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The Scene of Occupation

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I was going to prison then, and—in so far as in those places the re-education to virtue is reached through idleness—I asked myself: what is there more idle than to still occupy myself with a little materialism?

—Antonio Negri (2003:140)

On a gray Sunday in late October, I go in search of Occupy London. I locate St. Paul's Cathedral on a map (having never noted its existence on any prior visit to London) and take the Tube, wondering as I go what reasoning or happenstance had led activists to choose a center of state religion as a staging ground for their confrontation with the forces of capital.¹ A short walk and I am approaching the cathedral from the side; I wander through the encampment of tents, run my hands along a wire fence covered in protest signs—the snarky, stinging anonymous murmuring of the multitude—before arriving at the church's august west front,

1. I subsequently learned that St. Paul's was a recourse after an attempt to occupy the London Stock Exchange was thwarted (*The Independent* 2011).

Figure 1. Occupy London Halloween zombie march on the Bank of England, 31 October 2011. (Photo © Ed Telling)

with the two towers, wide steps, and fountain. Although Christopher Wren's baroque architecture was designed to lift the eyes heavenward in pious contemplation of eternity, the hum of life in and around the tented encampment of the occupation instead drew the eyes, ears, and shoulders down. One stooped to enter a kitchen, info tent, or place of discussion, or simply squatted outside to watch the circulation of tourists, occupiers, and passersby, and to watch oneself being watched.

The Thursday prior to my visit, a prominent cleric in the diocese of London had resigned (and another would days later) over plans to evict the occupiers, by force if necessary, from cathedral grounds. I listen, half-comprehendingly, as an English friend explains the local and national politics of this controversy, which was on the cover of the tabloids that week, and was enmeshed in the complex legal, ecclesial, and political web linking the contemporary metropolitan city known as London, the "City of London" (its financial center and counterpart to Wall Street), and the Diocese of London, of which St. Paul's is the cathedral. I began to intimate, if not fully comprehend, why occupying these particular church grounds might resonate within the context of a protest against the looting and pillaging of the world economy by finance capital, protected, in the case of the City of London, by privileges accorded to it as a private corporation established by royal edict in 1694, beyond the reach of democratic accountability. Knowing even a little of this background, I felt more able to speculate as to how the looming threat of eviction and violence might hang over that particular Sabbath, the day before All Hallows's Eve.

In front of the cathedral steps, a young woman of color is teaching a dance as Michael Jackson's "Thriller" blasts intermittently from the loudspeakers (which Occupy London, unlike Occupy Wall Street, possesses). Behind her, a group rehearses dance moves that bear a family resemblance to the famous zombie dance choreographed by Jackson and Michael Peters for the 1983 music video for "Thriller," directed by John Landis. Many of the dancers wear Guy Fawkes masks, an icon associated with Anonymous (the group of activist hackers). Anonymous appears to have initiated this dance rehearsal; at least one of its members is handing out masks to newly recruited dancers. Going into mock ethnographic mode, I accentuate my American accent and ask him in the most oblivious-sounding tone I can muster, who the mask depicts. He snorts and replies that it is an effigy of the only man who ever entered Parliament with honest intentions. The following day, these and other participants will dress up as corporate zombies and descend on the Bank of England, in a Halloween action fronted by banners reading "Dancing on the Grave of Capitalism" and "This Has Just Begun."

The church location lends the London occupation a different *Stimmung* than that which I had felt during my visits to Occupy Wall Street (which held its own zombie walk earlier in October; see Nyong'o 2011). Whether by decision or happenstance, encamping under the shadow of a cathedral placed the London occupation within a "vortex" of sacred resonances (Roach 1996). In New York, occupiers chose a privately owned plaza known as Zuccotti Park from 2006—until occupiers reclaimed its prior name of Liberty Plaza Park in 2011—that is required by law to remain open to the public. Liberty/Zuccotti Park is the kind of privatized public space that developers concede in exchange for zoning exemptions from the city, typically to permit developers to build higher than zoning laws permit (colonizing shared sky as well as

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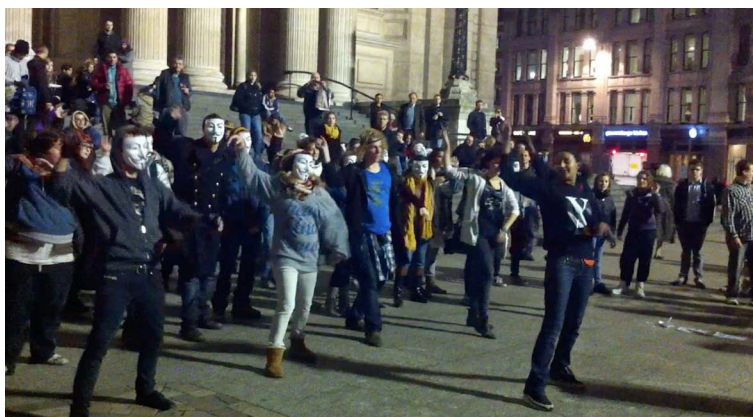


Figure 2. Rehearsing the zombie dance at Occupy London to Michael Jackson's "Thriller," 30 October 2011. (Photo by Tavia Nyong'o)

lic" land carved out from rapaciously expanding privatized space—contrasts with the symbolism of occupying hallowed ground, land set apart neither for commerce nor public recreation, but for the transport of communicants into the presence of the divine. Where the former acted on a nexus of the political-commercial power governing urban space, the latter did the same for a political-commercial-religious nexus, unearthing a connective grid of economic, ecclesial, and state power that lay deep in the history of the city.

To the wandering tourist, in other words, Occupy London could initially appear to be an act of religious refuge. This impression, while not fully accurate, is telling in that it brings forward



Figure 3. Rehearsing the zombie dance at Occupy London, 30 October 2011. (Photo by Tavia Nyong'o)

sovereign divinity, an administration covertly but continuously linked to the contemporary sovereignty of "the economy" over politics and society:

The Latin term *dispositio*, from which the French term *dispositif*, or apparatus, derives, comes therefore to take on the complex semantic sphere of the theological *oikonomia*. The

land). They are fig leaves draped over the naked takeover of the city by its finance, insurance, and real estate industries in the wake of the city's near bankruptcy in the 1970s.² The park is unusual only in its freestanding status (it occupies an entire city block) and the requirement for 24-hour access, reinterpreted in the wake of the 15 November 2011 eviction of occupiers to exclude sleeping. The decision to take a stand there—in a sliver of "pub-

one significant aspect of occupying: the manner in which it seeks to strike at a common root that unites what we typically accept as the divided realms of the sacred and secular. This common root was Foucault's great theme in his lectures on governmentality (2007). As his recent commentator Giorgio Agamben has argued, the term Foucault selected to describe the instruments of governmentality—*dispositif* in French, translated as "apparatus" in English—may descend from early Christian theological strategies for accounting for the administration of things by a unitary and

2. Begun in the late 1960s, the privately owned public park that is today known as Zuccotti Park (it was so named in 2006), was only completed in 1980, when the lease of the last remaining holdout on the block ran out (see Dunlap 2011). The story of the destruction of the economic base of the city by predatory capitalists (including John Zuccotti) is told in Fitch (1993).

“dispositifs” about which Foucault speaks are somehow linked to this theological legacy [...] The term “apparatus” designates that in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being. (Agamben 2009:11)

If early Christian theology found in the concept of “apparatus” an account of the ontological separation of God from the administration of his creation, then, Agamben argues, this division remains at the base of our contemporary concept of “economy.” Economy, in other words, is a fundamentally theological term that has been subsequently secularized without losing its subjectifying power, based in the “pure activity of governance.” Today we may have exchanged the sovereignty of God for the sovereignty of the market. But, according to Agamben, this shift has not abolished but only intensified the separation between being and the subject of governmentality produced by the apparatus. It has resulted in a proliferation of apparatuses to the point where we are perpetually being subjectified and desubjectified by a capitalism that continuously profanes the sacred even as it sets up its own sacred cows (like the Wall Street Bull). This violent oscillation leaves the subject in a “spectral” or “larval” state, Agamben argues, in language suggestive of an encounter with the haunted, protean figure of the zombie (21).

For Agamben, we are now engaged in an “everyday hand-to-hand struggle with apparatuses” (15). Occupation clearly counts as an intensification of such everyday hand-to-hand struggles with governmentality, and it throws into relief three aspects: time, space, and the act of naming, which all seem primed for performance analysis. Performance analysis helps unpack the concept of “everyday struggle,” revealing the immanent tension between everydayness and struggle, between stasis and movement, between “resistance” and “potentiality” (Deleuze 2006:74). For such a performance analysis of the time, place, and the act of naming, two additional theorists from the autonomist tradition assume importance: Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno. Known as theorists of the multitude, they are also theorists of the time and place of the virtuosic performance of occupation.

To extend and radicalize Agamben’s concept of the everyday hand-to-hand struggle against apparatuses, I propose to use Negri’s writings on *kairòs*, collected in the book *Time for Revolution* (2003), in order to theorize what I would call the *precarious time* of occupation. What does it mean to occupy time precariously? Clearly it is connected to occupying space by and for the commonweal. But even if occupying the commons profanes the religious/secular divide that captures and captivates us in the economy, such a profanation cannot return us to a prior time before industrial capitalism or neoliberalism.³ And after all, as Marx and Engels noted in *The Communist Manifesto*, it is under capitalism that “all that is holy is profaned” (Marx and Engels 1848). This capitalist profanation presents occupation with a paradoxical political task; “the profanation of the unprofanable,” Agamben concludes, “is the political task of the coming generation” (2007:92). Such a paradoxical task, Negri’s analysis of time shows, involves a precarious emancipation of temporality from the binds of eternity.

What might it mean to profane the unprofanable through the emancipation of time? Is this the familiar injunction of the generation of ’68: to live without dead time? Or is it, perhaps, a different engagement with the pervasive profanation of the life world by capitalist apparatuses—apparatuses enjoining us to preoccupy ourselves constantly, to aspire to a commercial simulacrum of “life without dead time”? Is it perhaps necessary to learn how to live *with* dead time? To live in *undead time*, the zombie time of austerity and financial chaos?

Precarious times for precarious life, no doubt (Butler 2004). But an ethics of human dignity and mutual recognition are but a part of the complex of power-knowledge that occupation diagrams. Pitching a tent at St. Paul’s undoubtedly drew upon the symbolism of the church as *refuge*, casting the occupiers not only as protestors against capitalist greed, but as vulnerable lives

3. Although the day I visited Occupy London I *did* take part in a spirited debate over the legacy and future prospects of the Luddite rebellion against industrial tools.



Figure 4. Occupy London encampment at St. Paul's Cathedral.
(Photo by Tavia Nyong'o)

seeking protection from dreaded or predatory forces. When I was there, a banner left the question hanging in the air: “What would Jesus do?” We might point here to the precedent, in recent years, of asylum seekers protesting the unjust immigration laws of Fortress Europe—squatting, occupying, and hunger-striking in churches in cities such as Barcelona (2001), Dublin (2006) and Zurich (2008). We might profitably employ this association to connect occupation to Paolo Virno’s dialectic of dread and refuge in the contemporary multitude. This dialectic is itself doubled, between “two forms of protection” and “two forms of risk”: “In the presence of real disaster, there are concrete remedies,” Virno writes. “Absolute danger, instead, requires protection from...the world itself [...] The permanent mutability of the forms of life, and the training needed for confronting the unchecked uncertainty of life,

lead us to a direct and continuous relation with the world as such, with the imprecise context of our existence” (2003:32–33). If squatting a church to prevent deportation sits on one side of this doubled dialectic, as a concrete remedy to real disaster, Occupy London is a response to its obverse, to *absolute* (or generalized) danger, and the forms of anguish and dread into which such danger propels us. Such absolute danger is not necessarily *greater*: in perhaps the majority of cases, the *concrete* danger to the lives of those seeking concrete asylum is much more immediate than the *absolute* danger to occupiers, even when it is visibilized in the form of the direct force of police brutality. Absolute danger rather involves a strategic and ensemblic giving over of oneself to risk, an infinite abandon to the imprecise context of being human, not as the bearer of rights or dignities, but as the nexus for a nondeterministic range of capacities and debilities (see Puar 2010).

Occupying the absolute danger of being human brought Occupy London into a range of quotidian conflicts with the ordinary functions of St. Paul’s as a vortex of ecclesial, political, and commercial power. But this contest over access to space and the rights to the city was woven into the fabric of another contest: that between *chronos*, the mundane, clock time of the everyday; and *kairòs*, the intensified, suspended time that Negri sees as key to revolution. The scene in October—with an impending Feast of All Saints—disclosed something of that tension between *chronos* and *kairòs*. Halloween is a secular, at times even irreligious festivity. In New York, a popular Halloween supply store, Ricky’s, had decided to make “zombies” the theme of 2011, and the zeitgeist was apparently cross-Atlantic. The zombie is a complex icon for Halloween, for capitalism, and for the protest of capitalism. As David McNally usefully argues, zombies are potent symbols because they work simultaneously as agents and victims of rapacious capitalism. They capture—in their corporeal intensities, appetites, movements, and

undeadness—the otherwise naturalized “risks to bodily integrity that inhere in a society in which individual survival requires selling out life-energies to people on the market” (McNally 2011:3). Zombie flesh is thus itself a nexus—hence its decay, its bleeding, its stumbling, and its viral bite—for competing temporalities of *chronos* and *kairòs*. The video to “Thriller” remains an urtext for a global pop culture of the zombie, even as Michael Jackson’s status as *the* icon of crossover black pop indirectly evokes the Afro-Caribbean roots of zombie lore.⁴ To adopt the guise of the zombie and go stumbling through the streets is a breaching of “the here and now of a stultifying straight time,” as José Esteban Muñoz terms it (2009:155), a hand-to-hand combat with the subjectifying power of the “soul” that the church traditionally shepherded, and for which neoliberal governmentality now takes responsibility. That such a combat could ground itself at a place devoted to the management of the passage from secular to sacred time, speaks to an at least tacit recognition of the rigorous demands of a contemporary revolutionary profanation of the unprofanable.

Kairòs as Precarious Time

“Eternity is in love with the productions of time,” wrote William Blake, antinomian poet of radical British romanticism (Blake 1988:37). In the current context, we can understand his proverb as pointing to the affinity between the desiring-production of *kairòs*—intensive, revolutionary, occupied time—and the eternity for which the church takes responsibility through its yearly cycle of feast days and fast days, its providential administration of a worldly economy of souls for which no rigid distinction is maintained between secular and sacred governmentality (particularly not in the neoliberal era of “faith-based initiatives” and “the big society”). Certainly, there are many of the cloth in love with the revolutionary desires of occupation (however much that love finds expression primarily in acts of resignation). The church itself has, entombed within its most formal rituals, a messianic time that holds open an elsewhere to the economy over which it ordinarily presides. So, how do we make sense of this affinity between two modes of time that are in such agonistic contention? How can we think about the productive performance of *commoning* within *kairòs*?

Here, Negri’s speculations, in *Time for Revolution*, are helpful for placing the affinity of eternity and *kairòs* within a materialist conception of history and struggle. Negri wrote the essay “Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo” on the way to prison, the Epicurean materialist Lucretius’s *On the Nature of Things* in hand (“my book during this period” [Negri 2003:139]). In this duration of imprisonment, he occupied himself with a little materialism, to paraphrase my epigram. His essay is concerned with the ability, the need, to name the event that throws us out of ordinary chronology and into the intensiveness of desiring-production. The three terms in its title draw an arc between the revolutionary time of *kairòs*, “Alma Venus” (his figure for Lucretius’s love of “the swerve” at the heart of things), and the contemporary multitude, whose capacity to decide against the apparatuses of governmentality is Negri’s preoccupation. The first stage of this tripartite analysis appears to have the most to do with both performance and precarity (understanding that all three levels are interlocking and interdependent). *Kairòs* is caught up with time, turning, and embodiment, insofar as “a thing called into existence in the act of naming [...] takes on corporeal characteristics, for the body is the predicate of any subject that lives in time, i.e., of something that exists in the moment in which it names” (Negri 2003:150; emphasis added).

Kairòs, Negri insists, is different time. Not *different from* eternity, but, following Deleuze, *difference in itself* (Deleuze 2010:36–89). The love or affinity of eternity for the productions of time is a love for this difference, for the cycle of efforts and defeats of the desiring, commoning production that we call revolution. Negri comments:

4. A devout Jehovah’s Witness, Jackson himself denied that his video indicated any personal belief in what he called “the occult.”

In the classical conception of time, *kairòs* is the instant, that is to say, the quality of time of the instant, the moment of rupture and opening of temporality. It is the present, but a singular and open present. Singular in the decision it expresses with regard to the void it opens upon. (2003:152)

It is possible to point to such a rupture, such an opening of temporality, inaugurated by the fall 2011 occupations in cities across the US, the UK, and beyond. It was a rupture that self-consciously inherited a sequence of prior openings, beginning most obviously with the revolutionary sequence of the Arab Spring. But the question of the revolutionary nature of this time of *kairòs* is often wrongly conflated with the immediate question asked by journalists: What will be the final effect or consequence of the occupations? Such questions prematurely yoke *kairòs* to *telos*, to destiny, and remain inattentive to the lived immediacy of the present moment, and the void it opens out onto. It is in the face of this void that great anguish is experienced, great innovations are accomplished, and—in a performative enactment of the swerve at the heart of both phenomena—the zombie walks breaks out.

There is something of the mundane about the zombie. Crushed by the everyday weight of reproducing social life under capital, moving “laterally” as Laurent Berlant puts it, we *feel* zombified (2011). And yet, to *perform* the zombie is to experiment with the pleasures of terror, shock, and surprise. It is, paradoxically, a form of *dezombification*, particularly when it gets you out into the streets dancing. The zombie march enacts the sudden swerve of matter as it falls through the void.⁵ The march is part of, but nonidentical to, occupation. It seems worth considering as an aesthetic mode that could expand upon more economic understandings of precarity (such as increasingly familiar theories of the precariat), but without falling back on the models of “precarious life” associated with moral philosophy (Butler 2004). The zombie dances, swerves, and stumbles along a staggered line that Negri and others associated with autonomist Marxism have sought to identify with the political. Insofar as the autonomist tradition has sought to read Marxism *politically*, and not as either ethics or economics, it serves a particularly useful role in interpreting the aesthetic politics of dezombification.

Again, the particular politics we are addressing here are the politics of time, and it is important to think these politics alongside the more expected (when it comes to the occupy movement) politics of space. Negri associates *kairòs* with a series of images we can think of as images of precarious time: “being on the brink,” “being on a razor’s edge,” and “the instant in which ‘the archer looses the arrow’” (2003:152). *Kairòs*, we could say, possesses its distinctive *affect*, one that we need to attend to and describe in all its variety and complexity (where journalistic coverage has always remained fixated on considering its *effects*). This affective account of *kairòs* as precarious time does not restrict itself to felt emotions but rather takes up the idea of affect as *extensible* in time and space, of affect as possessing a *movement* vocabulary and a set of principles for the *navigation* of a terrain. The politicized zombie supplies one image of this extension of affective dread, moving beyond the scene of occupation and into the pedestrian crush of the corporate city.

Occupy London certainly felt “on the brink” that weekend before All Hallow’s Eve (as Halloween is traditionally known in the church’s cycle of yearly feasts). At that evening’s General Assembly (the governing body of the occupation), a fervent struggle broke out, with denunciations and counter-denunciations, over a statement that had been released to the press, and attributed to Occupy London, demanding some specific revisions to the City of London’s legal charter. As in New York, the contention centered on whether and how to issue demands, and thus participate in party politics, the inefficacy of which the occupations had, at least in part, meant initially to highlight. That it was the City of London Corporation that ultimately

5. “Unless inclined to swerve,” Lucretius writes, “all things would fall right through the deep abyss like drops of rain” (2007:42).



Figure 5. Halloween zombie march. London, 31 October 2011. (Courtesy of Tavia Nyong'o)

brought suit over the occupiers (leading to their forcible eviction, in February 2012, from the “public highways” they were adjudged to have obstructed) would only underscore the diagram of ecclesial, capitalist, and political power that the occupation had already activated by October. At All Hallow’s Eve, however, repercussions from that summer’s urban rebellions, themselves following upon the infamous kettling of school children earlier in November of 2010, were foremost on everyone’s minds. This context made a potential face-off with the Metropolitan Police that much more anxiety provoking. The encampment had been there only days it seemed, and its time was already running out. Would the occupation fold up its tents before it had a chance to live up to its historical mission? Would it let the threat of violence force it into a premature reformism? The archer had loosed the arrow, and Occupy London felt like it was on the brink.

Rather than conclude this story (which is in any case ongoing, even in the wake of eviction) I want to dwell in this particular stage of the occupation, and ask what we can possibly ask of it regarding revolutionary innovation, if we do not ask after its ultimate result. At least to me, two possible alternative questions suggest themselves: How does revolutionary innovation emerge out of *kairòs*? And what does it mean to say that eternity is in love with the productions of time? For Negri, a materialist answer must incorporate “the dimension of temporality as the ontological fabric of materialism” (Negri 2003:157). That is to say, a materialist conception of time is one in which eternity becomes the name for that prior accumulation of time that launches, so to speak, the arrow of *kairòs* into the void of the to-come.⁶ Negri writes:

6. Negri distinguishes between the “to-come” pointed to by *kairòs* and the “future” of chronological, homogenous time. This distinction is necessary because, for instance, finance capitalism has already colonized the future of chronological, homogenous time, occupying it with its apparatuses of insurance, futures markets, risk assessments, four-year plans, mortgage-backed securities, etc. Punk rock prophetically declared, in the early stages of the neoliberal era, that there was “no future,” aligning themselves with the alternative time of the to-come. My use of Negri’s argument here clearly dovetails with José Muñoz’s reading of Ernst Bloch’s concept of the “not yet” (Muñoz 2009:3).

Eternity is the time that comes “before.” It is indeed the power of accumulated life, of an irreversible and indestructible temporality; it is the common name of the being that is. Every *kairòs* is installed in this eternity.

What we are saying—i.e., that *kairòs* is installed in the eternal, that is in time that comes “before”—does not push *kairòs* into the past, but rather it renders the eternal present to the present of *kairòs*. The “here” of *kairòs* is not detached from the “here” of the eternal; there is no order by which its temporal distance can be measured; neither is it possible to think a sort of contemporaneity of *kairòs* and of the eternal: for the eternal is a consisting in the place of *kairòs*, a simultaneous consisting. (2003:165)

Revolutionary time, in Negri’s exposition of it here, does not occupy a separate space of telos or destiny within history, as if the to-come were either predetermined or else a monotonous repetition of the present. He even rejects the notion of positing any temporal distance between *kairòs* and eternity. *Kairòs* is *installed* within eternity, or in our new parlance, it *occupies* it. For Negri, in each moment is installed its own arrowing arc of revolutionary affect, much as Walter Benjamin argued, at the conclusion of his own account of historical materialism, that “every second was the small gateway of time through which the Messiah might enter” (2003:97).

How to Live with Dead Time

How do we know when an event filled with *kairòs* is upon us? How do we name it? As Lauren Berlant has argued, one thing that can be so unsettling about an event is the arresting realization—amidst the ordinary ongoingness of everyday occurrence—that *something* is happening at all (2011). It is the event itself, much more than the presence or absence of our expectations for it, that can prove so jarring, spurring its retroactive codification into *genre*. Berlant notes:

In these narrative histories of the present, a shift between knowing and uncertain intuitionisms enables us to think about being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing whose demands on survival skills map not the whole world in one moment but a way to think about the history of sensualized epistemologies in the atmosphere of a particular moment now (aesthetically) suspended in time. (2011:64)

It is in this sense of a sensual epistemology of a particular moment suspended in time that I return to an analysis of the zombie. I again wish to avoid nominating the zombie as *typical* of occupation, or even of the contemporary precarious condition. Rather, thinking Berlant’s account of eventization together with Negri’s account of *kairòs*, I want to explore the *particular* figuration of zombification as a mode of delaying the becoming-object of the event, of holding open the swerve or, in the zombie’s case, the *shamble*, of matter moving into the void.⁷

Marx’s political writings point to one aspect of this phenomenon: the frequent recourse to figures and genres draped in historical familiarity at the very moment of rapid and accelerating revolution. Here the zombie inherits the Atlantic cycle of speculation and “accumulation through dispossession” that Ian Baucom anatomizes in *Spectres of the Atlantic* (2005). The zombie effigies dead, congealed labor. In Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* ([1852] 1996), such theatricality served a reactionary, cloaking function, but we can also note its ambiguity. Consider the cloaking of the zombie march on the Bank of London in the globally recognizable sounds and dance moves of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*. The infectious and enduring rhythm of his iconic hit became the subject of a viral video in 2007, when coerced performances of the dance by inmates of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) in the Philippines were uploaded to the internet. In J. Lorenzo Perillo’s lucid analysis of these performances, the

7. On the distinction between the typical and the particular, see Baucom (2005:39–46).

CPDRC video intersected with a strategy of containment, as the internet viewer looked on via the panoptic position of a camera stationed high above the courtyard in which the orange-jumpsuited men—and one *bakla* transgender performer—danced (Perillo 2011). I myself was part of a group that screened the video as part of an impromptu tribute to Jackson in the wake of his death in 2009, enthusiastically participating in the infectious joy his dance and music brought, until sharply, and correctly, upbraided by a colleague who pointed out the video's enactment of carceral power and imperial enjoyment. This episode brings forward the ambivalence I now see to be key to any approach to current uses of the zombie (or for that matter, reclamations of the name “occupation,” which is equally weighted with the history of ongoing settler and apartheid regimes). It seems to be that rather than the innocent or newborn subject,

rather than the ecstatically joyous figure that might have sought “to live without dead time,” the zombie performs the body as an accumulation strategy: an accumulation of genre, of history, of gesture, and of race. The zombie dance is a survival skill for living with dead time.

Shaka McGlotten's work on zombification and queer (a)sociality is especially productive for developing this insight into contemporary zombie aesthetics. Demurring before straightforward celebrations of the zombie as the latest avatar of the posthuman, McGlotten nonetheless wants to construe our “our collective zombification as still possessing an openness” (McGlotten 2011:183) Particularly useful are the possibilities he detects for new materialist conceptions of the zombie in what he describes as the new “emphasis on the openness of matter”:

That is, no matter is considered dead. Zombies, to take an obvious example, are alive not just because they have been reanimated, but because their decomposing bodies participate in ecologies of energy transfer, and because their contagiousness imputes an immanent continuity. Their hunger performs the obstinate movement of desire's passing. Desire induces changes, and it returns. This hunger transcends the constraints of life as we know it, or sparks at its edges. (190)

The particular, atypical shamble of the zombie—its asocial sociality, its decomposing ecology—choreographs a relation to the tense, dreadful time of precarity. In a literal way, becoming-zombie is a release from boredom and anxiety, as interviews with occupiers attest (see NYDN.com 2011). But release of energy should be seen as a *transfer* of energy, as itself evincing, if it is not too paradoxical to speak of this: a *surplus of time*. The scene of occupation, as William Scott has found in his historical research into workers occupations of factories, and



Figures 6 & 7. *Dancing on the Grave of Capitalism* protest. London, 31 October 2011. (Divi58 2011; screen grab courtesy of Tavia Nyong'o)



also his own service as an Occupy Wall Street librarian, produced a surplus, an elongation and intensification of time (Scott 2012a, 2012b). Within *kairòs*, Scott notes, hours felt like days and days felt like months. Time became elongated or *stretched* out, as striated (clock time) became smooth (haptic, felt time) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:523–51). *Time takes longer*. The zombie, shambling across the perimeter of occupation in roving hunger, transfers this time, makes it contagious.

Another way to put this is to address the blackness of the zombie, attached equally to laboring and racialized histories of the “many-headed hydra” (Linebaugh 2000). Rebecca Schneider has pointed to the theatricality of Marx’s historical materialism, both in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as well as in the dramaturgical possibilities inherent in the theoretical figure of “dead labor” (Schneider 2011:42–45; see also Schneider 2012). I am very much drawn to this idea, as I am to Fred Moten’s powerful reinterpretation of Marx’s trope of the “commodity that speaks,” which Moten reads both with and against the Marxian grain to proffer a conception of black performance as a scene of resistance by the object (Moten 2003). That the zombie dance is black performance seems overdetermined, given its burlesqued roots in cinematic fantasies of Haitian *vodun*. Disavowing—as Jackson did—the zombie as a generalized figure of the “occult,” one associated with a white, juvenile, male fan base for B-movies, only redoubles the musical ironies of a black artist “crossing-over” into the black-derived musical landscape of rock via a figure encrypted with such an accumulation of African meanings. Such musical and choreographic virtuosity steps around the many potential dead ends his character confronts in his attempts to escape the horrors of the occult, the many jumps cuts the video makes between layers of a reality that turns out to be a movie, within a television show, within a dream. As an allegory of racial capitalism, and of lateral agency within it, *Thriller* could not work better. It seems at least for this reason that it, rather than the B-movies it ostensibly cites, provides the urtext for contemporary zombie marches such as the one that was organized at Occupy London.

To think the zombie not as a generic figure of B-movie cliché then, nor even the zombie as it has enjoyed a popular and critical resurgence in the 2000s (most recently on TV in *The Walking Dead*), is to think the zombie through Jackson’s body as an accumulation strategy for politicized, anarchic dances. Compared side by side, the dance being rehearsed at Occupy London and the one performed in the *Thriller* video resemble each other only in idea. Jackson and his dancers have a virtuosic speed and “infectious rhythm” that the occupiers do not attempt (Browning 1998). Instead, in their amateurish, simplified gestures that afford room for joining and leaving, for error and improvisation, they enact both the affective tonality of the zombie, characterized by slowness and shambles, and the depressive contagion of the zombie bite, enlivening the socially deadened matter it comes into contact with. Whether that matter is other pedestrians, traffic, police, or buildings, they all become surfaces the zombie shambles into and across. There is an arrested “adolescence” at play in the adoption of zombie marches as a political tactic: it is a throwing of the dead affect of aggrieved and aggressive youth into the face of an overdeveloped, ravenous economy that feeds on the bodies, desires, and aspirations of the young. Would crowds of youthful wizards and vampires, or werewolves and demons have done the trick? Or is there too much of either the agentially evil or the simply bestial to permit such figures to do the same cultural work of representing the bad sentiments of precarity?

Let me answer that with one last narrative from the month before my visit to London. In October, I had been initially reluctant to take my own first trip down to New York’s financial district. I was, in a former life, a Wall Street zombie. Technically, I never worked on Wall Street. But, for a difficult year in my early 20s, I did don a suit at the crack of dawn and schlep down to one bank or another in the financial district (or, occasionally, to one of its outposts in Long Island City, Queens, or Stamford, CT, where I worked the graveyard shift). Citibank, Chase Manhattan, American Express, Swiss Bank. I was a permatemp in a series of postmodern secretarial pools, the highest paid work my liberal arts degree could secure me even in the middle of

the '90s dot-com boom. But when dressed up as “computer skills,” typing documents for a series of soulless financial corporations was a fairly high-paying job. In fact, it was the best I could do.

When, about a decade later, I returned to New York City a newly minted Assistant Professor, my annual salary, when converted to an hourly rate, barely exceeded what Wall Street had paid me. If indeed, it did exceed it. That simple conversion, however, belied the transformation from insecure hourly waged work to a stable salaried career. What chilled my spirit back in those early days, what filled me with dread and drove me from the workforce into the impoverished ranks of humanities graduate education, was the zombified state I felt myself enter into each morning, a state that persisted all day and lingered long into the night. Like the marchers in the zombie march on Wall Street and the Bank of England, I felt that doing precarious labor for high capital was slowly draining my life blood, taking away my dream of being young and alive in New York and slowly transforming it into a gray nightmare. Ever since escaping the corporate hellhole, I had been reluctant to ever voluntarily reenter lower Manhattan. So I was surprised, when I began taking trips in October to witness and participate in Occupy Wall Street, at the number of tourists milling around the financial district, snapping pictures of the Exchange, happily threading their way amidst the crush of police, brokers, street vendors, and occupiers. Considering the Stock Exchange and the geography of lower Manhattan from the point of view of a postmodern *flâneur* was an arresting thought. Were these shutterbugs appalled, or excited, to hear that the zombies were coming?

“Make a hole and let the zombies through!” was the refrain as the zombies broke out of Zuccotti Park and shambled towards the Stock Exchange. I immediately understood their impulse to take their bad sentiments and externalize them into “corporate zombie makeovers,” effigying the accumulated power and rapacious hunger of dead labor over live labor while, at the same time, identifying with the swarming movements, roving tactics, and monstrous affect of the zombies. Zombie marches, I was somewhat surprised to learn, are a phenomenon of only this past decade (do Vale 2010). They are officially designated as a form of “cosplay” (costumed play) and, along with everything else it seems, now have their own websites, conventions, documentaries: the whole apparatus of contemporary subculture. Their rise is attributed, reasonably enough, to the resurgence of the zombie film as a Hollywood genre in the 2000s. But it hardly strains credulity to understand the phenomenon against the backdrop of awful carnage of the post-9/11 world, and in particular the War in Iraq conducted by former US President Bush and former British Prime Minister Blair. Occupations in London, Boston, and New York have adopted the zombie walk as a recognizable performance genre of our times, drawing on B-movies, music videos, and zombie kitsch as a commodified cultural unconscious, an accumulation of dead and congealed labor that is reanimated through the theatricality of makeup and make believe. Occupying the zombie march is a hand-to-hand combat with the everyday apparatuses of entertainment and distraction, not a pious refusal of popular culture but a politicized immersion in its commodified affect for the purposes of its possible rerouting; not a recusal from the desires that result in a “larval” or “spectral” subject, but an ensemblic desiring-production of precarious time.

And what about the name of occupation? What can the precarious time of *kairòs*, as performed through the zombie, tell us about that name? Others have mentioned the numerous pitfalls associated with that name. But here too Negri’s discussion of *kairòs* comes to our assistance. Occupation, we might argue along the lines of Negri’s analysis, is not a concept in the strict sense, not a transhistorical category, but a name, immanent to the event which it names. And “the truth of a name,” he asserts, “cannot be given by anything other than its insistence in *kairòs*.” Occupation “does not ask language for its truth, because it has already asked it of *kairòs*. But in language it finds a place to ‘inhabit’” (2003:155). I have sought in this essay to find a place in the language of performance for such an occupation.

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