

MERGING SOULS:
A BATAILLEAN READING OF *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*

by

Shai Nickerson

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Approved by:

Dr. Kent Brintnall

Dr. Alexandra Kaloyanides

Dr. Sean McCloud

ABSTRACT

SHAI NICKERSON. *Merging Souls: A Bataillean Reading of Neon Genesis Evangelion*.
(Under the direction of DR. KENT BRINTNALL)

This thesis explores the iconic anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996) and its cinematic counterpart *The End of Evangelion* (1997) through the philosophical lens of Georges Bataille. Centered on Bataille's ideas of transgression, continuity, and the sacred, the thesis examines how the anime's existential and psychological depth reflects core human dilemmas: the tension between individuality and the yearning for unity.

The study focuses on the Human Instrumentality Project, a controversial plotline aimed at merging all human souls into a singular collective entity, erasing individual boundaries. Drawing on Bataille's works, specifically *Erotism*, *The Accursed Share*, and *Inner Experience*, the thesis contextualizes *Evangelion's* narrative as a meditation on the dissolution of boundaries and the sacred-profane dichotomy. Through critical analyses of key scenes—such as Shinji Ikari's dissolution in LCL and ultimate rejection of Instrumentality—this thesis demonstrates how *Evangelion* interrogates the cost of transcending individuality in pursuit of collective continuity.

By integrating Bataille's philosophical framework, the thesis positions *Evangelion* as a profound cultural text that challenges viewers to grapple with the paradoxical allure of connection and the pain of isolation. This novel interpretation not only deepens the scholarly understanding of the series but also reaffirms the relevance of Bataille's insights in modern media studies. Ultimately, the thesis contends that *Evangelion* exemplifies the enduring human struggle to reconcile the boundaries of identity with the desire for transcendence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis focuses on *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (the series) and *The End of Evangelion* (the film) as the primary texts of analysis. While other iterations of the franchise, such as *Death & Rebirth* and the “Rebuild” films, offer valuable reinterpretations and expansions of the original narrative, I have chosen to focus on the original series and its cinematic conclusion because they present the most philosophically rich and thematically cohesive exploration of identity, boundaries, and human connection. These works, in their historical and cultural context, provide the foundational framework through which the existential and metaphysical questions at the heart of *Evangelion* are most powerfully articulated.

Additionally, in rendering the names of Japanese individuals and characters, I have followed the convention established by A.D.V. Films in their localization of the series. This convention places the family name last, aligning with Western naming conventions for clarity and consistency. This approach ensures accessibility for readers unfamiliar with Japanese cultural norms while maintaining fidelity to the widely recognized translations of the series.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the extraordinary people who supported me through one of the most challenging experiences of my life. Writing this paper often felt like piloting an Eva: overwhelming, exhausting, and full of moments where I doubted my ability to continue. Balancing my studies with multiple jobs, including the start of my dream career, was a constant test of endurance. Living with depression, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue syndrome was like facing an impenetrable AT Field, keeping me distant from the goals I desperately wanted to achieve. There were many days when my energy was depleted, my plate far too full, and I struggled to feel proud of my work. Yet, it was the love and support of those around me that gave me the strength to persevere.

To my thesis chair, Dr. Brintnall: your guidance and mentorship have shaped me academically, professionally, and personally. Your insights and encouragement were invaluable, and I could not have completed this thesis without your steadfast support.

To the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. McCloud and Dr. Kaloyanides: thank you for your time, expertise, and thoughtful feedback, always shared with kindness.

To my husband, Perry: your unwavering patience and boundless love were my anchor in the storm. And to our cats, Zelda, V, and Beo: your playful antics, comforting presence, and quiet companionship transformed my desk into a place of solace and joy.

To my best friends, Aviana, Naomi, Kayla, Emily, and RJ: your friendship has carried me through the hardest days. I couldn't have done this without your love and laughter.

This thesis stands as a testament to the strength we find in ourselves and the resilience we draw from those who walk beside us. Thank you all for being my foundation when I felt like I was crumbling. I dedicate this work to you with all my love.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Could all men become perfect, could they attain their highest and ultimate end, they would all be equal to each other; – they would be only one – but one single subject.”
– Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of the Scholar*¹

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995–1996) and its cinematic conclusion, *The End of Evangelion* (1997), stand as watershed moments in anime history, renowned not only for their groundbreaking animation and complex storytelling but also for their profound philosophical inquiry. Widely regarded as a masterpiece, *Evangelion* is frequently cited as the most important anime of the 1990s, garnering critical and academic acclaim for its psychological depth, innovative narrative structure, and well-crafted characters. According to Susan Napier, a prominent scholar of Japanese literature and anime, *Evangelion* is “considered by many scholars to be an anime masterpiece” and “one of the most important and groundbreaking anime series ever created.”² Its global cult following and enduring popularity are a testament to its unique existential questioning, with scholars like Mariana Ortega describing its narrative as an “open work” that “requires multiple interpretations” and embodies elements of self-referentiality, parody, and deconstruction.³ Creator Hideaki Anno's own reflections on the work reinforce its philosophical openness: “Any person can see it and give his own answer [and] we must all find our own answers.”⁴

Through its innovative approach, *Evangelion* not only redefined the boundaries of anime as a medium but also established itself as a cultural and intellectual landmark that continues to resonate with audiences and scholars alike. At the heart of the series lies the Human Instrumentality

¹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of the Scholar*, trans. William Smith (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

² Susan J. Napier, “When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in ‘*Neon Genesis Evangelion*’ and ‘Serial Experiments Lain,’” *Science Fiction Studies* 29, no. 3 (2002): 424.

³ Mariana Ortega, “My Father, He Killed Me; My Mother, She Ate Me: Self, Desire, Engendering, and the Mother in ‘*Neon Genesis Evangelion*,’” *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 217.

⁴ “Hideaki Anno,” accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.evaotaku.com/omake/anno.html>.

Project, a controversial initiative that aims to merge all human souls into a collective entity, eliminating the boundaries of individual existence. This endeavor forces the series' characters—and its audience—to confront a fundamental question about identity, suffering, and the meaning of existence: Is it better to endure the isolating pain of being an individual, or to surrender one's individuality for the sake of unity, erasing the boundaries between self and other?

To explore these questions, this thesis draws on the philosophical frameworks of Georges Bataille, one of the 20th century's most challenging and provocative thinkers. Bataille's work, particularly *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1957), *The Accursed Share* (1949), and *Inner Experience* (1943), offers a compelling lens through which to interpret the thematic and existential concerns of *Evangelion*. Bataille's preoccupation with transgression, excess, sacrifice, and the dissolution of boundaries between the sacred and the profane provides a rich theoretical foundation for understanding the metaphysical stakes of the Human Instrumentality Project and the broader narrative of *Evangelion*. By examining *Evangelion* through Bataille's concepts, this thesis sheds new light on the anime's engagement with questions of individuality, continuity, and the human desire for transcendence.

Bataille's philosophy is fundamentally concerned with the limits of human experience and the tensions that arise from our desire to transcend these limits. In *Erotism*, for example, Bataille explores how human beings are drawn to experiences that challenge the boundaries of selfhood, such as death, eroticism, and sacrifice, all of which blur the lines between individual and collective, sacred and profane. In *Inner Experience*, Bataille reflects on the intense, often mystical experiences that lead to the dissolution of personal identity, proposing that such moments of ecstasy or transcendence provide access to a continuity that dissolves the isolating boundaries of the individual self. This tension between discontinuity (the pain and isolation of individual

existence) and continuity (the desire for union, transcendence, and dissolution into something greater) forms the crux of both *Evangelion* and Bataille's thought.

The guiding research question of this thesis asks: How does *Evangelion*, through the Human Instrumentality Project and its broader narrative, reflect Bataille's philosophical inquiries into the dissolution of boundaries, the sacred and the profane, and the role of excess in the human experience? In addressing this question, this project will explore how the existential crises faced by characters such as Shinji Ikari, Rei Ayanami, and Asuka Langley Soryu align with Bataille's vision of human experience as a constant negotiation between individual suffering and the desire for transcendence. Through their struggles with loneliness, fear, and desire, the characters of *Evangelion* embody Bataille's central concern with the tension between the individual's need to maintain boundaries and the simultaneous yearning to exceed them, to merge with something beyond the self.

This thesis is significant not only for its contribution to anime studies but also for its engagement with philosophical scholarship. *Evangelion* has long been celebrated for its psychological depth, religious symbolism, and existential themes. But never before has attention been paid to how the series resonates with Georges Bataille's unique brand of philosophical inquiry. By integrating Bataille's ideas on transgression, sacrifice, and the sacred-profane dichotomy, this study offers a fresh perspective on *Evangelion* as a work that challenges traditional boundaries—between life and death, individual and collective, and the sacred and profane. In particular, Bataille's notion of excess, understood as the driving force behind both transgressive acts and mystical experiences, offers a powerful interpretive tool for understanding the Human Instrumentality Project, which represents the ultimate transgression of the boundary between self and other. Moreover, this thesis aims to show how *Evangelion*, as a cultural text, engages with

some of the most pressing philosophical questions of modernity: What does it mean to be an individual in a world where connection is fraught with pain? What are the costs of transcending individual boundaries, and what do we lose in the process?

The method of analysis in this thesis will involve a critical comparative reading of key scenes from *Evangelion* alongside Bataille's philosophical works, focusing particularly on the psychological and existential struggles of the characters as they navigate the boundary between individuality and continuity. Scenes such as Shinji's absorption into the LCL (a primordial substance that symbolizes life and the potential for merging with others), Rei's revelation as a clone of Shinji's mother, Human Instrumentality, and Shinji's ultimate rejection of it, will be interpreted through Bataille's theories on transgression, sacrifice, and the sacred. This analysis will also engage with existing scholarship on *Evangelion* in the fields of anime studies, philosophy, and media studies, situating this thesis within broader academic debates on the intersection of philosophy and contemporary media.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to prove that *Evangelion* is not only a groundbreaking work of anime but also a profound meditation on the existential dilemmas that define the human condition. Through a close reading of the series and its cinematic conclusion alongside the philosophical works of Georges Bataille, this study will offer new insights into *Evangelion's* exploration of individuality, community, and the boundaries of human experience, while also demonstrating the continued relevance of Bataille's thought in analyzing modern cultural texts.

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995-1996) is a twenty-six-episode Japanese mecha anime series created by Hideaki Anno and produced by Gainax.⁵ While the early episodes follow a somewhat standard mecha-anime format of action scenes and monster-of-the-week plots, the series gradually shifts its focus toward the inner lives of the characters. Set in the year 2015, the story unfolds in a post-apocalyptic world devastated by the Second Impact, an event catalyzed by a failed experiment on Adam, the First Angel. This catastrophe annihilated half the world's population, leaving humanity to contend with the mysterious Angels, enigmatic beings that threaten annihilation. In response, humanity relies on NERV, a paramilitary organization that deploys Evangelion units: massive biomechanical constructs piloted exclusively by teenagers. NERV operates under the public pretense of defending the world but is secretly influenced by SEELE, an enigmatic group pursuing a grand, esoteric plan known as the Human Instrumentality Project.

Through this premise, *Evangelion* explores not only the struggle for survival but also the profound psychological and emotional traumas experienced by its characters. Anno, the creator of *Evangelion*, described the series as a reflection of his own psychological struggles, stating, “To live is to change. I started this production with the wish that once the production [was] complete, the world, and the heroes would change. That was my true desire. I tried to include everything of myself in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*—myself [and my period of depression], a broken man who could do nothing for four years. A man who ran away for four years, one who was simply not dead.”⁶ Anno's vision imbues *Evangelion* with a dual narrative structure. On one level, the story

⁵ *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The Complete Series* (SHOUT! FACTORY, 2021).

⁶ “What Were We Trying to Make Here? - Eva Monkey, an Evangelion Fan Website,” accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.evamonkey.com/writings/anno-hideaki-what-were-we-trying-to-make-here.php>.

is a conventional tale of humanity's defense against extraterrestrial threats. However, beneath this veneer lies an intricate exploration of human fragility, loneliness, and the existential quest for self-worth.

Central to NERV's strategy is the deployment of Evangelion units, or Evas, giant biomechanical constructs that blur the line between human and divine. Built using parts derived from the Angels themselves, the Evas are piloted exclusively by teenagers, selected for reasons that are gradually revealed throughout the series. These machines are as much symbols of the pilots' internal struggles as they are tools for humanity's survival. Their humanoid appearance and shared traits with Angels highlight the series' recurring theme of blurred boundaries—between self and other, humanity and divinity, and isolation and unity.

The strength of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* lies heavily in its characters, each of whom embodies specific psychological conflicts that mirror the broader philosophical themes of the series. Anno himself remarked, "It's strange that *Evangelion* has become such a hit—all the characters are so sick!"⁷ This observation underscores the series' unflinching portrayal of deeply flawed, human characters whose psychological struggles resonate powerfully with audiences, challenging traditional heroic archetypes and redefining the emotional depth of anime protagonists. Shinji Ikari, the fourteen-year-old protagonist, is an emotionally fragile boy reluctantly thrust into the role of piloting Evangelion Unit-01. Unlike traditional mecha heroes, Shinji is not a brave or confident figure. He is deeply insecure, introverted, and burdened by a profound sense of abandonment. His estranged relationship with his father, Commander of NERV Gendo Ikari, defines much of his psychological makeup. Shinji was abandoned at the age of three by Gendo after the death of his mother, Yui Ikari, a loss that left him emotionally adrift. Anno

⁷ "Neon Genesis Evangelion: The Death and the Rebirth," accessed November 19, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070927035716/www.aoianime.hu/evangelion/index.php?page=interanno>.

described Shinji as “a cowardly young man who feels that his father has abandoned him, and so has convinced himself that he is a completely unnecessary person so much that he cannot even commit suicide.”⁸ This characterization sets the tone for the series, subverting the traditional hero narrative.

Shinji’s father, Gendo Ikari, commands NERV, the organization responsible for fighting the Angels. Gendo is cold, manipulative, and secretive, and his relationship with Shinji is one of emotional distance. Gendo's personal motives, however, drive much of the series' plot. His obsession with resurrecting his deceased wife, Yui Ikari, under the guise of the Human Instrumentality Project, reveals a deep existential fear of death and loss. This goal blinds him to the needs of his son, which fuels Shinji's emotional isolation.

Shinji’s struggles extend beyond his relationship with his father. His reluctant acceptance of the role as an Eva pilot reflects his deep-seated desire for approval and recognition. In the early episodes, Shinji finds fleeting validation in his ability to pilot Unit-01, a role that earns him praise from NERV staff and his peers. However, this external validation fails to resolve his internal conflicts. As highlighted in the series’ introspective climax, Shinji’s actions are revealed to stem from a hollow dependency on others’ approval, rather than a genuine sense of self-worth. “What you've described is only a dependent or symbiotic relationship . . . [A]ll you wish for is for others to depend on you, then you wait for someone else to give you happiness,” Shinji is told during a moment of self-reflection.⁹ This exploration of self-deception and dependency is central to Shinji’s character arc.

Rei Ayanami, another key character, represents a contrasting approach to the human condition. A pilot of Eva Unit-00 and the First Child, Rei is a quiet and enigmatic figure. Initially

⁸ “What Were We Trying to Make Here?”

⁹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Episode 25.

presented as emotionless and distant, Rei's journey throughout the series reveals her internal struggle to understand her identity and place in the world. Her connection to Commander Ikari is complex and ambiguous, suggesting both deep loyalty and an undercurrent of manipulation. Over time, Rei forms a bond with Shinji, one that helps her begin to question her purpose and humanity. Rei's role becomes increasingly tied to the metaphysical aspects of the series, particularly the Human Instrumentality Project, which seeks to unify all human consciousness into a single entity, erasing individuality in the process.

In stark contrast to both Shinji and Rei is Asuka Langley Soryu, the pilot of Eva Unit-02 and the Second Child. Asuka's fiery personality and fierce competitiveness mask a deep reservoir of pain and insecurity. Her childhood was marred by tragedy—her mother's descent into madness and eventual suicide left her with a desperate need for validation. Asuka's bravado and arrogance often clash with Shinji's passivity, but their interactions reveal an unspoken kinship rooted in shared loneliness. Despite her outward hostility, Asuka's vulnerability emerges as a central theme in her character arc, showcasing the series' nuanced approach to human emotion.

The Angels, the enigmatic antagonists of the series, are as mysterious as they are terrifying. Unlike typical anime villains, the Angels' motives are inscrutable, and their appearances and abilities are wildly varied. Each Angel presents a unique challenge to the pilots, requiring not just brute force but strategy and innovation. The Angels' AT Fields (standing for Absolute Terror), which protect them from harm, are mirrored by the Evas' own AT Fields, representing an invisible barrier between individuals. This concept becomes a central metaphor for the series' exploration of human isolation and the struggle to connect with others, as the physical and psychic separation represented by the AT Field encapsulates the larger theme of alienation and the desire to overcome the walls that divide human beings. Moreover, the Angel's shared genetic link to humans further

complicates the moral landscape of the series, suggesting that the line between enemy and ally is far thinner than it appears.

Other key figures, such as Misato Katsuragi, Ritsuko Akagi, and Kaworu Nagisa, offer important thematic contributions. Misato's role as Shinji's guardian contrasts her own emotional scars, stemming from her complex relationships and the trauma of the Second Impact. Kaworu, another child pilot revealed to be the final Angel, becomes a pivotal figure in Shinji's personal growth, offering him a glimpse of unconditional love, but ultimately presenting a moral dilemma for humanity's survival.

The mechanics of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*—its world-building, technologies, and metaphysical underpinnings—serve as the narrative backbone, framing the psychological and philosophical explorations of its characters. The Evangelions, while ostensibly bio-mechanical mechas, are far more complex. Each Eva unit houses a human soul—specifically, the souls of the pilots' mothers. This concept of the maternal soul within the Evas deepens the already intricate relationships between the pilots and their roles. For instance, Shinji's connection with Unit-01 is not only technological but deeply emotional, as the Eva contains the soul of his mother, Yui. This psycho-biological connection reinforces the maternal themes of protection, birth, and individuation that run throughout the series. As Shinji is drawn into Eva Unit-01, the boundary between him and his mother's soul blurs, further complicating his already troubled relationship with his parents.

Perhaps the most significant mechanic is the Human Instrumentality Project, a metaphysical event orchestrated by SEELE and caused by a final apocalyptic event referred to as the Third Impact. The Human Instrumentality Project seeks to dissolve individual consciousness, merging humanity into a singular collective existence. While this idea offers the promise of an end

to loneliness and suffering, it also represents the loss of individuality and personal agency. NERV's efforts to avert the Third Impact by combatting the Angels, ostensibly to preserve humanity, are revealed to instead be a coverup for Commander Gendo Ikari to initiate Human Instrumentality, as his only desire is to reunite with his deceased wife, Yui. As humanity begins to dissolve into a collective sea of souls, the boundaries between individuals break down, and Shinji is faced with a vision of a world without separation. Shinji's rejection of Instrumentality in favor of individuality is a defining moment in the series, marking his first genuine assertion of self-worth. Anno explained this decision as a reflection of Shinji's growth: "Shinji's rejection of this state, and separation from Eva at the end, is a way for him to separate himself away from his mother and ultimately insist on his own individuality instead of conforming with the community."¹⁰

The final two episodes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* deviate dramatically from the rest of the series. Abandoning traditional narrative structure, they focus almost entirely on the psychological breakdown of Shinji during Instrumentality, utilizing abstract visuals, monologues, and internal dialogues to depict his inner crisis. This sudden shift to a minimalist and introspective presentation left many fans feeling confused and dissatisfied, sparking an intense backlash. As Christensen and Holmes describe in their chapter "Hands Off My Show!," "*Neon Genesis Evangelion's* final two episodes were loathed by fans, many of whom took to the then-nascent Internet to express their displeasure and to even levy death threats against Anno."¹¹ This vitriolic response demonstrates the unique relationship *Evangelion* cultivated with its audience—a relationship that gave viewers a profound sense of ownership over the series.

¹⁰ "Hideaki Anno," accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.evaotaku.com/omake/anno.html>.

¹¹ Jeremy Christensen and Eric Holmes, "Hands Off My Show!," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022), 173.

This backlash prompted Anno and the studio to produce *The End of Evangelion* (1997), a feature film that offered a more traditional and physical depiction of the series' conclusion.¹² Far from being an “alternate” ending, many—including myself—interpret the film as portraying what was happening externally during Episodes 25 and 26, which primarily take place within Shinji's mind during Instrumentality. *The End of Evangelion* responds to fan demands for resolution, offering a “less-cerebral conclusion” that, in the words of Christensen and Holmes, “assuaged fan concerns and made everything okay with the otaku universe.”¹³ However, the film does more than merely placate—it complements the original episodes, weaving together the psychological and physical dimensions of the story.

Neon Genesis Evangelion and *End of Evangelion* stand as a profound meditation on the human condition. The dual endings, the introspective finale of the original series and the apocalyptic events depicted in the film, invite diverse interpretations, ensuring that the series remains a subject of analysis and debate. The events of the series—culminating in the Human Instrumentality Project—pose the ultimate question: Is it better to live as an individual, with all the pain that entails, or to merge into a collective whole, free from suffering but devoid of personal identity? The series' refusal to offer a clear answer to this question is perhaps its greatest strength. It leaves the viewer with the same ambiguity that its characters face—an ambiguity that mirrors the uncertainties of life itself.

¹² *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The End of Evangelion* (WEA, 2002).

¹³ Christensen and Holmes, “Hands Off My Show!” 173.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Philosophical Approaches to *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

The philosophical dimensions of *Evangelion* have captivated scholars and viewers alike, making it a fertile ground for academic exploration. In recent years, various works have dissected the series' existential, psychoanalytic, and ethical underpinnings, positioning *Evangelion* as a critical text in anime studies and philosophical inquiry. One of the most comprehensive collections on this subject, *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, offers a rich dialogue on the series' engagement with key existential and psychoanalytic ideas, providing a foundation for my thesis.¹⁴ While this existing scholarship covers a broad range of philosophical discussions surrounding *Evangelion*, my project seeks to deepen these conversations by incorporating the unexplored theoretical lens of Georges Bataille. Several chapters from this collection are particularly relevant to my work, offering insights into the philosophical and existential tensions that define *Evangelion*. These chapters serve as touchstones for analyzing the series through Bataille's concepts of boundaries, continuity, and the sacred/profane divide.

Heather Browning and Walter Veit, in their essay, "The Desperate Search for Meaning in Life," explore the existential dilemmas faced by the series' protagonists. Drawing on Camus' assertion that the fundamental question of philosophy is whether life is worth living, the authors analyze how Shinji, Rei, and Asuka seek meaning in their roles as Eva pilots. Browning and Veit emphasize the necessity of relationships in self-definition, as encapsulated by Shinji's realization that one's sense of self is shaped by the boundaries between "self" and "other."¹⁵

¹⁴ Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters, eds., *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling* (Open Universe, 2022).

¹⁵ Heather Browning and Walter Veit, "The Desperate Search for Meaning in Life," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022).

Nathan Visser and Adam Barkman's chapter, "How Do We Know Who We Are?," similarly addresses the relational nature of identity. The authors analyze Shinji's rejection of the Human Instrumentality Project, a phenomenon that dissolves individual boundaries into a collective whole, and argue that the essence of humanity lies in its differences. Additionally, the chapter critiques existential self-reliance through Asuka's narrative, revealing her dependence on others despite her outward independence.¹⁶ This interplay between relational identity and existential autonomy complements Bataille's notions of intimacy and self-definition through transgressive acts, providing a critical framework for analyzing *Evangelion's* central conflicts.

Luka Perušić's essay, "The Mysterious AT," focuses on the AT Field as a literal and symbolic boundary of individuality. Described as a "protective field of energy projected by the self of each conscious individual," the AT Field simultaneously shields against external threats and internal insecurities.¹⁷ This boundary not only guards against external threats but also against the terror arising from within—unresolved fears and insecurities. The chapter further explores how the removal of the AT Field in the Human Instrumentality Project symbolizes the dissolution of individuality, which Shinji ultimately rejects. Khegan M. Delpont's chapter, "Evangelion's Terminal Dogma," examines the metaphysical and postmodern dimensions of *Evangelion*, particularly the tension between unity and multiplicity as embodied in the Human Instrumentality Project. Delpont critiques the erasure of individuality in favor of collective harmony, framing Instrumentality as a pursuit of modernity's ideals of certainty and absoluteness.¹⁸

¹⁶ Nathan Visser and Barkman Adam, "How Do We Know Who We Are?," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022).

¹⁷ Luka Perušić's, "The Mysterious AT," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022), 104.

¹⁸ Khegan Delpont, "Evangelion's Terminal Dogma," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022).

Gionatan C. Pacheco's chapter, "Plant a Tree, Build an AT Field, and Wait for the Apocalypse," provides further insight into the AT Field's metaphysical and ethical dimensions. Pacheco uses the Tree of Life as a metaphor for psychological evolution, highlighting the tension between individuality and relational existence. The AT Field, described as a manifestation of "our will to assert existence," reflects Bataille's view that boundaries both create meaning and facilitate their own transcendence.¹⁹

Finally, Deniz Yenimazman's chapter, "From Kabbalah, Angels, and Apocalypse to Kaiju, Mecha, and Personal Growth," situates *Evangelion* within the context of religious and mythological symbolism. The chapter also compares Shinji Ikari's journey to that of Christ, asserting that both characters undergo sacrificial rites that embody a moral message: "They both commit the ultimate sacrifice to save the future of mankind."²⁰ This chapter enriches my analysis by providing a framework for interpreting *Evangelion* as a narrative that merges mythic archetypes with modern psychological and philosophical concerns, emphasizing the transformative potential of self-awareness and responsibility.

Collectively, these chapters form a robust philosophical framework that illuminates the existential and psychological complexities of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. By incorporating Bataille's theoretical lens, my thesis extends these conversations, offering a novel interpretation of the series' exploration of boundaries, individuality, and continuity. This intersection of Bataille's philosophy with the rich existential discourse already established by *Evangelion* scholarship advances our understanding of the series as a deeply philosophical and culturally significant work.

¹⁹ Gionatan Pacheco, "Plant a Tree, Build an AT Field, and Wait for the Apocalypse," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022), 164.

²⁰ Deniz Yenimazman, "From Kabbalah, Angels, and Apocalypse to Kaiju, Mecha, and Personal Growth," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022), 202.

3.2 Anime Studies and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

The anthology *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion* contextualizes *Evangelion* as a case study for examining anime's unique media characteristics. *Evangelion*'s "superplanar narrative structures," described by Timothy Lamarre, reveal its layered storytelling and thematic hybridity, dismantling boundaries between genres and media.²¹ This framing is critical for analyzing how *Evangelion* interrogates the sacred/profane divide and the existential conflict between individuality and collective unity.

José Andrés Santiago Iglesias's essay, "Not Just Immobile: Moving Drawings and Visual Synecdoches in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," examines *Evangelion*'s deliberate use of stillness, focusing on how the series uses stillness as a deliberate narrative and aesthetic device. It challenges conventional notions of limited animation, redefining immobility as a dynamic force within anime. The author introduces "ratio dynamism" to describe the juxtaposition of static images with fluid, high-frame-rate sequences, arguing that this variation creates a rhythm unique to anime. This approach not only engages the audience emotionally but also aligns with broader media traditions, such as the visual synecdoches seen in Japanese cinema and manga. For example, Santiago Iglesias discusses the iconic still frame of Eva-01 holding Kaworu in Episode 24, which lasts over a minute and builds narrative tension through its simplicity and emotional weight.²² Similarly, the "dynamic immobility" of images in the lift scene between Rei and Asuka exemplifies how stillness can evoke profound discomfort and social tension without relying on action or dialogue.²³

²¹ José Andrés Santiago Iglesias and Ana Soler Baena, eds., *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021), 7.

²² José Andrés Santiago Iglesias, "Not Just Immobile: Moving Drawings and Visual Synecdoches in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," in *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion*, ed. José Andrés Santiago Iglesias and Ana Soler Baena (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021), 33.

²³ Santiago Iglesias, "Not Just Immobile: Moving Drawings and Visual Synecdoches in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," 34.

Ida Kirkegaard's essay, "Play It Again, Hideaki: Using the Cel Bank in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," examines the innovative use of "bank cuts"—recycled animations—in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as a deliberate narrative and aesthetic tool. Rather than dismissing these recycled sequences as cost-saving measures, Kirkegaard highlights their layered function in creating continuity, genre adherence, and later, deconstruction of realism. For example, the repeated sequence of Misato drinking a beer establishes a domestic familiarity that contrasts with the escalating chaos of the series.²⁴ Moreover, the reuse of scenes during introspective moments, such as Shinji's psychological confrontations, underscores the constructed nature of his reality, emphasizing his fragmented perception of others, such as Asuka.²⁵

The chapter "Objecthood at the End of the World: Anime's Acting and Its Ecological Stakes in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*" by Stevie Suan investigates how *Evangelion* critiques modern notions of individuality and agency through animation's unique capacities. Suan highlights how the series employs both "embodied acting" and "figurative acting" to explore selfhood, with embodied acting focusing on depth and individuality, while figurative acting emphasizes relationality and objecthood. For instance, Suan notes that "Eva-01 shatters this concept [of human control] by scuttling on all-fours and devouring an Angel like a carnivorous mammal," demonstrating its agency beyond human manipulation.²⁶ Overall, *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion* provides a robust analytical framework for understanding the series' thematic complexity and its technical and aesthetic properties.

²⁴ Ida Kirkegaard, "Play It Again, Hideaki: Using the Cel Bank in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," in *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion*, ed. José Andrés Santiago Iglesias and Ana Soler Baena (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021), 68.

²⁵ Kirkegaard, "Play It Again, Hideaki: Using the Cel Bank in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," 73.

²⁶ Stevie Suan, "Objecthood at the End of the World: Anime's Acting and Its Ecological Stakes in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," in *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion*, ed. José Andrés Santiago Iglesias and Ana Soler Baena (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021), 143.

3.3 Anime Studies and Religion

In *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Dr. Jolyon Thomas explores the nuanced ways in which anime and manga incorporate religious themes, often repurposing them for narrative rather than doctrinal purposes. This framework is instrumental for analyzing *Neon Genesis Evangelion* through Bataille's philosophy, as it underscores the series' use of religious symbols as aesthetic rather than didactic elements. Thomas notes that works like *Evangelion* “prompt intellectual interest in religions” without an overt commitment to religious doctrine, using symbols and themes primarily to evoke existential reflection rather than religious instruction.²⁷

This approach mirrors Bataille's understanding of the sacred-profane dichotomy as more about the transgression of boundaries than adherence to religious conventions. Thomas's interpretation of *Evangelion*'s Kabbalistic and Christian symbols as “cosmetic” aligns with Bataille's idea of the sacred as a domain of awe and mystery that exists beyond the boundaries of conventional religious life. By presenting religious elements in an aesthetic framework, *Evangelion* engages viewers in questions of continuity and isolation central to Bataille's thought.

Moreover, Thomas's notion of “re-creation” in anime—where viewers actively reinterpret media through personal or spiritual frameworks—adds depth to this analysis by illustrating how audiences reimagine religious themes to fit their existential concerns.²⁸ This interpretive process itself can be seen as a form of Bataillean transgression, as audiences dissolve the “discontinuities” imposed by fixed religious dogmas, embracing a more fluid and personalized spirituality. Through

²⁷ Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 71.

²⁸ Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*. 15-16.

Evangelion, viewers confront Bataille's profound question of whether it is better to live in individual isolation or merge into a collective, undifferentiated whole.

3.4 Bataille and Media Studies

Andrey Gordienko's dissertation, "The Politics of Eros: The Philosophy of Georges Bataille and Japanese New Wave Cinema," provides a nuanced reading of Bataille's theories, enriching the analysis of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Gordienko examines Bataille's "inward turn," a philosophical shift from direct political engagement to an exploration of individual experience and transgression, where eroticism becomes a means of resisting societal norms.²⁹ He frames Bataille's concept of sovereignty as "a shattering experience . . . [T]hat unfetters the individual from the consistent identity imposed upon him by the social order," offering a lens to understand *Evangelion's* critique of enforced unity and its existential dilemmas.³⁰

Gordienko highlights Bataille's transgression as a dissolution of boundaries, leading to "nonknowledge" and a confrontation with the self's limits.³¹ This idea resonates with *Evangelion's* depiction of Instrumentality, where traumatic transformations such as the dissolution into LCL embody Bataille's vision of unity and obliteration of identity. Gordienko's engagement with Bataille's "passion for the Real" further underscores how *Evangelion* interrogates existential suffering and individuality through the characters' psychological confrontations and ultimate rejection of collective dissolution.³²

²⁹ Andrey Gordienko, "The Politics of Eros: The Philosophy of Georges Bataille and Japanese New Wave Cinema" (Ph.D., United States -- California, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012), <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1022492002/abstract/A75FEB13CD184640PQ/1>. 16.

³⁰ Gordienko, "The Politics of Eros." 18.

³¹ Gordienko, "The Politics of Eros." 5.

³² Gordienko, "The Politics of Eros." 16.

Gordienko's exploration of Bataille's theories of sovereignty, transgression, and eroticism offers a compelling framework that can be used to analyze *Evangelion's* critique of identity loss within collective consciousness. By applying Bataille's later concepts, such as the "community of lovers" and a "politics of subtraction," his work provides insight into how Shinji's final decision to embrace individual suffering can be understood as a profound act of resistance, highlighting the enduring tension between individuality and enforced unity.³³

Another useful work for my analysis is Jeremy Biles' *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form*, which provides a compelling framework for analyzing *Neon Genesis Evangelion* through Bataillean concepts of monstrosity, the sacred, and the dissolution of form. Central to Biles' analysis is the "sacred monster," which embodies the "conjunction of opposites," being "at once human and holy, mortal and deific."³⁴ This concept illuminates the grotesque and sacred imagery in *Evangelion's* Instrumentality Project, where bodily dissolution and deindividualization merge terror and transcendence.

Biles' discussion of Bataille's notion of violence and intimacy further deepens this analysis. He explains that true intimacy requires "ecstatic and intolerable" boundary dissolution, a dynamic mirrored in Instrumentality's fusion of identities, which promises relief from suffering but provokes existential horror.³⁵ Biles' interpretation of Bataille's Nietzschean influences frames this dissolution not as a loss, but as an ambivalent state where existence and nonexistence converge.³⁶

The grotesque surrealism of *Evangelion* resonates with Biles' analysis of Bataille's "extremist surrealism," which confronts the sordid realities of material existence. *Evangelion's*

³³ Gordienko, "The Politics of Eros." 25, 211.

³⁴ Jeremy Biles, *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form*, Illustrated edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 4.

³⁵ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*. 11, 15.

³⁶ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*. 7.

unsettling imagery aligns with Bataille's vision of a "wounding reality" that shatters idealized form, merging the sacred with the grotesque.³⁷ Biles' notion of monstrosity as the "culmination of the left-handed sacred" underscores Evangelion's thematic interplay between divine ecstasy and extreme horror, exemplifying Bataille's aesthetics of contradiction.³⁸ Through Biles' work, *Ecce Monstrum* provides a powerful lens for interpreting Evangelion's exploration of monstrosity, sacrificial self-destruction, and the dissolution of identity, situating the series within Bataillean frameworks of sacred experience and existential terror.

³⁷ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*. 243.

³⁸ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*. 286.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK—BATAILLE’S PHILOSOPHY

4.1 Continuity vs. Discontinuity

Georges Bataille’s philosophical framework revolves around the duality of continuity and discontinuity, two essential states that define human existence. Discontinuity refers to the separateness of individuals, marked by their distinct births, lives, and inevitable deaths. This state defines personal identity and agency and entails profound isolation and anguish. Bataille emphasizes this tension, writing, “Discontinuity is the very condition of individuality; but continuity is what this individuality seeks to transcend.”³⁹ The boundaries of discontinuity both protect and confine, creating a persistent tension between the need for self-preservation and the longing to overcome isolation.

Continuity, in contrast, signifies a primordial oneness—a state in which individual distinctions dissolve into an undifferentiated whole. Bataille associates continuity with death, eroticism, and the sacred, as these realms involve the dissolution of boundaries and a confrontation with the void. He describes this state as one that humans both fear and yearn for: “We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation . . . [B]ut we yearn for our lost continuity.”⁴⁰ Continuity is tied to death and the sacred, as it involves a dissolution of boundaries, returning individuals to a state of unity beyond individual existence. Importantly, continuity is not unity in a relational or harmonious sense; it is the annihilation of individuality, a terrifying yet alluring obliteration of selfhood.

This duality lies at the heart of Bataille’s understanding of human experience. Continuity offers a release from the suffering of isolation but comes at the cost of selfhood, which humans

³⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vols. 2 and 3: The History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 24.

⁴⁰ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, First Edition (City Lights Books, 1986), 15.

instinctively resist. This ambivalence is captured in Bataille's statement: "The longing for continuity, for a realm where separateness disappears, drives human experience into the transgressive and sacred."⁴¹ At the same time, the individual's resistance to this dissolution affirms the value of discontinuity, as the boundaries of selfhood make identity and agency possible.

Bataille's exploration of continuity and discontinuity is deeply tied to his broader themes of transgression, eroticism, and the sacred/profane dichotomy. Acts of transgression, which deliberately violate the boundaries of discontinuity, momentarily reveal continuity and its profound implications. However, these acts are not without consequence, as they challenge the structures that define individuality and identity. For Bataille, death exemplifies the ultimate return to continuity, as he states, "Death is a return to the continuity of being, dissolving the isolation of life."⁴² Yet, human existence is defined by a constant negotiation between these states—the yearning for continuity and the inevitable separation of discontinuity.

In applying Bataille's framework to *Evangelion*, it is crucial to distinguish between continuity as Bataille conceptualizes it and the relational unity often sought by the series' characters. While the characters in *Evangelion* long for connection or unity, their experiences of continuity—such as through the Human Instrumentality Project—align more closely with Bataille's vision of the dissolution of individual boundaries rather than a harmonious relational unity. Instrumentality represents not the merging of selves in a relational sense but the obliteration of individuality into an abyssal state, raising questions about whether such a loss is desirable or horrific.

⁴¹ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 26.

⁴² Bataille, *Eroticism*. 13.

4.2 Eroticism and Transgression

Eroticism, as defined by Georges Bataille, extends far beyond its common association with physical or sexual desire. For Bataille, eroticism is a profound philosophical concept tied to the dissolution of boundaries and the interplay between life and death. He asserts that eroticism represents “assenting to life even in death.”⁴³ At its core, eroticism reflects humanity’s drive to transcend the isolation of individuality (discontinuity) by dissolving boundaries and momentarily experiencing unity (continuity). This dissolution often entails acts that challenge or violate societal norms and taboos, positioning eroticism as intrinsically linked to transgression.

Transgression is a central concept in Bataille’s philosophy. It refers to the deliberate act of crossing boundaries—whether physical, moral, or existential—that define human existence. Bataille writes, “Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same.”⁴⁴ In this sense, transgression does not abolish boundaries but affirms their importance by revealing the tension between what is permitted and forbidden. Through the act of transgression, individuals encounter the sacred—a domain Bataille closely associates with excess, danger, and the collapse of conventional order.

Eroticism and transgression, therefore, are deeply intertwined. Eroticism challenges the separateness of individual beings by dissolving the boundaries that define them, creating a space where the sacred and the profane intersect. Bataille describes this as “anguish turning to delight,” emphasizing the paradoxical nature of these experiences, which combine fear and desire.⁴⁵ The

⁴³ Bataille, *Erotism*. 11.

⁴⁴ Bataille, *Erotism*. 190.

⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 34.

sacred, in Bataille's view, emerges from moments of transgression, as they reveal the fragility of human constructs and open pathways to continuity.

Bataille's philosophical framework situates eroticism as a liminal force that disrupts the structures of ordinary existence. He characterizes it as a force that is not merely indulgent but transformative, stating, "Eroticism always entails a breaking of the regularity of the laws of existence."⁴⁶ This breaking of laws underscores the sacred/profane dynamic central to his philosophy. Sacred acts, such as ritual sacrifice, embody transgression by violating the boundaries of life and death, individual and collective.

The relationship between eroticism and death is especially significant in Bataille's thought. Death represents the ultimate transgression, dissolving the boundaries of the self and returning individuals to continuity. Bataille articulates this connection, noting that eroticism "reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea."⁴⁷ By dissolving the separateness of individual existence, erotic acts echo the transformative and destabilizing nature of death, which Bataille frames as a gateway to the sacred.

Through eroticism and transgression, Bataille explores the human condition's most fundamental tensions: the desire to connect with others and the fear of losing one's individuality. These concepts are not merely acts of rebellion but serve as a means of encountering the sacred and experiencing the continuity humans yearn for. In Bataille's framework, eroticism becomes a profound exploration of human boundaries, their transgression, and the revelations such acts produce.

⁴⁶ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 65.

⁴⁷ Bataille, *Erotism*. 22.

4.3 The Sacred and the Profane

Georges Bataille's philosophy explores the sacred and profane as interdependent realms, deeply entwined through acts of excess and transgression. The sacred, in Bataille's framework, is not inherently pure or separate from the profane; rather, it emerges through the violation of the ordinary and the everyday. Bataille asserts, "The sacred is always linked to sacrifice, where the continuity of existence is revealed through the destruction of the discontinuous."⁴⁸ This relationship between the sacred and the profane forms the foundation of his views on sacrifice, a pivotal concept in his thought.

The sacred is associated with continuity, unity, and the dissolution of individual boundaries, while the profane encompasses the mundane, structured, and discontinuous aspects of life. These realms are not opposites but exist in a state of tension, where acts of transgression bridge the two. Bataille explains that the sacred is accessed through acts that disrupt the profane order, often by confronting taboos and boundaries. He writes, "The sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo."⁴⁹

Sacrifice serves as the ultimate expression of this dynamic, revealing the sacred through the destruction of individual existence. In sacrifice, a discontinuous being—whether an animal, object, or person—is offered up, and its annihilation exposes the continuity of existence. Bataille elaborates, "Sacrifice is the destruction of the creature's discontinuity . . . [I]t is put to death and brought back into continuity with all being."⁵⁰ This transformative act dissolves boundaries, momentarily revealing the unity that lies beyond the profane world.

⁴⁸ Bataille, *Erotism*. 22.

⁴⁹ Bataille, *Erotism*. 126.

⁵⁰ Bataille, *Erotism*. 90.

Bataille's view of sacrifice is deeply tied to his understanding of excess. Sacrifice, in his framework, represents an act of unregulated expenditure—an offering that does not serve utilitarian ends but instead seeks to engage with the sacred. He describes sacrifice as “a violent and excessive act,” emphasizing that it reveals the limits of human understanding while confronting the void beyond.⁵¹ This excessive nature aligns sacrifice with both death and eroticism, as all three involve the transgression of individual boundaries and a confrontation with continuity.

For Bataille, the sacred-profane dynamic also encompasses an inherent ambivalence. The sacred is simultaneously awe-inspiring and terrifying, as it confronts individuals with the dissolution of their selfhood. This duality is evident in Bataille's assertion that “the sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression,” highlighting how moments of excess and sacrifice simultaneously maintain and subvert societal norms.⁵² Individuals access a domain where continuity and discontinuity collide by engaging in acts that defy ordinary boundaries.

Ultimately, Bataille's exploration of the sacred, the profane, and sacrifice, underscores his broader philosophical inquiry into human existence. Sacrifice exemplifies the tension between the structured world of discontinuity and the formless realm of continuity, revealing the fragility and permeability of human boundaries. Through acts of excess and destruction, Bataille situates the sacred as a force that disrupts, challenges, and transcends the limitations of the profane.

4.4 Excess and the Limit Experience

Georges Bataille's concept of excess and the limit experience forms a cornerstone of his philosophical exploration of human existence. Excess, for Bataille, represents an overflow—a movement beyond the ordinary and the utilitarian. It is not merely surplus but a fundamental force

⁵¹ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 77.

⁵² Bataille, *Eroticism*. 68.

that disrupts the structured, profane world. Bataille explains, “Excess is an unregulated expenditure that transcends utility and unveils the sacred.”⁵³ In this context, acts of excess challenge boundaries, opening individuals to experiences that defy conventional understanding.

Central to Bataille’s philosophy is the idea of the limit experience, which he defines as an encounter with the extreme boundaries of human existence. The limit experience pushes individuals to confront the void—the point where meaning, identity, and conventional structures dissolve. Bataille writes, “The blind spot of understanding...absorbs one’s attention.”⁵⁴ These experiences are characterized by intensity, destruction, and transformation, often achieved through eroticism, sacrifice, or direct confrontations with death.

Excess and the limit experience are intimately connected to Bataille’s broader themes of continuity and transgression. Excess disrupts the discontinuity of ordinary life by transcending boundaries, revealing a glimpse of continuity. The limit experience, in turn, magnifies this transcendence, forcing individuals to confront their deepest fears and desires. Bataille asserts, “At the extreme limit of the ‘possible,’ everything gives way.”⁵⁵ These moments challenge the individual’s sense of self, pushing them beyond the familiar and into the realm of the sacred.

Bataille links the limit experience to the sacred through its association with acts of destruction and transformation. He describes it as a “fall into the void,” where individuals are stripped of their discontinuous identities and exposed to the unifying force of continuity.⁵⁶ This confrontation with the void is both terrifying and revelatory, embodying the paradoxical nature of excess. While such experiences dismantle the structures that sustain individuality, they also open pathways to new forms of understanding and being.

⁵³ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 65.

⁵⁴ Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 110.

⁵⁵ Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 38.

⁵⁶ Bataille, *Eroticism*. 22.

Excess is not merely destructive; it is also creative, as it unveils possibilities beyond the constraints of the profane world. Bataille emphasizes that the value of excess lies in its ability to reveal truths that are inaccessible within ordinary experience. He writes, “The most intense truths are only encountered in the extremes, where boundaries are shattered.”⁵⁷ The limit experience, therefore, serves as a gateway to the sacred, providing individuals with a fleeting glimpse of unity and transcendence.

Bataille’s philosophy of excess and the limit experience underscores his view of human existence as a negotiation between boundaries and their dissolution. By engaging with the extremes, individuals confront the fragility of their identities, the allure of continuity, and the inexorable tension between structure and chaos. These experiences are both dangerous and profound, offering insights into the nature of life, death, and the sacred.

⁵⁷ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 77.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF KEY SCENES THROUGH BATAILLE’S FRAMEWORK

5.1 The Hedgehog’s Dilemma: Isolation, Continuity, and the AT Field

The Hedgehog’s Dilemma, introduced early in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, encapsulates the pain and paradox of human relationships. The analogy—derived from Arthur Schopenhauer’s writings—describes hedgehogs huddling together for warmth but being unable to get too close without hurting each other. This dilemma mirrors the tension inherent in Bataille’s concept of discontinuity, which emphasizes the separateness of individual existence. While individuals desire connection (continuity), their boundaries—physical, emotional, and existential—create an enduring state of isolation and vulnerability. The series captures this tension most poignantly in Shinji Ikari’s guarded interactions, as he navigates his longing for intimacy against a deep fear of rejection and pain.

Chief scientist at NERV, Ritsuko introduces the concept of the Hedgehog’s Dilemma in Episode 3, “A Transfer,” as a way to contextualize Shinji’s emotional distance to his guardian, Misato:⁵⁸

Ritsuko: Shinji might be the kind of person who can’t make friends easily. Have you ever heard of the Hedgehog’s Dilemma?

Misato: Hedgehog? Those spiky animals?

Ritsuko: Hedgehogs have a hard time sharing warmth with other hedgehogs. The closer they get, the more they hurt each other with their quills. People are also like that. I think some part of Shinji is afraid to take that risk because he’s afraid of being hurt.

⁵⁸ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Episode 3.

Misato: He'll figure it out eventually. Part of growing up is trying again and again using trial and error to work out the right distance to avoid hurting each other.

Ritsuko's explanation serves as an overt framing device for *Evangelion's* exploration of relational fragility, particularly Shinji's hesitation to connect with others. Misato's response, urging Shinji to "figure it out eventually" through trial and error, is both hopeful and ironic, as her own tumultuous relationships reflect her inability to resolve this dilemma. For Bataille, discontinuity defines human individuality, as each person is bounded by their own birth, life, and death.

The series uses the concept of the Absolute Terror (AT) Field to provide a powerful visual and symbolic representation of these boundaries. Initially depicted as a protective barrier used by Evas and Angels in combat, the AT Field is later revealed to be a "physical manifestation of the psychological barriers between individuals."⁵⁹ Kaworu's description of it as "the light of my soul" elevates it from a technical mechanic to a central metaphor for individual isolation. The AT Field embodies Bataille's idea that boundaries both protect and isolate, enforcing the discontinuity that defines human identity.

Visually, AT Fields are often depicted as glowing, geometric barriers, their vibrant hues contrasting with the dark, chaotic environments of battle. This aesthetic dichotomy reflects their dual function: as shields that protect but also impede connection. The sound design heightens this tension, with the AT Field's activation marked by an otherworldly hum or a sharp, resonant crack, emphasizing its impenetrability. These audiovisual elements underscore the emotional stakes of characters' interactions, where breaking through an AT Field requires both physical force and profound vulnerability.

⁵⁹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Episode 20.

The AT Field metaphor aligns closely with Bataille's philosophy. While AT Fields provide protection, they also enforce discontinuity by preventing individuals from merging with one another. Bataille notes that the boundaries of selfhood are both necessary and limiting: "Discontinuity is the isolation of individual beings, while continuity reflects the unity we crave yet fear."⁶⁰ Through the lens of Bataille's philosophy, the Hedgehog's Dilemma reflects the profound human condition of existing in discontinuity. Bataille writes, "Discontinuity is the very condition of individuality; but continuity is what this individuality seeks to transcend."⁶¹ This paradox is vividly portrayed in Shinji's interactions with others. His oscillation between withdrawing and seeking intimacy mirrors Bataille's view that boundaries, while painful, are self-preservative structures. Shinji's longing for connection is counterbalanced by his fear of dissolving the protective quills of his identity.

The fragility of these boundaries is explored aesthetically in moments of vulnerability. Shinji's accidental fall onto a naked Rei, her stoic response, and his awkward embarrassment reflect the tension between human closeness and self-preservation. Similarly, the series' use of lingering close-ups—on faces, trembling hands, or the stark emptiness of a room—captures the emotional weight of isolation. Silence is a recurring auditory motif, amplifying the characters' inner turmoil and the oppressive space between them.

The Hedgehog's Dilemma is not only a personal conflict but also a broader commentary on human existence. Bataille suggests that the boundaries separating individuals are fundamental yet fragile, and their dissolution—though offering moments of connection—often leads to discomfort or loss of identity. He writes, "Continuity terrifies as much as it seduces, for it demands

⁶⁰ Bataille, *Erotism*. 15.

⁶¹ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 24

the annihilation of the self.”⁶² This ambivalence underscores Shinji’s hesitation to connect with others, as he oscillates between his longing for intimacy and his fear of being hurt.

The AT Field serves as a visual and narrative tool to explore these philosophical tensions. It embodies the barriers that both protect and isolate, highlighting the pain of discontinuity while reflecting humanity’s yearning for unity. Through the Hedgehog’s Dilemma and the mechanic of the AT Field, *Evangelion* illustrates Bataille’s insight into the human condition: that the boundaries defining individuality are both a source of suffering and a necessary condition for identity.

5.2 The Human Instrumentality Project: Yearning for Continuity

The Human Instrumentality Project in *Evangelion* represents humanity’s ultimate attempt to dissolve individual boundaries and achieve a collective state of being. This project embodies the paradoxical yearning for continuity that Georges Bataille identifies as central to human existence. Bataille characterizes continuity not as unity in a relational or harmonious sense, but as the annihilation of individuality into an undifferentiated state. This state obliterates personal boundaries and distinctions, aligning it with death and the sacred.

Instrumentality seeks to fulfill this desire for dissolution by eradicating the AT Fields that separate individuals, merging all consciousnesses into a collective entity. This vision aligns with Bataille’s notion of continuity as the collapse of individual boundaries into a formless abyss. However, framing Instrumentality as “unity” risks mischaracterizing Bataille’s conception, as continuity does not entail relationality or recognition. Gendo’s pursuit of Instrumentality as a means to “reunite” with Yui exemplifies this tension. In Bataillean terms, continuity annihilates individual distinctions, raising the question of whether such a reunion could involve any form of

⁶² Bataille, *Erotism*. 22.

recognition or relational connection. Instead, Instrumentality imposes a permanent dissolution of the self, erasing the conditions necessary for relationality or identity to persist.

The series employs a striking blend of surreal imagery, abstract visuals, and dissonant sound design to convey the existential stakes of Instrumentality. As the project unfolds, the animation shifts from conventional storytelling to fragmented, experimental visuals. Characters dissolve into LCL, their forms reduced to amorphous, liquid-like shapes in a palette of red, orange, and gold. These fluid visuals symbolize the obliteration of personal identity and the merging into collective continuity, reflecting Bataille's vision of the sacred as a realm where boundaries collapse.

The soundscape during Instrumentality is equally unsettling. Layers of voices overlap, echoing the merging of individual consciousnesses into a collective whole. These sounds are juxtaposed with sharp silences, heightening the disorienting effect. In one scene, Shinji is confronted with Rei, who speaks in overlapping tones that reflect her role as a collective entity. This auditory design amplifies the existential horror of losing one's distinct voice in a sea of undifferentiated consciousness.

As Jake Potter describes, Instrumentality creates "a world where you exist everywhere and yet exist nowhere all at once."⁶³ This paradoxical state is mirrored in the show's use of shifting, surreal imagery, such as abstract line drawings and moments where the screen becomes a void, symbolizing the annihilation of identity. These aesthetic choices externalize the philosophical tension between individuality and collective dissolution.

Bataille's philosophy frames Instrumentality as a paradoxical pursuit of transcendence. He asserts that continuity is closely tied to death and the sacred, as both involve the dissolution of

⁶³ Jake Potter, "My Life Is Worth Living Here!," in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy: That Syncing Feeling*, ed. Christian Cotton and Andrew M. Winters (Open Universe, 2022), 39.

boundaries. He explains, “Death is to be identified with continuity,” highlighting the existential terror and allure of boundary dissolution.⁶⁴ Similarly, Instrumentality evokes both awe and fear, presenting a solution to the pain of individuality while demanding the obliteration of selfhood. Biles describes this dynamic as the “fundamental connection between divine ecstasy and its opposite, extreme horror,” a theme vividly realized in Evangelion’s depiction of Instrumentality.⁶⁵

The series emphasizes the psychological costs of Instrumentality through Shinji’s internal conflict. His memories, desires, and fears are visualized as a chaotic montage of overlapping voices, fragmented images, and stark, surreal settings. The series uses rapid cuts and disorienting transitions to immerse the viewer in Shinji’s fractured psyche. As Gordienko notes, the process of dissolving the self “introduces the possibility of the mad philosopher,” a state where identity is obliterated in pursuit of radical experience.⁶⁶ These sequences force Shinji—and the audience—to confront the existential cost of continuity.

Bataille’s concept of sacrifice offers further insight into Instrumentality. He describes sacrifice as “the destruction of the creature’s discontinuity,” where the individual is obliterated to reveal the continuity of existence.⁶⁷ Instrumentality requires this sacrificial act on a global scale, demanding the dismantling of AT Fields—the psychological and existential boundaries that preserve individuality. As Biles notes, “True intimacy requires the dissolution of personal boundaries in a manner that is ecstatic and intolerable.”⁶⁸ The merging of consciousnesses in Instrumentality evokes a monstrous sacredness, blending awe and terror as individuality is surrendered to a collective whole.

⁶⁴ Bataille, *Erotism*. 13.

⁶⁵ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*. 15.

⁶⁶ Gordienko, “The Politics of Eros.” 5.

⁶⁷ Bataille, *Erotism*. 90.

⁶⁸ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*. 11.

However, *Evangelion* complicates this vision by interrogating the permanence of such dissolution. Bataille emphasizes the oscillation between continuity and discontinuity, the sacred and the profane. Human existence, for Bataille, cannot be reduced to one state without losing its fundamental tension. Instrumentality's flaw, then, lies not simply in its demand for dissolution but in its imposition of a permanent and static continuity. This permanence eliminates the oscillatory movement between boundaries and transgressions that defines human experience.

5.3 Shinji Lost: Transgression and Limit Experience

Shinji Ikari's dissolution into the LCL in his dummy plug after an emotionally devastating battle marks a pivotal moment of transgression and existential crisis in *Evangelion*. This sequence exemplifies Georges Bataille's notions of boundary dissolution and the limit experience, where individuals confront the extreme edges of existence. Bataille describes the limit experience as a confrontation with "the extreme boundaries of the possible," where individuality is obliterated, revealing profound truths.⁶⁹ This moment literalizes Bataille's concept of continuity, a state in which the distinctions that define individuality dissolve into a shared existence. Bataille likens this dissolution to "the unstable presence of water in water," a state of immanence devoid of distinct limits.⁷⁰

During an intense Angel attack, Shinji's synchronization rate with Eva Unit-01 exceeds 400%, triggering a collapse of the physical and psychological boundaries that define his individuality. As his body disintegrates into the LCL—a viscous, amber fluid that facilitates synchronization within the Eva's cockpit—Shinji becomes indistinguishable from the fluid itself. This collapse represents the ultimate transgressive act: the surrender of selfhood in pursuit of unity.

⁶⁹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 38.

⁷⁰ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1992), 33.

Bataille describes such acts as a “sacrificial collapse” that “renders the subject into a state of glorious uselessness.”⁷¹

The visual and auditory design of this scene intensifies its symbolic and emotional resonance. The sequence begins with close-ups of Shinji’s body being absorbed into the LCL, depicted as shimmering particles dispersing into the fluid. The glowing, fluid animation contrasts with the mechanical rigidity of the EVA, visually reflecting the tension between individuality and dissolution. This transition from solid to liquid mirrors Bataille’s metaphor of water dissolving into water, representing the obliteration of boundaries and the merging into continuity.

The sound design heightens the scene’s existential stakes. The process of Shinji’s dissolution is accompanied by an unsettling hum, layered with distorted echoes of his breathing and heartbeat. As these sounds become increasingly fragmented, they symbolize the breakdown of Shinji’s physical and psychological integrity. The interplay between sound and silence punctuates the sequence, with moments of quiet amplifying the void-like quality of Shinji’s transformation. These aesthetic choices externalize Shinji’s inner conflict, wherein his desire to escape clashes with the terror of losing his individuality.

The LCL fluid operates as both a medium for synchronization and a metaphor for existential dissolution. In this sequence, Shinji’s synchronization exceeds its usual boundaries, erasing the psychological and physical separation between himself and Unit-01. This reflects Bataille’s notion of transgression leading to continuity, where “life dissolves itself in death, rivers in the sea, and the known in the unknown.”⁷² The fluid’s amniotic qualities underscore its dual role as a source of comfort and a site of existential annihilation, symbolizing both a return to a primordial state and the obliteration of selfhood.

⁷¹ Bataille, *Erotism*. 123, 190.

⁷² Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 101.

As Shinji dissolves, the sequence intercuts surreal, fragmented visions of his memories and desires. These include images of his strained relationship with his father, Gendo, juxtaposed with repeated images of Angels. Shinji repeatedly utters the phrase “my enemy,” creating a mantra-like refrain that reflects his need to defend himself against perceived threats.⁷³ This refrain blurs distinctions between external dangers and internal conflicts, suggesting that Shinji’s primary struggle lies not with external enemies but with his own fears, unresolved trauma, and sense of isolation. The mantra exemplifies what Bataille might describe as a defense mechanism of discontinuity—a desperate clinging to individual boundaries in the face of overwhelming dissolution.

A central motif in this sequence is the repeated appearance of Rei, Asuka, and Misato, each naked and bending over Shinji while asking, “Do you want to become one with me?”⁷⁴ These visions intertwine themes of intimacy, vulnerability, and transgression. Bataille’s reflections on nudity emphasize its capacity to strip away societal constructs and expose the raw essence of being: “Nudity signifies the absence of those barriers that man erects between himself and others.”⁷⁵ The nudity of these figures underscores their role as manifestations of connection, stripped of pretense, yet it also destabilizes Shinji by confronting him with a loss of individuality.

Rei’s spectral presence represents dissolution and continuity. As a clone and vessel for Lilith, she embodies the seductive allure of losing oneself in the collective. Her glowing, ephemeral form and calm demeanor align with Bataille’s assertion that eroticism is not merely a desire for union but a profound “call to lose oneself” in the experience of connection.⁷⁶ In contrast, Asuka’s appearance introduces an edge of confrontation, reflecting Shinji’s fraught relationship

⁷³ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Episode 20.

⁷⁴ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Episode 20.

⁷⁵ Bataille, *Erotism*. 57.

⁷⁶ Bataille, *Erotism*. 31.

with her and his deep-seated fears of inadequacy. Her uncharacteristic vulnerability—juxtaposed with her typically aggressive and self-assured personality—underscores the tension between attraction and conflict. Misato’s presence further complicates matters, blending maternal, erotic, and authoritative undertones. Her calm, almost soothing voice juxtaposed with her nudity magnifies the unsettling ambiguity of her role in Shinji’s life, highlighting the blurred boundaries between authority, care, and desire.

The repetition of their question, “Do you want to become one with me?” grows increasingly disorienting, reflecting Shinji’s fractured psyche and his struggle with the concept of unity. This question encapsulates Bataille’s assertion that “true intimacy requires the dissolution of personal boundaries in a manner that is ecstatic and intolerable.”⁷⁷ Moreover, the simultaneous allure and terror of this dissolution resonate with Bataille’s exploration of eroticism as “a deliberate loss of self,” where the subject embraces both ecstasy and anguish.⁷⁸ The interplay of seduction, exposure, and transgression in this sequence underscores the tension between Shinji’s longing for connection and his instinct to preserve the discontinuity that defines his individuality.

5.4 Evangelions and Maternal Souls: Sacrifice and Erotism

The Eva units in *Evangelion* serve as profound symbols of Bataillean eroticism and sacrifice, embodying the dissolution of boundaries between the sacred and the profane. These biomechanical constructs, revealed to contain the souls of their pilots’ mothers, function as both protective and deeply unsettling entities. This dual role encapsulates Georges Bataille’s notions of transgression, the sacred/profane dichotomy, and the transformative power of sacrifice. Through the Eva’s, the series explores complex intersections of identity, continuity, and maternal presence.

⁷⁷ Bataille, *Erotism*. 35.

⁷⁸ Bataille, *Erotism*. 37.

The revelation that each Evangelion contains the soul of its pilot's mother profoundly alters the viewer's understanding of these machines. Far from being mere tools of war, they are also vessels of maternal sacrifice. This duality blurs the boundaries between life and death, human and machine, reflecting Bataille's claim that "eroticism is the violation of the boundaries of existence."⁷⁹ The maternal connection of the Eva's exemplifies this transgressive collapse of boundaries, merging the sacred (life-giving maternal essence) with the profane (death-dealing war machines). This tension aligns with Bataille's assertion that "the sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo," framing maternal sacrifice as a space where protection becomes entwined with trauma and destruction.⁸⁰

Shinji's relationship with Evangelion Unit-01, which contains the soul of his mother Yui, epitomizes this sacrificial continuity. Each time Shinji pilots Unit-01, he unknowingly engages in a sacrificial bond with his mother, whose essence resides within the Evangelion. Bataille's exploration of sacrifice emphasizes its role as a method to transcend isolation and reach continuity through violent transcendence. He writes, "Sacrifice reveals the continuity of existence through the destruction of boundaries."⁸¹ Yui's presence within Unit-01 illustrates this principle, as her existence within the Evangelion bridges the gap between her death and her continued protection of Shinji.

Shinji's synchronization with Unit-01 literalizes this transgression. During moments of high synchronization, his identity merges with Yui's essence, erasing the psychological boundary that separates them. This intimate, unsettling connection confronts the viewer with the taboo of direct contact between the living and the dead. Bataille suggests that breaking such boundaries is

⁷⁹ Bataille, *Erotism*. 42.

⁸⁰ Bataille, *Erotism*. 126.

⁸¹ Bataille, *Erotism*. 22.

integral to accessing the sacred, and in *Evangelion*, these moments bring Shinji into forbidden contact with his deceased mother, intertwining his identity with hers in an act of metaphysical and emotional transgression.

The series employs striking sensory elements to convey the intimacy of this bond. Synchronization sequences are marked by pulsating hues and symbolic imagery, such as a glowing womb-like space enveloping the pilot. Sound design reinforces these themes through rhythmic mechanical hums interspersed with Shinji's heartbeat, blending with faint traces of Yui's voice during high synchronization. These elements immerse the viewer in the profound intimacy and disquiet of the maternal connection, dissolving the distinction between Shinji and Yui.

This act of synchronization requires the child to confront the maternal presence within the machine, making each synchronization a limit experience in Bataillean terms. Bataille describes the limit experience as “a fall into the void,” revealing the fragility of human constructs.⁸² For Shinji, piloting Unit-01 not only enables him to combat external threats but also demands a confrontation with his deepest fears of intimacy, rejection, and self-annihilation.

The maternal framing of continuity in *Evangelion* introduces a significant divergence from Bataille's philosophical conception. For Bataille, continuity is an obliteration of individuality, a terrifying yet seductive void that demands the annihilation of the self. In contrast, *Evangelion* portrays continuity through maternal restoration—a yearning for unity lost through separation or death. Yui's presence within Unit-01 embodies this protective continuity, reaffirming Shinji's individuality rather than negating it.

Shinji's rejection of Instrumentality during the series finale further highlights this divergence. Instrumentality, which offers a seductive vision of merging into a collective whole,

⁸² Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 51.

frames continuity as a maternal restoration. However, Shinji ultimately rejects this unity, choosing instead the painful discontinuity of individuality. While Bataille might interpret this as affirming the sacred tension between continuity and discontinuity, *Evangelion* frames it as rejecting a false restoration that negates selfhood rather than dissolves it into the void.

Through this dual lens of transgression and maternal continuity, *Evangelion* reimagines Bataillean themes, offering a maternal lens that prioritizes relational unity over existential rupture. By placing mothers at the center of a sacrificial and transgressive framework, the series redefines the sacred not solely as a site of dissolution but also as one of reconciliation. This nuanced portrayal enriches Bataille's framework, inviting viewers to reconsider the sacred through the maternal as both rupture and restorative embrace.

5.5 The Clone: Rei Ayanami

Rei Ayanami's identity as a clone of Yui Ikari—Shinji's mother—and her role in the Human Instrumentality Project position her as a Bataillean figure embodying transgression, the sacred/profane dichotomy, and the destabilization of boundaries. Rei's existence challenges conventional distinctions between life and death, self and other, and the sacred and profane, illustrating Georges Bataille's assertion that transgression reveals the interconnectedness of these realms.

Rei's status as a clone renders her both sacred and profane, a paradox central to Bataille's philosophy. As a vessel for Yui's soul and a genetic replica, Rei occupies a liminal space where the boundaries of individuality dissolve. Bataille describes the sacred as inherently tied to transgression, stating, "The sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo."⁸³ Rei's

⁸³ Bataille, *Erotism*. 126.

existence as a product of scientific manipulation—a transgression against natural order—underscores this dynamic, as she is simultaneously revered (as a means to Instrumentality) and dehumanized (as a tool for Gendo Ikari’s ambitions).

For Bataille, transgression “does not negate the taboo but fulfills and affirms it through violation.”⁸⁴ Rei’s identity exemplifies this, as her creation violates the boundaries of life and individuality while reinforcing humanity’s obsession with control and transcendence. This duality aligns with Bataille’s insight that “the forbidden is always laden with the sacred,” situating Rei as a figure who embodies both purity and taboo.⁸⁵

Rei’s transformation during Instrumentality further reflects Bataille’s philosophy. As she merges with Lilith, her body dissolves into a cosmic entity, erasing her individuality to facilitate humanity’s collective unity. This act of dissolution aligns with Bataille’s concept of continuity, where individual boundaries are obliterated in favor of unity. He states, “Death is the imposture that gives continuity to the discontinuous.”⁸⁶ Rei’s transformation represents the ultimate transgressive act, as it collapses the boundaries between self and other, human and divine, sacred and profane.

The cloning process itself exemplifies Bataille’s notion of profanation. Rei is a creation of human excess, a result of scientific experimentation that seeks to manipulate life for a higher purpose. This act of profanation underscores Bataille’s belief that “sacrifice reveals the continuity of existence through the death of a discontinuous being.”⁸⁷ Rei’s existence as a clone, suspended between life and death, mirrors the sacrificial nature of her role in Instrumentality, where her individuality is obliterated to achieve continuity.

⁸⁴ Bataille, *Erotism*. 37.

⁸⁵ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 88.

⁸⁶ Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 135.

⁸⁷ Bataille, *Erotism*. 90.

Rei's identity also embodies Bataille's concept of eroticism as a force that destabilizes boundaries and confronts existential fears. Her relationship to Shinji, as both a maternal figure and an enigmatic other, reflects Bataille's assertion that "eroticism always entails a breaking of the regularity of the laws of existence."⁸⁸ This interplay of maternal and alien qualities destabilizes Shinji's understanding of himself and others, forcing him to confront the fragility of human constructs.

5.6 Shinji's Rejection of Instrumentality: Affirming Discontinuity

Shinji Ikari's ultimate decision to reject the Human Instrumentality Project and return to individual existence serves as a profound affirmation of Georges Bataille's philosophy of discontinuity. This pivotal moment in *Evangelion* underscores the tension between the longing for continuity and the necessity of individual boundaries, framing Shinji's choice as an existential confrontation with Bataillean concepts of identity, transgression, and the sacred.

Instrumentality's allure lies in its promise to resolve the anguish of discontinuity by erasing individual boundaries and merging all consciousnesses into a single entity. This vision of continuity aligns with Bataille's description of the sacred as "a realm where separateness disappears."⁸⁹ However, Bataille warns that the dissolution of boundaries entails the annihilation of selfhood. He writes, "Unity offers an escape from suffering but threatens the obliteration of identity."⁹⁰ Shinji's rejection of Instrumentality demonstrates his recognition of this existential cost, affirming the value of individuality despite its inherent suffering.

This rejection also reflects Bataille's understanding of transgression and the limit experience. While Instrumentality represents the ultimate transgression—obliterating all

⁸⁸ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vols. 2 and 3. 65.

⁸⁹ Bataille, *Erotism*. 15.

⁹⁰ Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 135.

boundaries to achieve unity—Shinji’s refusal to accept this state is itself a transgressive act. Bataille writes, “Sovereignty is attained not by escaping suffering but by affirming life through its contradictions.”⁹¹ By choosing to preserve his individuality, Shinji confronts the extremes of existence, embracing the pain and complexity of human life as essential to the human condition.

Shinji’s decision also echoes Luka Perušić’s analysis of the AT Field as a metaphor for individuality. The AT Field serves as both a psychological and existential boundary, protecting individuals from external threats and internal insecurities. As Perušić notes, the removal of the AT Field in *Instrumentality* symbolizes the dissolution of individuality, which Shinji ultimately rejects as he realizes that “only through the hardship of struggle, against all the odds and all the evils, can they attain the life worth having for themselves, as a possibility in the future.”⁹² This act reaffirms the necessity of boundaries and the struggle to construct meaning and identity.

The scene of Shinji’s rejection of *Instrumentality* is marked by disorienting and surreal visuals, which shift between abstract representations of the collective unconscious and stark, grounded imagery. As the boundaries between individual consciousnesses dissolve during *Instrumentality*, the animation transitions to fragmented visuals: hand-drawn sketches, photographic montages, and blank voids. These stylistic choices externalize the process of existential annihilation, with the fragmented imagery reflecting the erasure of individuality. The return to traditional animation as Shinji rejects *Instrumentality* symbolizes his reassertion of selfhood and agency.

Auditorily, the scene juxtaposes overwhelming cacophony with moments of profound silence. The collective voices of humanity, layered into a dissonant chorus, create a suffocating atmosphere, underscoring the loss of individual identity. When Shinji declares his rejection of

⁹¹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 47.

⁹² Perušić’s, “The Mysterious AT.” 110.

Instrumentality, the soundscape abruptly shifts to silence, emphasizing the weight of his choice. His subsequent words, “I hate who I am. But still, maybe I can change and like myself,” resonate in isolation, reaffirming the existential significance of his decision to endure the struggles of individual existence.

Shinji’s decision not only critiques the existential cost of Instrumentality but also reconfigures Bataille’s notion of sacrifice. Instrumentality demands humanity’s collective dissolution as a sacrificial act to achieve continuity. Bataille posits that sacrifice reveals the sacred through the destruction of individuality, stating, “A violent death disrupts the creature’s discontinuity and brings witnesses into a shared experience of continuity.”⁹³ However, Shinji’s rejection subverts this framework by affirming the profound value of individuality, reframing it as a sacred quality in its own right. By denying the sacrificial obliteration of selfhood, he embraces the pain and imperfections of individual existence as a meaningful alternative to the homogenizing continuity offered by Instrumentality. This divergence from Bataille suggests that the sacred need not exclusively reside in continuity, but can also emerge from the persistent affirmation of discontinuity and the unique struggles of individual life.

This rejection also aligns with Gordienko’s concept of a “community of lovers,” which he describes as “a space without annihilating the old one,” where individuals can embrace connection without losing their identity.⁹⁴ By choosing to live as an individual rather than dissolve into the collective, Shinji asserts that true connection arises from the interplay of boundaries, not their erasure. His decision affirms the value of relationships formed through struggle and mutual recognition rather than through the homogenization of Instrumentality.

⁹³ Bataille, *Erotism*. 83.

⁹⁴ Gordienko, “The Politics of Eros.” 211.

Shinji's rejection of Instrumentality in *Evangelion* encapsulates the philosophical tension between continuity and discontinuity, autonomy and unity. By choosing individuality over collective dissolution, Shinji affirms the value of human imperfection and the necessity of boundaries in constructing meaning and identity. Through its fragmented visuals, dissonant soundscape, and profound thematic resonance, the scene situates *Evangelion* as a meditation on the existential stakes of individuality. Shinji's decision challenges Bataille's exaltation of continuity, proposing instead that life's meaning lies in embracing the struggles and contradictions of individual existence.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Neon Genesis Evangelion and *The End of Evangelion* stand as profound meditations on the human condition, blending existential dilemmas, psychological complexity, and philosophical inquiry. This thesis has demonstrated that Georges Bataille's framework of transgression, sacrifice, and excess provides a robust lens through which to explore the series' central themes, particularly those embodied in the Human Instrumentality Project and its broader implications.

Central to this analysis is Bataille's duality of continuity and discontinuity, which underpins both his philosophy and the narrative trajectory of *Evangelion*. The series explores the tension between the isolating pain of individuality and the alluring promise of dissolving boundaries through collective unity. Through Shinji Ikari's journey, *Evangelion* critiques the costs of continuity, revealing that while it offers the possibility of transcending isolation, it simultaneously entails the annihilation of selfhood. By rejecting Instrumentality, Shinji affirms the necessity of discontinuity, underscoring the value of individuality despite its inherent suffering.

The close analysis of key scenes illustrates how *Evangelion* encapsulates Bataillean principles. The Hedgehog's Dilemma and the metaphor of the AT Field exemplify the fragility and necessity of boundaries that define human existence. The Human Instrumentality Project functions as a limit experience, collapsing individual barriers and confronting the existential terror of unity. Shinji's dissolution into LCL and his deeply unsettling connection with Unit-01 exemplify Bataille's notion of sacrifice, where the dissolution of boundaries facilitates both transformation and destruction. Ultimately, Shinji's rejection of Instrumentality serves as an affirmation of individuality, positioning the series as a critique of the totalizing nature of collective unity.

By applying Bataillean philosophy to *Evangelion*, this thesis situates the series within broader academic conversations at the intersection of anime studies, religious philosophy, and

media analysis. The integration of Bataille's concepts of transgression, sacrifice, and the sacred/profane dichotomy with *Evangelion's* existential inquiries reveals the series' philosophical depth. In doing so, *Evangelion* emerges as not only a landmark in anime but also a significant cultural text that addresses the complexities of modernity's existential crises.

Ultimately, *Evangelion's* engagement with Bataillean philosophy challenges audiences to consider fundamental questions regarding the nature of human existence: is it preferable to endure the pain of individuality or to dissolve into the comfort of collective unity? Through its narrative complexity, evocative imagery, and philosophical resonance, the series resists definitive answers. Instead, it mirrors the ambiguities of the human condition itself, reflecting the paradoxical tension between the boundaries that define existence and the desire to transcend them—a tension that, as Bataille asserts, lies at the heart of human experience.

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