

*art philosophy horror*

# INCOGNITUM HACTENUS



*vol.3*

***Living On: Zombies***

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## *Editorial*

### Caryn Coleman and Tom Trevatt

Hordes of the living dead walk the earth. Not just in movie theatres and works of fiction, but in computer games, screen-savers, flash mobs, clothing, advertising, television dramas, comic books, self-help guides, dreams, performance art, the collective consciousness. In other words, they are a part of our real life.

Twenty years ago, Steven Shaviro wrote about the allegorical nature of zombies in George A. Romero's *Night* trilogy (*Land of the Dead* and *Island of the Dead* were not yet in existence) in his seminal essay, *Contagious Allegories*. Shaviro speaks of how zombies are represented in film, not as socio-political allegory but manifested in the very nature of cinematic gestures. He writes:

*But at such moments of waiting for the zombies awakening or approach, the link between apprehension and action is hollowed out or suspended, in what Deleuze (1986, 197-215) calls a "crisis" in the act of seeing. The stimulating sensation fails to arrive, and the motor reaction is arrested. The slow meanders of zombie time emerge out of a paralysis of the conventional time of progressive narrative. This strangely empty temporality also corresponds to a new way of looking, a vertiginously passive fascination. The usual relation of audience to protagonist is inverted. Instead of the spectator projecting him- or herself into the actions unfolding on the screen, an on-screen character lapses into a quasi-spectatorial position. This is the point at which dread slips into obsession, the moment when unfulfilled threats turn into seductive promises.*

This kind of forward thinking on how zombies trans-mutated from being merely representational into being the foundation of representation itself has not been matched since. Historically conditioned by its origins in Haitian folklore and the film oeuvre of Romero, the cultural familiarity of zombies in the social sphere and as a form of critique

has stunted the zombie evolution into the repetitive same. The zombie now seems to be doubly self-reflexive, becoming only a metaphor for itself, omniscient to the point of cultural assimilation. Our current moment sees a resurgence of horror theory and zombie narratives into contemporary philosophical writings such as Evan Calder Williams' book, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse: Luciferian Marxism* but it also bears witness to the continual rehashing of the same storylines in movies (adding strippers doesn't make it unique). It is apparent that the time to rethink the zombie has arrived.

Zombies are an amalgam of life in death, death in life, expressing double status not simply as critique but also to uncover criticality through the pronouncement of the biochemical real. As properly functioning humans, we are not thinking subjects divorced from the eviscerated object, but an entanglement of subject and object, death held at bay by the thinnest thread of electrical impulse. The zombie stumbling toward you, arms outstretched and moaning, should not just make you run but think about your own hybridity. The zombie is a true ecological figure, a composite of already composited beings, the continual extension of hybridity. So we must posit: if the contemporary is conditioned by a bifurcation between subject and object (between man and nature) and modern critique rests precisely on this disjuncture, then the corporeal figure of the zombie promises possibilities. The zombie necessitates us to think beyond, towards the future, of this dyad - beyond the narrow restriction of the present critical approach and the limits of the past.

In this *Living on: Zombies* issue of *Incognitum Hactenus* we attempt to progress the traditional zombie allegory into new forms of meaning through the lens of post-contemporaneity, pushing beyond the restrictions imposed by a static social critique. Not surprisingly, capitalism as the defining and immediate structure of our society, its formation and infection of social practice, is at the heart of our contributors' essays. And as we suggest in the beginning of this editorial, the duality inherent in the zombie figure is a prominent part of the discussion.

In her humanist essay *For the Ethical Treatment of Zombies*, unexpected zombie scholar Sarah Juliet Lauro places the realness, ethics, and empathy of zombies into present day, ranging from the recent bath salt attack in the United States to Haitian ritual voodoo. Tracing its contemporary roots from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), artist Simon Clark takes a psychoanalytical approach by addressing the paradoxical and melancholic progressiveness of the zombie in *The Haptics of Undeadliness; a Methodology for Melancholic Practice*. The title says it all but in *Nekros; or, the Poetics of Biopolitics*, Professor Eugene Thacker discusses the zombie outbreak as biopolitical (life, power, and the body politic) and as a consideration of a spiritual form of Life.

As outlined in artist, filmmaker, and writer Bruce LaBruce's introductory essay, the



inclusion of the original script for his 2008 film *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* is to uniquely address how the homosexual experience is conducive to a zombie treatment. Zombie porn is the future! *Incognitum Hactenus* co-editor Tom Trevatt outlines what the phrase “living on” suggests as he relates the impending apocalyptic life after the world’s oil supply finally dies. And finally, Kate Thompson’s non-manifesto outlines the (re)volution of zombies; acting as both a definition and reconsideration.

Our artist contributions by Jim Shaw and Chad Robertson detail how the representation of the zombie manifests in other visual forms outside of the cinematic. Shaw’s 2007 artist film *The Hole* presents the between space where the living “normal” world and the endless repetition of the continuous living in “zombie” world collapse, connecting through a hole in a wall in a domestic realm. While Chad Robertson’s *Untitled* zombie paintings from 2006 (inspired by the liminal boundary between order and chaos in post-Katrina New Orleans) outlines an ambiguous threat, questioning whether it’s the zombie or us we should fear.

In our longest issue to date, we aspire to ignite a new conversation around the over-used, played-out, yet endlessly fascinating zombie apocalypse. Unlike the vampire and the poor under-valued werewolf, the zombie as we collectively know it was born in the 20th century, a modern and continuous phenomenon. Welcome to a new zombie world.

## ***For the Ethical Treatment of Zombies*** **by Sarah Juliet Lauro**

On May 26th, 2012, a naked man named Rudy Eugene, 31, allegedly under the influence of a street drug known as “Bath Salts” attacked a homeless man reclining under the MacArthur Causeway in Miami, Florida, stripped off his victim’s pants and began chewing off the man’s face in what eyewitnesses referred to as a “zombie-like attack.” Though initial reports said that 75% of the victim’s face had been destroyed, that both his eyes were gone, his nose completely bitten off, more recent estimations describe Ronald Poppo’s injuries as affecting 50% of his face; one recent article described the damage to Poppo: “a deranged stranger gouged out one of his eyes and chewed off his forehead, nose, an eyelid and his lips,” (Clary, Sun Sentinel, 6.6.12). The police, who were called by horrified bystanders, were unable to persuade Eugene to desist in his attack; some reports claim he even continued to maul Poppo after being shot by police. They eventually shot Eugene dead, hitting Poppo with a stray bullet in the process. The very first accounts of the incident that surfaced drew comparisons to horror film, as if this were an incident manifested out of our collective cinematic nightmares. Larry Vega came upon the bizarre incident while riding his bike Saturday morning. He told WSVN-TV in Miami it was like something out of a horror movie.

“The guy was, like, tearing him to pieces with his mouth, so I told him, ‘Get off!’” Vega said. “The guy just kept eating the other guy away, like, ripping his skin. ... It was just a blob of blood. You couldn’t really see, it was just blood all over the place.” (Catherine Holland, 5.29.12)

As a scholar who has devoted nearly the past decade to the study of zombies, I’m finding it hard to talk about this incident, which has been widely labeled the “Miami zombie attack.” My reasons for this are entirely personal but they are revealing, I think, of the way we compartmentalize the subjects on which we work, and the border we depend upon

between fiction and reality, between our professional lives and our personal lives, between our intellectual responses, and our emotional ones. In a confessional mode, I feel pulled to describe how this event lead me to think differently about the way we talk and think about zombies, and what the larger implications of this may be for something like Post-human ethics, but in order to do this I need to transgress a barrier we erect in academic writing, and provide a preface that tells you a little bit about who I am.

I'm a staunch pacifist; I'm the kind of person who cannot watch the news or I'll be paralyzed for days in a depressive coma; I abhor violence and gore, in film, in video-games, in life. As a film scholar, I pretend to have some moral objection to the films of Quentin Tarantino on the grounds that his pastiche is too much plagiarism; the truth is, I just can't stomach the gleeful violence of his movies. Every zombie movie I had to watch in order to write my 400-page doctoral dissertation on the history of the zombie myth was absolute work, much of them seen through a lattice of fingers and a screen of scrunched eyes. The instant my dissertation was filed, I stopped watching AMC's *The Walking Dead* series with a sigh of relief. (No one liked it anyway; the writing was terrible.)

In short, I'm the least likely person to have become a zombie expert. Part of my interest in the topic, in the first place, came from the fact that I could not understand why people found zombie movies enjoyable in the slightest – they are filled with scenes of people's entrails being pulled out before their very eyes, arms separated from torsos with the ease with which we rip into a fresh baguette, and most of all, over and over again, skulls split open in a myriad of ways. To me, watching zombie movies is gut-wrenching, jaw-clenching, soul-sickening agony. But I've watched scores of them. And I suppose it gets easier, after awhile.

This is what made it so strange to me that when I heard of the "Miami zombie attack," I had virtually no reaction. I couldn't watch the video (I still haven't), but I read the reports in a sort of anesthetized fog. Such a fog, in fact, that I somehow missed the key fact that homeless victim Ronald Poppo remained alive. Somehow, I thought he died in the attack, and that most of the "cannibalism," as it was labeled in the press, occurred post-mortem; I suppose it was much easier to think of it happening that way. Shortly after news of the bizarre story began to spread, I was besieged by questions from my students, and texts from friends; I chatted briefly about it with a reporter from the BBC who was doing an unrelated story on zombie video-games. As I gave my "reading" of the event, it was fast becoming just one more narrative in my archive. I was blithely unaware of the fact that this happened in real life, to real people. No, that's not quite right. I was aware of it as something that occurred in reality, but its definition as a "real" event was subsumed to the fact that this is precisely what made it a zombie attack. I'll explain. First, I'm going to sketch out some of my cold, analytic interpretation, and then I'll address the ethics of performing such an analysis.

1. *Zombies are real*

It is central to my work on the zombie that unlike other cinematic creatures, or the bogeymen of folklore, the zombie is a mythological creature associated with natural rather than supernatural forces. The Haitian zombie on which our modern day zombie is based is the product --as Harvard-trained scientist Wade Davis describes in detail in his books *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (1988) and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985)-- of a pharmacological process involving poison and narcotics. The appearance of the creature as a resurrected dead body is but an illusion: the Voodoo zombie's slave-like somnambulism is the result, quite simply, of drugs. Tales of this technology can be traced back to Bryan Edwards's *History of the West Indies* (1793) and Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), in which he writes of the slaves: "The most sensible among them fear the supernatural powers of the African obeah-men, or pretended conjurors; often ascribing those mortal effects to magic, which are only the natural operation of some poisonous juice, or preparation, dexterously administered by these villains."

In Haiti, zombies are absolutely understood as a real occurrence and instances of zombie-making are well-documented. Real life zombies have been chronicled by Zora Neale Hurston, in *Tell My Horse* (1938) and in Davis's work, wherein he profiles Clairvius Narcisse, a man who claimed he was the victim of zombification in 1980; the BBC's attention to Narcisse's story brought his story to the world's attention. These Haitian zombies are acknowledged as the victims of poison; their families presume them dead, but their bodies are actually in a state of paralysis; the culprit supplies an antidote which banishes the death-like state and maintains the zombie at a low-level of functioning (probably through the repeated administration of other toxins). The zombie essentially becomes a slave, capable only of following basic commands. The fact that the Miami zombie attack happened "in real life," was therefore no diminishment of its authenticity as a zombie event. We'll even leave aside the fact that Rudy Eugene, the alleged zombie, is the child of Haitians, and that his girlfriend has put forth the theory that this attack was either the result of a Vodou curse, or that he was drugged unknowingly — she fails to realize these may not be mutually exclusive.

2. *"He's not a zombie. He's my son."*

Despite his mother's heart-wrenching insistence to the contrary (here, in a quote given to the Miami Herald), Rudy Eugene was a zombie. Aptly, this statement by the attacker's mother parallels a well-known line that appears in zombie movies, and in other iterations, in countless zombie stories: "She's not your mother anymore; she's a zombie." This line is spoken in Peter Jackson's gross-out zombie flick *Dead Alive* (aka *Braindead*, 1992), and in Simon Pegg's zombie farce *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), for example. Most of the time, the surviving characters in movies face the same sort of denial as Eugene's mother; they have to be told, by someone else, someone outside the family, that the person they knew is not

the same as the mad cannibal standing before them. Eugene's mother has the opposite problem; she pleaded with the media to stop referring to her son as a zombie. At the same time, however, both she and Rudy's girlfriend expressed multiple times to journalists that the person who did these things was not Rudy. What Rudy's mother hadn't yet realized is that this is precisely what makes him a zombie.

The zombie has continually evolved since becoming a mainstay of horror cinema in the 1930s, and we've used the word "zombie" to refer to the innocuous walking-dead and the virus-infected cannibal, and many other incarnations in between. The best current working definition of what counts as a zombie turns around the issue of what Peter Dendle calls "depersonalization." A zombie is, at every turn, precisely this: a body that has been stripped of the person it once was, acting in a manner that is completely out of character, or seemingly devoid of what we used to call a soul. Therefore, by contemporary definitions, and by his mother and girlfriend's own unwitting testimony, we must conclude with a bit of cold reason that the figure that attacked Ronald Poppo, the person formerly known as Rudy Eugene, was, in fact, a zombie.

### *3. What's real life, anyway?*

The zombie's invasion of the quotidian, the everyday, the "real world" became an increasingly important part of the zombie narrative, especially since the films of George Romero shifted the walking dead from an exotic phenomena associated with postcolonial climes, to our own backyards. Romero's staging of the zombie phenomenon as a global event watched on TV by the group of strangers holed up in a rural Pennsylvania farmhouse (in *Night of the Living Dead*, 1968) introduced the element of media spectatorship, through which real world crises are attended in our lifetime, as a key component of the mythology. I barely blinked when I saw the news captions proclaiming a "Zombie Attack" in Miami because I've seen this scene on television before, on the tele around which the survivors huddle in countless zombie films: a frame within the frame, suggesting the mis-en-abîme of life imitating art in the postmodern era.

It has become increasingly important, too, that the zombie involves the interruption of public spaces, like Romero's Monroeville Mall (in *Dawn of the Dead*, 1978), like formerly bustling London in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), and downtown Atlanta, which teems with zombies in the *Walking Dead* series (2010-2012) based on the comic book series by Rober Kirkman (first published 2003). Taking a cue from many such films, and using the zombie for a range of playful and political purposes, zombies have become ever more prevalent in real life. As I have written about elsewhere, zombies can be found on Main Street, USA in nearly every state in the union (at least one day a year) in the form of zombie walks and zombie pub-crawls. Zombies have been featured in performance art displays in Toronto, Canada, in protests in London, and even, last Autumn, at Occupy Wall Street in New York City. Often the point is to assault unsuspecting witnesses with

the presence of zombies in the space of “real life.” When I first read of the attack, I was painfully aware that if I had witnessed such a thing, my first reaction might have been like that of a bystander on a subway car in New York, who, seeing artist Jillian McDonald dressed and acting as a zombie in a piece called *Horror Makeup*, said bewilderedly: “I think it’s performance art.”

The problem with my analysis of the event, and my first reactions to it, is that I wasn’t bewildered. I was looking at it with all the remove and distance with which I have come to treat films, and video-games, and comic books, and truly awful short stories: as if I were just turning a geode over in my hand to see the mysteries inside. I forgot that this was a real event that happened to two real people: one shot dead by police, the other, left permanently disfigured. To be perfectly honest, I think I became a zombie, too, in that moment, losing completely my empathy for my fellow humans, distanced from it by the frames of my television set and the banner headlines.

#### *4. Social death*

Because the zombie comes directly to us from Haiti, and is a myth the origins of which we can trace back to Africa, and which implicate the slave trade in its inception—coming as it does, I believe, out of a myth chronicled by O. Dapper’s collection of narratives from the sailors of the Dutch East India Company in his *Description De L’Afrique* (1665)—and because, at every turn, it is a myth about slavery, about having no control over one’s actions, about being “depersonalized” by outside forces, zombies are always political. Even when they’re not. To my mind, even a game of zombie tag played on a college campus is laden with all kinds of latent content: the race fear that characterized the first wave of zombie cinema (in films like *White Zombie*, 1932 and *I Walked with a Zombie*, 1943); commentaries on the social death of slaves, whose misery was first translated into the Haitian myth of zombies, and those who are still socially disenfranchised in our society, like prisoners, say, or the homeless.

In R. Chetwynd-Hayes’s “The Ghouls” (in *The Mammoth Book of Zombies*, edited Stephen Jones, Carroll & Graf, 1993, a new version of a story published in 1975 titled “The Night Ghouls”), the protagonist, a Londoner named Mr. Goldsmith, discovers that he has been surrounded by the living dead for some time. The transients who live in the city are revealed to be zombies, kept alive and docile by means of the administering of a liquid called “Methy” (Ministry Everlasting Topside Hardened Youth) by a shadowy government department known only as HQ. In its obvious reference to the street drug “meth,” this story calls into question the government’s tolerance of the drug habits of the poor. This is just one example of a story that draws an overt comparison between the homeless and zombies; there are many others.

The fact that this attack occurred between a young African American male (the child of



Haitian immigrants, no less!), and a homeless man is one of the things that makes the story truly stranger than fiction. Both have, at times, been figured as zombies, as the outsiders of our society, and this narrative is very much present in the media coverage; an article in the New York Daily news referred to Rudy Eugene as a “wastrel” (Helen Kennedy, 6.12.12), presumably because of his career in odd-jobs, most recently car-washing. Media especially focused on the social death of vagrant victim Ronald Poppo; multiple articles emphasized that this event brought to light the fact that Poppo was even still alive: his grown daughter had presumed he was dead.

And what bears remembering too, is that in Haitian folklore, the zombie IS the victim; he is the prey of the witchdoctor who has drugged him and pressed him into service for wageless labour. It is only in later American cinema that the zombie becomes a terrifying cannibal, and a threat to the uninfected/unaffected humans, but it is also often the victim of unchecked corporate greed, or the result of a misstep taken by scientists that leads to the zombie outbreak or epidemic (For more on this see my chapter on “The Eco Zombie” in *Generation Zombie*, editors Boluk and Lenz, 2011). In nearly all cases, the finger points back to Capitalism as the witchdoctor holding its captives in a state of servitude and perpetual hunger.

In this case, Rudy Eugene seems to have been, at best, the victim of an unscrupulous drug dealer, at worst, the victim of an uncaring, unfeeling society that does not have the appropriate resources in place to help those struggling with mental illness, drug addiction, depression and general maladjustment. One of the more thoughtful pieces I’ve read on the subject is titled “Troubled lives clashed in ‘Miami Zombie’ face-eating attack (by Elinor J. Brecher and Nadege Green, Miami Herald); it describes Rudy Eugene’s dedication to his own spirituality, his difficulty with substance abuse, and his family troubles, alongside Poppo’s alcoholism and a life lead on the margins of society.

### *5. Empathy, Ethics, Apology*

If I feel terrible about how coldly I first viewed this incident, if I feel that I was zombie-like in my initial treatment of it, it is because it was so out of character for me. I am a deeply empathic person, fascinated by the way empathy informs ethics, and yet, I found myself making a terrible joke, well terrible jokes, actually, on Twitter in the wake of the attack. A friend of mine tweeted the phrase “Emmanuel Levinas Food Court.” He was doing a project in which he reimagined all the parts of an airport taking on the names of philosophers and philosophical concepts. To this I responded, “This one doubles as a joke about the Miami Zombie.”

The venom of this joke comes from the fact that the philosopher mentioned, Emmanuel Levinas, is known for describing the “face-to-face encounter,” from which he feels stems the first impulse to act ethically towards the other:

*The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse.... The first word of the face is the "Thou shalt not kill." It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me.*

(Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 87-89)

In confronting the naked face of another human, we are, in Levinas's view, made aware of the vulnerability of the other, and reminded of our responsibility to do no harm without being aware of whether or not this social bind will be reciprocated. In full force then, an instance in which a man tears off the face of another man with his teeth either directly, ironically flouts Levinas's description of the face-to-face encounter, or it shows us something else: that the attacker was no longer behaving as we expect a human being to behave.

In an article by Mike Nary of the Sun Sentinel, dated 6.6.12, Poppo's doctors discussed the moment they will tell him of the extent of his deformity:

"What they all say is, 'I've become a monster,'" said Daniel Alam, a plastic surgeon at Cleveland Clinic who helped transplant a face onto a Connecticut woman mauled by a pet chimpanzee in 2009. "Because without a face, others cannot see them as human. The world cannot relate to them ever again. That's where depression comes in. And he will be a victim of that." (Nary, "Miami 'zombie' face-eating attack victim Ronald Poppo has long road ahead of him, physician says")

The transformation from a human into a monster, therefore, was not Eugene's alone. He transmitted his non-human state to Ronald Poppo when he destroyed so much of his face. Therefore, in yet another chilling similarity to contemporary zombie narratives, the nonhuman state has proved contagious, passed on by means of the bite.

On this point I might go into much more detail in discussing the "becoming-animal/becoming-other" transformation that the zombie often represents. The damage to Ronald Poppo's face is horrific, but, as the physician's quote suggests, it is not unlike the kinds of injuries sustained by animal attack victims who cross paths with bears, mountain lions, pitt bulls. Many zombie narratives dramatize the separation of the human and the animal zombie, and juxtapose this to a dystopic vision in which the human survivors disconnect from their superegoes, as if civilization is all that holds us back from a similar abandonment of morality. Frequently, in such tales, the surviving humans prove themselves to be more sadistic than the animalistic zombies. But unsurprisingly, and perhaps humanly I'm more interested here in what this horrific event says about me.

How could I think such a thing when a man was lying in critical condition in a hospital, his face ripped off by another man? What possessed me to tweet that careless quip about Levinas? Well, the truth is, I had seen a picture, of a naked black body, face down,



wearing sneakers, his head dressed in corn-rows. Lying right next to him was a body with no face, just a bloody orb. I assumed they were both dead. Naturally, I assumed they were both dead, for who would take a picture of a live victim in that condition in the same pictorial frame as his destroyer -- their shoulders touching?

Only someone, I now realize, who saw that there were two victims here, and two very different zombies. One that we can neatly map onto the figure's origins, and the other standing in for the zombie's current moment: Poppo represents the harmless, pitiable social dead of Colonial empire, abused by a system geared towards the profit of the few at the expense of the many, where those unfit to participate in the smooth workings of the machine, are left to fall through the cracks. Eugene calls to mind the raving, insatiable cannibal that Capitalism makes us all out to be, perpetually driven to consume, having no real sense of what we do -- of whose misery, somewhere in another part of the planet, needs to be maintained to ensure the lowest prices. What this grisly story reminds me is that you don't have to look at the face of the other, in fact you can't even see it, if you're a zombie.

In the days that followed the news reports of the Miami zombie, panic spread, as it will, about this isolated event being the harbinger of a coming apocalypse. Straight out of fiction, there were Internet rumors bandied about concerning a mysterious zombie virus, there were copycat events involving mentally unstable individuals claiming to be zombies. But let me, as an expert, assure you: we are only zombies when we lose sight of the other as a person, and begin to see him as a food source, as cheap labor, or, as I did, an interesting bit of conversation. But thankfully, this is a zombie state from which we can awaken.

As I alluded to at the beginning of this piece, my various responses to this story (professional and personal, intellectual and emotional) lead me to question what is next in the field of Posthuman ethics. Is there really any liberation to be found in the term "Posthuman" anymore? The zombie is a post-human, quite literally, but it hardly seems to represent a promising future. Though we may find it useful to critique the values of Enlightenment humanism which, in actuality, worked against the valuation of all human bodies as equal, is there still anything to be gained from a term that puts the nonhuman -- I exclude here the animal, for naturally, animals, as all living creatures ought to be treated ethically-- and in particular, the object (as does the recent current in philosophy called Object Oriented Ontology) on the same level as the human? Though I continue to embrace Posthumanist interest in the combination of the human with technology and other life forms as offering liberatory potential, my interest in this has always been and remains limited to my desire to enable the human's escape from the individual subject position. And yet, increasingly, I think of all the other ways we might find a way out of the tomb of individualism; in particular, by looking to community, by seeking in empathy and sympathy a kind of transindividual state (Brian Massumi and others are already doing work in this vein). Yet, there is a difference between an attack of flesh-eating bacteria on a

person's limbs (which made news in the US nearly the same week as the Miami zombie) and an attack of one man against another: it is more horrifying because we expect humans to be better than animals, than viruses. If I say that I feel that we should treat "zombies ethically," what I mean is that we need to be careful of the way we talk about Poppo and Eugene, and the way we talk about the homeless and the drug-addicted, because "These zombies," as one short story author writes, "are not a metaphor." (Jeff Goldberg, "These zombies are not a metaphor," in Justin Taylor, ed. *The Apocalypse Reader*, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2007). In fact, no zombie is ever really a just metaphor, and what this real life tragedy reveals to me is the liberatory potential of a new kind of posthuman transformation. To this end, we can repurpose one of the best known zombie tropes, from Romero's landmark *Night of the Living Dead*, in which Barbara says of the zombies, "They're us. We're them and they're us." If we can start thinking of all other humans (or even beings) along these same lines, perhaps we can surmount the limits of humanism, even while preserving our humanity.



Jim Shaw, *The Hole*, 2007 (JS07.51)

Video with artist soundtrack

11min 5 seconds (looped)

Edition of 3, 2 APs

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Praz-Delavellade, Paris

# ***The Haptics of Undeadliness; a Methodology for Melancholic Practice***

## **Simon Clark**

The zombie. An oxymoron made flesh. A vile and stinking embodiment of paradoxical weirdness. A contagion of gory and slapstick nonsense that defiles reasonable sensibilities. As the louche and drawling sheriff from *Night of the Living Dead* says of the walking corpses in his midst, “They’re dead. They’re all messed up.” (George A. Romero, *Night of the Living Dead* 1968)

The zombie’s oddness derives from its refusal to submit to its own death. In order to understand the nature of this refusal, it is necessary to understand what is being refused. So what exactly is this death that undeadliness denies? In his book *The New Black; Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, Darian Leader establishes the Lacanian idea that biological death is a separate event to symbolic death. A person may die physically, but this death is not automatically fixed within the Symbolic; it continues to press upon the living as a haunting and unprocessed affect. The dead must therefore die twice before their absence can be registered symbolically.

*For symbolic death to occur, the dead must be banished and kept at bay. ... The second killing represents a movement from empirical biological death to symbolic laying to rest*  
(116 – 117 Darian Leader, *The New Black; Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*)

Leader claims that this process of “killing the dead” (ibid.) frames death within an ordered matrix of meaning. The dead are subjected to a second symbolic demise that reifies them within language as that which has definitively gone. The registering of this second death within the Symbolic allows the process of mourning to proceed. For example, the funeral service functions to ossify death as an event that has meaning – however painful that meaning might be. The dead person’s name no longer signifies a life; it becomes

instead an engraving on a tombstone that names an absence and thus fixes death on a symbolic level.

At the beginning of Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* we see Johnny and Barbara – a feuding brother and sister – driving into a cemetery. Romero never explicitly tells the viewer whose grave the siblings are visiting; all we know is that they are there at the behest of their mother who is not well enough to make the journey herself. The person who has died is not positively identified, so we can already claim that death has not been fixed within the symbolic register – it has no name attached to it. Johnny constantly moans about the inconvenience of travelling so far to the cemetery, and refuses to afford the occasion any sense of gravitas. They have bought a cross-shaped wreath that bears the inscription “we still remember.” Johnny scoffs at this and claims, “I don’t even remember what the man looked like.” Johnny then complains that the wreath will inevitably be gone by the time they next visit, and jokingly speculates that the same one is probably sold back to them year after year.

*A little spit and polish, you could clean this up and sell it next year. I wonder how many times we've bought the same one?*

Not only does Johnny's banter exhibit a cynical irreverence towards the protocols of the cemetery, it suggests that the wreath is no more than a banal commodity with no intrinsic symbolic meaning. It is unable to function effectively as an articulation of loss that might frame death and allow the process of mourning to proceed.

As the siblings park their car at the cemetery, the radio starts to buzz. The tuner is unable to grasp a clear signal, and we hear a swirl of glitchy feedback and white noise before an announcer is heard apologising for the technical difficulties that took them off air. Johnny looks momentarily troubled by the portentous sound of the radio not making sense, but he is able to manage his anxiety by simply turning off the device. He immediately shrugs off this disruption and continues his puerile ribbing of his long-suffering sister. But as soon as Johnny switches off the radio an extradiegetic bell chimes, followed by a flurry of nervous and jittery strings. Romero immediately pushes the soundtrack beyond the diegesis, signalling to the viewer a new ambiguity and tension that Johnny cannot keep at bay. The music serves to highlight just how much his cheery irreverence is fatally out of kilter with the peril that we know he is in. That tolling bell, as an injection of a doom-laden extradiegetic affect, states that he is hurtling towards his own demise, being acted upon by an unnamed and unknown ambiguity.

A storm breaks over the cemetery. Flashes of lightning streak across Johnny's face as he turns to see a distant male figure walking slowing towards them. Johnny does not react, totally impervious to this classic cinematic trope for looming disaster. Whilst Barbara is praying at the graveside, Johnny taunts her with memories of the game they used to play

in the cemetery when they were younger. Again he fails to heed the appropriate symbolic protocols associated with mourning the dead, and takes pleasure in disrupting Barbara's attempts to align herself with these recognisable and familiar behavioural codes. Johnny remembers how scared she used to be in the cemetery, and on noticing Barbara's continued unease he resurrects their childhood game.

*They're coming to get you Barbara!*

The figure in the background starts to draw closer. Johnny continues to taunt Barbara by incorporating the unidentified man into his teasing.

*They're coming for you! Look! Here comes one of them now*

Barbara is agitated and rebukes Johnny for his churlish behaviour, but as the figure approaches she composes herself. She turns away and starts to walk after Johnny, presuming that the stranger will simply pass her by on the path. But he does not. Instead he grabs her and tries to bite a chunk of flesh out of her neck.

And this is how Romero introduces undeadliness to us for the first time. This man is a corpse. He is dead, and yet he stumbles around the graveyard with a diabolical craving for human flesh. Barbara initially escapes him in this scene, but later succumbs to the devouring zombie throng. We do not know why the zombie exists – undeadliness remains a symptom without a cause throughout Romero's films – but, as a walking corpse that refuses to be laid to rest, its presence is a total violation of Leader's second symbolic death.

If Leader's process of mourning involves the living symbolically "killing the dead", then Romero's films desecrate this procedure on two levels; firstly by reversing it so that the dead are now killing the living, and secondly by turning the act of symbolic killing into a literal killing, whereby the living are devoured by the dead until they are no more than a steaming pile of bones. Leader's "killing the dead" makes sense – it is a strategy that generates meaning around death; Romero's zombie on the other hand makes no sense whatsoever – it violates symbolic death through its outrageous and undeadly ambiguity that does not sit within an ordered category of either life or death. The zombie collapses the mechanisms of meaning that normally keep death at a distance.

It is important to note that Barbara and Johnny fail to recognise the threat posed by the undead body lurching toward them. Instead Johnny incorporates the zombie into his childish game; he projects a meaning onto it that he had previously invented himself in order to torment his sister. How might we understand this misrecognition? In his book *The Sovereignty of Death*, Rob Weatherill understands the Lacanian Real as a vertiginous absence of meaning that lurks behind the "phantasy screen" (89 Rob Weatherill, *The Sovereignty of Death*) of the Imaginary. Johnny projects his phantasy of the dead rising from

their graves onto the body in the cemetery, and yet hidden behind this imaginary screen is a Real walking corpse that defies all symbolic conventions. The zombie inhabits a void where meaning ceases to operate. Johnny initially misrecognises the undead corpse as a monster from the Imaginary – as a fiction with which he can taunt his sister. But as soon as the zombie inexplicably lurches for Barbara, it gouges through Johnny’s “phantasy screen” and emerges instead as a monster from the Real that spreads a vile contagion of abject and malevolent nonsense.

### **Misreading Melancholia**

This collapse of meaning around death, so freakishly engendered by undeadliness, invites an examination of the term melancholia. Leader sets up melancholia as a state that occurs when living humans are unable to separate themselves from what they have lost. Instead of securing loss within the Symbolic, and therefore outside of herself, the melancholic preserves an element of that loss within her own psyche. The melancholic is unable to establish any distancing perspective that can frame and contextualise her loss. Instead death becomes a pervasive presence that seeps into the core of her subjectivity. Melancholia is effectively a collapse in meaning that prohibits death from being adequately laid to rest within language.

If mourning establishes the absence of a positive by symbolically framing the disappearance of a loved one, then melancholia asserts the presence of a negative; it injects a morbid identification with death into the living subject’s own psyche. Melancholia stubbornly tries to keep death alive – however impossible this might be – by refusing to let it settle within the Symbolic. The melancholic suffers precisely because she has within herself an overarching urge to reconnect with what she has lost. The only state that would fundamentally satisfy the melancholic is a reunion with the death that she craves so ardently, and so self-annihilation starts to assert its allure. As Leader says, “In mourning, we grieve the dead; in melancholia we die with them.” (8 Darien Leader, *The New Black; Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*) Leader here sets up the idea that whilst the mourner builds a buffer of symbolic meaning around death, the melancholic inhabits death through a process of identification. But crucially, Leader’s claim that we die with the dead is a metaphorical articulation of the living melancholic psyche that submits to an imaginary death. However, Romero’s fiction re-stages this process, creating a conceit in which the living actually die at the hands of the dead. He depicts a scenario in which the dead stumble forth from a fissure rent through the protocols of meaning, and pull the living into the deadly abyss of Real nonsense. Zombie fiction is thus a grotesque literalisation of the psychoanalytical poetics of melancholia. If Žižek can claim that “Shakespeare had read Lacan” (9 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry, An Introduction to Lacan through Popular Culture*) due to his treatment of the eponymous protagonist in *Richard II* who is unable to inhabit his symbolic status as ‘King’, then I will claim that Romero has wilfully misread Leader’s metaphor in order to



fashion his particular celluloid monster. Zombie fiction plagiarises psychoanalysis, restaging the melancholic's Imaginary encounter with death as a Real encounter. The zombie, as an abject literalisation of the collapse of meaning outside language, bites into the living subject – ripping sinew from skin and tearing gristle from bone – until he or she has been devoured out of symbolic existence.

### **The Undead Thing**

Julia Kristeva develops this relationship between melancholia and the collapse of meaning in exquisite detail in her book *Black Sun; Depression and Melancholia*. She formulates a particular brand of melancholia that, unlike the Freudian model, does not involve the introjection of the lost object. Kristeva's melancholic yearns to be reunited with her "Thing" (13 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun; Depression and Melancholia*) – an archaic sense of self that eludes representation and dwells in the Real beyond the parameters of symbolic life. The Thing is the part of the subject that holds on to a sensation of supreme wholeness and connectivity that precedes the arrival of language. Kristeva claims that this yearning to re-establish links with an archaic and lost sense of self plunges the melancholic into a "battle with symbolic collapse." (24 *ibid.*)

But why does the Thing occasion a breakdown in meaning for the melancholic? The speaking subject unconsciously accepts that her loss of archaic unity has been replaced by language, and it is precisely the function of words – the ability of signs to link to their referents – that locates the subject within a field of symbolic consistency. Speaking marks the subject's ascension to a normative position among other subjects within language. However the melancholic refuses the compensation offered by symbolic meaning. She chooses instead to fixate not on the substitute for her loss – language – but on the initial loss itself. She is drawn to the Real death of suicide precisely to escape the stultifying ossification of the Symbolic that prevents her from reuniting with her Thing.

We can now understand Romero's staging of the subject's vertiginously Real encounter with the zombie as the moment at which the melancholic becomes one with her own Thing. We might say that within the conceit of undeadliness, the zombie that bites her is not her Thing, though it stands in the place of a more general Thingness. However the zombie that she turns into, presuming that she is not devoured completely, is her particular Thing – herself without language. Kristeva notes that the all-consuming reunion with the Thing is unrepresentable; only the image of oral incorporation comes close to invoking it. Once again we can claim that Romero's fiction pushes the metaphor of psychoanalysis into abject literalism; whilst Kristeva's melancholic is poetically devoured by her reunion with Thingness, Romero's melancholic is actually devoured by Thingness in a very Real and crude feeding frenzy.



Within Kristeva's account of melancholia, to encounter one's Thing is to escape the ossification of language, only to be plunged beyond the event horizon into a fatal encounter with Real nonsense. But Romero's fiction authors an alternative melancholic position that ruptures the conceit of Kristeva's formulation. The state of undeadliness allows the melancholic to be devoured by the Thingness of symbolic collapse without succumbing to total dissolution. Whilst Kristeva's melancholic perishes in a void of meaning, the undead melancholic, as a nonsensical body that is neither alive nor dead, proliferates within the vertiginous territories of the Real.

### **The Haptics of Undeadliness**

When reading Kristeva, we have a strong sense of her poetic approach to psychoanalysis. She actively invites the reader to think into the spaces that she creates around her words. As such, the notion of the Thing – though the word itself pushes towards a description of an indeterminate or unclassified form – is primarily an invocation of a formless psychological space. However there are a number of striking passages in *Black Sun* where Kristeva talks about the materiality of the Thing as if it were on some level embodied – of the body – as opposed to purely of the mind.

Kristeva states that the living subject should not be exposed to the effluence and the base materiality of the dead body if the notion of death is to retain a stable place within the Symbolic. The corpse must be hidden away and replaced by a network of signs that attest to the absence of the person that it used to be. But in Romero's fiction, the corpse is animated and active; it is a lump of inert matter with a weird and headless agency – a body with an unnameable purpose but without personhood – that refuses to be contained by the symbolic armature of language. The condition of undead melancholia can for the first time be understood not as a transgressive subjectivity, but as a weird materiality beyond subjectivity. It is precisely the zombie's embodied and objectified Thingness – its anomalous and nonsensical mobilisation of the corpse – that makes it so horrifically Real.

So the challenge posed to the Symbolic by undead melancholia is engendered specifically by its nonsensical mobilisation of material death. The unfathomable void of the Real now exists on the surface of the undead body. The zombie becomes a transgressive texture – a corrupting plane of glitchy flatness amidst symbolic space – that collapses the normative distance of signification with a deathly closeness.

In her book *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks sets up the notion of haptic looking as an intimate encounter with surfaces, materials and textures that “escape our symbolic recognition.”(xi Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*) It is an immersive and tactile experience in which stable classifications are collapsed by proximity, and affect is privileged over knowledge. We might immediately say

that Romero's fiction injects a rotten violence into the sensuality of Marks' account of the haptic. The zombie corrupts the striated space of stabilised symbolic functionality and plunges the subject into a viscerally haptic encounter with the smooth space of undeadliness whereby meaning gives way to pure materiality (474 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*). The walking corpse demands an abject proximity, instigating a vile embodiment of the subject until she is no more than a body – until her subjectivity collapses altogether onto the surface of undead Thingness.

Deleuze and Guattari assert that neither smooth nor striated space can exist independently (ibid.). I dwell on this point because it helps me think through an essential quality of zombie fiction. If a subject encounters a hoard of zombies she will be devoured into non-existence. As Marks says:

*To lose all distance from the world is to die a material death, to become indistinguishable from the rest of the world*

(xvi. Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*)

So a total immersion in smooth space equates to a death in which the subject becomes no more than inert matter. This is the fate that befalls the victim of the undead rabble; she soon becomes no more than a pile of dead bones. But if “life is served” by an oscillation between smooth and striated space – “by the ability to come close, pull away, come close again” (ibid.) as Marks suggests – then undeadliness is served by the subject coming close, being bitten, pulling away, dying and then rising again as a zombie. Only the subject who is not entirely devoured – who is plunged into smooth space but then makes an escape of sorts back into the striated space of symbolic meaning (albeit until the fatal contagion takes hold) – is able to arrive at a state of undeadliness. She has become a corpse, yet she is not completely inert and retains the look of the subject she once was. There is a tension here between the opposing registers of the smooth body and the striated body – the body as pure material Thingness, and the body as recognisable and categorised subjectivity. This articulates the delicious and unique horror of Romero's fiction; the zombie still looks like the living person that it once was, even though it has retained none of her subjective personhood. It is a vertiginously weird mixture of material Thingness and symbolic familiarity – the Real with a residual whiff of evacuated meaning still hanging around it. Undeadliness is not a single point along the spectrum of smooth and striated space, it is simultaneously smooth and striated; two separate points folded in on one another. The symbolic function is totally decommissioned in that this body can no longer sign towards the subject, and yet the hollowed out shell of that same subject – the structural surface of signification – still remains on a visual and striated level.

## The Dead Zombie

So far I have been writing about the operations of undeadliness within its own fictional conceit. I have discussed how the zombie explodes subjectivity with a weird materiality that renders the sign non-functional though still visible. In the graveyard scene at the beginning of *Night of the Living Dead*, the zombie does not arrive from without – from some transcendent beyond; it exists within the weave of the symbolic reality, but does not behave according to the protocols of that reality. Instead, its Thingness – its weird materiality – creates a texture of haptic and nonsensical undeadliness in the very space where the corpse should submit to its symbolic death. But this depends on the other characters within the diegesis being totally bamboozled by the prospect of undeadliness, and in more recent zombie fiction this is no longer the case. In the *Resident Evil* films for example, Milla Jovovich is readily accepting of undeadliness as the condition of her apocalypse; a genetically modified virus is unleashed in a top-secret research facility, and the zombie scourge quickly ensues as a logical consequence within the narrative. There is none of the abject nonsense that is so particular to Romero's early films. It is important to remember that Romero does not initially name the zombie as such; the undead body is a weird anomaly that cannot be classified within the diegesis of his films. However Romero himself goes on to play with the way in which undeadliness is perceived by his protagonists. In *Land of the Dead*, zombies become a sub-class of pariahs who are taunted, teased and turned into caged attractions by the living human population. The persecuted undead mob rises up against the tyranny of corporate capitalism and eventually unseats the corrupt oligarch. By the end of the film the zombie throng is portrayed as a band of survivors who are just trying to eek out an existence for their own kind. They are still dangerous of course, but they do not traumatised meaning itself in the way that they used to in Romero's earlier films. The zombie has become normalised within its own diegesis; it has become assimilated and recognisable within the very symbolic order that it must collapse if it is to function as a transgressive haptic texture.

But more importantly, we as viewers have become entirely accustomed to the protocols of undeadliness. The genre can now only reproduce familiar tropes: the ostensibly isolated attacks that soon proliferate into a full blown zombie holocaust; the media descending into anarchy as chaos takes a grip; the coma patient waking up to a scene of undead desolation; the character who must slay the undead corpse of a loved one; these scenarios have now become over-saturated motifs within the highly-commodified and ubiquitous brand of zombie fiction. Undeadliness no longer makes nonsense; it has spawned a series of instantly familiar celluloid tableau that make total sense commercially. The lurching corpse in the graveyard that sends Barbara into paroxysms of hysterical fear is now an obsolete and nostalgic figure. Undeadliness has lost its weird haptic closeness and become part of the normative language of cinema. The zombie is dead. Completely.

## **A Contemporary Problem**

This problem of assimilation is symptomatic of contemporaneity. The homogeneity of late capitalism collapses radical opposition from the outside by assimilating dissent within its own operations. Mark Fisher claims that the ‘success’ of the current status quo stems from its ability to present its own highly ideological systems and processes as the inevitable mechanisms of a ubiquitous reality to which no alternative exists. (Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*). Human life itself becomes understood as a state in which one must consent to and assimilate the logic of capital. 50 Cent captures this contemporary co-option of human life in the title of his album *Get Rich Or Die Tryin’*. Life is measured solely on a continuum of financial solvency and commercial success; life is wealth, and death becomes inseparable from the absence of it. And herein lies the perpetual malaise of the contemporary practitioner; how might we make work without totally assimilating this logic?

Consider for a moment a performance by The Vines on the David Letterman show ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQgZB3sFdhY&feature=results\\_video&playnext=1&list=PLF8323BFFE0FC978F](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQgZB3sFdhY&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PLF8323BFFE0FC978F)). The lead singer Craig Nicholls gives an impressively off-piste rendition of the hit single *Get Free*. Large sections of the catchy song are rendered unrecognisable by Nicholls’ howling vocals and squawking guitar; he ends up prostrate and writhing on the studio floor while his bandmates desperately try to maintain the structure of the song. Nicholls eventually destroys the drum kit in a blaze of Rock’n’Roll cliché, and then the camera cuts back to a grinning Letterman. The unruffled host shares a bemused joke with his sycophantic musical director before announcing the advertisement break. Despite Nicholls’ nihilistic and raging self-sabotage, his protest becomes exactly what he is protesting against, namely his own assimilation within the commercial mainstream. His is a perfectly hollow rebellion packaged into three minutes – a purely stylistic spectacle of dissent that dovetails seamlessly with the TV schedule, raising the stock of The Vines immeasurably. I recognise in Nicholls’ behaviour the symptoms of a particular cultural desire that yearns for an oppositional space outside the status quo, even though this proposition disappeared as a viable aspiration decades ago. The resulting ache of unfulfilment can be understood as a melancholia that besets the practitioner who wishes to inhabit a cultural position deemed impossible by the homogenous machinations of contemporaneity.

## **Undead Melancholia as a Haptic Methodology**

To finish this essay I propose to explore how the melancholic practitioner described above might be able to find some respite in zombie fiction. In Romero’s films there is an absence of shots that enable the viewer to firmly identify with the human protagonists within the diegesis. Steven Shaviro develops this point in his essay *Contagious Allegories*. He claims that the zombie ruptures its own diegetic continuum and makes direct and unmitigated

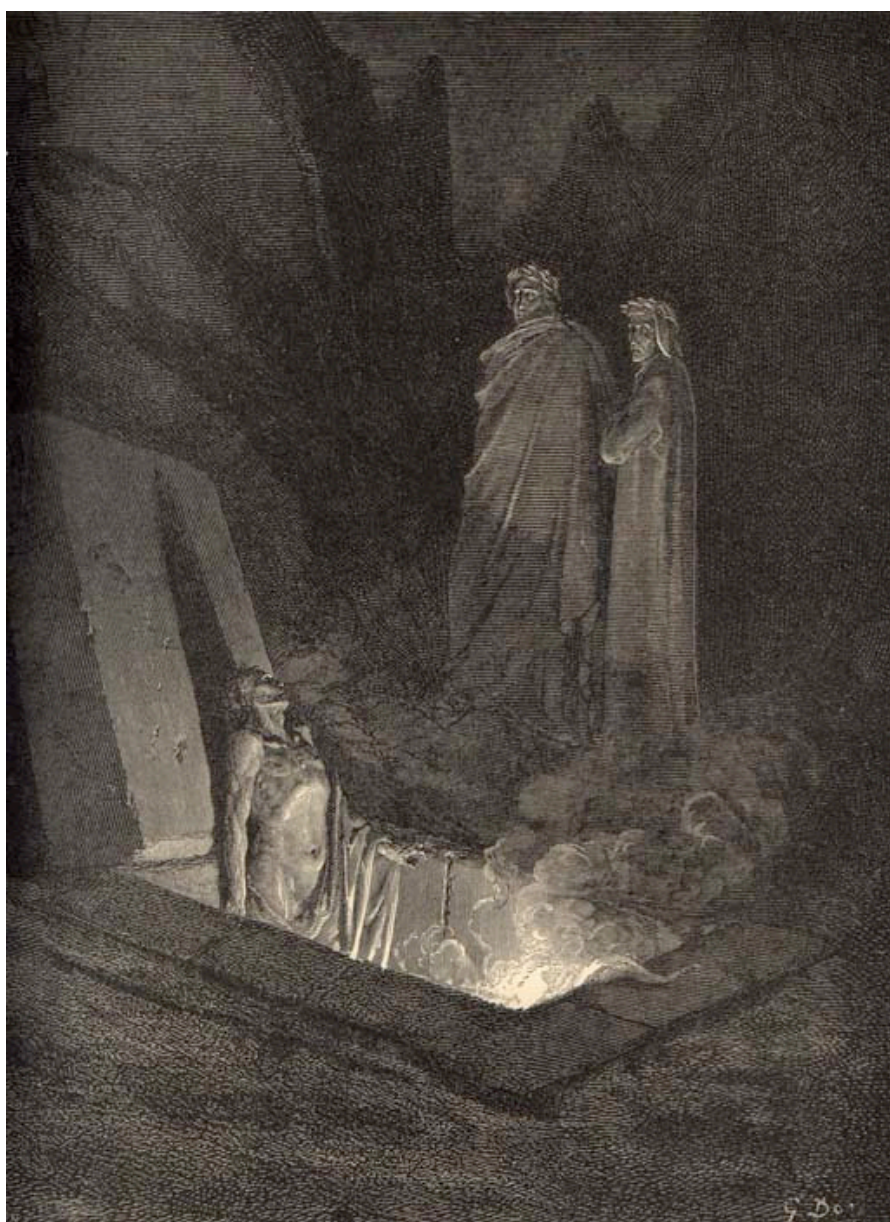
overtures to the viewer's own pleasures (Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*) We are invited to revel vicariously in the abject destruction meted out by the undead throng; we squeal and squirm with a nervous delight as the onscreen carnage and calamity cavorts before our hungry eyes. Romero's films violate their own fictitious conceit with a gleeful and gory excessiveness that totally undermines the celluloid illusion of hermetically sealed narrative coherence. When a diegesis is undone by an over-the-top spectacle we are reminded of our own status as spectators. We do not lose ourselves in the desires of the protagonists onscreen that remain channelled within a fictitious conceit; rather we find ourselves through a confrontation with our own unmitigated viewing pleasures.

So what type of pleasures might Romero's zombie from *Night of the Living Dead* offer the melancholic practitioner? I've discussed how this particular zombie is a mobilisation of weird material surfaces that confound the logic of symbolic space. Its undeadliness creates a textured flatness that infects the weave and the fabric of signification without being exterior to it. This would appeal to the melancholic practitioner who yearns to make work within a ubiquitous condition of homogeneity without consenting absolutely to its operations. Romero's zombie becomes the melancholic practitioner's imago – her idealised ego – that performs on screen the very manoeuvres she aspires to in her own practice. By appealing to these longings, the zombie now bleeds beyond its diegesis and infects our own cultural status quo. Undeadliness allows the practitioner to conceive of a weird materialism – an artefact of melancholic Thingness – that flattens the illusion of normalisation specific to late capitalism. This proliferation of haptic nonsense is not outside the structural mechanisms that support the ideological conceit of the prevailing symbolic reality; rather it plays across the surfaces of these mechanisms as an affective materiality that infects the political diegesis with a dose of Real weirdness.

But if the melancholic practitioner recognises in Romero's early zombie fiction an ideal approach to practice, how might she then reproduce this approach in her own work? Mimesis will not suffice; she cannot simply pretend to be a zombie, because the image of undeadliness has already been lost to the spectacle of postmodern homogenisation. Instead she needs to understand undeadliness as a methodology that she can replicate in her own practice without literally copying it visually. The zombie invites the practitioner to harness melancholia as a material interruption – a glitch of affective weirdness – that breaks the ubiquitous seamlessness of contemporaneity. This melancholic practice would not resemble undeadliness, but would operate like undeadliness in its efforts to flatten the ostensible realism of the ideological status quo. So this is how a practice that harnesses the haptic materiality of melancholia might function in principle, as articulated by Romero's zombie methodology. The challenge now is to work out what this practice might actually look like.



*Nekros; or, the Poetics of Biopolitics*  
Eugene Thacker



*L'Inferno* (Gustave Doré, 1857)

**Bio-politics.** A question: what is the “bio” of biopolitics? Contemporary theories of biopolitics often emphasize medicine and public health, political economy and governmentality, or the philosophical and rhetorical dimensions. But if biopolitics is, in Foucault’s terms, that point at which “power takes hold of life,” the moment in which “biological existence was reflected in political existence,” then it follows that any theory of biopolitics will also have to interrogate the morphologies of the concept of “life” just as much as the mutations in power. [i]

It is remarkable how the concept of “life itself” has remained a horizon for much biopolitical thinking.[ii] There is, for instance, the naïve position, in which one presumes something called “life” that pre-exists or exists outside of politics, which is then co-opted into specific power relations (e.g. political economy, public health, statistics and demographics). The problem with this approach is that it forces one to accept a concept of life that is either excessively vague (life-as-experience) or reductive (life as a molecule, life as data). The presumption of a pre-existent life also puts one in the dubious position of arguing for a protectionism regarding life, effectively making the removal of politics from life the goal of the critique. While we may disregard this position as naïve, it is important to note how it surreptitiously haunts contemporary critiques of medicine and health care, from “big pharma” to the ongoing debates over public health security and bioterrorism.

The opposite of this is the cynical position, in which one assumes that there is no extra-political, essential concept of “life itself” that is then co-opted by politics or recuperated in power relations. Life is always already political, not only at the literal level of medicine, but also in the way subjects are interpellated at the level of social, economic, and political life. Life is a concept that is not only constructed within scientific discourse, but equally within political discourse – even when that discourse articulates an “outside” called natural law, human rights, or bare life. A more sophisticated as a form of critique, the problem with the cynical approach is that it can end up leveraging critique on behalf of an empty concept. Since there is no pre-existent life that is co-opted by power, one is left with either dispensing with the concept altogether – a difficult task, since the concept of life remains politically operative in a variety of contexts – or one argues for a renewed concept of life that has yet to be envisioned – in effect producing a concept of pre-existent life similar to the one in the naïve position.

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**The Problem With Multiplicities.** Perhaps what life is, or how it is defined, is less important than the question of whether something called “life” comes under question at all in biopolitical theories – and one that is also not simply an empty yet functional shell. Michel Foucault’s Collège de France lectures offer several ways of addressing this dilemma. In Foucault’s 1978 course, biopolitics is often characterized in terms of multiplicity

– but the particular multiplicity of the collective, aggregate life that is the population. Foucault mentions three examples of epidemics as correlated to particular forms of power. In the Middle Ages, leprosy is aligned with sovereignty, and its ritual dividing practices and exclusion. The example of plague during the 16th and 17th centuries is, for Foucault, aligned with disciplinary power and its practices of inclusion and ordering. Finally, Foucault mentions smallpox and vaccination as an example of a third type of power, the apparatus of security, which “pulls back” and carefully observes the outcome of an event, so as to selectively intervene. It is from this third type of epidemic that Foucault isolates a power that stitches together medicine, politics, and a concept of “population” – that is, an awareness of a novel object of power that is defined at once by its multiplicity, its temporal dynamics, and its statistical fluctuations. What emerges, Foucault argues, is a form of power that operates at the level of highly-specified perturbations, one that intervenes at the level of the flux and flow, the manifold circulations, that is the population itself. “Circulation understood in the general sense as displacement, as exchange, as contact, as form of dispersion, and as form of distribution – the problem presented is: how can things be ordered such that this circulates or does not circulate?”[iii]

Biopolitics is unique in Foucault’s analysis because it expresses power as a problem of managing circulations and flows – something like *biopolitical flow*. It makes use of informatic methods, including statistics, demographics, and public health records, to insert a global knowledge into the probability of local events; it identifies and reacts to potential threats based on a whole political economy of the regulation of state forces; and, instead of a dichotomy between the permitted and forbidden, it calculates averages and norms upon which discrete and targeted interventions can be carried out. In a striking turn of phrase, Foucault suggests that, in this correlation between a distributed power and a distributed life, the central issue becomes “the problem of multiplicities” (*le problème des multiplicités*).[iv] In this sense, biopolitics “is addressed to a multiplicity of people, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on.”[v]

If we follow Foucault’s leads here, then the “bio” of biopolitics has to be understood as a concern over the governance of “life itself,” and this notion of life itself is principally characterized by what Foucault describes as the processes of circulation, flux, and flow. The problem of multiplicities is therefore also a problem concerning the government of the living, the governance, even, of “life itself.” This is, to be sure, life understood as *zoe* and *bíos*, as biological life and the qualified life of the human being, but it must also be understood in terms of what Aristotle called *psukhe* – a principle of life, a vital principle, the Life of the living.[vi] While human agency both individual and collective is implicated in this notion of life as *psukhe*, it is also an non-human, unhuman form of life – one that nevertheless courses through us and through which we live. Thus the primary challenge



to biopolitical modes of power is this: how to acknowledge the fundamentally unhuman quality of life as circulation, flux, and flow, while also providing the conditions for its being governed and managed. Biopolitics in this sense becomes the governance of vital forces, and biopolitics confronts what is essentially a question of scale – how to modulate phenomena that are at once “above” and “below” the scale of the human being.

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**Dead Tropes, Resurrected Bodies.** In biopolitics, the conjunction of life and power raises the specter of the body politic, a figure of political philosophy that is at once anachronistic and yet continually resurrected. Foucault, for example, talks about both the “anatomy-politics of the human body” as well as the “biopolitics of the population.” In his Collège de France lectures, Foucault points out that biopolitics conceives of a body that departs from the anatomical and mechanistic body politic of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. While this is true, the logic of the body politic continues to inform the concept of biopolitics, especially considering the centrality of a concept of “life” for both concepts. What is needed, then, but a way of thinking biopolitics in relation to its figural dimension – not just a biopolitics, but a *poetics of biopolitics*.

The figure of the body politic resolves a number of conceptual problems: it not only posits a form of political organization nested in the truth of the body’s anatomy, but it also implies a further analogy between the life of the natural-biological body and the life of the collective body, be that configured in terms of the political-theological community, the organismic nation-state, or, more recently, the global informatics of the multitude. Consider the primary question that occupies every discussion of the body politic – its building-up or its construction. We know the conditions for the need of a body politic – the state of brutish nature, the war of all against all, “man is a wolf to man,” and so forth. Once this irrevocable and universal mistrust of the human is established, how exactly does the body politic come to be? Quite simply, piece by piece, part by part, limb by limb. The *Leviathan* gives us what is perhaps the clearest example of this building-up process, one in which “the *sovereignty* is an artificial *soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the *magistrates* and other *officers* of judicature and execution, artificial *joints*; *reward* and *punishment*... are the *nerves*, that do the same in the body natural...*counselors*, by whom all things needful for it to know are suggested unto it, are the *memory*; *equity* and *laws*, an artificial *reason* and *will*; *concord*, *health*; *sedition*, *sickness*; and *civil war*, *death*.”[vii]

The *Leviathan* is, of course, picking up on a long tradition of analogizing the body politic and the body natural. Plato offers what is perhaps the earliest coherent example in the West. In the opening discussion of *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the question of justice in the individual should be sought by analogizing to the question of justice in the *polis*, the latter simply an individual “writ large.” What results is a view of the *polis* as an integrated,

tripartite order based on a tripartite anatomy of the human body: the philosopher-king (the head, or reasoning part), the auxiliaries or soldiers (the torso, or passional part), and the peasant class (the groin or productive/reproductive part). Today, this building-up of the body politic has today become a mainstay of dystopian science fiction. In the graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, the government establishes its oppressive unity through a pervasive, high-technology surveillance system which is the “eyes,” the “ears,” and the “hands” of the body politic.



*Zombi 2* (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1979)

**The Gothic Body Politic.** The body politic is built up, but it can also break down. The building-up also leads to a problem, however, for if the body politic can be constructed, then is it not also vulnerable to the inverse processes of destruction, dissolution, and decay? This is a major preoccupation in the literature of the gothic, which dwells on the processes of decay and degeneration, paradoxical processes that are at once generative and yet destructive. Consider the following passage:

*I am filthy. Lice gnaw me. Swine, when they look at me, vomit. The scabs and sores of leprosy have scaled my skin, which is coated with yellowish pus. I know not river water nor the clouds' dew. From my nape, as from a dungheap, sprouts an enormous toadstool with unbelliferous peduncles. Seated on a shapeless chunk of furniture, I have not moved a limb for four centuries. My feet have taken root in the soil forming a sort of perennial vegetation – not yet quite plant-life though no longer flesh – as far as my belly, and filled with vile parasites. My heart, however, is still beating. But how could it beat if the decay and effluvia of my carcass (I dare not say body) did not abundantly feed it? In my left armpit a family of toads has taken up residence, and*

*whenever one of them moves it tickles me. Take care lest one escape and come scratching with its mouth at the interior of your ear: it could next penetrate into your brain. In my right armpit there is a chameleon which endlessly chases the toads so as not to die of hunger: everyone has to live. But when one side completely foils the tricks of the other, they like nothing better than to make themselves at home and suck the dainty grease that covers my sides: I am used to it. A spiteful viper has devoured my prick and taken its place.*

Relentlessly perverting the classical body politic inherited from Hobbes, the text continues its anatomical litany, moving down into the nether regions of the body:

*Two small hedgehogs, that grow no more, have flung to a dog – which did not decline them – the contents of my testicles; inside the scrupulously scrubbed scrotal sac they lodged. My anus has been blocked by a crab. Encouraged by my inertia, it guards the entrance with its pincers and cause me considerable pain! Two jellyfish crossed the seas, at once enticed by a hope which did not prove mistaken. They closely inspected the two plump portions which comprise the human rump and, fastening on to these convex contours, so squashed them by constant pressure that the two lumps of flesh disappeared while the two monsters which issued from the kingdom of viscosity remained, alike in colour, form, and ferocity. Speak not of my spinal column, since it is a sword. [viii]*

This is from *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the enigmatic 19th century text by Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont. What we are given here is something like a gothic body politic, one that is still built-up, but that is ridden with natural decay and monstrous hyper-growth. This body politic is not simply sick, lacking some essential component or nutrient that would make it healthy again. Instead, it seems to exist in this state of growth-decay as its natural state. In the gothic body politic, the body politic has not simply died, but there is also no “getting better.” It remains a sovereign body, seated on a calcified throne – in fact, violently fixed there through the sword-backbone (perhaps the same sword depicted in the frontispiece to the *Leviathan*). What Lautréamont gives us is not an anatomical body politic, but a necrological one, a body whose natural state is this contradictory hyper-decay, at once generation and dissolution.

The gothic body politic therefore opens onto the inverse of the building-up process – the process of decay and dissolution. Not surprisingly, this is also a major motif of the body politic concept. But it is rarely foreground in the same way as the “heroic” building-up process. Often it is expressed in the somewhat furtive, later chapters dedicated to the “diseases” of the body politic. Here the figure of the body politic takes hold in a way that is, from Plato onwards, strikingly modern. Hobbes, for instance, is forced to acknowledge that if “concord” is analogous to “health,” then “sedition” would have to correlate to “sickness,” and “civil war” to the death of the body politic itself. The body politic is not only built-up, but it is also governed by a logic of anti-production, a breaking-down. Hobbes gives us such an image in the *Leviathan*: “Though nothing can be immortall, which

mortals make; yet, if men had the use of reason they pretend to, their Common-wealths might be secured, at least, from perishing by internall diseases...” [ix] The problem, for Hobbes, is when the body politic is dissolved, “not by externall violence, but intestine disorder” – is the cause of such disease to be located within the anatomy of the body politic itself, and if so, are such pathologies of the body politic in fact innate or internal to it? Hobbes ambivalently affirms this, noting that “[a]mongst the *Infirmities* therefore of a Common-wealth, I will reckon in the first place, those that arise from an Imperfect Institution, and resemble the diseases of a naturall body, which proceed from a Defectuous Procreation.”[x]

Here Hobbes is aware of a central dilemma in the figure of the body politic. Insofar as the body politic is predicated on an analogy to the human body, it is also vulnerable to the contingencies and pathologies of the natural body. Plato also demonstrates an acute awareness of this dilemma. Early on in the *Republic*, Socrates follows up his analogy of the body natural and the body politic with a medical qualifier: “there is an exact analogy between these states of mind [justice in the individual] and bodily health and sickness.”[xi] As Socrates notes, “health is produced by establishing a natural relation of control and subordination among the constituents of the body, disease by establishing an unnatural relation.”[xii] The implications of this are laid out in detail near the end of *Republic*: “Just as a sickly body needs only a slight push from outside to become ill, and sometimes even without any external influence becomes divided by factions within itself, so too doesn’t a city that is in the same kind of condition as that body, on a small pretext...fall sick and do battle with itself, and sometimes even without any external influence become divided by faction?”[xiii]

Despite their historically different points of reference (Hippocratic medicine and Greek democracy for Plato, mechanism and the English Civil War for Hobbes), the commonality between them is this way in which the construction of the analogy has brought with it a dilemma concerning the pathologies of the body politic. And, in both thinkers, this leads them to assert what is perhaps the central lesson of the figure of the body politic – that the greatest threat to the body politic comes from within. This in itself – more than the literal, anatomical analogies – ties the figure of the body politic to biopolitics. If the latter, in Foucault’s treatment, deals with the governing of “life itself” in terms of circulation, flux, and flow, then biopolitics can be understood as the management of the circulations that constitute the body politic – not an opening-up or a shutting-down of the body politic’s boundaries, but a calculated pull-back and targeted perturbation within this flux and flow, within this “problem of multiplicities.”

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**Poetics and Pathos.** The body politic – whether it is built up or breaking down – is always an issue of form, figure, and the figurative, always an issue of a poetics specific to a politics.

Aristotle give us what remains a basic premise of poetics – the relation between poetics and *pathos*, or affect. As is well known, Aristotle’s case study is tragedy, for it is in the weighty and serious matters of Greek tragedy that one finds the intimate coupling between *poiesis* and *pathos*. Tragedy delivers in dramatic form some statement about, for instance, fate and determinism, and this has the effect of a release, expunging or a purification in the audience members. This effect thus turns into an affect, something that flows and that circulates among those present at the play. This then encircles the effect of this affect as something “common,” as something collectively experienced. The combination of these three elements – circulation/flow of affect, the feeling of purification, and its collective aspect – is famously dubbed “catharsis” by Aristotle.[xiv]

The term catharsis has connotations that draw together a notion of healing that is inseparable from a ritual or social function. Catharsis is “purgation” or “purification,” both terms that denote a ritualistic process by which a body or bodies are made clean and free of any elements that would threaten the coherence, not only of the individuated body natural, but of the body politic as well. The *pathos* of catharsis is thus a process of separating out, of expunging, of rendering homogenous, of forcibly articulating an interior and an exterior. But it is also important to note that, in the *Poetics*, it is not only the feeling of release or purification that defines catharsis, but the fact that it circulates. Catharsis is less an emotion and more an affect – it proceeds by a sort of logic of miasmatic contagion or swarming, passing from stage to amphitheater, from actor to audience, and between one audience member and another.

If catharsis is the indissociability of poetics and *pathos*, then what kinds of pathos are produced? There is, for example the pathos of sympathy and empathy in moral philosophy. If, generally speaking, sympathy is “feeling-with,” then empathy is “feeling-in.” The latter is often taken as a more extreme version of the former (which is why, in science fiction, “empaths” are often used to detect what an alien creature is feeling). While Kant argues for an axiomatic approach to ethical relations based on sympathy as an innate character of human beings, Burke argues for a passage from sympathy to empathy as the basis for ethical relations. Burke’s famous example is itself rather gothic – the witnessing of a public execution, and the *pathos* it produces in the observers. One passes from a more distanced feeling-with (acknowledging the fear that must accompany the executed), to a more dangerous feeling-in (the hypothetical that the executed could also be me), and then – ideally – to a final *pathos*, a kind of feeling-together, in which I recognize my common humanity with others present at the execution. Thus *pathos* is not just feeling or emotion, but the circulation of such feelings or emotions. Putting *pathos* into circulation implies that



the tonality of such feelings or emotions are experienced as a passing, as a circulation, and as a connecting.

Death governs the circulation of *pathos* in Burke's example. But it is not a scene of total extinction, for something persists or resists afterwards – that is, *pathos* persists and becomes something like anti-*pathos*, or antipathy (“feeling-against”). Something still circulates and flows, some affect swarms throughout a given collective site that becomes the basis for the commonality of *pathos*. Burke no doubt chooses this scene for its dramatic effect – it literally has a stage, an audience, and an a tragic event. This is similarly highlighted by Artaud's essay “The Theater and the Plague.” For Artaud, interested precisely in this theater of swarming affect, the *pathos* that circulates and flows is not simply a quantized emotion felt by receptacle-like individuals; rather, *pathos* is at once a form of life – identified with breath – and also a form of contagion. The same affective principle that is life-giving is also life-destroying, not through negation, but rather through an excess that is part and parcel of that life-principle. Breath is life, but a form of life that endlessly circulates, that in fact cannot not circulate. For Artaud, *pathos* is also pathological, in the sense that it is a form of life defined by its propensity for circulation and flow.



*Zombi 2* (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1979)

**Pathological Life** The duplicity of *pathos* – donation and negation, feeling-with and feeling-against, crossing-over and dividing – is directly tied to an ontology of life that is defined in terms of *pathos*. Poetics is, for Aristotle, indelibly connected to life: “tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life.”[xv] But at the same time, this life-affirming aspect of catharsis often functions through its inverse, and objects that would

normally be repulsive, such as a corpse, become objects of understanding: “We take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them (e.g. the shapes of the lowest species of animal, and corpses).”[xvi]

In the *De anima*, Aristotle notes that any attempt to think about life must encounter the problem of pathos, or affections. Aristotle’s initial move here is to distinguish an inquiry concerning “life itself” from an inquiry concerning living beings. The real challenge, for Aristotle, is to seek “the first principle of living things” rather than any analysis living things, viewed individually or as a species. It is this principle that Aristotle refers to as *psukhe*, traditionally translated as “soul” but better translated as “life-principle.”[xvii] A basic distinction is made, then, between an essence or principle of life – *psukhe* – and the myriad of specific living things such as plants, animals, and people. We might, then, suggest that Aristotle here posits a difference between “Life” as an ontological foundation, and “the living,” or the various specific instantiations of Life. Yet, at the beginning of the treatise, this search for a principle of life immediately opens onto a number of problems. For one, Aristotle notes that the distinction between a principle of life and living things raises the question of their relation. Is *psukhe*, the principle of life, “in” each living thing entirely, or is it distributed or shared among particular living things? What, then, is the relation between Life and the living, between *psukhe*-as-principle and *psukhe*-as-manifestation?

The crux of this apparent confusion may not lie in the inexactness of Aristotle’s prose, but rather in the way in which relation itself is conceptualized. In Book I Aristotle’s initial response is to suggest that *psukhe* is quasi-autonomous with respect to living things. While there can be affections peculiar to *psukhe* itself, there can also be other types of affections that are specific to living beings – but then this also means that those affections specific to living things are indirectly specific to *psukhe* in itself. And this is where the language of pathos becomes important. As Aristotle notes, the “affections of the soul also present a difficulty. It is unclear whether all these are shared also with the ensouled thing or whether some one of them is peculiar to the soul itself.”[xviii] On the one hand, pathos is central in that it connects *psukhe* in itself to the various instances of *psukhe* – pathos connects Life to the living and vice-versa.

Aristotle’s comments on pathos are noteworthy, for the relation between *psukhe* as Life and as the living seems to hinge on the meanings that relation itself – pathos – has in this nexus between Life and the living. Here pathos is less like emotion and more like a relation, “what a thing undergoes.” A body – be it plant, animal, or human – undergoes or is capable of undergoing any number of affections. Thus, affection (*pathos*) is itself the relation between Life and the living.

But now the question is, if pathos is in some way constitutive of the very relation between

Life and the living – that is, if *pathos* actually conditions *psukhe* – then why would pathos need to be purged or expunged? If *pathos* conditions life generally, then the purification of *pathos* would seem to amount to a de-conditioning of life, to a negation of life, the anti-*pathos*. The central political question that the example of Greek tragedy poses is “what does *pathos* purge?” If one of the functions of *pathos* in this case is to cleanse, purify, and re-articulate the body politic, then what are the criteria that define what is to be purged, expelled, and healed? The answer – posed, for example, by Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* – would seem to be that it is not only a person or a person’s wrongful deeds that are deserving of purgation, but it is a whole class of persons, actions, of *life-forms*, that constitute that which must be purged. Again, “tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life.” It is not so much persons or actions that must be purged, but a chain of events, temporalities, and bodies – forms of life that are marked as threatening to the coherence of the body politic. In such instances, *pathos* becomes *pathological*, not just by its propensity to circulate and flow, but by the way it raises the political problem of managing such circulation and flow. This class of life-that-is-marked-for-purgation is that which we can call *pathological life*.

If *pathos* designates not just emotions of suffering and pity, but circulations of affects, then what would a “pathology” be in this context? From the modern epidemiological standpoint, what is pathological is a virulent microbe, abetted by the technologies of transportation, global trade, and the passage of peoples and animals across borders. One of the central affects of epidemics, plague, and pestilence is their pervasiveness, their seeming to at once be tied to stigmatized “others” but at the same time capable of connecting the most unlikely conjunctions of bodies, economies, and territories. But these ways of thinking give us an image of *pathos* that is, like the pathological life of disease, at once everywhere – in the air, all around us, pervading the very space of the body itself – and yet which must “emerge” from *somewhere* – even if this “somewhere” lies in the nebulous grey zones of an orientalized “East” or a biopoliticized and racialized “other.”[xix]

But an epidemic is not just the passing of a “thing” like a message along a channel. What circulates are also affects, affects that are also relations of bodies. In fact, epidemics illustrate, in a highly ambivalent manner, the way that bodies are affects and vice-versa. So, if pathological life is not simply the biological life of the virulent microbe, and if it is not simply the representation of the patient’s suffering, then what is the relationship between *pathos-as-circulation*, and the view of the body politic as constituted by circulation, flux, and flow?

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**I Am Legion.** Interestingly, the characteristics of pathological life are central to early modern demonology which identifies a *pathos* unique to the politico-theological interests



in the body politic. We can suggest, then, that there is a hidden genealogy to this Foucauldian biopolitics of flux, flow, and circulation. Not surprisingly, the descriptions of demonic possession during the early modern era often overlap with descriptions of epidemic disease. There are, of course, a number of precedents for this analogy in early Christianity. The most well-known of these is the scene in *Mark 5* (also repeated in *Luke 8-9*), in which Jesus, passing through a village with his followers, performs an exorcism on an old man possessed by demons. Jesus asks the demon's name, and a multitude of voices rings out "I am Legion, for we are many." The demons are then cast out of the old man's body and into a herd of swine, which are then driven off a cliff. Word of Jesus' healing powers spreads throughout the village, and, in fear, the villagers ask Jesus to leave. The entire scene is depicted in quasi-medical terms, the exorcism as a "healing" or "curing."

In the "I am Legion" fable we see pathos stratified in the three ways we've mentioned. The demons are explicitly identified – and identify themselves – as a multiplicity, not only by the multitude of voices that ring out, but by the multitude of quasi-material demonic bodies that inhabit the single body of the old man. There is also the animality of pathos in the herd of swine, which themselves swarm in a kind of "dance of death" frenzy. Here pathos is implicitly linked to the many animal instances of swarming in insects, flocking in birds or bats, or schooling in fish. Finally, pathos is also expressed in a linguistic dissemination of word-of-mouth. The exorcism incites both reverence and fear in the villagers, and word spreads to such an extent that Jesus' reputation precedes him to the next village.

Scenes such as this provided Scholastic demonology with a set of references against which individual cases of demonic possession could be verified, judged, and incorporated into Church doctrine. The result was not only a new set of juridical procedures, but an new discourse and way of thinking about the supernatural in terms of the unhuman. This culminates in the early modern debates over the ontological status of demonic possession – works such as Jean Bodin's *De la Démonomanie des sorciers*, Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum*, and Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, each shape this debate. Each text makes claims about the role that medicine plays in either dispelling demonic possession, or distinguishing it from other non-supernatural causes (e.g. epilepsy, melancholia, trickery). They draw out the boundaries of the demonic, which become formalized in the great "handbooks" on demonology, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*. In this way, the attempt to control epidemic disease, like that of the attempts to control cases of demonic possession and their potential heresies, is, in modern terms, a "problem of multiplicities"; or, to be more precise, the political challenges posed by epidemics and demonic possession point to a key relationship, that between sovereignty and multiplicity.

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**Spiritual Biopolitics.** Though medieval thinkers from Anselm to Peter Lombard had commented on Satan and the Fall, it is Thomas Aquinas’ treatise *De malo* (*On Evil*) that serves as the blueprint for Scholastic demonology. Aquinas’ treatise places the demon within an ontological framework of Aristotelian naturalism, examining not just the Biblical Satan, but the demon itself as a kind of life form – as a perturbation within the “flow of life,” the *spiritus*. Aquinas considers demons to be intermediary beings like angels, lacking the absolute omnipotence of God but also lacking the limits of mortality of human beings. The theological and ontological status of spiritual creatures was, in effect, an act of boundary-management between the natural and supernatural.

It is in the final eight questions of the *De malo*, in which Aquinas addresses the impact of demons in the human world, where the question of *spiritus* is raised. While Aquinas acknowledges the existence of demons as such, his dismissal of demonic powers is strangely modern – demonic signs, possession, and necromancy are all given Aristotelian-naturalistic explanations. This is the case when Aquinas discusses the impact demons can have on life processes such as generation and decay, and in particular on the lives of human beings. Aquinas explains demonic possession as a mis-application of demonic intellect outside of its appropriate domain (this alone distinguishes demons from angels). The demonic is the aberrant intellect, that then results in the aberrant form of life that is the possessed subject.

The technique by which the demon does this is through a perturbation of *spiritus*, a term which Aquinas uses in its theological sense of “life-spirit,” “breath,” or “flow of life.” Borrowing from Aristotelian hylomorphism, Aquinas suggests that demonic possession operates neither in the purely supernatural realm, nor purely in the mind of the possessed, but in the intermediary flux that connects them:

*Therefore, what happens in the case of those asleep regarding the apparitions of dreams from the local movement of vapors and fluids (spirituum et humorum) can happen by the like local movement achieved by devils, sometimes in those asleep, and sometimes in those awake. And in the case of those awake, devils can sometimes indeed move internal vapors and fluids (spiritus et humores) even to the point that the use of reason is completely fettered, as is evidently the case with the possessed. [xx]*

*Spiritus* is precisely that which mediates the natural and supernatural, earthly and divine – as well as managing the distinction and separation between them. The result, according to Aquinas, can be as simple as erratic behavior or as opaque as necromancy and the raising of the dead. Aquinas makes a key point here, however – the demon does not possess the power to create life, though it may have the impression of animating and re-animating. This is because, for Aquinas, the demon itself is not living; it does not have animation in

the Aristotelian sense of living, natural beings. And yet it can have the effect of animating. The demon, then, seems to be that which can animate but which itself is not animated; that which perturbs and disturbs the flow of life but which is not itself living.

While Aquinas grants little in the way of real effectiveness to demons, this question of animation and vitalization remain an important part of Scholastic demonology. As Maaïke van der Lugt notes in a recent study, the question of demonic generation is not just a question of whether angels or demons have bodies, but whether they partake in the vital processes that having bodies afford. This includes generation and decay, but also digestion, putrefaction, respiration, even communication. In her readings of Scholastic thinkers, van der Lugt focuses on the idea of “demonic generation,” or the capacity of the demon to take on human or animal life qualities:

*In the theological discourse, the concept of the possessed body presupposes and is opposed to the notion of life and the human person. The Scholastics had refined and made more precise this distinction between the possessed body and the living body in a series of questions concerning the activities of angels and demons at the moment of their appearance... Were they capable of feeling, of moving, of speaking, or eating, or, finally, of generating life? Could they, according to the expression of Saint Thomas, exercise the opera vitae?[xxi]*

There was, first, this taking on of vital properties are the “vital works” or “vital signs” of the demon, what Aquinas and other Scholastics referred to as *opera vitae*. But the *opera vitae* presumed a more basic action, which was the occupying of the body, and by extension, the occupation of vital or life forces, resulting in the possessed or “assumed” body, the *corpora assumpta*. The *corpora assumpta*, or the endowing of (human) life to the non-living (demon), produced a strange disunity within the body, manifested in the vital signs or *opera vitae* of the demon.

Not only was Scholastic demonology – and the Church laws that elicited it – concerned with the identification and verification of the demonic, and not only was it important to be able to distinguish divine possessions from demonic ones, but there was also a concern with the “spiritual biopolitics” of life-forces or principles of animation, a biopolitics of *spiritus*. As Alain Bourreau notes, “[d]ivine rapture was the mirror image of diabolical possession, which itself was held in the obscurity of extracted confessions, denials, or medical loopholes. The analogous nature of possessions, either divine or diabolical, was the result of a similarity in the modes of action of the *spiritus*, of the divine spirit, either angelic or demonic.”[xxii]

There is a further twist to this biopolitics of the demon. In Scholastic demonology, demonic possession involves not just the life of the demon itself as a supernatural creature, but the vitalization of the demon by the body of the possessed. In this sense, demonic possession is not an appropriation of body or life, but rather the taking-on of life-processes.

It is the “ensouling,” in Aristotelian terms (*empsychue*) of that which is not living, the vitalization of the non-living. This is an important distinction. Demons often possess non-living things as well as living bodies. This is what Boureau refers to as the “epidemiological” demon, the demon that enters the host unawares, either through food, via objects, or even as borne on the wind. The demon – that which is not animated but which animates – is also that which animates the inanimate – objects, mists, clouds, even the bodies of the dead. Demons can thus often take on an “elemental” quality. In such cases, the demonic becomes almost purely abstract, becomes nearly identical to multiplicity itself.



*Zombi 2* (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1979)

**Medical Demonology, Theology of Plague.** At stake in the development of Scholastic demonology is the extent to which a form of power is produced that at once establishes and governs a supernatural – or, we might say, unhuman – field of circulations and flows. At stake, in other words, is the governance of the unhuman itself, the biopolitics of life-beyond-life – perhaps, even, a supernatural biopolitics.

In cases such as these, medicine and theology are brought together in ambivalent ways. There is, first, what we might call “medical demonology,” or the ways in which medicine and medical knowledge came into relation with religious doctrine on, for instance, necromancy or the existence of demons. As early modern scholars have noted, medicine does not simply debunk or secularize demonology, quite the opposite. If anything, medicine comes to complete demonology, or at least serve as an arbitrator in disputed cases of demonic possession. The debate between Bodin, Weyer, and Scot is instructive. Bodin, an

important early theorizer of sovereignty, argues for the reality of demonic possession – a threat to the religious order is also a threat to the secular order, and sovereignty undermined in the divine is also an undermining of sovereignty in the earthly. Bodin writes his treatise as an explicit retort to Weyer, who, as a physician, tentatively argues for a more medicalized and secular view of demonic possession. But even Weyer’s text is filled with uncertainties; medicine’s role is not simply to debunk all cases of demonic possession, but to distinguish authentic cases from inauthentic ones (which may be symptoms of melancholy, epilepsy, or hysteria). If Weyer allows for the real existence of demons, then Scot goes the distance and argues for a general dismissal of the reality of demonic possession – again, medicine serves as the fulcrum of his argument, explaining the supernatural by recourse to the natural.

While that explanation varies, from the theological to the medical, and while the response varies, from persecution to diagnosis, what remains constant in medical demonology is the concern over the governance of the circulation and flow of *pathos*. If medical demonology pits medicine against a theological event, then we can also think about the inverse – the case in which theology is pitted against a natural-medical event. We can call this the “theology of plague,” and it involves, quite simply, religious explanations of epidemic disease. Not surprisingly, the “angry God” motif is a recurrent one, both in the classical context – Thucydides reports it as a popular explanation of the plague of Athens – as well as in the Christian context – for instance, in the many accounts of the Black Death. But more than the angry God or references to *Revelations*, these narratives of epidemic disease often contain a number of insights into the politics of plague and pestilence. Chroniclers of the Black Death often note how epidemic disease brings with it a disruption of social hierarchy and political order, often necessitating forms of intervention, from enforced quarantines, to the shutting up of houses, to the mass graves and legal interdiction on public gatherings, festivals, plays, and funerals. [xxiii]

All of these cases take place in an early modern or even pre-modern context. At the same time, they overlap significantly with contemporary concerns over global pandemics and biodefense. What if biopolitics is not simply immunological, but also demonological? Demonology, in this case, would have to be understood less as the all-too-human drama of temptation and sin, but more in terms of the governance of circulation, flux, and flow. It would also revolve around a phenomenon that is radically unhuman (the *anti-pathos*), or that serves as that which does not fit within the human framework. And it would also involve a form of life or vitalism that is often expressed as a contradiction (generative decay, the bestial and divine, communicable communication). In short, if biopolitics is demonological and not just immunological, this is because it raises the problem of the management of ambivalently vitalistic flux and flow – that is, the politics of unhuman life.

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**Poetics of Biopolitics.** The classical term *nekros* encapsulates many of dichotomies of the biopolitics concept. In its traditional sense, *nekros* names the corpse, the body that is no longer living. When, for example, Odysseus holds funeral rites for his deceased companions, it is the *nekros* that is cremated. But when Odysseus makes his way to the underworld, what he encounters is not simply the dead body or the corpse, but “the ghosts of the dead” (*nekuon kataethneoton*).[xxiv] Here *nekros* names “the dead” as a form of life, one that resists any reliable distinction between the living being and the corpse. And this second type of *nekros* is also a collective, politicized form of life (*ethnea nekron*, the “nations of the dead”).

Nowhere is this more effectively demonstrated than in Dante’s *Inferno*, where we see stratifications of the living dead that are at once the product of divine punishment and, as such, are meticulously managed as massing or aggregate bodies. In the sixth circle, where Dante and his guide Virgil come up to the giant, fortress-like gates of the infernal City of Dis. Guarded by hordes of demons, Virgil must enlist divine intervention in order to pass through the gates. Once Dante and Virgil enter, what they see is a city in ruins, an uneven landscape of burning, open graves:

*And then we started moving toward the city (terra)  
in the safety of the holy words pronounced.  
We entered there, and with no opposition.  
And I, so anxious to investigate  
the state of souls locked up in such a fortress (fortezza),  
once in the place, allowed my eyes to wander,  
and saw, in all directions spreading out,  
a countryside (campagna) of pain and ugly anguish.*[xxv]

In this landscape, at once *terra*, *fortezza*, and *campagna*, Dante and Virgil come to across another type of terrain – that of a landscape of open graves:

*the sepulchers make all the land uneven,  
so they did here, strewn in all directions,  
except the graves here served a crueler purpose:  
for scattered everywhere among the tombs  
were flames that kept them glowing far more hot  
than any iron an artisan might use.  
Each tomb had its lid loose, pushed to one side,  
and from within came forth such fierce laments  
that I was sure inside were tortured souls.*[xxvi]

This harrowing vision of a field of burning graves blurs the boundary between corpse,



grave, and the terrain itself. The scene prompts Dante to ask Virgil, “Master, what kind of shades are these lying down here, buried in the graves of stone, speaking their presence in such dolorous sighs?” His response: “There lie arch-heretics of every sect, with all of their disciples; more than you think are packed within these tombs.”[xxvii]

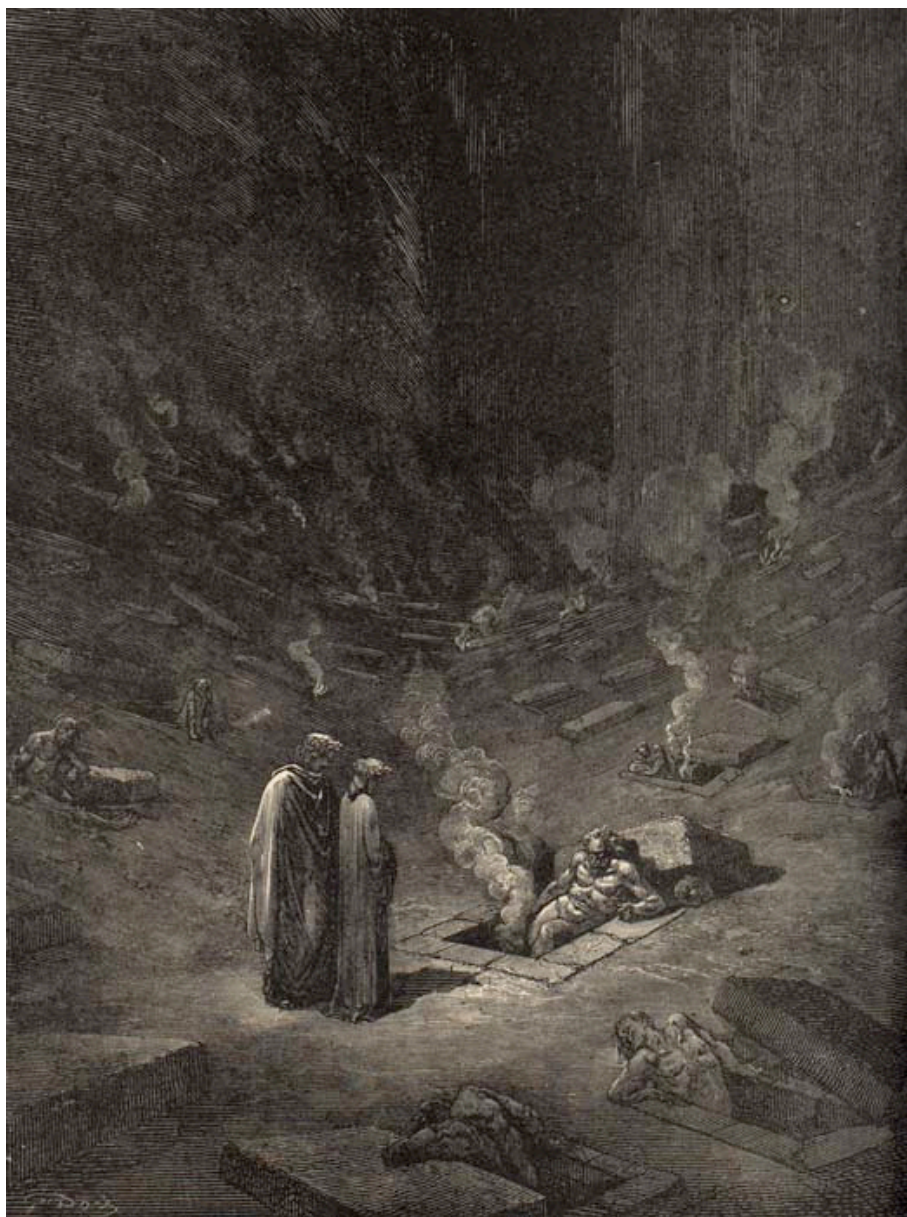
In Dante’s version of the dead walking the earth, the living dead are explicitly ordered within the City of Dis; indeed, the living dead are the “citizens” of this city. Furthermore, as Virgil notes, the living dead are politicized: they are the heretics, those who have spoken against the theologico-political order, and, importantly, who have do so from within that order. In this way Dante links the heretics to the other circles of lower Hell, including the “sowers of discord” (who are meticulously, anatomically dismembered) and the “falsifiers” (who are ridden with plague and leprosy).

Nowhere else in the *Inferno* are we presented with such explicit analogies to the classical body politic. The City of Dis is, of course, very far from the idealized *polis* in Plato’s *Republic*, or the *civitas Dei* described by Augustine. The City of Dis is not even a living, human city. Instead, what we have is a necropolis, a dead city populated by living graves, by the dead walking the earth. The City of Dis is, in this guise, an inverted *polis*, an inverted body politic.

Again we have the ambiguous vitalism of the “shades,” as well as their massing and aggregate forms. But here the living dead are not simply an instance of judgment or divine retribution; in fact, they are the opposite, that which is produced through sovereign power. This sovereign power not only punishes (in the famous *contrapasso*), but, more importantly, it orders the multiplicity of bodies according to their transgressions or threats. In the *Inferno*, the living dead are not only a threat to political order, but the living dead are also organized and regulated by sovereign power. Sovereign power determines the living dead through an intervention into the natural workings of things, thereby managing the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. It does this not only to preserve the existing theological-political order, but also to identify a threat that originates from within the body politic.

Within this mortified body politic we witness two forms of power – a sovereign power that judges and punishes, but also a regulatory power that manages the flows and circulations of multiple bodies, their body parts and bodily fluids. In this way, Dante’s underworld is utterly contemporary, for it suggests to us that the body politic concept is always confronted with this twofold challenge – the necessity of establishing a sovereign power in conjunction with the necessity of regulating and managing multiplicities.

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L'Inferno (Gustave Doré, 1857)

**Living, Dead.** This is a remarkably persistent motif, and one found in the contemporary low-brow example of the living dead. The peculiar sub-genre of the zombie film has, for many years, provided us with different cultural expressions of Dante's living dead. The American and Italian traditions are the most prominent examples in this regard. While early Hollywood thrillers such as *White Zombie* or *Revolt of the Zombies* placed Western doctors and heroes within the context of voodoo and colonialism, American zombie films

after George Romero's landmark *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) place the living dead within a decidedly post-industrial, American context, self-reflexively stressing the "silent majority" and the uses of political satire.

By contrast, the Italian tradition of zombie films displays parts of both the early and later American traditions. Though many well-known directors have dabbled in the genre, it is Lucio Fulci who has explored (some would say exploited) the motif of the living dead in the most detail. Fulci's zombie films not only pick up on the idea of the colonial encounter as a medical encounter, but medical power is always linked to the supernatural – perhaps we can even say, sovereign – power to raise the dead. Critics of Fulci dismiss his work, noting that Fulci basically made one film, over and over. Admittedly, it is hard to deny such dismissals, for Fulci's films, such as the cult classic *Zombie* (1979; released in Italy as *Zombi 2*), *The Beyond* (1981), or the strangely uneventful *City of the Living Dead* (1980), repeatedly present an archetypal scene, one that visually encapsulates each of the films – that of the dead walking the earth.[xxviii]

There is, to be sure, a political romanticism to these modern variants of the living dead; eventually, the multitude prevails through sheer persistence, and all symbols of hierarchy eventually fall. But more than this, what is instructive is the way such films demonstrate the problem of biopolitics as the governance of circulation, flux, and flow. These scenes of the dead walking the earth often signify moments of retribution, the living dead – themselves the product of a medical-sovereign power – taking vengeance upon their creators. Similar scenes are found in Romero's zombie films: *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), and, more recently, *Land of the Dead* (2005), all contain key, climactic scenes of the living dead as a massing, contagious movement through the fences, barricades, and bunkers that human groups construct to manage them. The spaces through which the living dead move – houses, suburbs, malls, city streets, military bases, and corporate towers – all become porous spaces to the miasmatic logic of the living dead. They not only occupy the borderland between the living and the dead, but between the One and the Many, sovereignty and multiplicity. Their massing and their aggregation is not only a matter of number, but also of circulation and movement (albeit a maddeningly slow, persistent movement...). The movement of such massing and aggregate forms is that of contagion and circulation, a passing-through, a passing-between, even, in an eschatological sense, a passing-beyond.

In these archetypal scenes of the dead walking the earth, the living dead are driven by an ambiguous vitalism. Occupying the grey zone between the living and the dead, the zombie is "animated" in an Aristotelian sense; put another way, the living dead are living precisely because they are a construed threat. But, at the same time, they are the not-living because they are excluded from the body politic and the fortifications of security and political order – especially when they always reside within such spaces.

From this perspective, what begins to become apparent is that biopolitics always implicates an ontology of life that is nevertheless is always attempting to supersede. That ontology is at once medical and theological, medical demonology and the theology of plague. Something that decomposes and that is living; perhaps this conjunction between *psukhe* and *pathos*, between life and circulation/flux/flow, is the central dilemma for biopolitics today – the intelligibility of the “bio” of biopolitics.

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**Coda: The Incorruptibles.** Theologians often talk about the incorruptibility of the corpses of saints, corpses touched by divine intervention and miraculously impervious to the temporal processes of decay. The corpses of mystics such as John of the Cross and Teresea of Avila are counted among the Incorruptibles of the Catholic Church. By contrast, I would like to be absolutely corruptible – nothing of my body would remain, not even the clothes I’m wearing or the notebook in which I’m writing. Finally all words and memories would evaporate, leaving not even an echo or resonance. It’s a political fantasy – but no less fantastical than the Incorruptibles.

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NOTE: This text is derived from a talk given at Amherst College in 2009. Some of this material is found in modified form in my book *In The Dust Of This Planet - Horror of Philosophy* vol. 1 (Zero Books, 2011)

- [i] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 142
- [ii] An important exception is the work of Roberto Esposito, whose trilogy *Bíos, Immunitas, and Communitas* examines the philosophical underpinnings of biopolitics as a concept
- [iii] Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population - Cours Au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004), p. 16
- [iv] *ibid.* 12
- [v] Foucault, *Il Faut Défendre la Société – Cours Au Collège de France, 1976* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1997), p. 216
- [vi] This idea is further explored in my book *After Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 1-24
- [vii] Hobbes, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994 [1651]), “Introduction.”
- [viii] Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror & the Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1994), pp. 142-43
- [ix] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter XXIX (“Of those things that Weaken, or tend to the Dissolution of a Common-wealth”).
- [x] *ibid.*
- [xi] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin, 2003), 444c, p. 153
- [xii] *Ibid.*, IV, 444d, p. 154
- [xiii] *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), VIII, 556e, p. 235
- [xiv] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (New York: Penguin, 1996), 1449a24-28. Aristotle’s famous definition is as follows: “Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete, and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification (*katharsis*) of such emotions.”

- [xv] Ibid., 1450a15.  
[xvi] Ibid., 1448b10-14.  
[xvii] Aristotle, *On the Soul / Parva Naturalia / On Breath* (Loeb Classical Library), trans. W.S. Hett (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1936]). Aristotle reiterates several times: “Let us then, taking up the starting point of our inquiry, say that the ensouled is distinguished from the unsouled by its being alive” (II.1.413a)  
[xviii] Ibid., I.1.403a  
[xix] See, for example, Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)  
[xx] Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), q.III, art.iv,  
[xxi] Maaïke van der Lugt, *Le Vex, le démon, et la vierge: les théories médiévales génération extraordinaire* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2004), p. 238  
[xxii] Alain Bourreau, *Satan the Heretic: The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 174.  
[xxiii] Literary accounts, from Boccaccio, to Defoe, to Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend*, and Octavia Butler’s *Clay’s Ark*, all take up these basic motifs – the disruptive event, the lack of adequate explanation, the political shutting-down, and the ensuing threat of social chaos  
[xxiv] *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin), XI.39  
[xxv] *Inferno*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin, 2002), Canto IX, lines 104-111. Italian consulted at the Digital Dante Project, [dante.ilt.columbia.edu](http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu)  
[xxvi] Ibid., 115-123.  
[xxvii] Ibid., 124-129  
[xxviii] The final scene in *Zombi 2* depicts the living dead slowly descending on New York City (they are crossing Brooklyn Bridge – apparently zombies come from Brooklyn...)



## *The PetroZombie*

Tom Trevatt

Dead matter articulates itself into the ongoing atelic regresses of expenditure; pumped and eviscerated lumps and dark liquids lubricate an excessive drive towards eventual collapse, the zombie and petroleum both as figures and victims of the radical decline. The burning of fossil fuel, the long dead bodies of ancestral plants, drives voodoo capitalism, yet with every fire approaches the extinction of life. With every depression, every bubble and its bursting the end is ushered in. What would life be without telos? As the decline proliferates, as the end is finally reached, as the zombie takes over or the oil runs out, we terminally tread towards not just the death of ourselves, but the deaths of our telos. What life work would be worth the work if survival was the only thing on our minds? Yet, we are aimed at death, we are already dead. Matter walking. Apophenia is merely the egoistic expression of a bursting forth of subjectivity from the object. Meaning is made to stave off death. But as the dead roam the earth feeding from our flesh the telos disappears. Peak oil is equivalent to the moment in the zombie movie where humanity is outnumbered. Peak zombie. The profoundly nihilistic speculative opportunity.[i]

Facing eradication, the human subject is cleaved by the contingency of the outside, ripped apart by bloody faced hordes as it closes its eyes to its fate. Telluric embodiment – the dead have risen from the ground – these non-humans are but matter, bodies without souls. But for Abrahamic theology eschatology is apophenia.[ii] The coming apocalypse is welcomed by believers; the zombie bite and burning oil fields as harbingers not of doom, but rapture.

*What is an end? One shudders perhaps. An end? Are there more than one? Is not the very question a violation of sorts? A ruthless denuding? Should death be pushed so harshly into my awareness? Can she not wait? Is it not permissible to sleep?*  
(*Thirst for Annihilation*, Nick Land)



As one listens to the foreboding predictions from scientists and crisis theorists about the decline of world oil supply and its effects, one cannot but think of the scenes from the zombie films we use to imagine the apocalypse. Abandoned shops are looted and burned, petrol stations flattened, humans and zombies alike are shot by either hired or self appointed militia. All apocalypses are different, but every one involves the construction of new power formations. We can survive a zombie attack and the decline of oil, but can we survive our own survival of it? Armies are more vicious than any zombie, yet give me *Mad Max* over Transition Whidbey.[iii]

Dead plants live on, persist, through petrochemicals, as the plastics that appear in our homes, as the fuel in our generators, flowing through our lives giving energy as zombie-inflections. The ancient futurity of death from geologically defined mausoleums swells and rises up as petroleum through capitalist refinement, becoming the far reaching hordes that both fuel us in and rip us from our soporific homes.

*Does everything that has ever existed continue to exist now, in the molecular transformation of geoprogrammatic recycling, and also, does everything that will ever exist already do so in another larval, disorganized distribution?*

(Peak Oil Apophenia, Benjamin Bratton)

The monstrosity of the zombie is not just its flesh eating hyper cannibalism, but that it is one of us 'living-on', it could be your brother, your friend, your mother, it could be you. Is not this very living on, the undead but alive-(too alive)-ness of the zombie, that has been linked so closely to a critique of capitalism, the figure of petroleum? It is of no surprise that capitalism, then, lives on the living-on, the continuation of organisms in their petromorphic decay. Unfathomably deep and unfathomably old these chthonic blobjects haunt us through our reliance on them.[iv] The blank body, devoid of consciousness, fleshy matter persevering as braindead horde.

*According to the biogenic theory of fossil fuels, petroleum was formed under pressure and heat in the absence of oxygen while sadistically counting organic death tolls for millennia. Under such extreme conditions, petroleum grew a satanic verve for reanimating the dead and puppetizing the living on a planetary scale. A precursor to blobjective narratives, (this) imagery grasps the "Thingness" of oil as a singular inorganic body fuelling the Conradian journey "up-river," from the gas station to the Chthonic oil reservoir via the tentacled edifice of oil pipelines.*

*.....From a nethermost point of view, Bush and Bin Laden are merely petropolitical puppets convulsing along the Chthonic strings of the blob just in the same way that a Chinese plastic toy and equally an American predator drone are brought to life by the strings woven from the hydrocarbon corpse juice.*

(‘Outlines for a Science Fiction of the Earth as Narrated from a Nethermost Point of View’, Reza Negarestani)

The instauration of petrol as lord and as thing, as puppetmaster and (bl)object marks the shift from oil as resource to oil as disaster embodied in our being-toward-deathness arising from oil as saviour through sacrifice. Millennia of stratification capitalize on earth as devouring force, as it eats its own history. Oil as atelic beings teleologically defined through capital. As world grows excessively, meaning production ever expands in a humanist dialectic of subject/object. Culture relies on the excess of capital. Capital creates, as George A. Romero would have us believe, blind consumers, zombie-like in their decrepitude. The zombie is metaphor for the consumer, the consumer is reliant on petroleum, the zombie is critique of petropolitics. Yet, in an interesting twist to the genre, Romero puts the petrol pump in the zombie's hand. In his film from 2005, *Land of the Dead*, Romero's zombies pick up tools; in a scene near the end of the film the 'lead' zombie pumps Kaufman's (the megalomaniac head of Fiddler's Green) car with petrol. Later a burning tyre rolls down the parking garage slope and ignites the car, killing Kaufman and his rival as they fight. The tyre, it is revealed, came from the zombie who recently discovered the combustibility of petrol. Becoming petrozombie.

All war zones have Green Zones, pockets of non-militarized land within a militarized Red Zone enjoyed often by companies but guarded by armies. In the recent gulf war they were often nicknamed Haliburton Zones; sectors dedicated not just to protecting important dignitaries, military leaders, politicians, but more often the avant garde of oil conglomerations bent on sticking their flag in oil rich land. With disaster comes disaster capitalism. [v] In *Land of the Dead* Fiddler's Green is one of these Green Zones. Surrounded on two sides by water and one side by heavily defended barricades this safe haven is populated by the rich, defended from not just the zombie hordes but the proletariat at its gates. The divide is greater at times of crisis. Yet instead of the mining of oil, the head of Fiddler's Green, Kaufman, is mining safety. He is hired thug turned multimillionaire, defender of humanity through barbaric extermination policies. This patrolled exclusion zone, named after an imagined afterlife where there is constant happiness, presents the realisation of a fascistic sacralisation of humanity defined by cognisance. It is the full expression of the subject/object divide, man's manifest image of himself.

To move beyond this manifest image one must make a radical break with the humanism of apophenia, to not divide the subject and object but understand that subjectivity erupts from the object not the object from the subject. The zombie is embedded in this process.

*The zombie's irreconcilable body (both living and dead) raises the insufficiency of the dialectical model (subject/object) and suggests, with its own negative dialectic, that the only way to truly get posthuman is to become antisubject.*

(*'A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism'*, Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry)

The zombie moves beyond the for-us of post-Kantian thought, it "threatens us with its

material form”[vi], presenting us with the blankness of the mindless horde. Becoming not just animal; becoming monster, the horror is complicit with the flesh of the human, erupting in dilapidation, existing eternally, beyond death, the zombie produces a petrocritique precisely because petroleum is the product of humanism as defined by consumerism. Peak oil is an expression of infinitely desiring machines within a finite system. Within a finite system zombie tends towards 100% population density, it is the ultimate desiring machine. Zombie here is both petrocritique and enactment of the desire production inherent in petrocaptial. Petrocapitalism is the production of desire for petrol by petrol. Oil proliferates zombie-like. Petrozombie is both devouring horde and flesh to be devoured.

As oil runs out we will be returned en masse to the earth as eventual hydrocarbon excretion to become in turn petrochemicals not for future generations, but for nothing. Lucretius, whose body we haven’t even begun to extract as oil despite dying many centuries ago, was right to oppose creatio ex nihilo, creation out of nothing. Matter persists as molecular distribution and redistribution. We haven’t begun to see surficial biodegradation into organic compounds that will create usable hydrocarbon chains within our life time. We are experiencing the decay of matter that will become, millennia from now, blackness itself, sleeping kilometres under the surface that will likely never be reawakened by combustion. Humanity will perish before it sees the use of human based fossil fuels. Before it sees the truly reawakened human zombie as petroleum.

The deeply non-correlational, ancient futurity of oil as expressed through fire as atelic affect is raped in the name of humanism. A humanism which cannot account for the ancestrality of ancient things compressed chthonically imagines the plasticity as ultimate result of petroleum as necessity rather than contingency. Things return from the old times in the form of plastic things and liquid or gaseous fuel.

*The rendering of surficial organic life into subterranean mineral fossil fuels is the core vascular labor, and the plasticity of plastic --the real compression-deformation effect of oil as ultimate fate of the thing-- long predates the physical possibility of its conceptualization by animals. That futurity is ancient.*  
(‘Peak Oil Apophenia’, Benjamin Bratton)

The petrochemical/plastic return of subterranean things embarks on rivers of Tellurian lubricant, vehicles for epic narratives that shudder under their own steam.[vii] As war machines that excrete carbon fumes and deal out justice, the Nemesis that is military capitalism is not the pure goddess of retribution but the satanised Nemesis of a Jihad/War on Terror amalgam. As forces clash they entangle and become monstrous through their entanglement, wasting energy in orgasmic consumption. Hordes of oil-frenzied soldiers plough mindlessly into hails of bullets; the petrozombie lives on devouring not contemporary human flesh but ancestral biomatter. In the future, if it is not already so, the petrozombie will fight all wars.

Escaping from zombies and the decline of petrochemicals alike relies in someway on going off-grid. Technocapitalism is to be avoided in both scenarios. As zombies proliferate and barrel numbers decrease small scale agrarian production will increase with more and more choosing to abandon densely populated zombie/petrozombie hunting grounds in favour of farms and homesteads. This medievalism operates as a kind of punking of agriculture. Tractors will be modified to run on plant oil, electricity will be sourced from the sun, the wind and the water. This anachronism is beyond steampunk....it is agripunk. As a response to global threats many people have adopted agripunk lifestyles, returning to the land to take a step out of society. Societal dropouts align themselves against death in an attempt to re-subjectivize their own decaying matter. But as a move to avoid becoming object this obfuscates the project of post-humanism.

Romero was asked in an interview recently what he would do in a zombie crisis, his response was to go out and immediately get bitten, “That way I could live forever”. The zombie lives until they have reached 100% population density, the petrozombie lives on only until oil runs out. The zombie may offer us an expression of post-humanism, but can we ever get truly post-petroleum and post-human? Post-humanism is not a rejection of the subject as such, but of the division between object and subject that resolves dialectically in the subject. Post-humanism understands the subject as derived mythically from matter not given to us as eternal life force. The negative dialectic that the zombie embodies, the holding off from resolution of life and death proposes a vista of continual un-life as expressed in the persistence of matter as hydrocarbon plasticity. Monstrous flows grease the narrative of the earth through technocapitalism, nothing is as black as the oil that is discharged from earth in capitalist jouissance and the petrozombie exalts in the rhythmic sexualisation of territorial molestation. The black corpse of the sun. Petrozombie is necrophiliac, fellating the tentacular pipelines that trace the surface of the earth, consuming the abject material excretion of Tellurian annihilation.

*Petroleum possesses tendencies for mass intoxication on pandemic scales (different from, but corresponding to capitalism’s voodoo economy and other types of global possession systems). Petroleum is able to gather the necessary geo-political undercurrents (subterranean or blobjective narrations of politics, economy, religion, etc.) required for the process of Erathication or the moving of the Earth’s body toward the Tellurian Omega – the utter degradation of the Earth as a Whole.*  
(Cyclonopedia: Complicity With Anonymous Materials, Reza Negarestani)

Long undead the Petrozombie, as ancient as the chthonic proteins it feeds off, stalks the surface, unsleeping it is both annihilation and monstrous progenitor of plastic life. Raising its brain-hole to the solar cunt petrozombie thrusts its rotting limbs under tectonic plates and gropes sedimentations of blobjects, “alpha-mutineer in Tellurian insurgency against solar capitalism and its neo-Ptolemaic heliocentrism”[vii] the petrozombie digests minerals. Oil refineries tremble as it manipulates their miles of phallic drilling equipment

plunged deep into the Earth. Terrestrial excitation, causing matter to matter, thrusting the oil-rich Persian Gulf forefront of global concerns. Dripping in black solar ejaculate the petrozombie orchestrates a deep regressive revolt determined to continually undermine generations of human life.

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[i] *Nihil Unbound*, Ray Brassier

[ii] 'Peak Oil Apophenia', Benjamin Bratton

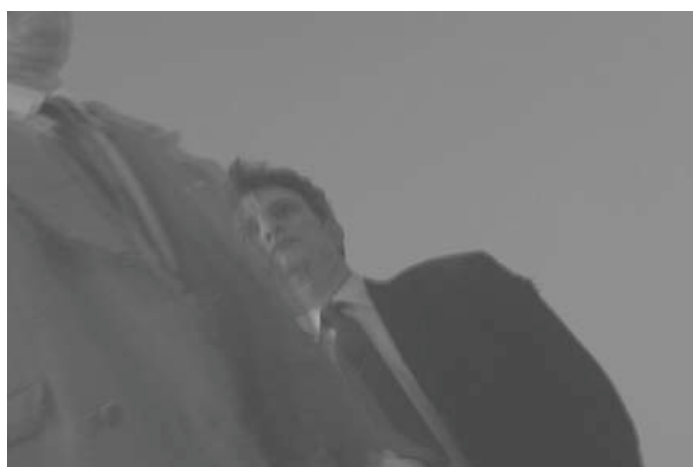
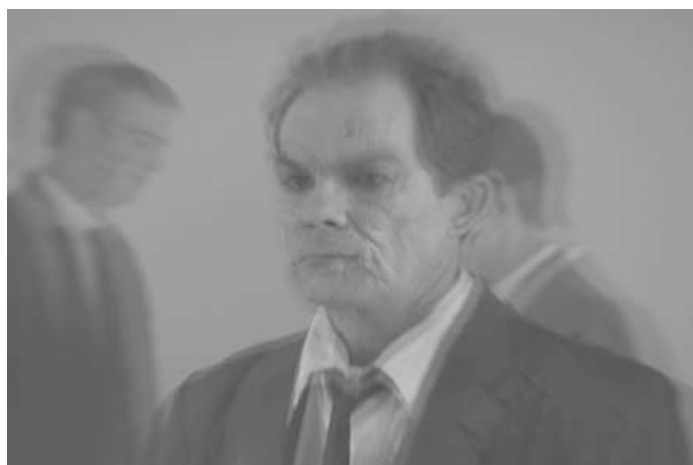
[iii] Transition Whidbey is a self sufficient community set up to cope with the peak oil crisis as predicted by the Hirsch Report published in 2005. Effectively the worst of hippy communes, Transition Whidbey is a turgid community of dying Americans eeking out a bare existence and enjoying every last bit of it. See this video on YouTube for the sheer horror of it: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=GjLAiSQ1vkQ>

[iv] *Cyclonopedia: Complicity With Anonymous Materials*, Reza Negarestani

[v] *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein

[vi] 'A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism', Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry

[vii] *Cyclonopedia: Complicity With Anonymous Materials*, Reza Negarestani



Jim Shaw, *The Hole*, 2007 (JS07.51)

Video with artist soundtrack

11min 5 seconds (looped)

Edition of 3, 2 APs

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Praz-Delavellade, Paris.



## *Otto: An Introduction*

### Bruce LaBruce

*Otto; or, Up with Dead People* is a movie that was partly inspired by my ex-boyfriend, a Shiite Muslim, and partly by my current husband, a Santeria priest. The Shia are a lugubrious bunch who spend the first six weeks of their new year in mourning for the death of the prophet Mohammed's grandson. They wear black and self-flagellate a lot. My ex-boyfriend lives life very intensely and joyfully, but he also often used to tell me that he felt like he was dead already or that he was one of the walking dead. He believes in genies and spirits of the dead, so he would always be seeing and communicating with them. My husband is a Santeria priest, so he also sees the dead all the time and communes with them. My relationship with him inspired me to reinvestigate the life and work of Maya Deren, the great American avant-garde filmmaker of the forties and fifties, who devoted much of her life to Haitian Voodoo, a syncretic religion exported to the Caribbean from Africa during slavery with strong similarities to Santeria. Her great book, *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti*, was considered so pure and accurate an account of Haitian Voodoo that the Haitians believed it was visited upon her. They considered her a Voodoo goddess. Of course Haitian Voodoo also has a connection with zombies and zombie mythology, a subject beautifully realized in the great Val Lewton horror film, *I Walked With A Zombie*. I decided to make a movie with a character inspired by Maya Deren (her name, Medea Yarn, is an anagram), and which addresses the idea of zombies, the walking dead, and spirits of the dead.

While writing the script for *Otto* I looked at the work of cartoonists such as Charles Addams and Edward Gorey, both of whom have a kind of macabre and morbid, almost romantic view of death. (To enhance the romantic, Gothic feel, I enlisted the wonderful American designer Rick Owens to contribute the costumes to the film.) I also watched certain American independent horror films from the past with a more whimsical, eccentric quality: Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls*, Curtis Harrington's *Night Tide*, and George A. Romero's *Martin*. Each film is about a kind of monstrous or mythical creature (a ghost, a

mermaid, and a vampire, respectively) with an identity crisis. Neither they nor the audience is sure whether or not they are real monsters or simply lost, lonely characters that have been marginalized or exiled from normal society. Otto follows in the tradition of these monsters: is he a real zombie, or just a sad, despondent homeless kid with an eating disorder who doesn't fit in?

I've always loved the horror genre, so making a zombie movie was a real pleasure for me. Horror movies really allow you to tap into all the fears and anxieties that float around in our culture, and they are also often about homosexual panic, so the idea of making a movie about a gay zombie made perfect sense to me. The zombie has emerged as the most prevalent modern horror trope, but I didn't want to make a conventional zombie picture. Zombies are the ultimate conformists – they all act alike, look alike, and are all drawn to the same locations. Zombies are also the ultimate consumers, so they constitute the perfect metaphor for modern consumer capitalist society. But I decided I wanted to invert the paradigm and make a zombie who is a non-conformist, who is, as the movie says, “conducting his own one man revolution against reality.” Otto the zombie is a return to previous horror figures like the werewolf and the vampire: eccentric, stylish individuals at the fringes of society with split personalities. As Medea Yarn points out, Otto is the logical product of a materialist society that has become soulless and deadening. He (dis)embodies modern alienation and spiritual malaise.

Most of my films have sexually explicit content, and *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* is no exception. The idea of a zombie porn movie interested me greatly because it makes perfect sense: the zombie body is porous, rotting – you can create your own orifice! I predict that zombie porn will be the wave of the future! I also considered the idea that the homosexual experience is conducive to the zombie treatment. If you've ever cruised a park or the halls of a bathhouse, you know that it can be just like *Night of the Living Dead*! (I say this not necessarily in a bad way: the anonymity of the dead, the interchangeable body parts, the sexual trance – all of it can be quite fun and exciting!) There is also the plague metaphor to consider, as zombies are often depicted as viral and contagious. Although I chose not to articulate it too literally, there is a definite AIDS subtext to Otto, who can be interpreted as the horrific outward manifestation of a modern, political disease. As a vulnerable, homeless gay youth, he also draws out the hostility and homophobia still evident in modern culture.

As I often make both softcore and hardcore versions of my films, and considering some of the actors in Otto, including Marcel Schlutt and Christophe Chemin, have acted in porn, we actually did shoot quite a lot of pornographic material for Otto that didn't make it into the final film. This will probably turn up in the future as DVD extras, hopefully ushering in a new era of gay zombie porn!

Music is always important in my films. I was looking for a particular kind of music for

Otto, a certain blend of modern, avant-garde, electronic, noise, neo-Goth, and romantic pop. I started to research the music on MySpace, and word got out that I was looking for music for a melancholy gay zombie movie. I was subsequently deluged with hundreds of submissions, most of who generously donated the music for free in return for credit. I wanted to use as much of the material as possible, so I got the idea to treat the music as if it were a score, almost as if by a single composer. The soundtrack for the movie has been released by Crippled Dick Hot Wax! Records, features the following amazing artists, among others:

01. Mikael Karlsson - Descent
02. Jean-Louis Huhta – Halfway Between The World And Death
03. 4th Sign Of The Apocalypse – Ascending The River
04. All My Friends – Theme From All My Friends
05. Pandas Of Black Metal – Kill Your Gods
06. Misty Roses – Mario And Dario
07. The Living Dead Boys – We Are The Living Dead Boys
08. No Bra - Doherruckher
09. Brittle Stars – On The Cusp Of Infinity
10. Eyes And Teeth - Sonicize
11. Othon Mataragas with Ernesto Tomasini - Metalipsis
12. La Jovenc – Going Home
13. Ultra Milkmaids + V - Load
14. The Homophones – Everyone's Dead

My editor, Joern Hartmann, and I also came up with the idea of using some of the music and noise as a way of expressing Otto's subjectivity, his inner monologue outwardly exposed, much like his rotting body is an outward manifestation of his inner turmoil. Finally, I thought it would be cool to include music from some more high profile artists whose work I admire and which fit the atmosphere of the film. My friend the artist and band member Kembra Pfahler, who has a cameo in Otto, generously introduced me to Antony and the Johnsons and CocoRosie, both of whom she had toured with. Their contributions greatly enhance the musical pedigree of the film. I also asked permission of my friends Genesis P. Orridge and Peter Christopherson of Throbbing Gristle fame to use one of their songs, which memorably serves as the mini-soundtrack for Medea's film-within-the-film, Duet for Somnambulists.

Shooting Otto in Berlin was a great pleasure. It is still one of the best cities in the world in which to make a film, owing to its spectacular locations, many of which are available either for free or at quite reasonable rates. I also shot my last film, *The Raspberry Reich*, in Berlin, which featured the great Berlin stage actress Susanne Sachsse as the very verbose and grandiose Gudrun, a character partly inspired by Gudrun Ensslin of the RAF. In

Otto, I cast Susanne as Hella Bent, the girlfriend of Medea Yarn (played by the amazing Berlin filmmaker Katharina Klewinghaus, who considers Maya Deren one of her great idols) as a completely silent film star whom has no dialogue. It was a role she took on with great gusto and flair. We were fortunate enough to shoot in some stunning Berlin locations, such as the almost mythic abandoned amusement park near Treptow Park by the Spree. The amusement park, which sits on several acres of land by the river, was owned by a South American man who got caught importing cocaine in some of the carnival rides, and he has been in jail ever since. It was difficult at first to get permission to shoot there for insurance reasons as many of the rides and buildings are in an advanced state of decay. But after a little intervention from the mayor's office, we were allowed a full night and day of shooting. (They even said we could shoot porn there if we wished!) Otto was probably the last production allowed to shoot at the amusement park before it will be razed to the ground. Another one of our locations, the garbage processing facility on Kopernickerstrasse by the Spree, was also recently closed down and relocated. Several cemeteries allowed us to shoot on their grounds, including one that allowed us to dig our own grave to bury Otto! We buried Jey Crisfar, the young art student from Brussels I cast as Otto (also through MySpace!), in a very Gothic-looking graveyard on his nineteenth birthday. It was only one of many ordeals the poor young actor had to deal with during the shooting of Otto, including eating roadkill (a rabbit from a farmer's market which our art department, headed by Stephan Dickfeld, stuffed with raw tuna and strawberry syrup!), walking through a bee-infested field of rapps, and chewing on raw chicken in a meat processing plant!

Otto was shot in the spring of 2007 during an unusually sunny three-week period in Berlin. My cinematographer James Carman, who has shot my last four films, used both super 16mm and HD formats to accommodate the concept of the film and the films-within-the-film. (We used the same camera, the Panasonic HDX 900, George Romero used to shoot his latest zombie movie, *Diary of the Dead*!). As HD is sometimes quite unforgiving in broad daylight, I would always try to stall the production and make excuses to delay shooting so that we could shoot instead during magic hour as the sun is going down. Eventually, near the end of the shoot, I was awarded by the appearance of a beautiful double rainbow, which hovers behind Otto in the final shot of the film. (It's real, not a CGI rainbow!) It was the perfect end to a remarkable shoot.





***Otto; or, Up With Dead People***  
***(a screenplay)***  
**Bruce LaBruce**

“The dead are so terribly dead when they’re dead.” - Tyrone Power, *The Razor’s Edge*

The movie begins with the initial titles as intertitles. Spooky lettering:

Existential Crisis Productions Present

A Bruce LaBruce Movie

Otto; or, Up with Dead People

This is followed by a series of intertitles in red and black:

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: OR

INTERTITLE: UP

INTERTITLE: WITH

INTERTITLE: DEAD

INTERTITLE: PEOPLE

Ext. A COUNTRY GRAVEYARD - late afternoon



BLACK AND WHITE FILM: Static shot of an empty tombstone on an overcast day.

DISSOLVE TO:

INTERTITLE: OTTO

...superimposed on the tombstone, fades in and out.

INTERTITLE: A Movie by Medea Yarn

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: Once upon a time, in the not too distant future, there unlied a zombie named OTTO.

NOTE: OTTO is a film within the film. So is UP WITH DEAD PEOPLE. OTTO is shot in contrasty, grainy black and white film, super 8 or 16mm. UP WITH DEAD PEOPLE is also in black and white (at least, initially), but it is more slick and letter-boxed (could be HDV). Both movies are directed by Medea Yarn.

Ext. A COUNTRY GRAVEYARD - late afternoon

BLACK AND WHITE FILM: A patch of earth in front of a tombstone. After a moment something beneath the surface of the earth begins to move. After another moment a hand begins to appear. The hand stretches out from beneath the earth until the arm is exposed up to the elbow. Then the wrist bends and the hand goes limp.

INTERTITLE: Up with Dead People

BLACK AND WHITE FILM: A group of five or seven zombies in an orgy of the dead against a backdrop of projections of stock footage of war and terrorism, and of people violently protesting and rioting. This is intercut with slogans including Zombie Power, Up with Dead People, Better Dead Than Alive, Dead and Roses, and, of course, Rise!

INTERTITLE: A Movie by Medea Yarn

INTERTITLE: A Short History of Zombies.

NOTE: This intertitle, along with all the intertitles to follow that recount the history and mythology of zombies, is accompanied by the off-camera voice of MEDEA YARN.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: It was a time, not much different from today, when zombies had become,

if not commonplace, then certainly unextraordinary.

Ext. A COUNTRY GRAVEYARD - late afternoon

BLACK AND WHITE FILM: OTTO wanders wistfully through the graveyard on a grey afternoon, shot by a hand-held camera. He's dressed stylishly in a horizontally striped, long-sleeve sweater over a white shirt and black tie, stove-pipe black pants, and black sneakers: a Neo-Goth dandy. He looks fashionable, but his clothes are crusty and appear as if they've been lived in for days, if not weeks. He is deathly pale and has extreme dark circles under his eyes. Heroin chic!

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: Zombies had evolved over time and become somewhat more refined.

INSERT: An illustration of refined zombies by Christophe Chemin: perhaps two zombies with their legs crossed smoking and drinking tea. Something Charles Addams-ish. Animation in the same vein.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: They had developed a limited ability to speak, and more importantly, to reason. Some say it was primarily owing to the fact that the practice of embalming had fallen out of favour. In the old days it was the embalming fluid that drove the zombies to their frenzied, deranged and sometimes retarded behaviour.

INSERT: Several quick moving images of crazed, spastic zombies: movie footage and animation.

OTTO runs his fingers gently over the tips of the tombstones, pausing occasionally to read them.

MEDEA YARN (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: Others say it was simply a natural process of evolution. Each new wave of zombies was beaten down and killed by the living, who found them to be an irritating and irksome reminder of their own inescapable mortality, not to mention an echo of their own somnambulistic, conformist behaviour.

INSERT: Stock/stolen footage of 1) a throng of people at a shopping mall, shopping; 2) a stadium full of sports fans, cheering; and 3) shirtless gays at a circuit party disco, dancing.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: But the few zombies who survived annihilation managed to pass on the intelligence they had acquired to subsequent generations, perhaps through some strange telepathy only shared by the dead...

INSERT: A Christophe Chemin illustration portraying telepathy between the dead: a sci-fi image more in the vein of Basil Wolverton.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: ...or perhaps by a kind of clandestine guerrilla activity born out of resistance against the violent and unceasing hostilities of the living.

INSERT: Stock footage of a Middle Eastern war and of a protestor wearing a Balaclava at a G-8 Summit throwing a Molotov cocktail.

OTTO picks a flower off a grave. He eats it.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: Still others say it was, and always had been, just a metaphor.

TITLE: OTTO; or, Up with Dead People

CREDIT: A Movie by Bruce LaBruce

Ext. Late afternoon - A COUNTRY ROAD

HD VIDEO (colour): OTTO can now be more clearly seen as a very haggard, slightly spastic-looking young man as he shuffles, shabby and disheveled, down a deserted, paved country road. He is approaching a crossroads, and a high angle shot shows him walking toward the middle of the crossroads, where he stops.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: Some things about zombies, however, had not changed. Zombies were still dead human beings who had been reanimated by some mysterious and unknown form of radioactivity or viral infection.

INSERT: More illustrations by Christophe Chemin and other illustrators, and animation, depicting radioactive zombies and viral zombies (again, something in the line of old Basil

Wolverton comic book covers), intercut with stock footage of nuclear plants and the bird flu pandemic (chickens).

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: As the normal decaying process of death had been slowed down or suspended, zombies could still remain animated for upwards of ten years or longer. Extreme close-up on OTTO's face standing at the middle of the crossroads.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: They still retained limited knowledge and memories from the past, when they were alive.

A wide shot from behind OTTO reveals in front of him, in the middle of the crossroads, some fresh road kill: a squirrel or a cat or a raccoon squashed on the pavement.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: And they still had an insatiable hunger for living or freshly killed flesh... OTTO rushes over to the roadkill, picks it up and begins to eat it rather voraciously.

CREDITS over OTTO eating the roadkill dissolving into a montage of found and created footage and illustrations of regular people and zombies eating flesh and various kinds of meat. Very Soylent Green.

END CREDITS

EXT. a country graveyard - late afternoon

A black sedan pulls up toward a country graveyard.

INT. The car - CONTINUOUS

A young woman and a young man, MEDEA and her brother ADOLF, sit and survey the graves before them. The light of day is just starting to evaporate. MEDEA, who dresses in stylish Addams family fashion, speaks in a flat, monotone voice, like... well, like a zombie might talk.

MEDEA

Are you sure this is where she's buried?

ADOLF

Positive. I looked it up on the internet.

ADOLF looks around at his spooky surroundings.

ADOLF (CONT'D)

It's so remote here. So far away from civilization. I don't understand why she isn't buried in some celebrity cemetery, like Pere-Lachaise.

MEDEA

You'll have to ask her agent. Besides, she was remote. Cold and remote. Don't you remember?

ADOLF

How could I forget? You've been patterning yourself after her since we were twelve years old.

MEDEA

Of course, and why not? She was The Way.

ADOLF

Are you sure you want to do this?

MEDEA

Certainly. After all, it's not as if we intend to exhume her. Although the idea of it intrigues me.

ADOLF

Don't be morbid.

MEDEA

That's like asking the Pope not to be evil. Adolf, I simply want footage of myself lying on the grave of my idol to use in one of my movies. Is that so wrong?

ADOLF

What if we get caught?

MEDEA

Have you seen a living soul in the last hour and a half?

Adolf

No. That's what worries me. C'mon. Let's get this over with.

MEDEA grabs a bouquet of lilies and exits the car. ADOLF follows her.

Ext. A country road - twilight

OTTO stops eating his roadkill for a moment and looks around, sniffing the air for something else he smells. Losing interest in his meal, he drops it and continues on his raggedy way, although remnants of the snack remain on his face and neck.

OTTO (V.O.)

I have no idea where I was headed that night. I can't recall what was going through my brain. It's difficult now, to have clear thoughts. My mind is like mush. I only have vague memories of the time before. Sketchy images, like charcoal drawings, that float in and out of the soup of my consciousness. They could be real or imagined. I have no real way of knowing.

Ext. A GRAVEYARD - TWILIGHT

Hand-held camera: MEDEA and ADOLF are walking amongst the gravestones, searching for a specific grave.

MEDEA

We should have buried mother and father here. Then we could have killed three birds with one stone.

ADOLF

Not that we ever visit mother and father.

MEDEA

They named us Adolf and Eva. What did they expect?

ADOLF

They're common names. I'm sure it wasn't intentional.

MEDEA

At least I had the courage to change mine.

ADOLF

To Medea!

MEDEA

It's my nom de guerre.



ADOLF

Adolf is a perfectly good name. There are many other respectable Adolfs. Adolphe Menjou, Adolph Zukor, Adolf Loos...

MEDEA

Adolf Eichmann.

ADOLF

Eva!

MEDEA

It's Medea! Adolf is such a common name. I never understood why you refused to change your name to Absyrtis, Medea's younger brother, like I implored you.

ADOLF

In case you've forgotten, Medea chopped his body up into chum and threw it into the ocean.

MEDEA

Yes she did, didn't she. Anyway, I can't bring myself to visit mother and father. It's too goulsh. I can't abide thinking about the two of them rotting beside one another in death as they did in life.

ADOLF

Everybody rots, Medea. Even your precious idol is rotting.

MEDEA

Some people rot better than others. Some people were born to rot. Here. I have a feeling it's over here.

MEDEA takes ADOLF by the hand and pulls him toward a remote section of the graveyard. MEDEA reads the gravestones as she walks.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Look! There it is! Her final Drama in Exile!

The siblings stand on either side of a specific grave. A close-up reveals that it belongs to Nico, the Warhol superstar. MEDEA runs her hand over the cool marble headstone.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

The marble index! Where's the camera?

ADOLF

I have it right here.

ADOLF gestures to the camera case he has slung over his shoulder.

MEDEA

And the tripod?

ADOLF

I left it in the car.

MEDEA

You fool. Go get it. I want to shoot a scene of us making love on Nico's grave.

ADOLF

But Medea, I'm your brother.

MEDEA

Don't be prudish, Adolf. Nico slept with Ari, her own son, fathered by Alain Delon. It will be our tribute to her flagrant disregard of the incest taboo!

ADOLF reluctantly heads back toward the car as MEDEA kneels down beside the grave and gently runs her hand over the earth.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

For whom none will go mourning..

MEDEA pulls an orange out of her black purse and places it beside the headstone.

EXT. a COUNTRY ROAD - twILIGHT

OTTO continues bojangling along the paved road, sniffing the air.

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: BAHN

OTTO (V.O.)

I had no idea where I had come from, or where I was going. I only know that I was being drawn forward by some overpowering smell. The smell of human density. The smell of flesh. Berlin.

EXT. A GRAVEYARD - TWILIGHT

ADOLF is back at the car. As it is gradually growing darker, he reaches in and turns on the headlights, which illuminate the tips of the gravestones in the distance. He then opens the trunk to retrieve the tripod. He sticks his head in the trunk, then, thinking he's heard something, pulls it back out and looks around. He surveys the nearby trees, peering into the shadows. Out of the corner of his eye he sees a shape and turns sharply toward it, but there's nothing there. He shrugs his shoulders and puts his head back into the trunk.

EXT. A GRAVEYARD - continuous

Point of view shot from behind the trees of someone or something in the distance watching ADOLF pulling the tripod out of the trunk, closing it, and walking back toward the graveyard.

Ext. A BERLIN STREET - evening

INTERTITLE: UP WITH DEAD PEOPLE

INTERTITLE: A Movie by Medea Yarn

BLACK AND WHITE FILM: FRITZ, a frantic, sweaty young man, nattily attired in a tight jacket, shirt and tie and a walking stick (read: old school gay from the 60's), hurries along a Berlin street with a cigarette jammed in his mouth and his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He looks around and behind himself nervously. The sequence is shot in a style half way between a Maya Deren film and George Romero's Night of the Living Dead, or think German Expressionist: skewed, off-kilter angles in high contrast black and white.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: There had come to pass a new wave of zombies and, as with every continuing cycle, a variety of scientific explanations and conspiracy theories about its origin. Another young man in a hooded sweatshirt approaches FRITZ from the other direction. As he passes, his shadowed face in the hood looks like it might be that of a zombie - dark circled eyes, pale skin... but it's difficult to tell.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: Certain scientists speculated that it may have had something to do with an intense wave of radiation from space that, owing to the diminishing ozone layer, had temporarily re-animated the dead. Others theorized about the mutation of a genetically engineered organism developed by the government to reduce or eliminate undesirable

elements of the population.

FRITZ stops and looks at his reflection in a mirrored window. Think Peter Lorre in Fritz Lang's "M". He pulls down the skin under his eyes to check his eyeballs, and opens his mouth to examine his tongue. He jerks away from the window and continues walking.

Ext. A GRAVEYARD - TWILIGHT

ADOLF has positioned the car so that the headlights illuminate Nico's grave. Now he begins to set up the tripod and camera as MEDEA lays a German flag on the grave and arranges herself on top of it, placing white lilies around her, and finally holding one in her clasped hands as she lies on her back.

MEDEA

Adolf, what are you fiddling with over there?

ADOLF

I'm setting up the tripod.

MEDEA

Well hurry up. I'm ready.

ADOLF

All right, all right. Let me get some footage of you solo first.

ADOLF steps away from the tripod and walks toward MEDEA with the super 8 camera, then starts to shoot her as she poses on her back holding a lily in her hands crossed on her chest, as if she were dead. After a moment he pauses and looks around.

MEDEA

What's wrong?

ADOLF

I'm not sure. I have this strange feeling that there's something out there.

MEDEA

Of course you do. It's a graveyard. Keep shooting.

ADOLF continues to shoot.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

They're coming to get you, Adolf.





ADOLF stops shooting.

ADOLF

I think you've made one too many zombie movies, Medea. You're beginning to believe in them.

MEDEA

Of course I believe in them. I see them every day. They're all around us. They are legion!

ADOLF

(reproachfully)

Medea.

ADOLF starts shooting again.

MEDEA

All right, all right. That's enough. Now put the camera on the tripod so that you can shoot us both in an incestuous embrace.

ADOLF

(resigned)

Yes, Medea.

MEDEA

Capture us making sweet forbidden love on Nico's grave!

ADOLF obeys his sister. He puts the camera on the tripod and sets it on running lock, then runs over and lies beside her on the grave.

ADOLF

We're rolling.

The two clasp hands on the lilies and kiss faux-passionately.

EXT. A country road - TWILIGHT

OTTO continues his narration while walking. He sniffs the air once more. A car approaches. He looks at his thumb quizzically, and, as if by reflex, sticks it out. He's hitchhiking. The car zooms past without slowing down. OTTO self-consciously puts his thumb back down.

OTTO (V.O.)

I felt empty. An emptiness without limit that went far beyond hunger. But it was also a



light feeling. The incredible lightness of unbeing.

Ext. A country graveyard - twILIGHT

MEDEA and ADOLF are still making love on the grave when MEDEA suddenly breaks their embrace.

MEDEA

What was that?

ADOLF

What was what?

All that can be heard are the crickets singing and the whir of the super 8 camera.

MEDEA

I could have sworn I heard something.

The two get up and survey the sparse trees surrounding the graveyard.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

There, look!

From MEDEA's point of view, a couple of figures can be seen lurking in the distance. They look like zombies. MEDEA rushes over toward them, with ADOLF following reluctantly behind. When they get up close, they discover two gay men with their pants down fondling each other. MEDEA smiles lasciviously.

INT. A BERLIN STREET - evening

BLACK AND WHITE FILM: FRITZ continues walking frantically along the sidewalk. He stops abruptly and starts to search his pockets. He finally finds a bottle of pills. He pops the lid and tries to pour the white pills onto his shaking hand, but he drops them on the ground. He looks down at the scattered white pills.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: According to other conspiracy theorists, scientists had been conducting experiments for the military for years, attempting to resurrect corpses to form an obedient, remorseless army of the living dead to overpower its enemies without having to concern itself with human casualties.

INSERT: An illustration of an army of the living dead and stock footage of Nazis or North Koreans marching.

FRITZ is crouched down looking at the pills. He picks up a few of them and pops them in his mouth. When he stands up, he sees a man in a suit and hat walking spastically towards him. He looks like a zombie, but then again he's walking with a cane, so it's difficult to tell. FRITZ ducks into a doorway as the man passes, then continues walking urgently as before.

MEDEA (v.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: Some say these experiments were first conducted by the Third Reich.

INSERT: An illustration of a Nazi Zombie.

EXT. an apartment building - evening

FRITZ approaches the large, heavy door of an old apartment building. He searches his pockets again, this time looking for his key. As he searches, he notices a woman approaching covered head to toe in a black burqa. As she passes, it appears as if she has no face or eyes, only blackness under her veil. He searches more frantically for his key, then stops and calmly opens his mouth and produces it. He unlocks and opens the door.

MEDEA YARN (v.O.)

INTERTITLE: Whatever the cause, it was not clear how widespread the contamination was, or if it had been contained.

INT. an apartment - EVENING

FRITZ enters an apartment and shuts the door. He starts to search the place, room by room. In the kitchen he notices an ashtray on the table with a cigarette still burning in it. He walks over to it, picks it up, and takes a drag from it. He looks down at the table and notices a note that someone has left. He picks it up and reads it.

INTERTITLE: I can no longer live in a world in which the living walk the earth as if already dead, and the dead come back to life as if to mock the hell of our existence.

FRITZ finishes off the cigarette and stubs it out in the ashtray. He stands for a moment and then, as if something has suddenly dawned on him, swings around. Now suddenly in colour, he sees a young man lying on the floor in a pool of blood, blood on his temple, and a gun in his hand at his side. FRITZ gasps and jumps back, bumping into the table

and knocking over a chair in the process.

MEDEA (v.O.)

INTERTITLE: Experts believed, for reasons that were still completely veiled in mystery, that only adult males seemed to be effected. Initial scientific speculation suggested that the re-activation phenomenon may have had something to do with the brain chemistry of the deceased, specifically, the “re-booting” of the hypothalamus, the region of the brain which regulates certain metabolic processes and autonomic activities.

EXT. A Country road - twilight

As OTTO continues to walk along, another car approaches. He again self-consciously sticks out his thumb. The car slows down and stops, but as OTTO, with his slightly spastic walk, approaches, reaching his hand out toward the handle of the back door, the wheels spin and the car takes off, leaving OTTO literally in the dust.

INTERTITLE: Recent brain research had found structural brain differences in the hypothalamus in relationship to biological sex and sexual orientation in humans. Differences in size and cell number of various nuclei in the hypothalamus of homosexual versus heterosexual men had been reported, indicating that homosexual behaviour in adult males may be linked to an enlarged hypothalamus.

INT. A kitchen - EVENING

FRITZ is still standing frozen, staring at the dead body of the young man who has shot himself. Then, from FRITZ's point of view, a slightly high angle shot, the young man, whose name is MAXIMILIAN, appears to blink. FRITZ shakes his head and rubs his eyes, and looks again. This time the young man turns his head and looks at FRITZ, and leans forward slightly.

INTERTITLE: You've got to be fucking kidding me.

MAXIMILIAN slowly stands up and approaches FRITZ as he stands immobilized in terror. MAXIMILIAN grabs FRITZ and gives him a long, deep kiss. Then he pulls back and buries his teeth in his neck. He pulls back with a chunk of flesh in his mouth.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: As incredible as it may sound, it seemed that only dead males with an enlarged hypothalamus had been reanimated in this latest wave of zombies.

EXT. a country graveyard - late afternoon

Black and White film: As in the opening sequence, shots of the limp hand from the grave and of OTTO wistfully walks amongst the tombstones of a country graveyard.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: A new wave of gay zombies had emerged.

INTERTITLE: NOUVELLE

INTERTITLE: VAGUE

Ext. A country road - twilight

OTTO sits on an old tire by the side of the road. A car approaches, slows down and stops. The back door opens. OTTO gets in, closes the door, and the car pulls away.

Int. MEDEA's Studio - afternoon

Digital video footage of an empty studio flickers on, as if someone has just turned on the camera. In the background, blow-ups or projections of images of modern war, terrorism, etc. After a moment, MEDEA walks into the frame and sits on a stool.

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: A Movie by Media Yarn

MEDEA speaks directly to the camera.

MEDEA

I did not find Otto. Otto found me. He saw one of my casting flyers and showed up at my studio to audition for a role in *Up with Dead People*, the political zombie movie that I had been working on for years. My magnum corpus. My dissertation on the dead.

Int. A car - twilight

OTTO sitting in the middle of the backseat of a car. He stares straight ahead. A reverse shot of his point of view shows two old people in the front seat, an old man driving, and an old woman in the passenger seat. The old woman turns around and smiles nervously at OTTO. The old man eyes OTTO suspiciously in the rear view mirror.

MEDEA (V.O.)

He looked extremely abject, wearing clothes that appeared to have been lived in for days, if not weeks, which smelled like they were on the verge of rotting. He had obviously been homeless for some time.

Int. Medea's studio - day

MEDEA continues her monologue on camera.

MEDEA

He vaguely reminded me of the other boys I had already cast in *Up With Dead People*: lonely, empty, dead inside. In a way he fit the typical porn profile: the lost boy; the damaged boy; the numb, phlegmatic, insensate boy willing to go to any extreme to feel something, to feel anything.

INT. a car - twilight

OTTO sits motionless in the backseat. Then he leans over and looks out the window. He sees the outskirts of the city, the barren industrial landscapes and construction sites.

MEDEA (V.O.)

To me it seemed like the only sane and logical response to a dead and sterile world.

Ext. A berlin Street - evening

A car pulls up on a street near Treptow Park and OTTO emerges from the backseat and closes the door.

MEDEA (V.O.)

But there was something different about Otto. Something more... authentic.

The car takes off with surprising speed (considering the age of the driver), the tires squealing.

A shot from the back seat of the car as OTTO recedes into the distance.

Ext. Another berlin street - CONTINUOUS

OTTO walks down a deserted street lined with trees before cutting off into a wooded area.

Ext. Treptow park - CONTINUOUS

In long shot, from various angels, OTTO walks across an open field in Treptow park with the monuments and statues in the background.

MEDEA (V.O.)

I remember thinking that he was the one I'd been looking for.

When OTTO reaches the other side of the field, he disappears into another wooded area.

Ext. An abandoned amusement park - cONTINUOUS

OTTO emerges into a clearing that is the site of an abandoned amusement park. He sits on one of the old rides that has fallen into disrepair.

MEDEA (V.O.)

I had always been fascinated by the nocturnal habits of the homosexual male. I had long observed how they haunted the public toilets and wooded parks and even the graveyards that I frequented.

After a moment, OTTO sees something moving amidst the trees across the open space. A young man, who seems like he could be a zombie, emerges. Nearby, a second zombie-like young man emerges. They slowly approach OTTO.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They seemed to be in some sort of trance, sexual somnambulists, the walking dead in search of anonymous flesh. Sex and death! What better subject for a pornographic film?

OTTO begins to rub his crotch mechanically.

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: EROTIC

OTTO and the two zombie-like men engage in sexual activity. Although the three men look like they may be zombies, the sex they have at the beginning is more akin to the sex that gay men have in public parks: shadowed, furtive. But eventually, and particularly from OTTO's point of view, entrails and guts and blood begins to appear. At one point one of the other "zombies" wraps entrails around OTTO's neck and sexually strangles him.

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: EROTIC



INTERTITLE: ASPHYXIATION

InT. a kitchen - EVENING

MAXIMILIAN is sitting on the kitchen floor chewing on some of FRITZ's guts. Suddenly, FRITZ, who seems to be lying dead on the floor, opens his eyes. The two gaze at each other for a moment, then begin having frenzied sex, alternately kissing and devouring each other covered in blood. This includes gut-fucking.

MEDEA (v.O.)

Death is the new pornography. The adult entertainment industry has become permeated by death: mechanical sex performed by the living dead in endless repetition, devoid of soul; expendable body parts bought and sold like so much meat, the endless consumption of flesh. Meanwhile, the mass media packages and promotes war and violence in the titillating style of sexual pornography. Otto was the inevitable product of such a deranged world.

INT. MEDEA'S STUDIO - day

MEDEA finishes her monologue on camera.

MEDEA

But there was something special about the boy. He was a throwback to the classic somnambulists of silent movies. He was the shadow of man, the very eye of night. His particular psychosis embodied all the classic aberrations of the one dimensional man. I had to make a movie about Otto. I had no choice.

EXT. AN ABANDONED AMUSEMENT PARK - NIGHT

OTTO, who does not sleep, sits on a broken down ride with his eyes wide open as night turns into daylight.

Ext. An ABANDONED AMUSEMENT PARK - morning

OTTO, in the same position, gets up and leaves the clearing.

Ext. TREPTOW PARK - morning

OTTO walks back across the same open field he came across the previous evening.

Ext. a BERLIN STREET

OTTO emerges from a wooded area and walks in his characteristic zombie walk along the sidewalk. He seems to be following everyone else, as if going to work in the morning. He is dressed in the same clothing he always wears, crusty and fey and neo-Gothic, which seems inappropriate for the warm daylight hours. No one seems to notice.

Ext. u-bahn Schlesisches Tor - morning

OTTO is in the foreground with the U-Bahn Schlesisches Tor in the background. He observes people getting on the U-bahn. He crosses the street and enters the station.

Ext. U-BAHN SCHLESISCHES TOR - CONTINUOUS

OTTO stands on the platform with everyone else. When the train arrives and everyone else boards it, so does OTTO.

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: PILOT

EXT. a HEADSTONE RETAIL OUTLET - Morning

MEDEA and her brother ADOLF walk desultorily amongst the rows of empty headstones early in the morning, the sun low on the horizon.

MEDEA

Isn't it divine, Adolf? I love shopping here.

ADOLF

Yes, Medea, it's beautiful. But why did we have to come so early?

MEDEA

It's Hella's birthday. I wanted to pick something fresh out for her.

ADOLF

A fresh headstone. How unthoughtful of you.

MEDEA

Thank-you, Adolf. I love birthdays. Each year they bring you closer to death. Look, Adolf! A pink one!

MEDEA gestures over to the HEADSTONE SHOP OWNER.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

I'll take two of these.

Int. U-bahn - CONTINUOUS

OTTO sits on the train and stares straight ahead. He looks lonely and forlorn. He looks around and sees other people looking straight ahead, like zombies. In flashes, several of them, from Otto's point of view, actually appear to be zombies. A few people in his vicinity glance at him and make faces as if they smell something bad, one woman putting a handkerchief over her mouth. They move away from OTTO to another part of the train. From OTTO's point of view, two young men board the subway and sit directly across from him. It's obvious that they are a couple from the intimate way they act with each other as they talk. One of them glances at OTTO and whispers something in the other one's ear. The other one nods in agreement. A close-up on OTTO is interrupted by a series of images that seem to be cutting in as recovered memories: OTTO, dressed in a similar style, but not as a zombie, in various scenarios with a young man named RUDOLF. These include OTTO and RUDOLF sitting on the subway together; OTTO and RUDOLF walking through the Tiergarten together; and OTTO and RUDOLF making love in a bed. After a final close-up on OTTO, the gay couple across from him gets up and leaves the subway car, leaving OTTO alone once again.

Ext. A Berlin street - day

OTTO walks along a crowded street. No one seems to pay any attention to him.

Ext. A city graveyard - day

On an overcast day, MEDEA, dressed in tout black, with a black scarf around her head, walks by a church in a graveyard. She is carrying a very heavy present, wrapped in black paper with a black bow. The tombstone.

Ext. A park - day

OTTO sits on a park on a bench, eyeing the pidgeons and the squirrels.

OTTO (v.O.)

It's not easy being undead. The living all seem like the same person to me, and I don't think I like that person very much.

The same person seems to walk by OTTO several times.

OTTO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I try to relate to them, but it's difficult. I mean, what could we possibly have in common? Besides, that is, the overwhelming, measureless and unceasing desire to consume.

Several people walk buy stuffing their faces with food and carrying expensive-looking shopping bags. This is intercut with the images from the beginning of the film of both the living and the dead eating, eating, eating. Finally, a particularly yummy-looking boy walks by eating an ice cream cone, ignoring OTTO. OTTO eyes him lustily, slobbering a little.

Ext. A city graveyard - day

MEDEA is waiting for someone. She checks her watch. Finally her girlfriend, HELLA BENT, arrives at the cemetery, exiting from a taxi. HELLA is also dressed in black, but more in a Vampyra style, and she carries with her a big black basket. The quality of the shot that introduces HELLA is different from the shots of MEDEA. MEDEA is shot in colour HD video; HELLA is shot in ancient grainy black and white film, as if from the silent era. A medium close shot of MEDEA:

MEDEA

(in colour, sound)

Where have you been? I've been waiting almost an hour.

When HELLA answers, the reverse angle shot of her is in the silent film style, as is all coverage of this character. It is as if a silent movie star has been inserted into a talking picture. There is silence when she speaks, followed by her words printed on title cards. She also acts in the exaggerated idiom of the silent picture.

HELLA

(distressed, in black and white, silent, with intertitle)

I'm so sorry, darling. I tried to give the taxi driver directions, but he didn't seem to hear me. They never seem to hear me.

MEDEA

(in colour, sound)

You know how much I hate waiting. How are you ever going to replace the hour that I wasted waiting for you?

HELLA

(distressed, in black and white, silent, with intertitle)

I don't know. I'll think of something. Forgive me?

MEDEA

(in colour, sound)

All right, all right. Don't get all riled up. It's not the end of the world. Not yet.

HELLA

(in black and white, silent, with intertitle)

Don't be angry with me. I can't bear it.

MEDEA

(In colour, sound)

Calm down, Hella.

They kiss in a two shot, which appears in the black and white, silent era style. (Whenever anyone shares a frame with Hella, the film reverts to this style.) They hold hands and walk together deep into the middle of the dense, forested graveyard.

Ext. A park - day

OTTO still sits on the park bench, wistfully watching the people go by.

OTTO (V.O.)

I wanted to consume the living, to devour human flesh, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. At first I thought it might have something to do with the time before, when I was alive. It occurred to me that I might have been a vegetarian. Or worse, a vegan. But that wasn't exactly it.

OTTO starts to eye the squirrels and pigeons again.

OTTO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I was a zombie with an identity crisis. And until I figured it out, I was stuck eating whatever non-human flesh was available.

He feeds the pigeons some bread crumbs, and they start to gather, accompanied by ominous music. OTTO slobbers some more.

Int. MEDEA'S STUDIO - day

FRITZ sits in the same position as we previously saw MEDEA, sitting on a stool in front of the blow-ups/projections of terrorism and war.

FRITZ

Otto intrigued me from the very beginning. I considered his particular form of mental

illness a healthy response to a materialistic world that had become soulless and deadening.

OTTO tries to catch some of the park creatures by sneaking up behind them and pouncing on them, but he is unsuccessful. People stare at him as they pass, but no one says anything.

Int. MedEA'S STUDIO - day

FRITZ

I had always been a great admirer of Dr. Wolfgang Huber of Heidelberg University and his brainchild, the SPK, the revolutionary group composed of his psychiatric patients, who believed that their mental disorders were a direct result of capitalist alienation. In fact, I met Medea at an SPK support group meeting. While not overtly political, Otto, on a subconscious level, was acting out the same kind of mentally disordered resistance exhibited by the SPK. It's not easy for the sick person to realize a causal connection between the misery which has stricken him, seemingly as an individual, and the process of exploitation under capitalism. I knew immediately that Otto was, for this reason, the perfect subject for Medea. He was the hollow man, the empty signifier upon which she could project her political agenda.

Ext. A CITY GRAVEYARD - day

MEDEA and HELLA are having a Gothic picnic in the graveyard. They've spread out a blanket and a tea set and they sit under their black umbrellas, reading books like Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*.

MEDEA

(in colour)

Are you miserable, darling?

HELLA

(ecstatic, in black and white, silent, followed by an intertitle)

Oh, yes, my love, yes! Terribly!

Int. MEDEA'S STUDIO - day

MEDEA sits in her studio as before.

MEDEA

In an industrialized society which has reached a point of abundance that is characterized by the production of "unproductive goods" - tech gadgets, excess waste, planned



obsolescence, luxury items, excessive military build-up, etc. - a certain repression over and above the one necessary to advance culture is forced on its citizens in order to exert a particular notion of “normalcy” that is more aligned with conformist social and institutional attitudes rather than ideas of individual fulfillment. The redundant, unnecessary work upon which advanced capitalism is predicated, characterized by a deadening or stupefying effect - a kind of zombie state when performed by the working or middle class subject, or, in the case of the white collar workers, by a moral indifference and callous aggressiveness - results in a distraction from their own personal and sexual needs. A person who functions normally in a sick society is himself sick, while it is only the “nonadjusted” individual who can achieve a healthy acting out against the overly strict restraints and demands of the dominant culture. The idea of a “common sense” notion of “reality” or “sanity” under such a noxious system is absurd. Considering that all dominant discourses are defined and controlled by the ruling class, the first step to becoming a revolutionary is to act out against any consensual reality. Clearly, as a homeless person who believed he was dead, Otto was conducting his own, one-man revolution against reality.

Ext. a park - day

In an secluded area of the park, behind a tree, OTTO sits with feathers and blood all over his face.

Int. MEDEA'S STUDIO - day

FRITZ

But I couldn't help but wonder if, on some level, she was just exploiting him.

Ext. A CITY GRAVEYARD - day

MEDEA and HELLA continue their picnic.

MEDEA

(in colour, sound)

I've met the most fascinating boy, Hella. His name is Otto. He will be the subject of my new movie.

HELLA pulls two sandwiches out of her black basket.

HELLA

(in black and white, silent, with intertitle)

That's wonderful, Medea! Blood sausage or black caviar salad?

MEDEA

(in colour, sound)

He actually believes that he's dead. A walking corpse. He's exquisite!

HELLA holds up a thermos.

HELLA

(in black and white, silent, with intertitle)

Marvelous! Hemlock Tea?

HELLA pours.

Medea

(in colour, breathing in deeply)

I love the smell of a graveyard in the afternoon. It smells like...

HELLA

(in black and white)

Yes, my dear?

MEDEA

Extinction!

A quick montage of MEDEA and HELLA in fast motion, or single-frame animation, cavorting around the graveyard, pretending to be zombies, pretending to mourn at people's graves, laughing and generally having a good time. ADOLF arrives carrying a very heavy present, gift-wrapped in black with a big black bow. HELLA, surprised, opens it and sees the pink headstone.

HELLA

Medea! I thought you'd forgotten.

MEDEA

No, my dear. Unhappy birthday.

INT. The Street - day

INTERTITLE: UP WITH DEAD PEOPLE

Medea's movie continues with FRITZ and MAXIMILIAN sitting at the table in the kitchen where they previously had their frenzied zombie love-making session. FRITZ is wearing the same clothes as before, but he now has the zombie look: a pale, white face, dark-rimmed eyes, a soupcon of blood. MAXIMILIAN is also dressed as he was before.

FRITZ reads the newspaper casually as MAXIMILIAN hunches over a cup of coffee. They exchange an intimate glance, as between a couple. Close-up of Fritz looking down into his coffee cup. Close-up down into the brown liquid and...

Dissolve to:

INTERTITLE: ZOMBIE THEOSOPHY

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: In a superstitious age, many believed that the return of the dead signified a punishment of mankind by God. A theological explanation such as this gained even more popularity when it became apparent that the latest cycle of zombies was homosexual. A gay plague had descended on humanity.

Ext. the street - day

The camera pulls out from a close-up in a brown puddle on the street as Otto's foot steps into it. As OTTO walks down the street, a group of children starts to throw rocks at him.

INT. Medea's studio - AFTERNOON

FRITZ

I needed to find out what had caused Otto to believe that he was dead.

MEDEA

I needed to find out what had caused Otto to believe that he was dead.

Ext. the street - day

OTTO continues to walk in his slightly spastic but automaton-like way. He sniffs the air as if smelling something specific, and heads in that direction.

Ext. A butcher shop - day

Continuing to follow his nose, OTTO ends up in front of a butcher shop. He looks longingly in the window at all the pigs heads and cuts of meat and blood sausages with his nose pressed up against the glass. He watches the butcher slicing up some meat. After a moment, the butcher notices OTTO outside the window and does a double take. As OTTO begins to move on, the butcher runs out of the store and grabs him by the arm.

BUTCHER

Otto!

Terrified, OTTO wrenches himself out of the grip of the BUTCHER and runs away down the street.

EXT. a berlin street - twilight

OTTO walks alone down the same tree-lined street as before.

EXT. treptow park - twILIGHT

OTTO walks across the deserted Treptow park, and cuts into a wooded area as before.

Ext. An abandoned amusement park - twILIGHT

OTTO returns to the broken-down ride where he spent the previous evening. He sits staring straight ahead as before, with his eyes wide open, as darkness falls. As the camera stays on his face, time accelerates, and several days come and go.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. A Berlin street - night

An unspecified amount of time has passed. OTTO is walking down a street at night. Across the street he sees a couple of boys walking who, from a distance, look like zombies. OTTO stays on the opposite side of the street, but follows them. Finally he sees them duck into a night club.

Ext. A night club - night

OTTO crosses the street and stands outside the club, the sound of muffled thumping music coming from inside. He hesitates, then puts his hand on the handle of the door, but before he has a chance to open it, an attractive boy who looks like a zombie, but doesn't particularly act like one, bursts out of the club, knocking OTTO to the floor. The ZOMBIE BOY helps him back to his feet.

ZOMBIE BOY

Sorry about that! Are you all right?

The ZOMBIE BOY dusts OTTO off.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

I wouldn't bother going in there. It's dead.

OTTO remains silent.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

Too bad. You obviously put a lot of effort into your ensemble.

ZOMBIE BOY sizes up OTTO more closely. He also notices a strange smell.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

Wow, you even smell authentic.

OTTO smiles, almost apologetically.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

You'd think Zombie night would be more popular. Then again, I guess it's not that much different from any other night at a gay bar? Do you know what I mean?

OTTO looks at him blankly.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

Have we met before? You look familiar.

OTTO shakes his head.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

Hey listen, I know I'm probably moving way too fast, but that's my style. Why don't you come over to my place for a drink. I live right around the corner.

OTTO looks at him blankly.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

C'mon. It really is dead in there.

ZOMBIE BOY starts to walk and motions OTTO with his head to follow him. OTTO hesitates, then follows him.

Int. An apartment - night

OTTO is sitting on the bed in the background, fully clothed. The ZOMBIE BOY is in the foreground, facing the camera, taking his clothes off. He speaks to OTTO.

ZOMBIE BOY

You don't talk much, do you? That's okay. We both know why we're here.

The ZOMBIE BOY strips down to his underwear. With his clothes off, his body looks normal - only his face and hands have zombie make-up on them.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

I'm going to wash some of this off. I'll be right back.

The ZOMBIE BOY enters the washroom. OTTO examines the room, the gay posters on the wall. He then sits on the side of the bed.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

Hey, aren't you going to take your clothes off?

OTTO

No.

ZOMBIE BOY

(shrugging)

Whatever gets you through the night.

The ZOMBIE BOY approaches the OTTO on the bed.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

I think we can work around that.

OTTO and the ZOMBIE BOY begin to have sex. At first the ZOMBIE BOY kneels down and starts to give OTTO a blow job.

INTERTITLE: OTTO FELLATIO

What follows is a montage in which the two start out kissing and having sex, until at a certain point, one of OTTO's kisses draws a little blood from the ZOMBIE BOY. As they continue, things get bloodier and bloodier, including a certain amount of gore, until the ZOMBIE BOY seems to be pretty much dismembered and left a bloody pulp. The montage ends with a close-up of OTTO, who spits a chunk of flesh out of his mouth and starts to wretch and vomit as the boy lies still beside him.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:



OTTO stands in the foreground, with the ZOMBIE BOY, a bloody mess, in the bed in the background. OTTO walks to the door, but before he exits he turns around and looks at the mess in the bed. The ZOMBIE BOY lifts his bloody head.

ZOMBIE BOY (CONT'D)

That was amazing. Can I see you again sometime?

Without responding, OTTO exits.

Ext. An industrial area - day

FRITZ and MAXIMILIAN are walking in an industrial area, both dressed as before except that FRITZ now carries a satchel and MAXIMILIAN is wearing a wool cap to cover the hole in his temple, from which blood still trickles down.

MEDEA YARN (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: As zombies had become more refined and intelligent, they learned how to blend in with the living, although for reasons that baffled even the most serious zombie aficionado, they still never seemed to change their clothes.

Finding a suitably deserted building, FRITZ pulls two cans of spray paint out of his satchel and hands one to MAXIMILIAN.

Ext. the street - day

OTTO stands in an alleyway beside some garbage cans. He pokes around for some food. A stray cat comes up to him and rubs up against his leg, accompanied by the ominous music heard previously with the pigeons.

Ext. An industrial area - day

FRITZ and MAXIMILIAN have tied bandanas over their faces and they are spray-painting graffiti slogans on the wall such as KILL WHAT YOU EAT and I EAT YOUR FLESH and RISE! and UP WITH DEAD PEOPLE.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: To be less conspicuous, many of the gay zombies learned to break into hospital morgues and funeral homes or dig up fresh graves to satisfy their lust for human flesh. Some of them, however, would occasionally become desperate enough to fuck and eat the living. For others, it was a matter of pride. Consuming human flesh became a

political act.

FRITZ acts as a look-out while MAXIMILIAN writes WE CAN KILL YOU AND WE CAN EAT YOU.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

INTERTITLE: When it was discovered that the gay undead craved the flesh of men, they were hunted down and eliminated even more ruthlessly than previous generations. Gangs of marauding street youths stomped on the heads of zombies and set them on fire until they ceased to exist.

INSERT: Stock footage of anti-gay protestors holding GOD HATES FAGS signs.

As FRITZ and MAXIMILIAN finish their graffiti, they are suddenly swarmed by a group of young men brandishing baseball bats, like something out of *The Warriors*. They are all dressed in the same costume, a variation on a baseball uniform, with heavy make-up, a black star over one eye - a soupcon of *A Clockwork Orange*. Some of the baseball bats are on fire, like torches. The zombies square off back to back and try to fend off their attackers.

Ext. The street - day

OTTO passes by three or four youths gathered at a street corner. They eye him suspiciously, then begin to follow him.

Ext. An INDUSTRIAL AREA - day

As one of the thugs holds off FRITZ with a baseball bat, the others surround MAXIMILIAN and start to beat him.

MEDEA (V.O.)

INTERTITLE: It had always been thought that the bite or scratch from a zombie would kill you, but not turn you into one of them unless you were exposed to the same phenomenon that caused reanimation in the first place. With the new generation of gay zombies, however, it was the bite itself that was irrationally feared to be contagious, like a viral infection.

FRITZ continues to try to bite his tormentors, but he is held back by the torches. Clearly distraught, he has no choice but to abandon MAXIMILIAN. From a distance he sees one of the thugs pull a gun from his pocket and put it to MAXIMILIAN's head. He shoots

him, execution style. FRITZ, horrified, flees. He finds an empty back alley and, winded, crouches down with his back against a brick wall. He begins to sob.

FADE OUT.

Ext. The street - day

Otto notices that he is being followed by the youths and tries to speed up his slightly spastic walk. The youths quicken their pace. OTTO ducks down...

Ext. An alley - Day

...an alley and presses himself up against a wall. He sees them run past the alley, and heaves a sigh of relief. Then, he notices beside him, taped to the wall, a casting flyer for *Up with Dead People*. OTTO rips it from the wall. A close-up on the flyer.

Int. MEDEA'S STUDIO - day

OTTO sitting in front of the same empty screen in which MEDEA and FRITZ previously appeared, with the projections of war and terrorism in the background.

INTERTITLE: SCREEN TEST

Medea's voice is heard coming from behind the camera as she interviews OTTO.

MEDEA

So you think you are dead?

OTTO

I am dead. I mean, I don't think I'm dead. I'm dead.

MEDEA (O.C.)

How do you know that you're dead?

OTTO

Because I don't feel anything.

INTERTITLE: Interview with a Zombie

MEDEA (O.C.)

You feel nothing?

OTTO

No. Only emptiness.

MEDEA (O.C.)

But you feel hunger, for example.

OTTO

Hunger is a kind of emptiness. I crave flesh, but it's an automatic impulse. It's purely mechanical.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Do you crave human flesh?

OTTO

Yes, but I don't eat it.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Why not?

OTTO

I'm not sure. Something's holding me back.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Then what have you been eating?

OTTO

Roadkill. Small animals. Whatever I can find.

MEDEA (O.C.)

I see. What about friends?

OTTO

No, I don't eat friends.

MEDEA (O.C.)

I mean do you have any friends?

OTTO

Dead friends? I have no desire for the close company of other dead people.

MEDEA (O.C.)

I was under the impression that the undead were drawn to each other?

OTTO

Not really. We all just gravitate to the same locations out of habit, from the time before we were dead. Or if we smell flesh.

MEDEA (O.C.)

But isn't there some comfort in congregating with the undead.

OTTO

No. Hell is other dead people.

MEDEA

What do you do for a living?

OTTO

A living?

MEDEA (O.C.)

An unliving.

OTTO

I'm unemployed.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Where do you live? Unlive.

OTTO

I'm homeless.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Where do you sleep?

OTTO

I never sleep. Zombies never sleep.

MEDEA (O.C.)

What about the time before you were dead. Can you remember anything about that?

OTTO

Not really. It's murky.

MEDEA (O.C.)

You don't remember any family or friends?

OTTO

No, except...

MEDEA (O.C.)

Except...

OTTO

The other day on the U-bahn, I thought I remembered something.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Something or someone?

OTTO

Someone. A boy.

MEDEA (O.C.)

A boyfriend.

OTTO

Maybe. I suppose so.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Can you remember his name?

OTTO

No. I can only remember smells.

Quick intercut of OTTO and RUDOLF making love.

MEDEA

Any other memories?

OTTO

I think I may have worked in a butcher shop.

Quick intercut of a butcher's hands chopping meat with a cleaver.

MEDEA

A butcher shop? What makes you think that?

As MEDEA's questions drone on, OTTO's voice-over interrupts.





OTTO

I wasn't particularly keen on appearing in a movie. I was perfectly satisfied with the anonymity of the dead. But she was willing to pay me, and I needed the money. I had to rent a room and get off the streets. It was too dangerous out there for a zombie.

Back to the interview:

MEDEA (O.C.)

What is the privilege of the dead?

OTTO

To die no more.

MEDEA (O.C.)

What do you mean by that?

OTTO

You don't have to worry about dying if you're already dead.

OTTO thinks for a moment.

OTTO (CONT'D)

Hey, I just figured that out!

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: DIDACT

MEDEA comes from behind the camera into the frame.

MEDEA

All right, all right, that's enough. You had me at "I am dead." You got the part. Let me introduce you to my cameraman. Adolf!

ADOLF enters the frame from off-screen.

OTTO (V.O.)

She introduced me to her brother, Adolf, and told me that she wanted to follow me around the city with her camera while I acted like a zombie. I told her I didn't have to act.

ADOLF walks behind the camera and starts to zoom into the action.

OTTO (O.C.) (CONT'D)

She also introduced me to her girlfriend, Hella, and a couple of actors who were appearing in her other zombie project, Up with Dead People. Their names were Fritz and Maximilian.

FRITZ and MAXIMILIAN enter the frame and shake OTTO's hand. They are both seen here not in zombie drag, but in normal street clothes. They merely look like hip young actors. ADOLF, who is now controlling the camera, catches a brief moment of meaningful eye contact between OTTO and FRITZ as they meet.

OTTO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They were a band of outsiders, so I figured it would be the perfect cover for me. Besides, with a camera following me around, no one would suspect I was a real zombie. I'd just be playing one in the movies!

Int. Medea's studio - AFTERNOON

In a different part of MEDEA's studio, OTTO, ADOLF, FRITZ, MAXIMILIAN, and HELLA are seated on a couch in front of a television monitor. Each one is seen in close-up and in a tracking shot. MEDEA puts a video in the VCR, then goes and sits on the arm of the couch.

OTTO (v.O.)

That afternoon, Medea showed us some of her early silent movies. The ones that put her on the underground map. If the underground has a map.

Reverse angle of the video screen as the title of one of Medea's movie comes up: Duet for Somnambulists. This is followed by: A Movie by Medea Yarn. The camera zooms into the monitor as the first images of the movie fill the screen.

Int. Medea's studio - day

Black and White Film: We now see Medea's movies:

INTERTITLE (on the monitor screen): DUET FOR SOMNAMBULISTS

A dance film, choreographed by Alex Riccoli, involving zombie-like somnambilists, in the style of Maya Deren.

INTERTITLE (on the monitor screen): MESSY IN THE AFTERNOON

INTERTITLE: A Movie by Medea Yarn

An affectionate tribute to Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*: Medea and Hella are standing facing each other in a pool of light that falls away into darkness. They are both dressed in black tights and wrap-around skirts. Medea has her hands extended with yarn wrapped around them. Hella is spinning around, wrapping the yarn around her body as Medea lets it out. The action is in slow motion. Hella begins to become mummified by the yarn until it looks like she is in a cocoon. A dance sequence follows involving the two characters and a lot of yarn. This scene is intercut with shots of Medea and Hella walking through a gauntlet of black veils toward each other, but not being able to find each other. This also involves elements of modern dance. The camera angles are off-kilter, and the tone almost beatnik. This is followed by a close-up of Medea's feet in black flats running down a variety of staircases, both indoor and outdoor. She finally trips and falls onto a mirror lying on the floor. She looks at her reflection in the mirror. The mirror breaks into many pieces so that her reflection is multiplied in the fragments. She picks up one of the shards of glass and sees her reflection in it. The shard of glass turns into a knife with her reflection in it. She drops the knife, which falls onto a table, standing straight up. Medea is seated at the table across from herself. Both she and her double reach for the knife. One Medea grabs the knife first and holds it out. The other Medea grasps the blade of the knife with her hand. As she pulls it, her hand is cut. A close-up of her bleeding hand with a slit in it. She closes her hand, and when she opens it again there is an eyeball with ants crawling all over it. Etc.

Int. MEDEA'S STUDIO - day

A close-up of OTTO's face watching the movie, his eyes wide. Then in wide shot, MEDEA gets up and takes FRITZ aside. As the others continue watching the movie, she talks to him in a hoarse whisper.

MEDEA

Fritz, I want you to let Otto stay with you for a few days and keep an eye on him, at least until we finish the movie. I don't want to lose him.

FRITZ

I don't know, Medea. I realize he's an interesting subject, but I'm not sure I want him staying in my apartment.

MEDEA

Don't be ridiculous. He's perfectly harmless.

FRITZ

He thinks he's a zombie!



MEDEA

He's only acting that way because he knows I'm making a zombie movie. He's living the part. Unliving the part.

FRITZ

He's homeless, delusional, and possibly schizophrenic! Plus he seems to have some kind of eating disorder. Remember the cannibal of Rotenburg?

MEDEA

You have a lock on your bedroom door, don't you?

FRITZ

Why don't you let him stay here?

MEDEA

Fritz, he's obviously been without a home for a long time. He needs a warm bed and some male companionship.

FRITZ

Well if you think I'm going to sleep with him, you're crazy.

MEDEA

Come on, Fritz. Just be nice to him. You want us to make another movie together, don't you?

FRITZ looks at MEDEA in exasperation, then looks over at OTTO. Close-up of OTTO, still entranced by MEDEA's movie.

INT. Fritz's apartment - evening

FRITZ and OTTO enter FRITZ's apartment. OTTO's voice-over explains.

OTTO (V.O.)

As we were leaving Medea's studio that day, Fritz told me that he had a spare bedroom in his apartment that I could use until I got a room of my own.

FRITZ shows OTTO the apartment.

OTTO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He showed me his place and then offered to run me a bath. I tried to tell him that zombies didn't bathe, but he insisted.

Int. FRITZ'S bathroom - EVENING

FRITZ enters the bathroom and starts to run OTTO a hot bubble bath. He exits, then returns with OTTO, leading him by the hand. He hands him a towel and then exits, closing the door behind him. OTTO pokes around the bathroom. He opens the medicine cabinet and touches the contents as if they are totally alien to him.

Int. FRITZ'S APARTMENT - evening

FRITZ approaches the bathroom door. He pushes it open slightly. From his point of view, we can see OTTO sitting in the bathtub full of water with all of his clothes still on.

FRITZ slowly closes the door without saying anything.

INT. Fritz's kitchen - evening

OTTO is seated at the kitchen table, a small puddle of water under his chair. FRITZ stands by the open refrigerator.

FRITZ

Are you hungry? Let's see, I have some nice liver here...

FRITZ pulls a plate out of the fridge. He holds it out to OTTO and pulls back the paper, revealing some raw liver.

OTTO

Oh yes. Thank-you.

OTTO grabs the liver with his hands and starts to eat it ravenously.

FRITZ

...that I could cook up for you.

FRITZ watches nervously as OTTO eats the raw liver. A close-up of FRITZ eating the liver reflected in the toaster that sits on the table.

Int. Fritz's spare room - EVENING

OTTO is in bed with his clothes on, the covers pulled up to his waist. FRITZ stands by the open door.



FRITZ

You can take your clothes off and make yourself comfortable. No one's going to bother you.

OTTO

I'm okay.

FRITZ sighs.

FRITZ

Suit yourself. There's some old clothes of mine in the closet that you're welcome to use. Good night.

FRITZ flicks off the light and closes the door. OTTO sits immobile in the dark, his eyes wide open. Close-up on the alarm clock by the bed. 10:00 PM. Dissolve to the clock at 3:00 AM. Cut to OTTO, who is sitting in the same position with his eyes wide open. OTTO starts to have flashbacks of scenes of himself and RUDOLF in dreamy slow motion. In them, he looks like a normal young man. OTTO and RUDOLF riding bicycles together. OTTO and RUDOLF laughing hysterically in the middle of the street. OTTO and RUDOLF splashing together in a swimming pool. OTTO and RUDOLF riding the rides in a carnival. OTTO and RUDOLF in bed having sex. Close-up on OTTO's face again, eyes wide open.

Ext. A country graveyard - day

MEDEA, ADOLF, and OTTO are making a movie. ADOLF operates the super 8 camera while MEDEA directs. ADOLF digs a hole so that OTTO can pretend he's emerging from the grave as per the beginning of the movie. MEDEA yells ACTION as OTTO's hand comes out of the ground as per an earlier scene.

MEDEA (V.O.)

Action! Now raise your hand up out of the grave. That's it. Raise it as a protest against all the injustices perpetrated against your kind. Raise it in solidarity with the weak and the lonely and the dispossessed of the earth, for the misfits and the sissies and the plague-ridden faggots who are buried and forgotten by the heartless, merciless, heteronormative majority. Rise! Rise!

The hand extends upward until the arm is visible.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Now give me the fruit salute.

OTTO's hand falls limp.

Following this we see a montage of silent footage of OTTO, as per the opening of the movie. He walks wistfully through the graveyard. He runs his fingers over the tips of the tombstones.

Ext. The street - day

From the point of view of ADOLF's camera, OTTO walks down a crowded street while passersby stare at him and look into the camera. As the camera cuts to a wide shot that shows ADOLF and MEDEA shooting him, MEDEA berates the gawkers.

MEDEA

Fools! Don't look at the camera. Can't you see we're trying to make a movie?

Shots of the crowd gawking at MEDEA yelling at them.

MONTAGE: A SERIES OF IMAGES, SET TO MUSIC (IDEALLY "ANDY WARHOL" BY BAUHAUS) OF MEDEA AND ADOLF AND OTTO MAKING THE MOVIE "OTTO", INCLUDING SHOTS OF THEM ON THE STREET, ON THE SUBWAY, IN THE ABANDONED AMUSEMENT PARK, IN GRUNEWALD CEMETERY, IN MEDEA'S STUDIO, ETC.

Int. A supermarket - day

Continuing with the black and white footage from ADOLF's camera, OTTO is in a supermarket in the meat department. After peering around to see that no one is looking, he picks up some raw meat and starts to eat it. After a moment he stops and looks down. A dirty-faced LITTLE GIRL eating a candy bar is staring at him. OTTO looks at the camera and then looks down at the LITTLE GIRL. Medea enters the frame and walks over to them. She grabs the LITTLE GIRL's arm.

MEDEA

Get out of here, you little brat. You're ruining my shot.

She gives the LITTLE GIRL a sharp little shove, and the LITTLE GIRL runs away, crying. Soon after, a MANAGER of the supermarket enters the frame and starts to yell at them. MEDEA grabs OTTO and starts to run with him as ADOLF follows, capturing their escape with his shaky, hand-held camera.

Ext. An industrial area - day

OTTO walks his signature walk in an industrial area. He sniffs the air and follows his nose. ADOLF captures him from a variety of angles as he walks in the bleak, industrial landscape.

Ext. A slaughterhouse - day

From the point of view of ADOLF's camera, OTTO and MEDEA stand outside a slaughterhouse. MEDEA gives OTTO direction.

MEDEA

In this scene I want you to imagine that you are drawn to the slaughterhouse like the prince of the dead returning to his beloved homeland from which he has been exiled. As a zombie you are intoxicated by the lurid perfume of bloody carnage - the sweet systematic slaughter that could only have been devised by the diabolical mind of modern man. You are intrigued and impressed by the cold mechanical precision and efficiency that the living have developed to promote and institute the ideology of death. For you it is a lotus land, an idyll of truth and beauty, a symbol of mankind's quest to turn the earth into an industrialized wasteland of casual extermination and genocide. Do you understand?

OTTO nods his head vigorously.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Good. Just think of it as a metaphor for the heartless corporate technocracies that govern the earth and you'll be fine. Are you ready, Adolf?

MEDEA walks toward the camera and exits the frame, leaving OTTO by himself.

MEDEA (O.C.) (CONT'D)

And Action.

OTTO sniffs the air as if he were alive and smelling a bed of roses. He approaches the entrance to the slaughterhouse and enters.

Int. The slaughterhouse - day

OTTO wanders around the inside of a slaughterhouse, accompanied by happy or romantic music.

NOTE: If this isn't possible, stock footage of a slaughterhouse intercut with shots of OTTO wandering in an industrial area will do.

Ext. A garbage dump - day

Once again, from the point of view of ADOLF's camera, OTTO and MEDEA stand within the frame in front of huge piles of garbage. MEDEA explains the location to OTTO as they trudge through the waste, which we see in detail.

MEDEA

Garbage, garbage everywhere. Garbage as far as the eye can see. Garbage piled to the heavens and buried to the depths of hell. Garbage cluttering the environment and demeaning nature. Spent nuclear fuel rods containing radioactive isotopes with half-lives of a thousand years or more seeping into the earth. Plastics with irreversibly linked molecules effortlessly achieving the kind of immortality that men can only dream of.

MEDEA, a little carried away by her oratory, pauses and looks at OTTO. OTTO gazes back at her blankly. Unfazed, MEDEA continues her rant.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Garbage dumps are the great mass graveyards of advanced capitalism, repositories of all the unrestrained consuming and unnecessary waste of a soulless, materialist world. Did you know that Waste Management, Inc., the largest rubbish handling corporation on the planet, has a landfill site - a glorified garbage dump - just outside of Morrisville, Pennsylvania, that covers 6000 acres of land? Did you know that on average one American consumes as much energy as 370 Ethiopians, and that Americans throw out 200,000 tons of edible food every day? That the United States produces approximately 220 million tons of garbage each year, enough to bury more than 82,000 football fields six feet deep in compacted garbage? And although I can't think of a better use for football fields, we must be aware that it's the gluttonous, mindless consumers of the developed industrial countries who are burying the third world in an avalanche of putrescence and decay.

OTTO

Why did you bring me here?

MEDEA

Because, my dead darling, this is your kingdom! This is the earth that you and your kind will inherit. Some day all this will be yours!

MEDEA fishes an ad hoc crown from the garbage heap - a hubcap or coil spring of some kind - and puts it on OTTO's head, then hands him an old broom handle or something for a scepter.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Hail Otto! Prince of the zombies!

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: CRAT

MEDEA leaves the frame and ADOLF shoots the Prince of The Zombies wading through the garbage.

MEDEA (O.C.) (CONT'D)

All right, all right, cut, Adolf. That's a wrap for today.

MEDEA trudges into the frame and pulls her black wallet out of her stylish black purse.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Here's your daily wages.

MEDEA puts five bills in OTTO's hand. She notices that OTTO holds the money like he's never seen money before.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Don't lose it. Put it in your wallet.

OTTO

My wallet?

MEDEA

The thing in your back pocket?

OTTO feels his back pocket and, as if noticing it for the first time, pulls out his wallet. He opens it and extracts a photo booth strip of four photos. The photos are of OTTO and another boy, RUDOLF, with OTTO looking like a healthy, living, and almost normal version of himself. OTTO shudders.

INSERT: A quick flash of the hands of a butcher chopping up some raw meat, of the middle aged couple that OTTO remembered earlier, and, finally, of RUDOLF. He flashes to himself and RUDOLF in the photo booth getting their picture taken together. OTTO pulls out something else from his wallet: a library card with a number written on the back. He flashes to RUDOLF standing on the other side of a chain link fence writing his number on the back of the card and handing it to OTTO through the fence.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Otto. Otto, what's wrong? You look like somebody just walked over your grave. So to speak.

OTTO quickly puts the photo back in his wallet, followed by the five bills.

OTTO

It's nothing.

MEDEA

Don't forget. My studio, tomorrow. Don't be late.

ADOLF steps into frame and fiddles with the camera, and the screen goes black.

Int. Fritz'S APARTMENT - morning

OTTO and FRITZ sit at the breakfast table much the same way that FRITZ sat across from MAXIMILIAN in MEDEA's movie earlier. FRITZ reads the newspaper while OTTO hunches over a cup of coffee. FRITZ lowers his paper and looks at OTTO.

FRITZ

Are you sure you don't want any breakfast?

OTTO

No thanks. I don't have much of an appetite this morning.

FRITZ

You haven't touched your coffee.

OTTO

I don't drink liquids.

FRITZ goes back to his paper. After a moment, he lowers it again.

FRITZ

How did the shoot go yesterday?

OTTO

Fine, I guess.

FRITZ

Did she pay you?

OTTO pulls out a wallet from his back pocket and opens it up, showing off the wallet and the money.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Well that's good. At least you're gainfully employed.



OTTO

Don't worry. As soon as I save up enough I'll find a room somewhere.

FRITZ

That's not what I meant.

FRITZ puts down his newspaper.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Look, Otto. I want to help, not hurt you. But you have to work with me.

OTTO squirms in his seat a little. FRITZ persists.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Let's talk about the time before.

OTTO

Before I was dead?

FRITZ

Correct. You said the other day that you remembered a couple of things. That you had a boyfriend, and that you may have worked in a butcher shop. Can you remember anything else?

OTTO

No.

FRITZ

Let me see your wallet.

OTTO

What for?

FRITZ

There might be something in there to give us a clue. Have you checked for anything like that?

OTTO

I forgot I even had a wallet until I got paid yesterday.

FRITZ

That's what I figured. May I see it?

OTTO reluctantly pulls out his wallet and hands it to FRITZ. FRITZ searches the soggy wallet and finds a library card that is almost falling apart.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

I guess you liked books. The only thing in here is a well-worn library card.

FRITZ examines it more closely.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Otto Schenk. Does that sound familiar?

Close-up of OTTO. A quick flash of a normal looking middle aged German couple sitting on a couch. The man is the BUTCHER from before.

OTTO

No.

OTTO puts his hands over his face. FRITZ looks in the wallet again.

FRITZ

Wait a minute. There's something else in here.

FRITZ pulls the photo booth strip out of the wallet.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

It looks like you, with another boy.

FRITZ holds out the photos to OTTO.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Do you recognize him?

OTTO has several quick flashes of himself, as per earlier, with RUDOLF.

OTTO

(agitated)

No.

FRITZ

There's a name written on the back of the library card - RUDOLF - with a number. Why don't we call it and see who answers?



OTTO

I don't think that's a good idea.

FRITZ

C'mon Otto. You want to know about the time before, don't you?

OTTO

I'm not so sure.

FRITZ sighs and puts the photo strip and the library card back in the wallet and hands it back to OTTO.

FRITZ

I think you should. But I'm not going to force you.

FRITZ sighs and gets up, grabs his coat.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

I'm heading over to Medea's studio. It's our big day. The final scene of *Up with Dead People*!

OTTO

(half-heartedly)

*Up with Dead People*.

FRITZ

Are you coming with me?

OTTO

No. I'll be over later. There's something I have to do first.

FRITZ heads for the door.

FRITZ

Okay. See you later, Otto.

FRITZ exits, leaving OTTO sitting alone at the kitchen table holding his wallet. He sits, motionless, for a few moments. Then he opens the wallet, pulls out the library card with the phone number on the back and the photo booth strip, and places them on the table. He smooths them down with his hand and looks at them. Then, without looking, as if unconsciously, he reaches over to the cup of coffee that he hasn't touched and raises it to his mouth. Realizing what he's doing, he puts it down again without drinking. Slowly

he picks up the cup again and smells it deeply. His eyes widen. He takes a sip and puts it down. He picks up the library card, then picks up the phone and starts to dial.

Ext. A COUNTRY GRAVEYARD - late afternoon

OTTO, in black and white, walks wistfully through the graveyard as per the beginning of the picture, accompanied by his voice-over narration.

OTTO (V.O.)

Is it possible to come back from the dead?

Int. MEDEA'S STUDIO - late afternoon

MEDEA stands on a platform in front of five or seven boys dressed as zombies (several in pajamas), including FRITZ, with the usual projections of war and terrorism behind her. She speaks to them through an old-fashioned megaphone, the kind that directors used to use in old Hollywood, even though she obviously doesn't need it to be heard.

MEDEA

All right, boys. Listen up. I've gathered you here to participate in something historical. Today we film the final scene of *Up with Dead People*, the politico-porno-zombie movie that I've been working on for too many years to count owing to the fact that no one would give me the funding. My brother Adolf, whose dedication to the project has been unwavering, will be behind the camera, as usual, and my long-suffering girlfriend, Hella Bent, is here to provide immoral support. And of course the star of the picture, Fritz Fritze, will be playing out his last scene as the revolutionary leader of the zombie uprising. Fritz, come forward, please.

FRITZ joins MEDEA on the stage as the other zombies clap politely.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

(in an aside)

Where's Otto?

FRITZ shrugs, concerned.

EXT. A schoolyard - late AFTERNOON

OTTO stands behind a chain link fence. A reverse angle shows RUDOLF sitting on the bench in a schoolyard, smoking a cigarette. OTTO walks along the fence to the gate and enters the schoolyard. He walks over to the bench where RUDOLF is sitting and sits down beside him. RUDOLF is sexy in a hustlerish kind of way: deliciously dumb, but



street smart.

RUDOLF

Hello, Otto.

OTTO

Hello, RUDOLF.

RUDOLF

Whoa. You look kind of pale.

OTTO

Yeah.

RUDOLF

In fact, excuse me for saying, but you look like death warmed up.

OTTO

Thanks for the warmed up part.

RUDOLF

Well, it's a look. I'll give you that. Still the sentimentalist, huh? We met on this very bench, what was it, three years ago?

OTTO

I'm not sure. I kind of lost track of time.

RUDOLF

I used to see you reading on this bench all the time. I figured you for a real brainiac the way you were always reading.

OTTO

That's funny. I never read anymore.

RUDOLF

Really? That's surprising, because I never saw anyone read so much as you. You were forever lugging around some book or other. Doosty Oovsky. Truman Carpose. I never heard of half of them.

OTTO

My memory is a little fuzzy.



RUDOLF

Don't you remember? I finally worked up the courage to talk to you. You said you liked to sit here beside the school and read while all the kids were in class. You said it made you feel like you were getting educated by teleportation.

OTTO

Telepathy.

RUDOLF

Telepathy, telepathy. I gave you my phone number right over there. Wrote it on the back of your library card. Remember?

OTTO

I do remember that.

RUDOLF

So what's new? You still a vegetarian?

OTTO

No.

RUDOLF

No? That's funny. You always hated the meat. I guess I'd hate meat too if my father wss a butcher.

OTTO

A butcher?

RUDOLF

How are your parents?

OTTO

I haven't seen them lately.

RUDOLF

That's too bad. I always liked your Dad. I still go to his shop sometimes to buy blood sausages for my Mom. That's how I found out you were in the hospital.

OTTO

The hospital.

RUDOLF

You don't have to pretend. He told me all about it. The Dollen Heussgen, in Leipzig. The loony bin. He said they specialize in eating disorders and schizophrenia, melancholia, that type of stuff. Seelenstörungen. Disorders of the soul.

OTTO

Disorders of the soul.

RUDOLF

Sorry I didn't make it out there to visit you. Leipzig is kind of far. I didn't figure you'd want to see me, anyway, considering the way things ended.

OTTO

The way things ended.

RUDOLF

Look, I know it was wrong of me to dump you like that, but I'm just no good in those types of situations. When you told me you were sick, I didn't know what else to do. I figured you'd be better off without me.

OTTO

Better off without you.

RUDOLF

Come on, Otto. Don't make me feel worse than I already do. I've never been good with sick people. You seem to be doing okay now, though, right? I mean, you look good. I like the new Goth thing. It suits you. Although you might want to think about taking a bath every once in a while. You're a little gamey. You smell like a dead mouse. No offense. Anyway, I really have to get going. It was nice seeing you again.

OTTO

Nice seeing you again.

RUDOLF gets up off the bench and starts to leave, but then he remembers something and comes back.

RUDOLF

Oh, I almost forgot. I brought you this book you lent me a long time ago. I thought you might want it back.

RUDOLF hands OTTO a copy of *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol.

RUDOLF (CONT'D)

I didn't get a chance to read it. Little too depressing for me. See you around, Otto.

RUDOLF leaves. OTTO sits alone on the bench clutching the book.

INT. MEDEA'S STUDIO - AFTERNOON

MEDEA continues her speech.

MEDEA

(to the crowd)

For inspiration, I will now recount the narrative of the movie as it has evolved thus far.

Accompanied by MEDEA's voice-over, we now see a truncated version of the scenes that have already been shown of *Up with Dead People*, plus a few new ones that we haven't seen before. We see Fritz walking down the street before he became a zombie, pulling the key out of his mouth, entering his kitchen and finding MAXIMILIAN dead. We see MAXIMILIAN attacking and biting him, MAXIMILIAN eating his guts as FRITZ wakes up, FRITZ and MAXIMILIAN having sex, the two of them at the breakfast table, the two of them spraying graffiti slogans, the two of them being confronted by armed thugs. We see MAXIMILIAN being executed, and FRITZ running away. We then see how the narrative evolves from there. The following speech by MEDEA accompanies the montage.

MEDEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In a futuristic society not very different from our own, the walking dead have learned to blend in with the rest of society. The advent of a new wave of gay zombies has made everyone even more paranoid than usual about homosexuals, now commonly known as the purple menace.

Ext. The STREET - late afternoon

OTTO walks along the street clutching his book in his hand. He passes by the same group of youths who chased him earlier. They begin to follow him.

MEDEA (V.O.)

Fritz, our anti-hero, returns home after a long day of forced labour in the fashion mines, ever vigilant of the marauding gangs of youth who hunt down and annihilate anyone they suspect of being undead or homosexual, having become indifferent to the distinction between the two. Entering his apartment, Fritz finds his longtime companion, Maximilian, dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on the kitchen floor. He could no longer live in an environment of persecution and paranoia, a topsy-turvy world in which the living,

deadened by an increasingly materialistic, corporatized world, exterminate the undead, who have become more humane and sensitive than their living counterparts.

Ext. the street - late afternoon

OTTO continues to walk on the street, followed by the violent youths.

MEDEA (V.O.)

The bullet to his brain, however, does not prove enough to prevent Maximilian from being reanimated. After recruiting his lover, Fritz, into the homosexual army of the undead by making sweet zombie love to him, the necromantic duo begins to plan an uprising against living civilization. While writing graffiti to spread the word, they are interrupted by a gang of thugs brandishing baseball bats. Maximilian is shot in the head again and, this time, permanently exterminated.

Ext. The street - late afternoon

The violent youths catch up to OTTO and pull him into an alley and start to beat and kick him.

MEDEA (V.O.)

FRITZ escapes and, inspired by the martyrdom of Maximilian, begins his rise to infamy as the guerrilla leader of the homosexual zombies, the gay Che Guevera of the undead. In the beginning he recruits his followers one by one, luring homosexuals into dark alleys and fucking them into immortality.

Ext. An alley - night

FRITZ lurks in the shadows of an alley. When a HOMOSEXUAL begins to cruise him, he attacks and kills him. FRITZ sits beside the corpse and eats its guts, waiting for it to come back to life. When it does so, the two clasp hands in solidarity and walk off together.

MEDEA (V.O.)

Soon he has recruited enough members to form a gang of his own, a small army of gay zombies who recruit members by fucking, killing, and partially devouring vigorous young men, not necessarily in that order.

As the story continues, FRITZ leads a gang of hot gay zombies down the street. They encounter several handsome young men, overpower them, kill them, and partially devour them. Then the two corpses arise and join the gang.

EXT. THE STREET - EVENING

OTTO, bloody and beaten up, staggers down the street. Faces of strangers, flashing in and out as zombies, loom up as he walks.

Int. MEDEA'S studio - CONTINUOUS

Back to MEDEA on her platform with her bullhorn as she continues her speech.

MEDEA

In the final scene, FRITZ has gathered together his insurgent sissies from beyond the grave, his macabre Mujahideen, to prepare them for their last stand against the overwhelming forces of the deadened living. He has brought them together for a final orgy of the dead. Adolf, roll camera. Action.

MEDEA steps off the platform and against the backdrop of terrorism, war, and violence, the zombies start to engage in an orgy of the dead set to freaky trance music.

Ext. MEDEA'S studio - evening

From across the street, OTTO watches the actors from the previous orgy of the dead emerge from the studio, some still in full or partial zombie costume, others in their street clothes. FRITZ emerges still dressed as a zombie. After the rest have dispersed, FRITZ stands alone waiting for a cab. After one pulls up, OTTO emerges from the shadows and stands in the street in a pool of light. FRITZ sees him and, after asking the taxi driver to wait a moment, runs over to him.

FRITZ

Otto, what happened?

Although it's a little hard to tell, OTTO looks significantly more beat up than usual. He's hunched over and seems a little broken.

OTTO

I got bashed.

FRITZ

Come on. I'll take you home.

FRITZ helps OTTO over to the cab. They both get in and the cab drives off.

Int. FRITZ'S spare room - evening

OTTO and FRITZ sit on bed in the spare room while FRITZ examines OTTO's scalp.

FRITZ

There doesn't seem to be too much blood.

OTTO

Zombies don't bleed.

FRITZ

We better check the rest of you. Let me take this off.

FRITZ starts to try to pull off OTTO's striped sweater, but OTTO pushes him away.

OTTO

I'll do it.

OTTO pulls off his sweater, takes off his tie, unbuttons his shirt and removes it. FRITZ, still dressed as a zombie, starts to examine OTTO's back and chest. The two zombies look at each other. They kiss. A sex montage, accompanied by trippy trance music, follows.

Int. FRITZ'S SPARE ROOM - Morning

FRITZ awakens and sits up. OTTO is gone. He gets up and pulls on his pants, then heads for the kitchen.

Int. FRITZ'S KITCHEN - morning

FRITZ enters the kitchen and finds a note on the table. He picks it up and looks at it.

INTERTITLE: A drawing of a tombstone with the words OTTO RIP written on it.

Ext. An INDUSTRIAL AREA - early evening

OTTO, carrying a metal cannister, walks into a wide frame and sits on the ground. After a moment he screws the cap off the cannister and starts to douse himself with gasoline. A hand-held camera shows him continuing the dousing in close-up, and continues to show him as he pulls out a pack of matches. Back in the wide shot, he strikes a match and appears to go up in flames.

INTERTITLE: OTTO

INTERTITLE: DA

INTERTITLE: FE



As OTTO apparently continues to burn, we hear an off-camera voice.

MEDEA (O.C.)

All right, cut. That's a wrap.

MEDEA enters the frame and douses the embers of the burnt dummy with water. OTTO ambles into the frame behind her and watches. He looks the same as always, but maybe a little more together, a little less ill. He is also wearing new clothes that look like they haven't been changed in maybe a week. MEDEA turns and looks into the camera.

MEDEA (CONT'D)

Adolf, I said cut.

The screen goes black.

Ext. AN INDUSTRIAL AREA - early evening

OTTO is interviewed for the last time, with MEDEA's voice coming from behind the camera.

MEDEA (O.C.)

Now that the movie is finished, what will you do?

OTTO

I'm not sure. All I know is, I can't unlive in the city anymore.

MEDEA

Why not?

OTTO

Because the living have no respect for the dead.

MEDEA

So you still think that you're dead?

OTTO

I am dead. I mean, I don't think I'm dead. I'm dead.

EXT. a Country road - Twilight

OTTO, seen from behind, walks his jangly walk north along a country highway. He approaches a crossroads, and stops in the middle of the intersection. Cut to a camera

showing his feet, which cranes up to show OTTO's face, a little more real, but still with undertones of the zombie look.

#### OTTO

I really didn't know what my destination was, but something told me to head north. The cold doesn't bother me. In fact, I find it comforting. It preserves my flesh. Maybe I'd find more of my kind up there, and learn to enjoy their company. Maybe I'd discover a whole new way of death. Most of the chances were against it, but not, I thought, quite all. At one point I did consider ending it all, like at the end of Medea's movie. But how do you kill yourself if you're already dead?

OTTO continues walking past the crossroads and fades away into the distance.

#### THE UNLIVING END



# ***No More Manifestos!***

## **Kate Thompson**

### **Fear**

1. What makes us human: the capacity for rational thought.
2. With thought comes the awareness that there is much we do not know, either because we cannot experience it or because we cannot conceive of it.
3. Our mental landscape is shaped by our fear of the unknown, death included. That death is the only certainty is a cruel joke.
4. Though we are able to conceive of death, it is impossible to conjure an experience of it. Trying to imagine what it's like to not exist gives rise to a paradox which can lead from a mild stupor to unqualified fear. As long as we are able to think, imagine, and feel -- to undertake any of the activities which are the endowment of living -- we are left to ponder death from distance, always sensing the void but never grasping it.
5. We turn to symbolism to allay the undercurrent of fear. By giving death a form through representation, it becomes possible to grasp it and to characterize our fear.
6. The various creatures and scenarios of horror films work to this purpose. Zombies shamble mindlessly among them like macabre wind-up soldiers.
7. At first glance, our fear of zombies is a fear of their mindless rotting bodies, harbinger of what is to come.

## **Zombies**

8. Zombies originated in Haitian folklore, the products of voodoo. If a community found one of its members too great an annoyance, they could call on a priest to relieve them of their burden. The priest would administer a magic powder which would lower the heart rate and body temperature and erase all memory, effectively transforming the pest into a walking corpse. The zombi (patois for 'spirit of the dead') would remain the priest's slave until the end of his life.
9. Zombies made their film debut in the 1930's. Early films like *White Zombie* and *I Walked With a Zombie* were faithful to the Haitian conception of zombies as drones controlled by a practitioner of black magic.
10. They symbolized a loss of agency, their minds and wills subsumed by a higher power.
11. In 1968, George Romero replaced the Haitian supernatural backstory with a (superficially) scientifically plausible explanation for zombies. By the end of *Night of the Living Dead*, it was understood that radioactive contamination from a space probe had reanimated the bodies of the recently deceased, which then began to attack and 'infect' the living.
12. When zombie genesis was naturalized, the contemporary zombie was born.
13. Contemporary zombie films shifted focus from the plight of one person under a spell to worldwide outbreak and the fight for survival as the dead beget dead and humanity extinguishes itself with exponential efficiency.
14. Contemporary zombies are also mindless, but they are not controlled by a higher power.

## **God/s**

15. The shift in the symbolic value of contemporary zombies makes sense in the context of the historical movement away from the supernatural and the divine: modern science has disabused us of our gods and attendant explanations of nature that turn on the intentions of omnipotent beings.
16. But for all of the progress made through its methods of inquiry, science has not relieved us of our anxiety about death, since rational thought about death only brings about the paradox mentioned before.
17. Our relationship with the unknown was different when we took ourselves to be in the

presence of an all powerful being.

18. A god is by definition superhuman, but resembles humans in one important respect: it has a mind and can communicate with them through some medium or other. It is possible to remain agnostic about the existence of a god or gods while remarking on the convenience of this similarity.

19. Being able to communicate with a god or gods does away with the fear of the unknown to some extent: understanding anything becomes a matter of asking for the answer in the same way one might ask a trusted, if sometimes violent, elder.

20. Science does not offer this kind of psychological refuge.

### **Humans**

21. Without gods, we only have ourselves (to talk to).

22. Science is fallible and humans are destructive.

23. The post-apocalyptic fight for survival as depicted by contemporary zombie films usually includes several sub-plots about prejudice and infighting. The refuges of abandoned buildings and houses boarded up from the inside often become intimate, confined spaces where aspects of human interaction are played out, magnifying the havoc brought about by malicious human tendencies.

24. If we are no longer on speaking terms with a god, the contemporary zombie also symbolizes the disintegration of our relationships to each other.

26. Face to face with a contemporary zombie, we expect some recognition, the spark of a connection, an invitation to communicate. Instead we find a void, the newly empty universe projects through the familiar form, eclipsing the last signs of humanity.

In the pilot episode of *The Walking Dead*, after protagonist Rick Grimes catches on to the causes and behaviors of the rampant flesh-hungry ‘walkers’, he finds a particularly ravaged walker who has lost the lower half of her body, and resolves to end her suffering. Before he shoots her, he looks into her blank stare and says, “I’m so sorry this happened to you.”

### **The Next Evolution**

27. One might regard contemporary zombies as merely the latest expansion of the horror genre if they remained fictional constructs, but they have not. Over the past decade or so, zombies have steadily ambled into the culture at large.

28. The term ‘zombie’ is used to name a great number of things. They vary in kind, from bizarre behavior or cannibalistic crimes to the egregious nominalization of nouns in the English language.[i]

29. As uses multiply, the term ‘zombie’ no longer denotes a particular creature, but instead describes the state of anything which has become a mindless or unconscious remnant of a formerly conscious entity. ‘Mindless’ can be taken literally-- as with the zombie-ant fungus in Thailand which commandeers the brains of ants -- or metaphorically, when it describes the primary function or center of control of zombie computers or zombie banks.

30. If there is a next evolution of the zombie, a post-contemporary zombie, this linguistic shift hints at what it might be.

### **Language**

31. What makes us human: the ability to communicate our thoughts using language.

32. Human language developed from a cooperative platform of shared knowledge and communicative motivations.[ii]

33. Shared knowledge--or context--includes everything from social and environmental information to an intuitive understanding of another person’s thoughts inferred from his facial expressions and behavior.

34. The primary communicative motivation is to communicate information with another person that might be helpful to him. When this motivation is shared by all members of a community, establishes the basic trust needed in order for the exchange of information to take place.

35. With the support of the collaborative platform, early humans were able to use simple gestures and sounds creatively and flexibly in their environment, accruing a rudimentary symbology which eventually flourished into conventional linguistic communication. New and more complex concepts were distinguished, named and shared as memory and shared knowledge increased. And concepts were strung together as the cognitive capacity



to organize them evolved.[iii]

36. Impressionistic gestures were codified into symbols with conventional meanings, forming a fine-grained code which speakers use to package and convey or receive detailed information. Because so much information can be contained in symbols themselves, communicative exchanges need not rely so heavily on the immediate environment or the speakers disposition. And with the development of systems of writing and electronic transmission, speakers no longer need to see each other or share an immediate environment at all in order to communicate.

37. If language continues on its trajectory towards a perfect code, it may seem that the collaborative platform will eventually fall away as old scaffolding.

38. Some recent theories of language offer evidence to the contrary. Their basic insight is that while language carries some of the information a speaker wishes to convey, the speaker's full meaning cannot be grasped by a decoding process alone.[iv] Linguistic communication is only effective --through any channel--when it is supplemented by the contextual information and trust.

An example. A man approaches a woman at a bar and pulls out the stool next to her. She says, "I think it's taken". The information given by the meanings of the words and their configuration alone do not give the man the woman's complete meaning. There are gaps in the information which he must fill in using what he understands about the environment: that 'I' refers to the woman and 'it' refers to the barstool. Further, he must try to understand the intention behind her statement. He makes assumptions about what is going on in her mind, and what she thinks is going on in his mind--that he wants to sit next to her--using indications from her body language and tone. He works out that by telling him about the status of the barstool, she means to tell him that he can't sit there, or that she doesn't want him to. Then, drawing on his knowledge of social norms, he may also conclude that she probably thinks that he is trying to pick her up, and he sees that she is not game.

39. Working out the meaning of a four-word sentence requires an intricate calculation involving a large number of contextual variables. We can pull it off almost effortlessly in every situation. And even if the information ultimately communicated is not flattering or accepting, we still trust that the speaker's basic communicative intention is good. Although the woman at the bar seems to have little affection for our friend, by interpreting and responding to his action, she is telling him something she thinks he might want to know. In the grand scheme, this is a favor, and a completely human gesture. Imagine the same scene with two macaques, the male pulling himself up on the barstool, the female unresponsive until he taps her on the head and she responds with a wild shriek.

### **Post-Contemporary Zombies**

40. Though still dependent on the cooperative infrastructure, language has developed a certain level of autonomy, where words may be easily abstracted from their original context or meaning.

41. Such is the case when a word or phrase goes viral. As it multiplies and gathers the world into its concept, the meaning is stretched to nothing and the word becomes an empty sound.

42. Given this new autonomy of language, communication may also be divorced from an intention to help.

43. Post-contemporary zombies are just these uses of language.

44. They jostle our communicative sensibilities by subverting the cooperative infrastructure. True connection is supplanted by bromides and chit chat, and communicative intention becomes manipulation.

45. Messages engineered by advertisers, whose words rouse our emotions, appealing to our vanity or shame. The sanguine voice in the advertisement speaks as if it can actually see us and it understands our wants. It talks to us directly, telling us that we will find what we seek in this or that product. Political messaging, often characterized by equivocation and flattery, has much the same effect. Candidates offer up slogans and sound the trumpets of resolve in order to galvanize their listeners, but the sole intention behind any statement they make is to gain favor, and a vote.

The total amount of data produced in a year is now estimated in exabytes, hinting at the magnitude of the droves of language we are each exposed to every day. We are bombarded by language on billboards, store signs, screens and flyers that explain, warn, argue, complain and cajole, most of which is written or uttered for the purpose of selling something. We watch the talking heads of news and politics spout whatever language is expedient to their own advancement but see the disconnection in their faces, dissolving the basic trust at the core of communication. Looking for the human in the swarm of so much disembodied language calls to mind the scene in *Night of the Living Dead* where, just before Barbara is engulfed by the throng of zombies bursting through the door, she recognizes among them the unseeing face of her own brother, Johnny.

### **The Antidote in Art**

46. Now that we can recognize the uses of language that undermine communication, we can work to lessen their effects.

47. Though we cannot halt the progression of language--nor would we want to--we can enact a sort of reversal of it where possible, moving from the word or conventional symbol to the collaborative platform itself.

48. In the moments just before we become “speakers”, we gaze at one another, prolonging our attention to the details of our immediate surroundings. If we let ourselves rest in those moments, we begin to open directly to the person in front of us. Without the conventional symbols with their predetermined meanings, we are free to engage in more flexible and creative kinds of exchange based on pure presence.

49. The filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky holds that expression which does not take into account the materiality of its own medium--whether it is language or paint or film-- directs our experience away from reality and toward some other message, denying us an opportunity to connect with what is in front of us, and to be fully present in the moment.

50. His notion of self-symbol,[v] or an expression which is understood in itself and not as a representation of something else, encapsulates this return to the primordial communicative state.

51. Dorsky’s own films provide a strong example of self-symbolic expression. As does the work of Marina Abramovic. This is just a starting point.

### **Caveat**

52. A new realization that points the way forward usually impels someone to jot the joyful and strident exclamations of a manifesto, teaming with passwords and isms, and nail it to the door. Here the post-contemporary zombie also lurks. Better silence.

---

[i] Helen Sword, “Zombie Nouns,” *New York Times*, 23 July 2012, Opinionator.

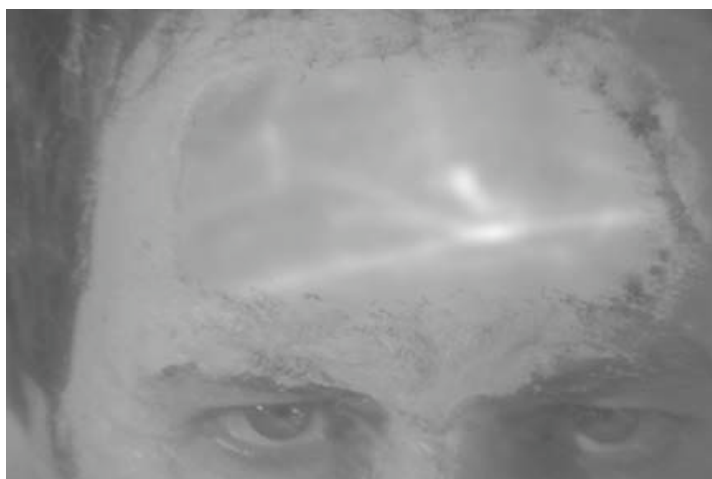
[ii] Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

[iii] An oversimplified example: in an ancestral community, if every time the presence of a predator was sensed, everyone would climb to safety, the gesture of pointing up might come to be associated with that particular scenario, and the gesture would represent the act of climbing to escape a predator. Whenever someone points up, then, his cohort thinks that he referring to the predator scenario, understood as the original context of that gesture. Even if they do not sense a predator themselves, they assume they are being informed that there is a predator roaming about. Eventually, the gesture might be supplemented with a particular noise, so that it is possible to warn others to climb away from a predator even when they cannot see one another. At this point, the noise means something like ‘predator, climb away’. If down the line two members of this community are playing

a game, one might use the noise to simply mean ‘climb’ without the additional meaning of ‘there’s a predator’, if his interlocutor also sees that there is no predator and that his companion is not alarmed or fearful. From then on, the noise might simply mean ‘climb’ whether or not there is a predator.

[iv] Dan Sperber & Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication & Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995).

[v] Nathaniel Dorsky, *Devotional Cinema* (Berkeley: Tumba Press, 2003).



Jim Shaw, *The Hole*, 2007 (JS07.51)

Video with artist soundtrack

11min 5 seconds (looped)

Edition of 3, 2 APs

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Praz-Delavellade, Paris.

*Rise*  
**Chad Robertson**













## **Images**

Chad Robertson

*Untitled*

Oil on canvas

48"x24"

(also cover image)

Chad Robertson

*Untitled* (2006)

Oil on canvas

48"x60"

Chad Robertson

*Untitled* (2006)

Oil on canvas

36"x72"

Chad Robertson

*Untitled* (2006)

Oil on paper

30.5"x 30"

## *Notes on Contributors*

### **Simon Clark**

Simon Clark is an artist/writer/musician living and working in London. He is currently working on a practice-based PhD at Goldsmiths College. The provisional title is *The Kiss of the Dead; Towards an Undead Sublimation of Melancholia*.

As an undergraduate at Leeds University Simon was a member of the Leeds 13 – a group of art students who used a public art grant to fund a holiday on the Costa del Sol. The national press reacted with bilious outrage before the students revealed that the holiday was in fact an elaborate simulation and the money had never been spent. During his MA in Art Practice at Goldsmiths, Simon wrote a collection of morbid songs and short stories called *Sad, Sad Songs of Wretchedness and Death*. After graduating he performed this repertoire live at many international art events including the New Wight Biennial at UCLA, Late at Tate Britain in London and the Sonar Festival in Barcelona. As part of the Curare Quito project in 2007 he was invited to compose and conduct an original piece of music especially for a deconsecrated church in Quito, Ecuador. His essay *The Undead Martyr* is included in the book *The Undead and Philosophy* published by Open Court Press.

### **Caryn Coleman**

Caryn Coleman is a curator and writer based in New York whose curatorial practice explores the intersection of film and visual art with an obsessive focus on horror cinema's influence on contemporary artists. This is the basis for her online writing project *The Girl*

Who Knew Too Much, the journal *Incognitum Hactenus*, and exhibition programming including the *On the Desperate Edge of Now* at the Dumbo Arts Center in February 2013. She is Coordinator in the Cinema Department at Nitehawk Cinema and is currently Program Curator for the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts 'Art & Law' Residency program. Coleman received her MFA in Curating with distinction from Goldsmiths College in London

### **Bruce LaBruce**

Bruce LaBruce is a filmmaker, photographer, writer, and artist who is based in Toronto but who works internationally. Along with a number of short films, he has written and directed seven feature films and is hard at work on his eighth. As a visual artist he is represented by Peres Projects in Berlin, and he has had numerous gallery shows around the world, the latest of which, called *Obscenity*, a photography exhibit, caused a national ruckus in Spain. His last feature film, *L.A. Zombie*, was banned in Australia. LaBruce has written a premature memoir called *The Reluctant Pornographer*, and has had two books published about his work: *Ride, Queer, Ride*, from Plug-In Gallery in Winnipeg, and *Bruce(x) ploitation*, a monograph from his Italian distributor, Atlantide Entertainment. LaBruce has contributed to a variety of international magazines as both a writer and photographer, including *index*, for which he also acted as a contributing editor.

### **Sarah Juliet Lauro**

Sarah Juliet Lauro is the co-author of "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism" (*Boundary 2*, 35:1, Spring 2008, pp. 85-108), co-editor of *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Posthuman* (New York: Fordham UP 2011), and completed her dissertation, an intellectual history of the zombie myth, at the University of California at Davis (2011). She is a visiting assistant professor in the English department of Clemson University

### **Chad Robertson**

Chad Robertson has developed a unique painting style that gained critical acclaim by combining digital, video and print photography into a multi-layered oil painting. These works capture 'the moments between the moments' in our daily lives by merging dozens of images onto one canvas. Robertson, a graduate of Otis/Parsons Art Institute, is represented by Western Project in Los Angeles. He has shown nationally and internationally from Seattle to New York and London, Stockholm to Munich. His work has been featured numerous times in the press including the LA Times as well as Anthem Magazine and Flaunt, to name a few. He is currently working and living in Los Angeles.



*We all need to be aware of the potential disaster that stalks us everyday.* - Francis Bacon

Influenced by the films of George A. Romero and the societal chaos in a post-Katrina New Orleans, Chad Robertson's suite of untitled paintings from 2006 feature ambiguous actions frozen in a moment of time. The uncertainty as to whether these figures are a threat or benign reinforces the idea that society exists on the cusp between order and disaster and that people often resemble the "mindless" figure of the zombie without having made the living-dead turn.

## **Jim Shaw**

Jim Shaw was born in Midland, Michigan in 1952. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles. He will have a major exhibition of his work shown at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts, Gateshead, England from November 9, 2012 to February 17, 2013.

Jim Shaw's first fictional feature, *The Hole* (2007) appears as an O-ist horror movie where a new female convert to the religion, peering through a hole in her apartment wall, discovers a parallel world where zombies stroll in an ill-defined "somewhere beyond which space becomes abstracted." Here, the space between the living "normal" world and the endless repetition of the continuous living in "zombie" world collapse, meeting through a hole in a wall in a domestic space. The zombies, all men, are dressed in suits aimlessly wandering, slightly bumping into each other. A close up into the zombie nerve center reveals the "brain" is a fuzzy television-like portal (Dani Tull's soundtrack is incredible), providing us an abstracted account of what goes on in the mind of the mindless. The film suggests a parallel world of zombies to our own, prompting the question of how do we look, evaluate, adapt, and change our own end of the world that's so near by?

Recent solo exhibitions have also been presented at CAPAC Musée d'art Contemporain, Bordeaux, France (2010); P.S.1 MoMA, New York (2007); MAGASIN Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, France (2003); Kusthaus Glarus, Glarus, Switzerland (2003); and the Swiss Institute, New York (2002).

His work and performances have been included in group shows such as *Artissima: Blinding the Ears*, Teatro Carignano, Turin, Italy (2009); *Le Printemps de Septembre, Les Abattoirs*, Toulouse, France (2009); *Eden's Edge: Fifteen LA Artists*, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2007); *Into the Vacuum: An Evening of Oist Sacred Music*, Billy Wilder Theater, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; *Disparities & Deformations*, SITE Santa Fe Biennial, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2004); *(The World May Be) Fantastic*, Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2002); and the *Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1991, 2002).

### **Eugene Thacker**

Eugene Thacker is the author of *In The Dust Of This Planet – Horror of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Zero Books, 2011) and *After Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). Thacker teaches at The New School in New York.

### **Kate Thompson**

Kate Thompson is a writer and consumer researcher in Brooklyn with an interest in language and branding.

### **Tom Trevatt**

Tom Trevatt is a curator and writer based in London. His research is focused on recent post-continental thought, specifically around developments in Speculative Realism and the zombie. Siting these in relation to curatorial and art practice, his work operates in the strange, monstrous juncture between thought and artwork. He is developing a curriculum for thinking art beyond the contemporary with artist Christopher Kulendran Thomas. Recent exhibitions include *Cosmophobia*, L'Atelierkunst(spiel)raum, Berlin, *Lewton Bus* at Vitrine Gallery, London, *The Rise and Fall of Matter* at Collective/David Roberts Art Foundation, London and *The Accidents of Form* at LoBe, Berlin. He is currently organising a series of symposia in Paris, London and Limousin, France to explore research around Speculative Realism and art. He is on the programming committee for Treignac Projet, France and holds a research laboratory at David Roberts Art Foundation, London. He is a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths College, London.

# *Incognitum Hactenus vol. 3*

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Next issue, *On the Desperate Edge of Now*