Apocalypse, or in wider terms the apocalyptic imagination, cannot be confined to the Biblical writings but has continuously poured over the boundaries of the Bible finding expressions on all levels of society. The apocalypse has as a result always been part of the cultural heritage represented in art and literature and with the recent crisis of the postmodern it has also found its expressions in philosophy through thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Jean Paul Baudrillard. In the introduction the question of what the effects are on the apocalypse as it becomes popular. This question ties into the characteristic and power of apocalyptic writing to adapt and transform itself for different audiences and different times. As a result it does not lose its urgency and power but retains its attraction by relating to ever new fears and concerns. In our own contemporary society we face the actual threats of human and global destruction through nuclear and ecological damage and as a result the apocalypse has changed to accommodate the changing society. In the postmodern era the apocalypse has really come into its own as it is challenged with real and possible scenarios of destruction that feeds the apocalyptic imagination.³³⁵ The contemporary apocalypse is one coloured by postmodern society and influenced by the risks as well as possibilities of this society, creating an apocalypse corresponding to the particular threats of our times to our existence.

In our own era we have had a reluctance and fear of taking the apocalyptic challenge seriously and the Church has often hidden behind a stale and dated form of classical apocalypse that does not seem relevant to our times. As the Church has turned away from the apocalyptic it has tended to emphasise stability over temporality, hierarchy over the breakdown of borders and a set moral code over the challenge of ethics that the apocalypse entails. At the same time the apocalyptic imagination, is as present and vital as ever, finding alternative forms of expression outside the boundaries of the institutionalised church. The apocalypse has reinvented itself for the postmodern

³³⁵ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Future of Immortality and other essays for a Nuclear Age*. (New York, Basic Books, 1987) P.10-27.

society, a product of two world wars, the holocaust and the 'Death of God', and has responded to the challenge of our times by internalising the contemporary neurosis into its very being, making it the centre of its own existence. Similarly contemporary society has adopted and identified with the apocalypse making it the foundation upon which it has built its social construct creating a society which identifies with the probability of temporality. Zygmund Bauman notes how contemporary society following the crisis of the postmodern has gone from an emphasis on the eternal to an acceptance and awareness of the temporality of our own being as well as the world.³³⁶ This crisis has challenged established institutions and ideas creating an understanding of our culture as a temporal culture, where nothing is seen to last and where we are faced with our own insignificance and temporality resulting in feelings of indifference as well as fear. The crisis poses a challenge to the apocalyptic to reinvent itself to correspond to contemporary culture creating a response that makes use of the existing fear and neurosis of society.

Where the Church has turned away from the apocalyptic, contemporary culture has not only taken on its challenge but also started to identify with it in such a way that it has become part and parcel of contemporary life. As human kind has become disillusioned through the pains of modernity and the universe has grown bigger at the same rate as our world have shrunk humankind has been left at a cross-roads where the old answers about our existence and mortality no longer are provided by the traditional religious institutions. We are at loss, unable to create meaning for ourselves. This addresses my second question of what effects the loss of God has on the apocalyptic message that is at the heart of Christianity. Our relationship with the divine has been redefined and the creation of meaning is seen as futile just as our life and world is seen as futile and temporal. With a secularisation of society the answers are not any longer sought outside ourselves in a divine realm in which we trust, but inside ourselves in an increasingly private and individual space.³³⁷ However, on entering the postmodern, the apocalyptic also has changed, responding to the dis-connectedness of our society, replacing its linear outlook on time with a circular one. Instead of seeing salvation history as a race towards the end, that is also a beginning, this race has become an ever on-going race, responding to the bleak outlook of humanity and its continuity. The 'classical apocalypse' is building up to the downfall, only to emerge again through the

³³⁶ Zygmund Bauman, Public Lecture at University of Lund June 2001.

³³⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Welwyn: James Nisbet and Company Ltd, 1961 (1952)), pp. 37-39, 57-59

fire and the ashes to a new heaven and a new earth such as in *Revelation 21*. In our contemporary apocalypses no such regeneration happens, no new start is given, and the apocalypse responds to the challenge of humankind losing its belief in stability and continuity by being discontinued and disrupted, losing its tomorrow for an ever ongoing apocalyptic moment. The apocalypse is rehearsing the end, over and over again, caught up in the apocalyptic moment where the end has become a simulacrum of the end, repeating itself forever. The belief in the end has then become a belief in a constant downfall, an ongoing apocalyptic moment, without rebirth and regeneration rehearsed in the constant crashes of Crash, Alex's casual violence, and Kurtz's insane kingdom.

6:1 On Eating the Scroll

The apocalypse, being what it always has been, a revelation- a revealing of that which is hidden, and the truth about the end, of the world and of ourselves, is in its contemporary form a response to an ever-changing world. This world is fluid and temporal, and focus on the temporality of being and the insignificance of humankind whilst expressing its apocalyptic concerns through available forms of art in an aim to reveal what takes place at our end. There are many representations of the apocalypse in contemporary society and I have focused on film which has become one of the favourite expressions of the apocalyptic in our era. Film as an art form lends itself easily to the apocalyptic genre and here the 'visuality' of the 'classical apocalypse' has an opportunity to express itself in images that are immediate and ever changing. The vehicle of film has an ability make apocalypse visual, creating images that not only represents the apocalypse but provides the possibility for the apocalypse to express itself fully.

The films discussed here all respond to the challenge of the apocalyptic and are an outlet for the apocalyptic imagination as well as the fears of the contemporary era. They are set over a period of twenty-five years and does all respond to postmodern society in different ways but they all have in common that they do not turn away from the apocalyptic, but choose to face the end head on. They are all depicting the end as imagined through the context of contemporary society, focusing on different characteristics that are present in the classical apocalypse but which also are significant components of contemporary society, and together these films cover the essential arenas of violence, war and sex, crucial to the classical apocalypse. In the various depictions of a society in breakdown, the contemporary culture and establishment is seen as blind and unable or unwilling to see society and humankind for what it really is, a community on

the brink of disaster. The film characters all have in common with Ezekiel the consuming of the scroll, or the truth that inevitably makes you ill, quite literally so for Alex who responds to the cruelty and violence of his world with anxiety and nausea. The scroll that Ezekiel eats, *The Book of Revelation* opened seal by seal or the gradual enveloping of the horrors in Kurtz compound all express that which is impossible to express, shows that which is un-watchable, and utters that which is un-speakable and hence the message needs to be internalised or eaten. By having the veil lifted from their eyes the central characters in the films such as Alex, Willard and James become crusaders for the end, and for the challenge that the end entails. Like Ezekiel eats the scroll and feels sick, Alex sees the un-watchable and is physically ill as a result. Similarly Willard experiences that which is unimaginable, the horror and death of Kurtz's compound and he turns into someone else and finally James who has a near death experience and continues to pursue the feeling of death, in order to feel alive.

The characters all have in common that they have seen, heard or experienced the un-watchable, something that changes them and forces them to become advocates of the impossible, and unbearable, making them speak out about that which is unspeakable. This ontological problem of imagine/experience the unimaginable is addressed by Robert Detweiler who argues along with Baudrillard that our world already lost its rooting in reality and instead is living a hyper-real. In the hyper-real the only thing that exist is the surface, where images reflect and mirror each other without signifying anything 'real'. The images are only simulacra, reflecting each other and themselves simulating the real in a situation where the real no longer exists hence making it as impossible to think the thinkable as the unthinkable.³³⁸ The characters of these films become the advocates of this unthinkable, and unimaginable, messengers of the apocalypse who like Ezekiel, and John of Revelation, have seen the truth and what really is. As a result of seeing the unwatchable they are forced to internalise the truth which changes them from being the searchers of truth, and meaning to the ones who have to utter that which is unspeakable, to speak of the abyss. The three films all feature a pilgrimage where the characters are entering that which is beyond belief, the abyss, only to experience the horror that lies within themselves as well as the absence that lies beyond the surface. In experiencing that which cannot be experienced the characters do not only look down into the abyss of humankind but are also staring into the face of

³³⁸ Robert Detweiler, 'Apocalyptic Fiction and the End(s) to Realism.' In *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century*. (Ed, David Jasper and Colin Crowder. London, Macmillan, 1990) P 169-173.

their own particular deaths, the little apocalypse. It is Kurtz words as he enters the gateway to his end, his death, that expresses that which lies beyond and his last words 'the horror, the horror' points at that which exists or that is absent at the very end.

At the end of contemporary human life as well as modernity itself it is only emptiness, a revisiting of the images of the end, a simulacra of the end and an endless ongoing apocalyptic moment. With God (or 'Bog' in Alex's words) absent from the apocalypse the connection to the divine is severed and thereby the hope for a transformation through liturgy, to renewal. In a situation where we can experience nothing that is but only the traces of what has been Derrida argues that the 'trace' is all that we can experience and everything beyond the 'trace' is absence.³³⁹ This means that the presence of God can only be seen as a 'trace' which represents ahead to that which went before it which is nothing else than our projection. The apocalypse of the postmodern is hence unable to break away from the apocalyptic moment, and from the "trace" which represents nothing, the absence, the abyss. As a result the apocalypse is caught up in a ritual, rehearsing the end over and over again, but without the ability to become liturgy. It is a celebration of mass where the bread and wine never becomes or signifies anything else then bread and wine, and hence unable to transport humanity from the bottomless pit to the promises of *Revelation 21* of a New Heaven and a New Earth. What remains are humans fending for themselves, coping and surviving, through any means possible, and the celebration or indulgence of James, Alex and Kurtz in the horror, becomes a means of survival, as well as the only ethical choice.

6.2 From dying metaphor to living image

Addressing my third question of how the imagery of the 'classic apocalypse' is transferred to the medium of film, from the literary image to a visual image the use of metaphor comes to the foreground. The Book of Revelation is most often read as a metaphor for a particular time and a particular situation. At the same time, it is a book loaded with metaphors translatable for any time and any place. In the same way the films discussed here can be seen as metaphors of their time, loaded with the imagery and the language of their society, but working as metaphors they also survive through time and change. The strength, as well as the problem with metaphors is that they are not easily translatable over time, or between situations, and what seems clear to one person, or in one time is incomprehensible to someone else in a different time or place.

The metaphors and imagery in the apocalyptic text escape the reader, and the meaning of the text is always in front of the text, constantly moving along as the reader does. Hence a true reading is never possible. Herein lies the strength of the metaphoric text: it escapes interpretation, it challenges and intrigues, and most importantly, reinvents itself in every new situation. Reading as well as watching the apocalypse is then a constant chase after meaning, after metaphors that reinvent and transform themselves, an attempt to reveal that which is concealed.

Just like the 'classical' apocalyptic the apocalyptic films or texts of our contemporary time are evasive, an ever-changing quality of escaping us, having its meaning avoiding us, challenging us. The films discussed here are all examples of contemporary apocalypses, containing the traits of the 'classical' apocalyptic as well as an imagery that constantly avoids interpretation, moves ahead of us and reinvents itself. The apocalypses portrayed in the films extrapolate on that which already is but which has been heightened and exaggerated, creating images that resemble the real but which are only images on the surface, which go in front of the real, escaping all attempts of capturing a set meaning. The metaphors are breaking down, only to be reassembled, escaping interpretation and understanding at the same time as creating meaning, and emotion, relating us to the end without understanding the end. Our incapacity to understand the radically other makes the metaphors crumble and become useless, and through this breakdown new metaphors are created. The death of the metaphor leads to the rebirth of images and a new meaning, which in turn breaks down and is reassembled in an endless repetition, where a way out of the apocalyptic moment seems impossible. The result is a fresh apocalypse freed from the old source but within its apocalyptic tradition, that has disconnected itself from God but which has retained its language, reinvented itself at the same time as it stares into the abyss, in an ever ongoing apocalyptic moment without a promise of the New, and where the presence of a God has become a 'trace' of the absence.

The three films discussed here then stand in sharp contrast to the apocalypse of Hollywood which is borrowing an apocalyptic imagery without the theology to accompany it. The Hollywood apocalypse never happens, is forever postponed, the rat race towards the end declares a winner in a Hollywood hero who fends off the evil and ensures continuity. The metaphors are captured and robbed of their content in an effort of creating a safe apocalypse of Hollywood where the end is avoided and we can keep

³³⁹ Robert Detweiler, 1990 P 156-162.

on living under the continued threat of the End which ensures a sequel. This depiction of Hollywood bear resemblance to the apocalypse or anti-apocalypse of the institutionalised church, sharply criticised by Thomas Altizer, which like its Hollywood partner is not allowed to happen and which becomes the embarrassment of the Bible. He argues that we have inherited a theological tradition that excludes the most central and earliest theme of Christianity and a result of this exclusion, a rebirth of theology has to take place in the contemporary secular, atheistic, and nihilistic world where the apocalyptic has survived.³⁴⁰ The conclusion is then that the postmodern realisation that God is dead makes it possible and even necessary to form a contemporary theology aiming at the absolutely new, not avoiding the end.³⁴¹ Altizer's critique of contemporary theology as anti-apocalyptic has the radical implication that contemporary theology is not truly Christian. The belief in redemption and the new beginning has in theology as well as in society become a belief in an end that is not an end of absolute emptiness but an end which is possible to postpone by stability.³⁴² This raises the interesting paradox that Christianity in the hands of the church has become anti-apocalyptic whilst popular culture is struggling with the apocalyptic condition of the contemporary world. For the Church to become truly Christian means to take on the challenge that the apocalypse brings and argue for a theology that would result in its own extinction.³⁴³

Where the domesticated apocalypse is a heap of dead metaphors, serving stability and safety, the thoroughly apocalyptic text follows the tradition of the classical apocalypse, being fluent, fluid and viscous, avoiding any attempt of capturing. Here Derrida's 'trace', the presence that indicates the very absence, becomes interchangeable with the apocalyptic end, the heart of darkness and the horror. In Burgess' *Clockwork Orange*, Alex is left contemplating an alternative future from the violent apocalyptic path he earlier chose. Likewise in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is returning to society, different but alive, indicating that the apocalypse, the very end has been re-rooted/re-routed, and the future re-evaluated and possible. In contrast the films do not offer this safe way out but become examples of what Altizer is calling for, nihilistic possibly even atheistic apocalypses which leaves the viewer with only a 'trace'. In *Apocalypse Now* Willard is leaving Kurtz's kingdom after staring into the abyss which is the 'trace' but

³⁴⁰ Thomas J J Altizer *Genesis and Apocalypse; A Theological Voyage Toward Authentic Christianity*. (Louisville Kentucky, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) pp. 9-11, 29.

³⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 28-30.

³⁴² Ibid, pp. 178-187.

³⁴³ Ibid, pp. 186-187 and Harvey Cox, *The Seduction of the spirit*. (London, Wildwood House, 1974), pp. 312, 328-329.

that's where the viewer as well as Willard is left, in 'The Horror, the horror'. In Kubricks' *Clockwork Orange* we leave Alex with 'lovely Ludvig van' in his hospital bed fantasising about new violent crimes, rehabilitated to continue his quest of the end. And finally in Cronenbergs' *Crash* the failure to obtain grave physical injuries sets up the set for another attempt, again rehearsing the end leaving all three films deeply embedded in the 'trace' and committed to the apocalyptic moment. A moment which like the Biblical apocalypse is now, but not yet, always at the present, and always is the future as a presence, that is an absence.

6.3 The Ethical Absence that is a Presence

It is through being committed to the apocalyptic moment that these films succeeds in being truly apocalyptic and make a theological statement about the end which is the end of realism as well as of morality as we know it. In the apocalyptic moment the imagery, language and morality are destructed/deconstructed and turned into its very reversal and what was moral meets the utterly immoral. The ever present Now of the apocalypse is a place of opposites where the only ethical choice is the utterly unethical. The apocalyptic moment stands outside morality and the morality of the end is one unknown and other to us where our measurements do not apply and our moral code is made redundant. In the apocalypse of sex or human relations that *Crash* represents, showing only sex stripped of anything else, the sex turns into its opposite and becomes anything other than sex. Something similar happens to *Apocalypse Now* where the war featured at the arrival at Kurtz compound and the heart of darkness turn into something other than war, just as the violence acted out by Alex through its very singularity becomes something other. The end is the coincidence of opposites, and as a result of this reversal of the ethical code that what seems immoral is that which has taken the challenge of the end seriously and seen the consequences. With this reversal of morals the only moral characters left are Alex, Kurtz and possibly Vaughn, they are the centre around which everything takes place and in their a-morality they are utterly moral. They are images of an apocalyptic Christ who is one of vengence, violence and disruption, utterly different from the Christ of the Church who has been robbed of all apocalyptic traits. The apocalyptic Christ has to die in order for the world to move on, but also in order for the world to open its eyes and see that which is. To live in the apocalyptic moment is to live in the unimaginable, watch the un-watchable, and experience that which cannot be experienced and this is exactly what our characters do without realising it since that

which is unimaginable cannot be seen when one is on the inside. The apocalypse is a place of destruction and deconstruction where our greatest enemy is ourselves and where we need protection from ourselves as well as from the God we have created. The space of the 'trace', the apocalyptic moment, is a space positioned between morality out of which we would need to step in order to re-evaluate our position and understand what is happening. Being inside the 'trace' the end prevents us from seeing the end but it is through staying in the apocalyptic moment that we, or the characters of the films can be delivered to the other side, to the promise of Revelation 21. However by staying in the end, within the 'trace' what is achieved is the abandoning of God and the recognition that Christ is Anti-Christ. The total ethical reversal makes Kurtz, Alex and Vaughn our only ethical choices in an apocalypse of emptiness that is always enacted and always in the future.³⁴⁴ The apocalypse then also results in an end to realism where we are faced with a situation where many are already living the unthinkable, where the End has already taken place and is continuing to take place, where Kurtz's kingdom rules, Alex repeats his crimes, car crashes have become the rule and Christ is revealed as the monster, the Anti-Christ.

³⁴⁴ Thomas J J Altizer, 1990 pp 160-187.

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