

Zombie Pedagogy: Rigor Mortis and the U. S. Body Politic

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Abstract:

This article explores the popularity of Zombies in recent American popular culture and media.

Keywords: Zombies | Cultural Studies | Popular Media | Literary Theory

Article:

"English zombies!" blurts out Denis in Thomas Pynchon's 2009 novel *Inherent Vice*. "Look at them, man," the hero carries on, "American zombies are at least out front about it, tend to stagger when they try to walk anywhere, usually in third ballet position, and they go, like 'Uunnhh . . . uunnhh,' with that rising and falling tone, whereas English zombies are for the most part quite well spoken, they use long words and they glide everywhere, like, sometimes you don't even see them take steps, it's like they're on ice skates. . . ."¹

"Culture-specific" zombies? Good question. One thing is certain, though: the flesh-eating ghouls are popping up all over America. A telltale sign the U. S. economy still has to come back from the dead, the zombie industry is booming. No longer an unwonted revenant from Hollywood's restless netherworld, the loathsome creatures have become a cultural epidemic that makes you wonder: which is more contagious, the zombie bite or the zombie theme? Sporting their hallmark rags or still reasonably groomed, the walking dead keep stumbling out of America's obsessional closet to take over neighborhoods, malls, campuses,² and freeways in popular and experimental, cult and mainstream art forms alike, and sometimes in all at once, as in Pynchon's book and, before it, in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie* (1995), Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), and E. L. Doctorow's *The Waterworks* (1997). In these and other recent novels, American postmodernism unabashedly flaunts its twice "zombified" nature. For not only is postmodernism, as Jacques Derrida might say, a spectral formation, a textual present intertextually visited by a past that declines to pass; furthermore, not only is this past's posthumousness too culturally productive, too *enlivening*, not to tempt some—*pace* Fredric Jameson—to approach the postmodern as a postmortem lease on life extended to things otherwise deemed done with, "history";³ but what haunts this present, what this present

presentifies, and, conversely, what makes our time kick is, to no negligible degree, the undead themselves.⁴

This holds true across genres, media, and fields, in literature commonly understood as postmodern but also in its poorer relative, pulp, and in the Stephen Kings and Brian Keens feverishly mining the subject in between; in movies such as Ruben Fleischer's 2009 comedy *Zombieland* and in TV cartoons, with *The Simpsons* and *South Park* leading the pack; in commercials and in the anti-commercial Ronald McDonald Internet "exposés"; in cultural-political satire à la George Saunders and in mashups like Seth Grahame-Smith's 2009 *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*; in music videos and computer games from Michael Jackson's 1982 *Thriller* and the *Resident Evil* multimedia series to comics such as the 2008 *Zombie Broadway*; in masterpieces that have already undergone "zombification" as well as in zombified classics to be,⁵ no less culturally blasphemous than the "Schwarzeneggerized" rewrites of Mark Leyner's avant-pop *Et Tu, Babe*;⁶ in mock-scientific zombie vade mecums and manuals, a cottage industry whose output ranges from Max Brooks's "traditionalist" 2003 *Zombie Survival Guide* (billed as "Complete Protection from the Living Dead") to Mac Montandon's "revisionist" 2010 "Completely Scientific Guide to the Lives of the Undead" (titled *The Proper Care and Feeding of Zombies*); and, last but not least, in reputable venues from newspapers and magazines to academic journals and presses, where philosophers debate the "physicalism," mind, and soul of the "soulless," and economists quarrel over the "zombie economy" and the "zombie companies" thriving in it.⁷

This fast growing body of work has time after time reembodyed figures, scenes, plot lines, and sociocultural allusions from George A. Romero's 1960s trend-setting films. However, in getting "new life," the Romero hits and, with them, the entire "ghoulish genre" only emulate the obstinacy of their staple character.⁸ "This thing just won't die!" the handful of humans left standing in zombie flicks invariably scream—ironically enough, an outburst itself haunted by Hamlet's undying "Rest, rest perturbed spirit!" (1.5.181). Alas, both in Shakespeare's Denmark and in Romero's America, the "thing" does not oblige. The dead have died and not quite; they are "deadish," as a (still) human hero quips in the 2004 remake of Romero's 1978 *Dawn of the Dead*. Literalizing an afterlife that for many of "us" remains a vaguely religious metaphor, zombies, rather than Max Brooks's readers, may be the consummate survivalists after all—*Survival of the Dead* is the title of Romero's 2009 movie. Anything but "completely and thoroughly dead,"⁹ they wake in the very wake of their ambiguous demise to take up residency in the limbo of U. S. culture and, from there, to gross out, horrify, and confound, but perhaps also "enlighten" us, tell us something about ourselves. For, when read with the grain, the zombie figure does not actually speak to us; it casts a spell on us without spelling itself out; it remains "mute" or, at most, "tells" us what we expect or want to hear, namely, of its fundamentally inhuman essence, of that which is so unlike us, rational beings, that it cannot possibly tell us anything at all, let alone about the limits of our rationality. But, when read against its rhetorical-ideological grain, the zombie starts speaking to us despite or, better yet, by means of its unspeakably irrational appearance, thus engaging us through the very radical difference it stages so willfully. How is this possible?

An epitome of inhumanity, zombies are, it seems, more than simply "different" from us. The dissimilarity is total, allayed by no residual overlap, affinity, or commerce across the existential-

intellectual gap between “us” and “them.” This radical contrast explains why we are drawn so hypnotically to the catatonic hordes and also why they have all but supplanted vampires as our unmitigated Other in the collective imaginary.¹⁰ Some critics argue, in effect, that zombies fascinate Americans to a degree Dracula’s progeny never have. Their demonism ever part-time, dampened by the “soft” alterity built into it, blood-sucking monsters retain a modicum of humanness because they are endowed with sentience and, more importantly, with consciousness, “twisted” as it may be. Not so zombies, even though one still has to shoot them in the head to put them out of their misery. There are, of course, exceptions such as that confounding Laurell K. Hamilton’s zombie “animator” Anita Blake. As a rule, however, they have every semblance of lacking consciousness.¹¹ Consequently, they do not possess the individuality most vampires boast. True, a vampire’s bite may dehumanize its human victim. But, because vampiric contact is not automatically infectious, it is not instantly metamorphic either. As Elizabeth Kostova reiterates Bram Stoker’s observation in her Vlad Țepeș thriller *The Historian*, several bites are required for the transformation to occur. Even so, this vampirizing dehumanization is “mushy.” Not unlike the Borg’s “assimilation” of *Star Trek*’s Captain Picard, it is usually neither perfect nor irreversible given that it does not de-individualize. Again, zombification does. Accordingly, the zombie, being one or turning into one, performs the unadulterated difference between the inhuman in its serial and mindless form, on one side, and the human and its equivalents, the individual and the rational, on the other.

Zombies are, then, our absolute opposite. Not only that, but they are keen on *looking* absolutely opposed to how we see ourselves as living entities in general and *homo sapiens* in particular. Preserving just the material veneer of humanness, the zombie is, and insists on appearing to the spectator or reader, as the human in its most despiritualized or a-spiritual, reified embodiment: the human as mere embodiment, the human *qua* body.¹² Except that, trading on the anatomy of “corpus” and “corpse” simultaneously, the zombie body does not have the structure of a human body either. The tautological regime of zombie phenomenality, in which how the “thing” appears to us is no more than that, an appearance, an epidermal phenomenon or “show” of deceptive layers, surfaces, and looks, holds sway over the zombified body too; the latter *presents*, quasi-theatrically, the mere façade of human physicality. This corpus no longer incorporates. In other words, it is not an organic apparatus, an anatomic-physiological system that contains and thus depends on organs with “vital” functions no less vital to the unifying, coherence-building workings of the mind, but something like a depthless, decentered, and socially decentering “body without organs.”¹³ If in David Lynch’s corporeal “universe . . . bodily depth constantly invades the surface and threatens to swallow it,”¹⁴ zombification flattens the body into a one-dimensional “surficial” assemblage with no insides and no inside. Rendering thingness not anorganic but organless, this vertical surficiality of sorts marks a major step in the zombie body’s “thing-becoming.”¹⁵

Anima demoted to animality and its abominable kabuki theater of bodily postures and cognitive impostures, the Cartesian subject here totters before us only to cancel itself out in its dejected hypostasis of object or “thing” groping around for our flesh. The “thing” will never eat its fill, though. Its hunger for us is bottomless because, as a venerable philosophical tradition reassures us, so is the gap between the human as cogitative subject and the inhuman other as subject solely *to* our cogitations and thereby de facto object or thing. Which is to say, not only are we, humans, the sole and absolute subject, entitled to our epistemological absolutism, but the object on the

other side of the human-inhuman divide is absolute too and so irredeemably hostage to the stultifying immanence of its gruesome materiality. In brief, we are a *res cogitans*; we are a, or better still, the “thinking thing,” in which the heavily emphasized first term tones down the “thing” (*res*) in us. For, as the Cartesian dictum has it, if we think, if we are subjects—if we are, *tout court*—this happens at the expense of the thing, of the object.¹⁶ At the same time, the only reality granted to the object of our cogitations is opaque re(s)ality, the selfimploding black hole of unthinking “thingness” or, as Jacques Lacan underscores, the twice “dumb” reality that does not speak and hence remains silent because it cannot think to begin with.¹⁷

Disseminating this tradition across the high- and low-brow cultures of contemporary America, the zombie plays up the object’s hopelessly objectual condition by putting an “abjectual” spin on it through a tactical overdramatization of the somatic object as *abject object* or cadaver. The underlying assumption here is that, in the “dead body,” the object’s destitution or, as Jean Baudrillard says, “prostitution,”¹⁸ its ab-jection or re-jection to the otherworld’s nonsubjective otherness and to its inert, a-rational thingness, is categorical and definitive *and* will be registered as such by us.¹⁹ Thus, the object’s “obscene,”²⁰ ignominious objectuality, the cadaveric “abjectuality” on which zombie cinema dwells so obstinately, sanctions the subject’s rational downgrading to object, to a thing that, Sartre claims, while it can be said to “exist,” is not as *we* are.²¹ Sanctioned by the “accursed” ontology of subaltern beings, it is as tool and prosthesis, human substitute, rational ersatz; it is, bluntly put, so *we* can fully be.

This fall from the rational grace of subjectivity, now a condition safely earmarked for us alone, is further compounded by the subject’s “atypical” survival as zombified body: a fraudulent survival, un-whole and in that unholy, “diabolically” partial.²² Metaphysically speaking—speaking, namely, from a simultaneously rationalist and theological position concerning what makes the subject human and under which circumstances it is “operational”—this subject would be better off if, once clinically dead, it vanished from our world without a trace and “stayed,” as one of Elizabeth Kostova’s characters opines, “respectably dead” instead of sticking around and appearing, in the aforementioned sense of “appearance,” as thing-like body.²³ Following its “half-death”—*demi-mort*, in Lacan—and “disrespectful” of this interstitial state, the body may and does appear. But, the same tradition has it, this appearance represents, as earlier, just that, an appearance, smoke and mirrors without substance precisely because all there seems to be to its reality is corporeality, to wit, flesh. On the face of it—the inhumanly defaced face the zombie’s body turns to us—there is no subject in or with the pseudo-resurrected body that puts in an appearance. The body is now merely a “thing” or, as Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, “The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body.” “The King,” Hamlet adds, “is a thing . . . [o]f nothing” (4.3.23-26). But is the anthropological subject the only heading under which knowledge can give itself a vehicle and a form, in short, a body? To ask the question differently: Is the thing necessarily a-subjectual, utterly unable to exert cogitative and articulatory functions equivalent or comparable to a living person’s? And, if it is not, how exactly do zombies help us warm up to the notion of a thing’s “personhood,” as Barbara Johnson might say.²⁴

One of Shakespeare’s notoriously cryptic places, the passage above has been interpreted in a disconcerting number of ways. Most critics agree, though, that the body in question is more than meets the eye. The body, they maintain, is not, or not only, Polonius. More remarkably, we are

not dealing exclusively with empirical bodies either. Along these lines, two distinct bodily formations come into play here: the King's "natural" body and the monarch's body politic.²⁵ One is private, physical, hence mortal. It dies and does not tarry. Or, if it does, it does not do so as such but as its metaphorically disembodied double or "spirit"—as the body's "other body." Bodying forth the law, authority, and kingship, the "somatic" body's alternate is more of a transcendental, collective-juridical concept, a signifier of political desire, of monarchic will and legitimacy. These bodily attributes of the ruler are sui generis "things" that do not fade away upon the death of his perishable body. They outlive his mundane exit and so can be passed on to the rightful heir or can be denied to pretenders and usurpers, as the case may be. In this sense, Claudius *is* a King/thing of no(-)thing. "Thingified,"²⁶ he looks the part but is hardly (with) "it," the real King/thing. This is why the law, which he violated when he poisoned Hamlet's father, cannot possibly be with Hamlet's uncle; it is the murdered King who retains authority even after death has degraded his physicality to nothing (physical), to the ghostly revenant. Urged by his son to "rest," the King cannot take a break because the law is still "restless," active. In or with him, power, *imperium* in Latin, remains imperative, and the first action it demands regards Claudius because his crime has reduced the law and its embodiment to a nobody, to spirit, immaterial specter.

The King's appearance is thus a "phallophany," a *phallophanie*, as Lacan writes in his seminar on desire (Book VI).²⁷ For, what appears (cf. Gk. *phainesthai*) or reappears, rather, in the King's phallic apparition—what comes to light in the Heideggerian, enlightening *Lichtung* ("clearing") opened up by *Hamlet's* revenant and makes itself known to the Danish prince, to his spectators, and to human consciousness more generally—is the luminous essence of the phallus as *Ur-index* of relation, as "with" marker. An arch-signifier, the phallus is all about signifying, signification, and significance, pointing to how things relate to one another, come about, signify, and overall get done in our world, to who is running them, that is, *with* whom "it," the law or moral-political authority, lies or should lie. The copulative phenomenology of the "with" is here paramount. What this "with" articulates (formulates, lays down) is articulation itself as key world principle because the link and the aptly named "signifying chain" in which we are all enmeshed, our socio-political and affective-phantasmatic ties, the logical-grammatical copula and the very act of copulation make for the building blocks of worldly languages and codes, both encode this world and help decode it semiotically and politically by revealing how bodies of people, culture, and institutions are "with" one another.²⁸ Thus, on the one hand, the phallus sets up the world as sexual, cultural, political, and cultural juxtaposition (tradition, transmitted culture, is quintessentially phallic too) and, on the other hand, assists us in parsing the world syntax accordingly. The premier phallic function, Lacan submits, is to "lift the veil"²⁹ from the libidinal underpinnings of cultural-political codifications and hierarchies. "With" the King, the phallus returns from the dead to unveil to the living the makeup of the symbolic. The King shows itself in order to show that which must be shown to us because we cannot discern it on our own. The unveiling presupposes the veiled—verbalized, symbolized, disguised—status of things human, but the apparition appears so that those things do not remain forever unapparent to us. It follows, then, that the "truth" the ghost conveys is both hermeneutic and critical, that it also pertains to—indeed, warrants—a certain *Kritik*. Otherwise put: this truth has to do with our world as much as with our capacity to "get" it and implicitly with the human itself, more specifically, with the critical shortcomings of human consciousness.

As Lacan insists elsewhere, this is the profound and disturbing revelation the subject experiences “in the place of the Other.”³⁰ More basically, it is in the place occupied by the King’s reappearance as apparition, as “other” to Hamlet and us all, that we get a glimpse of some (“other”)thing we ordinarily do not make out from our station in the world of the living, namely, of how limited our capacity for ideological analysis and critique can be. For, if it “knows its place” in the hardened order of things mortal and immortal, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, as it usually does, the human risks not knowing itself, and, more often than not, ignorance and its corollary, self-ignorance, are the price we pay for the entrenched cultural-metaphysical sedentariness that locks us inside our *Weltanschauungen* and paradigms. So, against an entire Cartesian line of thought this time around, we may conclude that we are and own up to what we are as cognitive subjects *where we normally are not*; that, perforce “beyond us,” learning is an away game; that knowledge reveals itself to us, the knowing subjects, in the realm of otherness, in Michel de Montaigne’s anthropological *ailleurs*.³¹ Canvassed ad nauseam in our daily routines, the social remains, unfortunately, a site of socio-critical blindness: being-in-the-social, and by extension being overall, is a blind spot, a topo-epistemological handicap. Instead, the place where the phallus appears marks the scene where the workings of human desire, power, and hegemony can be queried and made apparent. Returning from the otherworld in an appearance *of necessity* other to us, the King’s ghost shows up, Lacan contends, “to bring to the subject’s mind” [*pour . . . porter à la connaissance du sujet*]³² what in the subject’s abode gets in the way of his or her knowledge: the ideological underlays of the social terrain itself and, deeply engrained in our consciousness, the self-sufficient rationalism that blinds us to ideology’s “veiled” grip over our lives.

But, if zombies are not vampires, they are not ghosts either. They are less than spectral, or perhaps more, higher up the inhuman scale. Arguably, ghosts are not ghastly enough, at least compared to zombies, whose “over-the-top” bodily appearances look stranger than disembodied apparitions and so carry superior heterological value. Does this matter? It does because, if we entertain the notion that the Other returns to raise human consciousness—if the King must come back *as* the Other to orient us in the symbolic and, within it, in the nuts and bolts of the ideological—then, the more hair-raising the Other, the more consciousness-raising its rise: the more “other” to us the revenant’s form, the more unfamiliar to us its resurgence and the more critically defamiliarizing its presence among us and to our human condition. No doubt, the hero of the 2006 comedy *Fido* constitutes another exception, for, as a rule, zombies are neither well behaved nor “trainable,” unlikely to remember or relearn our cultural rites, walk our dogs, and become the caring fathers we have never had. Their dehumanization, more accurately, their incapacitation as functioning human subjects, is and must be acted out in the symbolic world of the living as absolute because, unlike specters, they can *embody* the Other absolutely, that is, they can “lend” otherness their body *and no more than that*. “A true ZOMBIE[’s] . . . eyes,” fancies Q_P_, the serial killer protagonist of Oates’s 1995 novel, “would be open & clear but there would be nothing inside them *seeing*. & nothing behind them *thinking*. Nothing *passing judgment* . . . Nor *memory*.”³³ And vice versa: since the zombified body entails a thoroughgoing dehumanizing of the human, the “veritable” Other, the Other as the “real thing,” necessarily appears to us as a zombie (kind of) thing.

To most commentators, the thingness of the thing—the human as zombie body—allegorizes the “human reductionism” striving to “reduce a person to body, to reduce behavior to basic motor

functions, and to reduce social utility to raw labor,” hence the usual references to earlier films such as *White Zombie* (1932), *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936), *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), and even *Modern Times* (1936).³⁴ Instead, what a critical reading foregrounds in the “thing” no matter how this appears and speaks (or does not speak) to us at first blush, is not principally a feature we lose as mindless zombies, but, to the contrary, something we gain intellectually, something we get to see in ourselves once we have seen it in or as a thing; not a cognitively regressive narrative allegorizing the old chestnut of modernist “alienation,” but a progression in knowledge and self-knowledge, odd as it may “appear.” For it is in such extreme incorporation that the Other plays its “unveiling,” analytically othering role best, naming for us that which otherwise would remain “unknown,” “unimaginable” to us;³⁵ it is, specifically, as bodily thing that the Other “calls the subject into question,”³⁶ puts up the twofold high drama of *our* social reification and false consciousness most effectively. The zombie “critical method” and its focus—our sociocultural positioning—are, then, isomorphic: as a “thing of flesh,” “fleshed out” as thing rather than airy spirit, the Other stands ideally poised to awaken us to our material embodiment and related conditioning, viz., to how much the loftiest of our representations and values, and our ability to “see through” them all no less, are conditioned by symbolic, socioeconomic and political arrangements geared not only to holding our world together but also to screening its asymmetries and injustices from our gaze.

Therefore, what Derrida calls the “spirit of Marxist critique”—Marxism’s critical *Geist*—may well prove less pugnacious in ghosts than in zombies.³⁷ In fact, ever since Hegel, the *Geist*, both “spirit” and “ghost” in German, has been coopted by the metaphysical methodology and vocabulary of Western humanism. Its critical thrust repeatedly exorcised, the *Geist* has been harnessed to the teleological project of the human, and on this account too *somatology*, the “a-spiritual” logic of the body, poses a more serious threat to the metaphysics of the human than Derrida’s post-Marxist “spectrology.”³⁸ First and foremost, this threat and, potentially following from it, the re-visitation of some of our basic “grand narratives” stem from the zombie’s bodily performance—from that which makes zombie somatology a radical heterology. Granted, werewolves, vampires, ogres, mummies, poltergeists, and phantoms are heterologies too, but zombies are a heterology with teeth in more ways than one.³⁹ These teeth have a uniquely pedagogical bite to them in the sense that if indeed, as Derrida claims, the “love[r]s of justice” stand to learn a lot from a “ghost” in which they nevertheless recognize themselves as much as they do in vampires—*Our Vampires, Ourselves*, reads the title of Nina Auerbach’s book on the subject—then the same “scholars” and “intellectuals,” along with the rest of us, “should learn” even more from zombies.⁴⁰

Learn what, one might retort. And again, can we learn anything at all from that which has come “to represent an absence of spirit”?⁴¹ Suppose we are, at long last, prepared to accept that “[t]he human body is an instrument of knowledge,” as Paul Auster writes in his 2010 novel *Sunset Park*.⁴² Can we say the same about the zombie body? To answer, let me offer first that startling in the spectral *Unheimliche* is a Freudian recognition, an almost necromantic resuscitation of what has been, in sum, a reenactment or comforting mimesis of the human subject. What comes back from the *ultra-monde*⁴³ in and “with” the specter and its phallic appurtenances of authority, control, and privilege is thus the reiteration of a cognition originated in, and referencing, our *hic and nunc* and so fraught with all the philosophical and not-so-philosophical concessions consciousness has been making in the name of our “reasonable” humanity. By contrast,

unsettling in zombie *Unheimlichkeit* are the “body beyond recognition”—bodily otherness—and its phallic flipside, namely, a deeper, more difficult, and troubling realization analogously surging from beyond human consciousness and cutting through that which customarily confines our thought processes to preset intellectual grids and their inbuilt status quos.⁴⁴ It is the zombie uncanny that truly “goes against one’s waking” and, more broadly, against rational, human “wishes or beliefs.”⁴⁵ What pulls us toward vampires, and what, in them, “teaches” us, is a psychocultural matrix of self-identification, the vampiric *in* the human, for, at the end of the day, “[v]ampires [are] [l]ike [u]s.”⁴⁶ Admittedly, they are monsters. But in their monstrosity—in their botched metamorphosis—we view ourselves. Like the specter, the vampire is a *speculum*, a “mirror” of and for the human. To that extent, what the vampiric or ghostly mirror image of ourselves uncovers and reflects back to us is, critically and politically, a mixed bag: not just the phallic as heretofore unavailable insight into the logic of our world—the phallus as “embodied . . . *nous* and . . . *logos*,” according to Lacan⁴⁷—but also the world’s “phallogocentrism,” as Derrida contends, against Lacan, in “Le facteur de vérité.”⁴⁸ In such monstrous vehicles, the phallic tenor at once enables and disables “learning” and the critique grounded in it. What accounts for this ambivalence is that which, in vampires, ghosts, and other Others of this kind, reminds us of what has created them in the first place: human rationality and its apparatus, consciousness. Living on in vampires—and, with heightened pathos, in disembodied revenants like spirits—consciousness, complete with its all-too-human reflexes and compromises, bears out Hamlet’s suspicion that “conscience does make coward of us all.” “[T]he native hue of resolution,” the Prince goes on in the famous Act III soliloquy, “is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.” Put in another way, while we may learn something from the specter, we “lose the name of action” in the bargain: learning is one thing; acting on what we have learned is quite another. “Cast” as they have always been in consciousness and its representation systems, the thought or thoughts in question are not only liable to accommodate the represented epistemologically, but they are also “weak” politically.

Beholden to a “weak thought” redolent of Gianni Vattimo’s *pensiero debole*, the thinking subject may end up “neutraliz[ing],” Derrida worries, “[the specter] through naturalization,”⁴⁹ that is, by explaining away the specter’s nature. And so, premised on the spirit’s bodilessly “logocentric” pantomime, the naturalizing and rationalizing constructions we put on the world are predictably “despiriting,” so to speak, bound to do ideology’s bidding. By the same token, they translate into correspondingly insubstantial “actions”—into Slavoj Žižek’s “decaffeinated revolution, a revolution which doesn’t smell of revolution.”⁵⁰ On occasion, we may “catch” somebody’s consciousness promisingly unawares “in the open,” in another place, in the place of the Other as “thing” —“The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King,” announces Hamlet in Act II—and yet consciousness, moral conscience included, cannot solve actual problems as long as it does not have the strength to pose itself as a problem to the world-as-world, to the world’s concrete body of bodies, of smells, noises, contacts, and views. In this light, what *Inherent Vice*’s FBI agents say of unscrupulous real estate mogul Michael Wolfmann should be taken literally. “We’d always assumed,” they admit, “that Michael’s conscience would never be a problem. After all his years of never appearing to have one. Suddenly he decides to *change his life* and give away millions to an assortment of degenerates—Negroes, longhairs, drifters. Do you know what he said? We have it on tape.

‘I feel as if I awakened from a dream of a crime for which I can never atone, an act I can never go back and choose not to commit.’⁵¹ After his “crisis of conscience”—once his conscience “appears”—Wolfmann disappears but only to reappear later in “the clutches of the [same] System,” “back to them old greedy-ass ways.”⁵² Following his institutionalization, he lumbers around all doped up, at the same time cured and sicker than ever. Is Wolfmann Freud’s Wolfsmann? A Lazarus *à rebours* perhaps? In any event, he turns up fully, *obtrusively* zombified. But he must be so in order to draw attention to himself, and, more notably still, he must draw attention to himself because this is the only way *we* may pick up, in his pre-crisis behavior and in everyday America generally, on what Doc, Pynchon’s private-eye hero, refers to as “all telltale zombie symptoms.”⁵³

As one can see, not only does the zombie dissimulate and disclose concurrently, but it cannot accomplish either without attempting both at once. On that account, it ramps up its corporeal spectacle of difference to the point where the horrified spectator is no longer afforded any identification with Wolfmann whatsoever. If initially Pynchon’s reader may have “related” to Wolfmann and more broadly to entrepreneurial America, that becomes fairly impossible after the realtor resurfaces in all his otherworldly inhumanity as bodily thing plodding along like a speechless automaton. But, again, this shocking reemergence is of the essence; this is how the “Other as [Freudian] *Ding*” (thing), *must* “present itself to us,” given that, as Lacan stresses, “the Thing only presents itself to the extent that it becomes word, hits the bull’s eye, as they say”⁵⁴ [*pour autant qu’elle fait mot, comme on dit faire mouche*].⁵⁵ More plainly, Wolfmann would not have assumed a form so pointedly discrepant from ours, i.e., he would not have presented himself before us as a thing, as a no-thing by human standards, if he did not have some “other,” more important thing—Lacan’s *Chose*—to present or communicate *to* us; Wolfmann’s ghoulishly astonishing, theatrical-discursive rhetoric of self-presentation conveys his “message” by virtue of the same negative dialectic of phallic presentation according to which the stranger the messenger and his delivery, the stronger the message and its impact on the receiving subject.⁵⁶ Thus, he presents *us* with something to “think about” in *our* world of symbolic deployments insofar as *his* presentifying “comeback” boggles our mind, representing for us an “encounter” with a thing that resists symbolization since its meaning lies, Lacan states it plainly, somewhere “beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back.”⁵⁷ Wolfmann addresses us, has “things” to say to us, *because* he looks so unlike us, so inhuman, “thingly.” He makes *us* reflect *because* reflection, consciousness, and so on do not seem available *to* him. He speaks to us *because* he is, or *sounds*, rather, speechless—as Lacan also glosses on the Other’s “mute” recital, the thing becomes *mot* (“word,” in French) by way of its very silence. It is in this aporetic wordlessness pregnant with meaning, dialectically “telling,” that the Other is “on target” (*fait mouche*) and targets us; through its unlikely presentation, “the Other as *Ding*” “tells it *like* it is,” to us.⁵⁸ This observation too should be taken literally. Not only must the telling (the phallic signifier) be thing-like, must be carried out in a *dingliche* fashion or appearance, but the “it,” “[*les choses don’t il s’agit*”—the “things” the *muette* (silent) Other talks about not in so many words (*mots*),⁵⁹ that which is told us and concerns us in zombie “phallophany” (the signified)—must also be some(-)thing germane to the form the telling and the “mute” interpellation of the human take up.

The bestselling *Walking Dead* multivolume graphic novel forefronts this thought-provoking interpellation insistently. This should come as no surprise. In the introduction, Robert Kirkman,

the series creator, explicitly likens his work to “[g]ood zombie movies [,which] show us how messed up we are[, . . .] make us question our station in society . . . and our society’s station in the world. They show us gore and violence and all that cool stuff too . . . but there’s always an undercurrent of social commentary and thoughtfulness.”⁶⁰ Kirkman’s protagonist, former Kentucky policeman Rick Grimes, his family, and friends are “addressed” by the undead into a “thoughtfulness” that, inchoate as it looks, was unavailable to humans prior to the zombie outbreak. On the one hand, interpellation is here metaphorical. Except for the occasional grunts, the interpellating things remain silent, inarticulate. On the other hand, it is literal in that it does articulate a demand, a challenge to consciousness to recognize and possibly overcome its “station.” In the makeshift camp outside Atlanta from volume 1 and especially in the former prison where volume 4 is for the most part set, the zombies surround the survivors and provide an omnipresent audience under whose scopic pressure Rick and others take steps to rescind their compliance with “every retarded little rule we ever invented to make us feel like we weren’t animals” and come up with “new rules” instead.⁶¹ The old rules held together the human world Rick’s group has been trying unsuccessfully to salvage, a social model fundamentally compliant, in effect rooted in allegiance to law and in which daily interaction of the group members and sociality largely are dramatized as “congenial” law enforcement. This is particularly obvious in volume 1, where Shane, Rick’s one-time partner and a big believer in “rules,” equates their survival with the government’s ability to take charge. For somebody like Shane, the current situation is a deviation from norm, a wrinkle in an otherwise dependable, rational sociopolitical narrative. The state of exception brought about by the crisis, he believes, is both illegitimate and temporary. On this ground, as far as he is concerned, it makes no sense either to question pre-zombie, legal setups and social affordances or to adjust to the present. By contrast, Rick, while acknowledging the present’s abnormality, senses in it, albeit still vaguely, an opportunity if not a necessity to query the norm itself. To Shane, what they are going through is a “mess” the government and its agencies will somehow sort out, rationalize, and the army will “clean up” sooner or later. Rick, however, feels that the mess is here to stay, marking as it does a profoundly messy, fast-changing world whose shifting practices and boundaries of gender, sexuality, religion, class, property, community, and humanity, emphatically thematized across the volumes, make him take another look at the world left behind.

What “it” all comes down to is this: in keeping with the logic of phallophanic self-articulation, the thing the zombie body as thing conveys to us also is—or is of the nature of—the thing itself. The Freudian-Lacanian *rebus* is, self-reflexively and with the kind of selfreflexiveness absent in “us,” about *res* itself.⁶² More enigmatic and, nonetheless, more urgent than a spectral communiqué, this carries a message about the re(s)ality of human consciousness, about how reified, how thing- and automaton-like, and ultimately how mindless the human mind and the human broadly stand in the signifying system and in the clasp of socio-systemic relations subtended by it. Only consciousness cannot and does not appear so to itself but to its “selfless” Other, the zombie. Unaware of the situation, of the “System” and its grip on us, consciousness acts, or rather merely reacts, as false consciousness, playing along docilely. Busy to fulfill its social “mandate,” as Lacan dubs it, the subject’s consciousness largely fails to question the subject’s world.⁶³ By contrast, the thing is a brazen provocateur: as Heidegger proposes in *Being and Time*, the “thingliness [of things can be or] becom[e] a problem”⁶⁴ that may end up problematizing the world. “As in *W[hat Is a] T[hing]*,” the book the German philosopher devotes exclusively to the thing, “the question ‘What is a thing?’ brings,” Michael Inwood

comments, “the whole world into play.”⁶⁵ Asking about the world’s *choses* (see Lat. *causae*) is an etymologically and philosophically apposite way of “bringing into play” the world’s *causes*, its reasons to be the way it is.⁶⁶ The play at hand is the material play (cf. the French *jeu*) of thinking, of thinking and its high stakes (*enjeux*). A chief ingredient of the genre from the first Romero movies to Amelia Beamer’s 2009 Alcatraz “romance” *The Loving Dead*, the zombie uprising may allude to the social disobedience for which humans have become unfit. But more significant, and hence less transparent, is the allusion to what lays the groundwork for any questioning and dissent in a world of ideologically dematerialized values, namely, to the requisite retrofitting of thinking as thing-thinking, as “thinging.” For the thing/*Ding* does no more (and no less) than that—“its thing”—by helping us see how things connect to one another in their bigger “scheme.” Here, in Heidegger’s political “assembly” (*Ding*, in the Old High German),⁶⁷ things (*Dingen*) are “thinged out” (*gedungen*)—discussed, sorted out, legislated on, and otherwise “assembled” into symbolic configurations; it is to these configurations of desire, meaning, and authority that the zombie’s thing-appearance alerts us on closer inspection. Revelatory and “instigative,” its thingness jars us into “thinging” critically, into critical thinking “about things.” In that, “it” is neither quiet nor stupid, regardless of how creepy, taciturn, and overall mindless its bodily performance—or precisely because this performance looks so. Supremely and necessarily amphibological, the thing’s dumb show is just (for) show, a half-camouflaging, half-revelatory self-performance where performing bodies set out to “catch” *our* “conscience” by acting out *our* re(s)ality and its corollaries: objectification, instrumentalization, serialization, and “massification.”⁶⁸

Does this mean, as Žižek claims, that “we all *are* zombies who are not aware of it, who are self-deceived into perceiving themselves as self-aware?”⁶⁹ Is “the zombie monster ultimately terrifying because in it one sees one’s self?”⁷⁰ Not exactly. Things are—we know it already—more complicated. Even though we employ the zombie as an unflattering human simile in movies, political analysis, and in casual conversation, we are *not* zombies.⁷¹ Of course, we may *imagine* ourselves as zombies as much as anything else. But even that would take a serious stretch of the imagination, let alone that it would rub against our own cultural imaginary, which intimates that, properly speaking, we cannot be (like) them if we cannot be where they are or where they are from. On this score too Lacan is unequivocal: to that place—the “world of the Other”—we have no access.⁷² Unthinkable and unspeakable, beyond the symbolic and thus uncompromisingly alien, the zombie world remains inaccessible to us.

But not the other way around, I hasten to say. While we “stay put,” unwittingly cooped up inside symbolic arrangements, the abject thing designates, as Julia Kristeva argues, a “limit-object,” an object equally limited (confined) and limitless, intrinsically transgressive.⁷³ So, we may not go over to the “other” side—or we may, but with a one-way ticket. A “threshold” type of bodily unit, as Deleuze and Guattari might describe it,⁷⁴ the zombie, however, does cross over to us, and, to repeat, it is this dramatic asymmetry between us and “it,” the irreconcilable disjunction enacted as body thingness, that, in prompting the crossing, implicitly sets in train what I have labeled zombie pedagogy. This seemingly non-negotiable difference from the resurgent thing that defies symbolization is instrumental—moreover, a prerequisite—to the rediscovery of the symbolic as problematic and ultimately to the resurgence of our self-awareness. To be “for real” and thereby help us make sense of the world, the return of the Lacanian Real must be mind-blowing and thus “make no sense” at first, and it achieves this absolutely, as that-which-we-are-

absolutely-not, in the form of the zombie body or thing to which, try as we may, we find no way to “relate.” But the impossibility of a rationale emotional connection with that which, in its “impossible,” unhinging appearance, shocks us out of our analytically and socially inoffensive habits provides the steppingstone to ascertaining, albeit tentatively, our condition of possibility. If, in order for us to be and cope with the world as it is, we must be oblivious to the intolerable truths nesting at its core, the thing also must burst forth, writes Žižek, in all its unbearable materiality, as “the ultimate horrible Thing,” so that we “put things together” and make this core’s content somewhat visible.⁷⁵ We may still have a hard time picturing what lies within it. For all intents and purposes, it may still mark a no-thing, a hiatus, or wrinkle in the Lacanian socio-semiotic continuum analogous to the irruption of the apocalyptic creatures of Pieter Brueghel’s *Triumph of Death* and Sergei Eisenstein’s “lost” film *Unterwelt* into the leiscapescape of DeLillo’s *Americana*.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, not unlike a potter’s vase, shaped by the emptiness inside it, the everyday “plenum,” along with its underpinning ties, associations, and allegiances, comes together around this reordering crack in the symbolic order,⁷⁷ and for that the illegible void opened up by the thing’s rise is also where this meaningful togetherness, this copulative condition and conditioning of the human, lends itself to reading—ours.

It is in this fatally circumventing sense that *all* zombies are “cultural zombies” and American zombies are culture-specific or specifically “about” America.⁷⁸ Bearing critical witness to the culture they have left behind, their afterworld is not postcultural but *metacultural*. In that regard, once more, their posthumousness is not posthuman. Their hereafter is given over to our present, which *they* revisit so that *we* might revise it. Attuned to phallophany’s contrastive dialectic, our reading, then, does not read the vacuum of the “thing,” which remains inescapably unreadable, but the surrounding vacuity, the glamorous thoughtlessness in the culture around it. The body liminal sheds light, accordingly, on the body politic’s limitations, constraints, and elaborately induced knee-jerk reactions—in *Dawn of the Dead*, zombies converge on the mall “instinctively” because that is where “the lobotomized masses of middle class laborers and consumers that comprise late capitalist society”⁷⁹ flock “rationally” in their “free” time, not just during the zombie pandemic. Thus, the thing’s thingness itself, its muteness or incoherent mumbling, pinpoints with unmatched eloquence the incoherence of our wishes and justifications. Zombie hypermateriality unearths the material constitution of our desire along with the sociocultural apparatus designed to hide the desire’s content in plain sight; as in Romero’s 1985 film *Day of the Dead*, we fail to “domesticate” *them* because *we* are already domesticated, sold on said justifications and on ideology overall; similarly, they bite us so as to punish us for this domestication, i.e., for how they themselves led their own lives when *they* indeed were (like) us, but also to “tell” us what they are doing *by doing (the) it (thing)*, namely, by unleashing an orality in which the distinction between “biting” (devouring, mastication, etc.) and enunciation no longer operates.⁸⁰

Embodying phallophanic dialectic with a clarifying vengeance, the zombie bite is phallic communication *par excellence*. As such, the bite stands outside “the chain of language [*parole*],” tracing language’s outside, the unspeakable and the violent impasse or interruption in communication within language itself. But this bloodcurdling static, this intolerable break in discourse, is also the vociferous emptiness around and from which the speaking subject’s position and the plenitude of linguistic exchanges get their contour.⁸¹ This is how rigor mortis—sign, as common wisdom has it, of lack of consciousness, judgment, speech, in sum, of

humanness—bespeaks, in the same circumvoluntary fashion, our lack of rigor and passes judgment on human consciousness and its vulnerability to the affluent-consumerist mythology of freedom, free will, and agency; this is how “evil” shows off an “intelligence” of its own, capable of debunking what Baudrillard identifies as “Integral Reality: the irreversible movement towards the totalization of the world . . . the growing hegemony of the powers of good”⁸²; this is, after all, death that might do the living some good insofar as only in or “with” it, in and through the thanatological re(s)alism of the half-dead thing, the nuts and bolts of this hegemony become readable; this is how, in its zombie context, Hamlet’s dilemma might just start making sense again—how the “not to be” part and the “wisdom” and “eloquence” of not-being might just get us thinking, again. Successively coupling and decoupling the cognitive and the conscious, the conscious and the cerebral, the cerebral and the rational, the rational and the subject, the subject and the human, the human and the living, the living and the organic, and—at last—the organic and the body, the zombie raises the time-honored question with renewed urgency.

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Notes

1 Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 132.

2 On March 22, 2011, the Dean of Students Office and the Office of Campus Activities and Programs at University of North Carolina, Greensboro, sent out a campus-wide email announcing that “hundreds of students” were expected to play “Humans vs. Zombies, a game of moderated tag,” between March 28, and April 3, 2011.

3 I allude here to Laura E. Savu’s book *Postmortem Postmodernists: The Afterlife of the Author in Recent Narrative* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009). On Fredric Jameson’s controversial claim about the “weakening of historicity” in postmodernism, see his *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 6.

4 On spectrality and Jacques Derrida, I refer the reader to the French philosopher’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf. Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Gullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994).

5 Christopher Campbell, “10 Classic Films That Would Be Better With Zombies,” <http://blog.spout.com/2009/02/04/10-classic-films-that-would-be-better-with-zombies/> (accessed March 31, 2010). In his turn, Scott Roeben supplies an even funnier list of “classic novels zombified.” The list has been posted by Cory Casciato at <http://www.inevitablezombieapocalypse.com/2009/03/classic-novels-zombified/> (accessed December 28, 2010).

6 Mark Leyner’s alter-ego protagonist casts Arnold Schwarzenegger in classic movies in *Et Tu, Babe* (New York: Harmony Books, 1992). For a discussion of Leyner’s remakes, see my book *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 129-142.

7 Robert Kirk is just one philosopher of consciousness who has taken the zombie problem seriously in his book *Zombies and Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press. Oxford University Press, 2005). *The Undead and Philosophy: Chicken Soup for the Soulless*, edited by Richard Greene and K. Silem Mohammad (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), is a collection of witty and insightful essays. Particularly relevant to my discussion are the contributions on the ontology and politics of the body by Manuel Vargas, Adam Barrows, and especially William S. Larkin (“*Res Corporealis: Persons, Bodies, and Zombies*,” pp. 15-26) and Leah H. Murray (“When They Aren’t Eating Us, They Bring Us Together: Zombie and the American Social Contract,” pp. 211-220). On the zombie metaphor in economics, see Ben Woodard, “Zombie Economy,” *Naught Thought*, May 17, 2007, <http://naughtthought.wordpress.com/2007/05/17/zombie-economy/> (accessed April 4, 2010). The movie *Fido*, I might add here, features a company named Zomcom, which controls the zombie outbreak by re-humanizing— that is, essentially enslaving—the undead.

8 See Stefan Dziemianowicz’s article “Might of the Living Dead: A Ghoulish Genre Gets New Life,” *Publishers Weekly*, July 13, 2009: 20-24. “In some sense, every zombie film is a kind of remake,” Meghan Sutherland also remarks in “Rigor/Mortis: The Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema,” *Framework* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 64.

9 Kyle Bishop, “Raising the Dead: Unearthing the Nonliterary Origins of Zombie Cinema,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 201.

10 “Although they were once human, zombies have no real connection to humanity aside from their physical form; they are the ultimate foreign Other,” Bishop maintains in “Raising the Dead,” 201. At the same time, the critic argues that zombies “are in essence a metaphor for humanity itself” (201).

11 In Hamilton’s *The Laughing Corpse* (New York: Ace, 1994), Anita Blake runs into a zombie who regains consciousness and language after eating human flesh (257). (Editor’s note: In the Anita Blake series, Hamilton also typically presents zombies as being in a liminal state for a few days after death, still pathetically recalling human memories.)

12 Zombies are, Sutherland writes in “Rigor/Mortis,” “bodies utterly surrendered to their own physicality” (64).

13 Regarding the “body without organs,” its structure, and its psychosocial role, see the locus classicus in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, preface by Michel Foucault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), “The Body without Organs” chapter, 9-21. See too Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), especially 135-135, for a discussion of the issue apropos the zombie problem in popular culture, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and philosophy. D. Harlan Wilson applies the “body without organs” model to zombie corporeality in “Schizosophy of the Medieval Dead: Sam Raimi’s *Army of Darkness*,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 41, no. 3 (2008), especially 514-515.

14 Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 122.

15 On surface, depth, and the body without organs' thing-becoming, also see Wilson's "Schizosophy of the Medieval Dead," 514-515.

16 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 45. For the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res corporealis* and the zombie challenge to our understanding of personhood, also see Larkin's "Res Corporealis: Persons, Bodies, and Zombies."

17 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 68.

18 Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 141.

19 On the cadaver as an example of "absolute" abjection, see Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 11.

20 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 141. On Baudrillard and the object's status in Western thought, see Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 179.

21 Julia de Funès, *Coup de philo . . . sur les idées reçues* (Paris: Michel Lafon, 2010), 33-35.

22 Jacques Lacan, *Le Désir et son interprétation. Séminaire 1958-1959. Publication hors commerce. Document interne de l'Association freudienne internationale et destiné à son membres*. Leçon 3, 26 novembre 1958 (n. p.: n. d.), 29.

23 Elizabeth Kostova, *The Historian* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2005), 90.

24 Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 107.

25 See Jerah Johnson, "The Concept of the 'King's Two Bodies' in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1967): 430-434.

26 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 63.

27 Lacan, *Le Désir et son interprétation*, 370.

28 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*. A selection translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 287. Also see Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 212, 217.

29 Lacan, *Écrits*, 285.

30 Lacan, *Écrits*, 288.

31 Nicole Lapierre glosses on Montaigne's dictum "Nous pensons tousjours ailleurs" ("Our thinking always takes place elsewhere") in *Pensons ailleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 11-20.

32 Lacan, *Le Désir et son interpretation*, 249.

33 Joyce Carol Oates, *Zombie* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 169.

34 Peter Dendle, "The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety," in Niall Scott, *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 48.

35 Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 171.

36 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 142.

37 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 68.

38 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 174.

39 On the conscience/conscienceless distinction in relation to the ghost/zombie divide, also see Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," *boundary 2* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 93-96.

40 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 176.

41 Kevin Alexander Boon, "Ontological Anxiety Made Flesh: The Zombie in Literature, Film and Culture," in Scott, *Monsters and the Monstrous*, 36.

42 Paul Auster, *Sunset Park* (New York: Henry Holt, 2010), 217.

43 See Jacques Lacan's "Sortie de l'ultra-monde" chapter of *Le Séminaire. Livre VIII. Le Transfert*. Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 153-166.

44 In "Raising the Dead," Bishop holds that the human victim "recognizes" itself in the zombie assailant (203).

45 Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 164.

46 Tomislav Z. Longinović, "Vampires Like Us: Gothic Imaginary and 'the Serbs,'" in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić, 39-59 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

47 Lacan, *Écrits*, 291.

48 Jacques Derrida, “Le facteur de la vérité,” in *The Post Card: Form Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), especially 480-482.

49 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 174.

50 Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: Robespierre, or, the ‘Divine Violence’ of Terror,” in Maximilien Robespierre, *Virtue and Terror*, introduction by Slavoj Žižek, text selected and annotated by Jean Ducange, translated by John Howe (London: Verso, 2007), vii.

51 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 244.

52 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 334.

53 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 306.

54 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959—60*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated with notes by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 55.

55 Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre VII*, 68.

56 In “A Zombie Manifesto,” Lauro and Embry also talk about “negative dialectics” apropos of zombies. Unlike mine, their use of the concept follows closely Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno.

57 Lacan, *Écrits*, 53.

58 Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre VII*, 69, 68.

59 Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre VII*, 68.

60 Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Cliff Rathburn, *The Walking Dead, Vol. 1: Days Gone By*. Berkeley: Image Comics, 2010.

61 Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Cliff Rathburn, *The Walking Dead, Vol. 4: The Heart’s Desire*. Berkeley: Image Comics, 2010.

62 On Freud, Lacan, and the dream as rebus, see Lacan, “The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious,” in David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2008), 195.

63 Gilbert D. Chaitin, *Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

64 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. A Translation of *Sein und Zeit*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 59.

65 Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford, Blackwell: 1999), 215.

66 On *chose* (“thing”) and *cause* (“cause,” “reason”) in Lacan, see *Écrits*, 151.

67 Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 215.

68 Luigi Volta, “‘Horror’ nella cultura di massa: dal mito allo *zombi*,” *Quaderni di Filologia Germanica della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università di Bologna*, 2 (1982): 194.

69 Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 136.

70 Bishop, “Raising the Dead,” 204. On the zombie as a trope in general and, in particular, as a signifier of “our” anxieties, also see Scott, *Monsters and the Monstrous*, and in it especially Boon, “Ontological Anxiety Made Flesh,” and Peter Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety.”

71 On the “zombies-like-us” cliché, see, for instance, Bishop, “Raising the Dead,” and Lauro and Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto.”

72 Lacan, *Le Désir et son interprétation*, 240.

73 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, 180. On the zombie as “boundary-figure,” the reader may consult too Lauro and Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto,” 90.

74 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 249.

75 Slavoj Žižek, “Fantasy as a Political Category: A Lacanian Approach,” in Lodge and Wood, *Modern Criticism and Theory*, 698.

76 Leonard Wilcox, “Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* and the Return of the Real,” *Contemporary Literature* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 120-137. Wilcox’s is the best Lacanian interpretation of DeLillo’s novel to date.

77 Chaitin, *Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan*, 67.

78 Boon argues that “cultural zombies” make for just one zombie “category” (“Ontological Anxiety Made Flesh,” 40).

79 Wilson, “Schizosophy of the Medieval Dead,” 523.

80 On oral activity, language, and voraciousness, see Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, 52.

81 The phallus plays a key signifying role by standing outside the signifying chain (“Le phallus . . . est élément signifiant soustrait à la chaîne de la parole, en tant qu’elle engage tout rapport avec l’autre”). On this account, see Lacan, *Le Désir et son interprétation*, 28. On Lacan, *Hamlet*, and the role of the phallus with respect to the subject’s “speaking position,” see Stefan Polatinsky and Derek Hook, “On the Ghostly Father: Lacan on Hamlet,” *Psychoanalytic Review*, 95, no. 3 (June 2008): 370.

82 Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, translated by Chris Turner (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 21, 24.

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