

## **A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism**

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The zombie has been one of the most prevalent monsters in films of the second half of the twentieth century, and as many have noted, it has experienced a further resurgence (or should we say, *resurrection*) in British and American film in the last five years.<sup>1</sup> Zombies are found everywhere, from video games and comic books<sup>2</sup> to the science textbook. The zombie

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1. Films such as *Shaun of the Dead*, directed by Edgar Wright (Big Talk Productions, 2004); *28 Days Later*, directed by Danny Boyle (British Film Council, 2002); *Dawn of the Dead, 2004 Remake*, directed by Zack Snyder (Strike Entertainment, 2004); *Land of the Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (Atmosphere Entertainment, 2005); and the *Resident Evil* series, directed by Paul W. S. Anderson (Constantin Film Produktion GmbH, 2002) and Alexander Witt (Constantin, 2004). See Peter Dendle's book *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2001); Jay Slater's *Eaten Alive! Italian Cannibal and Zombie Movies* (London: Plexus, 2002); and Stephen Thrower's *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Guildford, UK: FAB Press, 1999).

2. For example, *Bogus Dead*, *Zombie Commandos from Hell*, *Carnopolis*, *Containment*, *boundary 2* 35:1 (2008) DOI 10.1215/01903659-2007-027 © 2008 by Duke University Press

has become a scientific concept by which we define cognitive processes and states of being, subverted animation, and dormant consciousness. In neuroscience, there are “zombie agents”;<sup>3</sup> in computer science there are “zombie functions.”<sup>4</sup> We even find “zombie dogs,” “zombie corporations,” and “zombie raves” in the news.<sup>5</sup> The ubiquity of the metaphor suggests the zombie’s continued cultural currency, and we will investigate why this specter has captured the American imagination for over a century. We want to take a deeper look at the zombie in order to suggest its usefulness as an ontic/hauntic<sup>6</sup> object that speaks to some of the most puzzling elements of our sociohistorical moment, wherein many are trying to ascertain what lies in store for humanity after global capitalism—if anything.

Our fundamental assertion is that there is an irreconcilable tension

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and *Biohazard*. See *All Things Zombie*, [http://www.allthingszombie.com/comics\\_reviews.php](http://www.allthingszombie.com/comics_reviews.php).

3. “Longtime collaborators Christof Koch and Francis Crick (of DNA helix fame) think that ‘zombie agents’—that is, routine behaviors that we perform constantly without even thinking—are so much a central facet of human consciousness that they deserve serious scientific attention” (“Zombie Behaviors Are Part of Everyday Life, According to Neurobiologists,” February 11, 2004, Caltech Media Relations, [http://pr.caltech.edu/media/Press\\_Releases/PR12491.html](http://pr.caltech.edu/media/Press_Releases/PR12491.html)).

4. “Zombie functions” or “zombie processes” in computer science refer to multiple functions including: “1. Term used to describe a process that is doing nothing but utilizing system resources. 2. A computer that has been maliciously setup to do work of another program or users. A zombie computer is often a computer or server that has been compromised to help a malicious user perform a Denial Of Service attack (DoS) or DDoS attack. 3. When referring to chat or IRC, a zombie or ghost refers to a user who has lost connection but their user is still logged into the chat server” (“zombie,” *Computer Hope*, <http://www.computerhope.com/jargon/z/zombie.htm>).

5. After scientists at the University of Pittsburgh’s Safar Center for Resuscitation Research “announced that they have found a way to revive dogs three hours after clinical death,” articles referred to the experiment as involving “zombie dogs” (*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, June 29, 2005). A recent edition of the *New York Times* Sunday business section ran an article declaring the existence of “Biotech Zombies,” corporations that should be financially extinct yet continue to survive (*New York Times*, February 11, 2007). A shooting occurred at what was termed a “zombie rave” in Seattle (*Seattle Times*, March 25, 2006).

6. In part, we are claiming that there is such a thing as a materially real zombie; thus, an ontic object, for our interest, is not just in the zombie as an epistemic thing. However, we are also, following Derrida, taking up the paradoxical nature of the zombie as neither being nor nonbeing; but, of course, the zombie is more substantial than the ghost. The zombie resides somewhere between the ontic and the hauntic. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

between global capitalism and the theoretical school of posthumanism. This is an essay full of zombies—the historical, folkloric zombie of Haitian origin, which reveals much about the subject position and its relationship to a Master/Slave dialectic; the living-dead zombie of contemporary film, who seems increasingly to be lurching off the screen and into our real world (as a metaphor, this zombie reveals much about the way we code inferior subjects as unworthy of life); and finally, we are putting forth a zombie that does not yet exist: a thought-experiment that exposes the limits of posthuman theory and shows that we can get posthuman only at the death of the subject. Unlike Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," we do not propose that the position of the zombie is a liberating one—indeed, in its history, and in its metaphors, the zombie is most often a slave. However, our intention is to illustrate that 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.

We propose that reading the zombie as an ontic/hauntic object reveals much about the crisis of human embodiment, the way power works, and the history of man's subjugation and oppression of its "Others." Herein, we trace the zombie from its Haitian origins to its most recent incarnations in popular culture. Given the fact that there are multiple valences in play, it seems best to designate the distinction typographically: there is the Haitian *zombi*, a body raised from the dead to labor in the fields, but with a deep association of having played a role in the Haitian Revolution (thus, simultaneously resonant with the categories of slave and slave rebellion);<sup>7</sup> and there is also the *zombie*, the American importation of the monster, which in its cinematic incarnation has morphed into a convenient boogeyman representing various social concerns. The *zombie* can also be a metaphoric state claimed for oneself or imposed on someone else. This zombie has been made to stand for capitalist drone (*Dawn of the Dead*)<sup>8</sup> and Communist sympathizer (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*),<sup>9</sup> and, increasingly, viral

7. Voodoo rituals were commonly used to communicate and motivate antiwhite sentiment leading up to the Haitian Revolution. See Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789–1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 47. In many accounts, there is some suggestion that the hordes that rose up to throw off the yoke of oppression had, through Voodoo practices, rendered themselves insensible to pain.

8. *Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (Laurel Group, 1978), and *2004 Remake*.

9. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, directed by Philip Kaufman (Solofilm, 1978).

contamination (*28 Days Later*). In its passage from *zombi* to *zombie*, this figuration that was at first just a somnambulistic slave singly raised from the dead became evil, contagious, and plural. Our manifesto proclaims the future possibility of the *zombii*, a consciousnessless being that is a swarm organism, and the only imaginable specter that could really be posthuman.

### 1. Zombi(i)/es, an Introduction

A recent piece of humorous literature, Max Brooks's *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*, is written as an instruction manual for defeating an onslaught of zombie attacks. The book also may come close to revealing what it is about the zombie that captivates the human imagination: "Conventional warfare is useless against these creatures, as is conventional thought. The science of ending life, developed and perfected since the beginning of our existence, cannot protect us from an enemy that has no 'life' to end."<sup>10</sup> Its immortality is a defining attribute of the zombie that both terrifies and tantalizes. As Brooks notes, in an age when weapons of mass destruction can wipe out whole cities at will, the formidable foe is one who cannot be destroyed by being deprived of "life." Or, as a recent commercial advertising the B movie *Return of the Living Dead: Necropolis* boasts, "You cannot kill what is already dead."<sup>11</sup>

During the summer of 2005, much media hype surrounded the release of *Land of the Dead*, George Romero's final installment of his zombie series. In a television interview promoting this latest movie, Romero was asked what he would do if zombies were to take over the planet. He responded that he would go right out and get bitten: "That way I could live forever," he said. The irony is that while the statement prompts us to ask what kind of *life* that would be, it reveals that our fascination with the zombie is, in part, a celebration of its immortality and a recognition of ourselves as enslaved to our bodies.

Why does the zombie terrify, and what explains the enduring currency of the zombie threat? Is it merely that the zombie mocks our mortality, and if so, is the fear it inspires different from that of other immortal monsters, like the vampire? One psychoanalytic interpretation purports that we are most acutely aware of ourselves as subjects when we feel afraid—spe-

10. Max Brooks, *A Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* (New York: Three Rivers Press/Random House, 2003), xiii.

11. *Return of the Living Dead: Necropolis*, directed by Ellory Elkayem (Denholm Trading Inc., 2005).

cifically, when we feel threatened by a force external to our bodies.<sup>12</sup> Quite simply, fear heightens our awareness of ourselves as individuals because our individuality is endangered in life-threatening situations. Nowhere is this drama more acutely embodied than in the model of the zombie attack: for the zombie is an antisubject, and the zombie horde is a swarm where no trace of the individual remains.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, unlike the vampire, the zombie poses a twofold terror: There is the primary fear of being devoured by a zombie, a threat posed mainly to the physical body, and the secondary fear that one will, in losing one's consciousness, become a part of the monstrous horde. Both of these fears reflect recognition of one's own mortality and ultimately reveal the primal fear of losing the "self"; however, in the figure of the zombie, the body and the mind are separated antinomies. The zombie is different from other monsters because the body is resurrected and retained: only consciousness is permanently lost. Like the vampire and the werewolf, the zombie threatens with its material form. Whereas the vampire and even the intangible ghost retain their mental faculties, and the werewolf may become irrational, bestial only part of time, only the zombie has completely lost its mind, becoming a blank—animate, but wholly devoid of consciousness.<sup>14</sup>

The terror that comes from an identification of oneself with the zom-

12. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno write, "The mere idea of the 'outside' is the real source of fear," connecting this primal emotion to self-preservation and the economy's hold on the individual" (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002], 11). For another interesting discussion of fear, see Julia Kristeva's chapter "Suffering and Horror," in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 140–56, in which fear is described as crucial to subject formation.

13. Though the vampire may, in some legends, travel in packs, it seems always very definitely to retain its individuality. The exception might be the 1964 film *Last Man on Earth*, directed by Ubaldo Ragona (Associated Producers Inc., 1964), which spawned the 1971 sequel *The Omega Man*, directed by Boris Sagal (Warner Brothers Pictures, 1971), based on Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend* (New York: Fawcett, 1954). (A remake of the same title is slated for release in December 2007.) Though the epidemic overrunning the planet causes "vampirism," the narrative can be understood as belonging to the genre of the zombie plague film: the creatures are nonconscious, and a bacterial outbreak has caused the pandemic.

14. Our ghost stories, in which the body is lost but consciousness remains, usually focus on the individual being threatened or terrorized by a ghost; we do not often see throngs of ghosts infecting others so that they too will become ghosts. The reason for this may be its inability to inspire fear: to live forever and still get to be yourself—would that really be so terrible?

bie is, therefore, primarily a fear of the loss of consciousness. As unconscious but animate flesh, the zombie emphasizes that humanity is defined by its cognizance. The lumbering, decaying specter of the zombie also affirms the inherent disability of human embodiment—our mortality. Thus, in some sense, we are all already zombies (but not yet zombiis), for they represent the inanimate end to which we each are destined.<sup>15</sup> Yet the zombie is intriguing not only for the future it foretells but also for what it says about humanity's experience of lived frailty and the history of civilization, which grapples with mortality in its structure as well as in its stories. Humanity defines itself by its individual consciousness and its personal agency: to be a body without a mind is to be subhuman, animal; to be a human without agency is to be a prisoner, a slave. The zombi(i)/e is both of these, and the zombi(i)/e (fore)tells our past, present, and future.

In its origins and in its folkloric incarnations, the zombi is quite literally a slave, raised by Voodoo priests to labor in the fields, but the zombie metaphor also reveals to us our own enslavement to our finite and fragile bodies. As Plato wrote, "the body is the tomb of the soul." Just as the slave's own body becomes his prison, the zombie illustrates humanity's inherent imprisonment, if by counterpoint. The zombie shows us what we are: irrevocably bound to our bodies and already married to the grave. But the zombie also shows us what we are not: man, as we know him, as a cognizant, living creature, does not outlive the death of his body. As such, the zombie metaphor (like its mythological parent, the Haitian *zombi*) is not purely a slave but is also slave rebellion. While the human is incarcerated in mortal flesh, the zombie presents a grotesque image that resists this confinement—animating his body even beyond death. At the same time that the zombie emphasizes human embodiment, he also defies the very limits that he sets. What underlies this symbolic duality, however, is that the zombie, neither mortal nor conscious, is a boundary figure. Its threat to stable subject and object positions, through the simultaneous occupation of a body that is both living and dead, creates a dilemma for power relations and risks destroying social dynamics that have remained—although widely questioned, critiqued, and debated—largely unchallenged in the current economic superstructure.

15. Many film critics have offered this kind of psychoanalytic reading of the zombie. See, for example, Jamie Russell's discussion of the zombie and Kristeva in his *Book of the Dead* (Godalming, England: FAB Press, 2005), 136. Here we present this distinction: the zombie is a metaphoric comparison that can be casually adopted for such discussions; the zombii is always the truly consciousnessless posthuman.

We attempt to read the zombie as a more effective imagining of posthumanism than the cyborg because of its indebtedness to narratives of historical power and oppression, and we stress the zombie's relevance as a theoretical model that, like the cyborg, crashes borders. Simultaneously living and dead, subject and object, slave and slave rebellion, the zombie presents a posthuman specter informed by the (negative) dialectic of power relations rather than gender. In this essay, we outline the various conversations with which we might put the zombie in dialogue: with Marxist and postcolonial discourse, with psychoanalysis and history, and most promisingly, with philosophy and posthumanist theory.

Borrowing the title and the spirit of Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," one of the inaugurating texts of "posthuman theory," we argue here that the zombie can be made to speak only as a somewhat ironic discursive model. The zombie is anticatharsis; thus, "a zombie manifesto" is one that cannot call for positive change, it calls only for the destruction of the reigning model.<sup>16</sup> Though our essay is at times tongue in cheek and aware of the absurdity of its own suggestions (rather like the zombie film genre itself, which often celebrates itself as "schlock" and "camp"), we are never mocking Haraway's pivotal and enduring piece. We are greatly indebted to the "Cyborg Manifesto," and this is our homage. However, this essay is not a utopic fantasy in which man is liberated from the subject/object conundrum, nor is it a riotous celebration of the apocalypse that would ensue if humanity were able to get free of the subject/object bind. Mostly, it is an ironic imagining of what some of the philosophical concepts that have such currency in critical theory, such as "posthumanism," "negative dialectics," and the "rupture," which is awaited as the second coming of poststructuralism, might look like if incarnated in material form, our zombii.

That said, we do feel that the zombii solves several problems that the cyborg model failed to adequately address: specifically, we read the zombie with and against humanist philosophy and psychoanalysis, but we also discuss the historical significance of the zombie as boundary marker and read it in the context of a Marxist theory of power dynamics, colonialism, and industry. In outlining these various discourses that have defined humanity, we ultimately suggest what a true "posthuman" would look like.

As a figure defined by its liminality, the zombii illustrates our doubts about humanity in an era in which the human condition may be experi-

16. Jamie Russell notes that this is the dominant mode of the "progressive fantasy" of the zombie film: "the old order is overturned without *anything* being offered in its place" (*Book of the Dead*, 83).

encing a crisis of conscience as well as a crisis of consciousness. We will present the zombii as a model of posthuman consciousness (one that is postcyborg) in dispute with the capitalist era's *homo-laborans*, as well as a body that speaks to the psyche's fears of dissolution; the zombii is both an effective model for imagining the condition of posthumanity and, quite literally, a post(mortem) human. Above all else, the zombii's "negative dialectic"<sup>17</sup> reshapes the way we think about the boundary between subject/object, resonating especially with the roles of master/slave that so profoundly inform our own sense of human embodiment. We will investigate the significance of the zombi(i)/e across various cultural planes, interrogating the origins of this monstrous figure and proposing some examples of what we ironically posit as "*real-life*" zombies. But first we must turn to the theoretical questions that lead us to the figure of the zombie, in order to show how our historical and economic moment summons this apparition as our most apt metaphor.

## 2. The Zombie's Brain

Filmmakers and critics have noted the resonance of the zombie with the factory worker's mechanistic performance, the brain-dead, ideology-fed servant of industry, and the ever-yawning mouth of the nation-state. The individual under capitalism is often characterized as a zombie.<sup>18</sup> But as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno write, our zombie individuality is one that relies on the *illusion* of self: Under such a system, "nothing is left of him but that eternally same *I think* that must accompany all ideas. Subject and object are both rendered ineffectual."<sup>19</sup> What Horkheimer and Adorno and others illustrate is that the illusory separation of subject and object, the *fata morgana* of individualism, keeps happy the camp of zombies—the slaves to capitalism who are merely deluded into thinking that they are free. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that subject and object are rendered

17. Theodor W. Adorno "developed the idea of a dialectic of non-identity from a certain distance; Adorno gave this idea the name 'negative dialectics'" (Rolf Tiedemann, "Editor's Afterword" to Adorno's *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000], 191).

18. This trope is so common that even an episode of the children's show *SpongeBob SquarePants* overtly draws this connection, when a character thought to be a zombie takes his rightful place behind a cash register. See "Once Bitten," *SpongeBob SquarePants*, written by Casey Alexander, Chris Mitchell, and Steven Banks, season 4, episode 73b, September 29, 2006.

19. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 26.



ineffectual categories under capitalism, as the commodity fetish animates objects, and reification objectifies the worker. But identifying this conflation is not enough—in the figure of zombie, subject and object are obliterated. This figure, simultaneously slave and slave rebellion, is a more appropriate reflection of our capitalist moment, and even if it holds less promise than a cyborg future, its prophesy of the posthuman is more likely to come to fruition. The zombie, we feel, is a more pessimistic but nonetheless more appropriate stand-in for our current moment, and specifically for America in a global economy, where we feed off the products of the rest of the planet, and, alienated from our own humanity, stumble forward, groping for immortality even as we decompose. For Marx, the efficiency of large-scale industry relies on the division of labor that is accomplished “by converting the worker into a living appendage of the machine.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, reified as a part of the process of production, the subject has already bled into the object: we are already dwelling in the zombie’s interzone.

The history of thought concerning power relations and our servitude to global capitalism has pointed to the humanist constructions of “mind,” “self,” and the sanctity of “the individual” as the bars of our imprisonment. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno show that subjectivity remains but a fiction that allows for ideological control.<sup>21</sup> They write, “Subjectivity has volatilized itself into the logic of supposedly optional rules, to gain more absolute control. Positivism, which finally did not shrink from laying hands on the idlest fancy of all, thought itself, eliminated the last intervening agency between individual action and the social norm.”<sup>22</sup> For thought to break out of the grasp of ideology, which ultimately serves the economic system, it must be devoid of all positivist claims. When it comes to metaphysics, Adorno’s model of negative dialectics is preferred, “since reason itself has become merely an aid to the all-encompassing economic apparatus.”<sup>23</sup>

For us, the zombii is an enactment of negative dialectics. The living-dead, which cannot be divided into parts constitutive of the categories it

20. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (1867), trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 614.

21. “In the bourgeois economy the social work of each individual is mediated by the principle of the self; for some this labor is supposed to yield increased capital, for others the strength for extra work. But the more this process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labor, the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul” (in Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 23).

22. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 23.

23. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 23.

bridges, raises the insufficiency of the dialectical model. The kind of dialectic the zombii incarnates is not one that strives for resolution; indeed, it cannot, for as we've said, the zombie, by its very definition, is anticatharsis, antiresolution: it proposes no third term reconciling the subject/object split, the lacuna between life and death. The zombie is opposition held irrevocably in tension. We are interested in reading the zombii as a "determinate negation" of the individual in the postindustrial, post-Holocaust era, for the zombie is not merely the negation of the subject: it takes the subject and nonsubject, and makes these terms obsolete because it is inherently both at once. The zombii's lack of consciousness does not make it pure object but rather opens up the possibility of a negation of the subject/object divide. It is not, like the cyborg, a hybrid, nor is it like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's schizophrenic, a multiplicity; rather, the zombii is a paradox that disrupts the entire system.<sup>24</sup>

As we've suggested, our model of the zombii is motivated by our search for a new mode in which to discuss the posthuman subject. A subject that is truly posthumanist would be a subject that is not a subject. Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" sought to resolve the antagonism between subject and object binary by reimagining the chasm between the two through the hybrid. In the end, however, the text seems to propose that the subject itself can dissolve the boundary between subject and object through a process of inclusion. Critics have exposed the limitations of this figuration of the cyborg as posthuman. N. Katherine Hayles complicated the model of the cyborg with her argument that the posthuman had lost its body but kept its identification with the Enlightenment position of the liberal humanist subject.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the cyborg does not really undo the subject position as much as it just cloaks it in high-tech window dressing. As Hayles and others

24. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer their concept of "Schizoanalysis" in place of Psychoanalysis. See *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). Their Schizophrenic "General Freud" is replaced by "the unconscious as an acentered system, in other words, as a machinic network of finite automata (a rhizome)" (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], 18). Deleuze and Guattari discuss the zombie, vampire, and werewolf; however, they are interested in these figures and their narratives as "becomings" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 249). Though we are interested in examining the zombie epidemic and its relation to bacterial transformation (something that deeply interests Deleuze and Guattari), we primarily identify the zombie as an "unbecoming."

25. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287.

suggest, to truly move *posthuman*, we have to shirk not the body but the Enlightenment subject position. In contrast, the zombii does not reconcile subject and object, but, rather, as walking antithesis, holds them as irrevocably separate; in the figure of the zombii, the subject position is nullified, not reinvigorated.

We contend that the only way to accurately model a *posthuman* state is the “neither/nor” of the zombii, which rejects both subject and object categories, and is irreducible, anticathartic, antiresolution, and working in the mode of negative dialectics. We put forth the zombii as an analogy to humanity as it exists today and (simultaneously) as a foreboding of a “monstrous future.”<sup>26</sup> We avoid making the zombii a “metaphor” for post-humanism, for a metaphor implies equivalence; the analogy connotes only unspecified ratio, and thus, just as the “zombii” manifesto is one which cannot advocate a new model, the zombii analogy functions negatively to suggest only the form, not the substance, of the figural relationship between humanity and its antitheses.<sup>27</sup>

The cyborg seemed to undo the tensions of the opposing slash, which organized life into binary categories (male/female, master/slave, subject/object), and suggested that the model of the hybrid evinced the dissolution of difference. The zombie metaphor itself goes beyond the hybrid by virtue of its inseparability into distinct terms. It is itself an incarnation of presence-absence, yet it complicates the subject/object position because it is the *livingdead*. What we learned from the cyborg is that it is not enough to negate the model “either/or” by claiming “both/and.” The zombii doesn’t merely do this—in functioning as analogy, it replaces any preposition that could articulate the relation of zombii to human; there is no term joining subject and object. The body of the zombii is itself this indeterminable boundary.

In most contemporary cinematic versions, to kill a zombie, one must destroy its brain. To successfully undo the position of the liberal humanist subject, which has been tainted by an inhumane history shaped by power relations that were perhaps suggested by the opposition of subject and object, one must forfeit the already illusory sense of the individual. In the

26. As Franco Moretti would say, “The monster expresses the anxiety that the future will be monstrous” (see “Dialectic of Fear,” in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* [London: Verso, 1988], 84).

27. However, the zombie is obviously a metaphor and an allegory in several other regards, especially in the filmmaker’s vision; in contemporary cinema, for example, we could say that the zombie is an allegory of contagious disease.

preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno write, “The individual is entirely nullified in face of the economic powers. These powers are taking society’s domination over nature to unimagined heights. While individuals as such are vanishing before the apparatus they serve, they are provided for by that apparatus and better than ever before.”<sup>28</sup> If, as Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, the individual is a fiction conjured by the economic structure to ensure greater domination, then for us the only answer to this bind comes in the form of the zombii—a literalization of what has already happened: the death of the individual that continues to lumber forward. The zombii thus suggests how we might truly move posthuman: the individual must be destroyed. With this rupture, we would undo the repressive forces of capitalist servitude. But at what cost? The zombii’s dystopic promise is that it can only assure the destruction of a corrupt system without imagining a replacement—for the zombii can offer no resolution.

### 3. The Zombie’s Body

The zombie is historically tied to, and has been read alongside, the expansion of global capitalism.<sup>29</sup> The zombie is a colonial import: it infiltrated the American cultural imagination in the early twentieth century, at the time of the U.S. occupation of Haiti. We cannot take up the figure of the zombie without acknowledging its appropriation from Haitian folklore. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said warns that what may appear “to be detached and apolitical cultural disciplines” actually often depend “upon a quite sordid history of imperialist ideology and colonialist practice.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, though the Haitian zombi has been “cannibalized” by Western film and horror mythology, and though the zombie can therefore be read as a racist denigration of a “savage” people, there is also so much said by the power implicit in this monster’s history; the zombie narrative is, in some ways, a reprisal of the Haitian Revolution and a story of slave rebellion. The

28. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvii.

29. The association of zombies with the capitalist automaton is long standing, but for a recent discussion of how other cinematic monsters “embody the violent contradictions of capitalism,” see Annalee Newitz, *Pretend We’re Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). For a discussion of images of the undead in Marx, see Robert Latham, *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

30. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: First Vintage Edition/Knopf, 1994), 41.

Haitian slave literally threw off the yoke of colonial servitude, but the country has had an unhappy national history, plagued by foreign occupation, civil unrest, and disease. Similarly, the zombi/e seems to embody this kind of disappointment: it only symbolically defies mortality, and woefully at that: even the zombie's survival of death is anticelibratory, for it remains trapped in a corpse body.

We might read the revision of the zombie qua capitalist as yet another imperialist act—one that dispels the dark fury of the slave and, in turning the iconography inside out, makes the zombie's insatiable hunger figure the white consumer instead, effectively swallowing the slave body as the icon is reappropriated. On some level, this narrativizing recuperates the insurmountable power of the zombie so that it allegorizes the imperial, the colonial, the capitalist structure, rather than the lowly black body.

Our arrival at a historical moment in which the zombie, above other metaphors, reflects the state of the human/posthuman moment must be traced back to the colonial roots of the figure. In Haitian folklore, from which all zombies are derived, the word *zombie* meant not just “a body without a soul” but also “a soul without a body.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the issue of boundaries was never limiting for this mythological figure.<sup>32</sup> However, in contemporary incarnations, the zombie has a fluid body that transgresses its borders by infecting those it bites; the Haitian zombi could only be created by a non-zombi. Thus, in its articulation of Western fears of the infectious spirit of rebellion, this trend manifests itself in the cinematic zombie in a metaphor of ubiquitous contagion.

In Daniel Cohen's excavation of Haitian folklore rituals, he notes that the embodied zombi is first understood as a soulless, animate corpse and reminds us, “The zombie is not inherently evil, like a vampire; it is

31. David Cohen, *Voodoo, Devils, and the Invisible World* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1972), 59. Spellings of the word differ in the literature: we have seen *zombii*, *zombi*, and *zombie*, all used to refer to the product of Haitian Voodoo. Here we keep to Alfred Métraux's spelling, *zombi*, from *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (London: Deutsch, 1972), in order to make visually apparent the distinction between the Haitian zombi and the cinematic, ontological zombie, except where another spelling has been used in a quotation.

32. The origin of the word *zombie* is debatable. Some speculate it comes from the French *ombres* (shadows); most believe it has African origins, and that the Bonda word *zumbi* came to Haiti via Portuguese slave traders. See Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 18.

merely a servant.”<sup>33</sup> Cohen notes that zombis were believed to be created, raised from the dead, by a *hungan*, a witch doctor, so that they could work in the fields at night.<sup>34</sup> That the zombie myth is deeply connected with slavery is obvious, though critics have proffered different readings of the significance of the monster’s origins. One anthropologist, Francis Huxley, claims that the *zombi* is an expression of the population’s endurance of slavery.<sup>35</sup> Cohen writes, “Others have speculated that the zombie is sort of a slave’s nightmare. For the slave the only hope of release was death and the possible promise of a blissful afterlife. But if a dead slave’s body was reanimated for labor as a zombie, then the slave existence would continue even after death, a particularly horrible thought.”<sup>36</sup> The roots of the zombie can be traced back to the Haitian Revolution, when reports of the rebelling slaves depicted them as nearly supernatural: “fanatic and insensate hordes of blacks rose as a single body to overwhelm the more ‘rational’ white troops.”<sup>37</sup> The conflict began in “1791, two years after the French Revolution, [when] the colony was shaken and then utterly destroyed by the only successful slave revolt in history.”<sup>38</sup> The war lasted twelve years, and the native population defeated the most powerful armies of Europe. The insurgents’ battle cry was said to be “We have no mother, no child; What is death?”<sup>39</sup> The slave could not lay claim to family relations because all persons involved were the possessions of their masters; likewise, the zombie has no kin and has lost ownership even of itself.

The zombie is currently understood as simultaneously powerless and powerful, slave and slave rebellion; this is central to our understanding of it as a boundary figure. The dual potential of the *zombi* to represent both slave and slave rebellion is key to its capture of the Western imagination. In acknowledging its appropriation—and potential *misappropriation* for ideological purposes—we must not disconnect the zombie from its past.

33. Cohen, *Voodoo, Devils, and the Invisible World*, 60. How the zombie became evil is also of great interest; why the zombie became conflated with that other “savage” stereotype, the cannibal, is, we think, only too obvious.

34. It was Wade Davis who suggested that the reality behind this folk belief might have been indebted to the use of tetrodotoxin, a neurotoxin derived from the poisonous puffer fish, but his work is now considered controversial. See Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 117.

35. Cohen, *Voodoo, Devils, and the Invisible World*, 60.

36. Cohen, *Voodoo, Devils, and the Invisible World*, 60.

37. Davis, *Passage of Darkness*, 20.

38. Davis, *Passage of Darkness*, 18.

39. Davis, *Passage of Darkness*, 20.

However, if the contemporary zombie body is an indeterminable boundary, no site is perhaps more emblematic of that omnipresent permeability, and insatiable hunger, than the zombie's mouth. For it is always at the mouth that the zombie feeds, and it is where the physical boundary between zombie and not-zombie is effaced, through its bite.

As a nonconscious, consuming machine, the cinematic zombie terrifies because it is a reflection of modern-day commercial society, propelled only by its need to perpetually consume. In this fairly common interpretation of the zombie as capitalist icon, the monstrous figure of global capitalism is fed on the labors of the impoverished, "third world" labor force. The zombie has thus transitioned from a representation of the laboring, enslaved colonial body, to a dual image of capitalist enslavement: the zombie now represents the new slave, the capitalist worker, but also the consumer, trapped within the ideological construct that assures the survival of the system. This ravenous somnambulist, blindly stumbling toward its next meal, is a machine that performs but two functions: it consumes, and it makes more consumers. Despite the Haitian zombi's roots as imperial slave, the Hollywood zombie of today does not produce anything except more zombies.

Aside from this difference in production, we must pause to consider more deeply the difference between the zombie and the slave. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt identifies the ancient justification of slavery as an attempt to shift the burden of human necessity; she states that men "could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force."<sup>40</sup> Both zombie and slave are subject to pure necessity, but the slave is performing someone else's labor, more like a machine, while the zombie labors for no one and produces only more zombies. The zombie's reproductive drive, in the service of zombie "society" (if it can be classified as such), is either an unconscious urge or a mere side effect of its own hunger, for it is through its bite that the zombie reproduces itself. Therefore, the zombie cannot even really be said to have two separate functions—consumption and reproduction—for the zombie reproduces as it consumes. Thus, the urge of self-preservation is united with the propagation of the species: the urge of the individual body is the same as the will of the collective. Incidentally, this mirrors what Adorno defines as the "rational" impulse that ensures the success of capitalism: the desires of the individual and the state merge.

40. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 84.

The figure of the infectious, consuming zombie illustrates humanity's attempt to transfer its burden onto others—as well as our fears of increasingly publicized diseases. In its frenzied state of pure consumption, the zombie seeks to infect those who do not yet share in the oppression of their state: the zombie does not attack other zombies.<sup>41</sup> It seeks to transfer its burden, but the result is only a multiplication of its condition: no zombie body is relieved of its condition by passing it on. Therefore the zombie once again deters the possibility of catharsis. The boundary between man and slave that allows one to shift the burden of necessity onto the other—whether in ancient Greek society or in the global capitalist superstructure of today—is threatened by the zombie: no appetite is sated, all become slaves.

This danger is evident in the figure of the cinematic zombie and its infection of public space. The zombie body is often seen in the public sphere: town squares, cemeteries, schools, streets, and even in malls—providing overt social critique. The fear that the public realm is being invaded by pure necessity, or pure consumption, is expressed through the drama of the inhuman, ever-consuming zombie. For Arendt, the capitalist system's "waste economy" results in the ills of "mass culture," wherein "things must be almost as quickly devoured and discarded as they have appeared in the world."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, we see that the insatiable zombie of contemporary cinema incarnates this kind of social critique and forebodes capitalism's monstrous future.<sup>43</sup>

The zombie's collapsed subject/object status recalls, as no other monstrous or posthuman figure can, that this distinctive feature describes both the automaton and the slave. Though the zombie is incapable of thought, it is a two-headed monster. Zombies, like all things that are feared, are the products of the culture that shapes them and bear within their myths the imprint of existing social conditions. Marxist theory reso-

41. Our conflation of the singular and plural pronouns here is intentional, for the zombie is neither single nor plural.

42. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 134.

43. A comparison of the 1978 *Dawn of the Dead* with the 2004 remake exemplifies the significance of the zombie's ability to adapt in order to take on current societal fears. Many similarities remain in the remake, particularly the setting in a shopping mall, but one striking difference is the speed with which the zombies move. The 2004 zombies are notably faster than those of 1978. This trend may parallel the rate at which the capitalist necessity of consumption drives us forward, toward "devouring" and "discarding," as Arendt and Paul Virilio warned.



nates with many aspects of this ominous figure (on the most obvious level, the zombie resembles both brain-eating consumer and zombified worker in one), but it can also be read as a fulcrum joining psychoanalytic and materialist approaches.

The zombie speaks to humanity's anxiety about its isolation within the individual body, and our mortality is burlesqued by the zombie's grotesque defiance of the human's finite existence, thus calling into question which is more terrifying: our ultimate separation from our fellow humans, or the dystopic fantasy of a swarm organism. What we see in examining the historical trajectory of the zombie's evolution is that our fears, the mediating impulses that translate our psychological makeup, are narratives informed by the material conditions of society. If the zombie articulates anxiety about the division of body and mind/soul, through history this narrative takes on various trappings of political and social crises. The zombie is not purely an expression of the pressing social concerns of the historical moment in which it appears (be it colonization, slavery, or capitalist servitude), but, rather, it is given structure by these historical events and at bottom represents a crisis as old as the mind itself, concerning the mortality of the flesh. In order to see how the zombie obliterates the fascistic structure of the subject/object split, we have to understand the broader way in which the zombie reconfigures power dynamics—not just between those who make other humans into objects but also between the agentic, conscious subject and the body as object.

#### 4. Real Live Zombies

The vulnerability of the flesh and the instinctual fear of its decay, as well as the dissolution of consciousness—all things that happen as we approach death—are suggested in the monstrous hyperbolic of the zombie as living corpse. The corpse represents the inherent and inseparable thing-character of human existence, that inanimate state to which we must return.<sup>44</sup> The corpse itself has the ability to terrify by implication, but the animate corpse, a walking contradiction, may frighten most deeply because it represents not only our future but our present. Our bodies are something that we may fear and reject, but from which we cannot part. The zombie as bodily specter thus refutes the resistance to embodiment of which

44. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva writes of the “waste body, the corpse body,” that blurs the line between the “inanimate and the inorganic” (109).

many posthumanist models are accused.<sup>45</sup> Like most monsters, the zombie illuminates our own discomfort with various kinds of bodies, but above all it illustrates the ever-present and real threat of the human body. We are all, in some sense, walking corpses, because this is inevitably the state to which we must return. In imagining that humans are burdened with their own deaths, we can come to see one of the various ways that the zombie terrifies: not as an apocalyptic vision but as a representation of the lived human condition.

We have tried to describe the zombie as it exists in historical and philosophic inquiry, and to propose how it can be read in dialogue with Marxist theory. Here we want to put forth a few examples of “real-life zombies” (pardon the paradoxes), in order to illustrate that the indeterminability of the zombie as boundary figure extends to its undecidability as metaphoric or literal, fantastic or real, for this vein of inquiry opens up a discussion of the various power dynamics that are put into play when we take up the zombii as an ontic object.

In Julia Kristeva’s investigation of the “waste body” of the corpse, she refers to the puerperal fever epidemic that was caused by the introduction of bacteria from decaying bodies into the open wombs of delivering women: “Puerperal fever is the result of the female genitalia being contaminated by a corpse; here then is a fever where what bears life passes over to the side of the dead body. [A] distracting moment when opposites (life/death, feminine/masculine) join.”<sup>46</sup> In this example, we see the first of the real-life zombies that we want to posit. This is also an interesting moment where the Western doctor lines up with the Haitian hungan as zombi(e) makers. The woman afflicted with puerperal fever was a zombie, a combination of dead and living flesh, if only at the molecular level.<sup>47</sup> Many critics are concerned with illustrating how monsters betray a distrust and discomfort with certain kinds of bodies. The female body has often been characterized as the bor-

45. The posthumanist vision, which exhibits a willingness to disappear into the machine, or to dissolve into cyberspace, is refuted by critics like N. Katherine Hayles, Anne Balsamo, and Deleuze and Guattari, who characterize the overthrow of the material world as either a “nightmare” vision or a flat impossibility, rather than an empowering fantasy.

46. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 159–60. See also Adrienne Rich’s detailed account of the epidemic in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976).

47. One such zombie, a real-life woman who was destroyed by puerperal fever, was Mary Wollstonecraft. It is not without significance that her daughter, Mary Shelley, went on to produce a literary zombie, Frankenstein’s monster: a man who was a composite of living and dead tissues.

der between life and death.<sup>48</sup> In the example of the woman with puerperal fever, therefore, this distrust of the female body's ability to regenerate itself, zombie-style, is metaphorized as the reproductive woman becomes a living corpse.

Most critics note that the concept of monstrosity is deeply associated with disabled bodies.<sup>49</sup> The same should, of course, be said of zombies. The mentally ill historically have been portrayed as having a consciousness that is morally suspect or a total lack of subjectivity. As Giorgio Agamben notes, "incurable idiots"<sup>50</sup> were on the Nazis' list of those who occupy the indeterminate state wherein they could be supposed to have neither the will to live nor the desire to die; this is used as justification for their extermination.<sup>51</sup> As a monster without consciousness and without speech, the zombie recalls the mentally ill or the language impaired, such as those with aphasia. Even the lumbering gait of the cinematic zombie, which probably is meant to reflect rigor mortis and advanced decay, looks like a muscular disorder.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault notes many of the treatments that were used to cure mental illness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the rituals associated with attempts to purify the body was the bizarre notion that the corruption of the mind could be prevented if the living body was embalmed like a corpse.<sup>52</sup> In this way, treatment of the mentally ill made them into symbolic zombies long before

48. Kristeva writes of the "desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body," in *Powers of Horror*, 54. Even the healthy maternal body is made a symbol of this border between life and death; elsewhere, we might argue that the zombie is primarily a female monster.

49. See Lennard J. Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Erin O'Connor, *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).

50. Giorgio Agamben's discussion of "incurable idiots" stems from his analysis of the Nazi document *Authorization for the Annihilation of Life Unworthy of Being Lived* (1920)—the "first appearance on the European juridical scene" of the concept of "life that does not deserve to be lived"—in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 137.

51. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 138.

52. Herbs typically used to preserve the dead, like myrrh and aloe, were administered to the patients. Thus the living body was ritually embalmed to prevent the decay of the mind, as the dead are preserved after death, including treatment with bitters, vinegar, and soap, as well as bloodlettings and the cauterization of open sores. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1988), 163.

failed shock treatment and botched lobotomies would, by causing severe brain damage, make them more literally resemble the animated corpses incapable of demonstrating agency or expression that we see in film.

The embalmed madmen are real-life zombies: like the women with puerperal fever, who were contaminated with the bacteria that infest corpses, these were real bodies that straddled the civic and social border which determines the difference between the living and the dead. Just as the cyborg is a body implemented with or affected by technology, these real-life zombies also, on a microlevel, contain within their forms the attributes of the corpse. In the example of the embalmed madmen, we see how the social death of the mentally ill, deemed inferior, is translated into a literal transgression of these vital boundaries, as the living are construed as already dead and treated accordingly. There is yet a third “real *live* zombie” that we want to put forth, one that is a contemporary example and that we might claim as both a cyborg and a zombie, thus bearing fruitful discussion of the overlap between these two categories: Terri Schiavo.<sup>53</sup>

Several court cases and a media frenzy were sparked by the petition that Michael Schiavo made to have his wife’s feeding tube removed; it was deemed “artificial life support” by one of the ruling judges and brought this woman’s story to national attention. What most interests us here, however, is the aspect of the debate that surrounded Schiavo’s indeterminability as living or dead. Her parents, who opposed their son-in-law’s desires to remove Terri’s feeding tube, released video of Schiavo blinking and appearing to smile. The issue of whether the outward appearance of cognition reflects an internal awareness of one’s circumstances directed the argument. This alludes to the larger discussion that rages in cognitive neuroscience, concerning the various “zombie” agents that comprise what we call consciousness.<sup>54</sup> In order for Michael Schiavo to establish that his wife was truly in a persistently vegetative state, he would have to establish not

53. The undecidability of the coma patient is a long-standing debate, with legal precedents well documented. Giorgio Agamben sites the case of Karen Ann Quinlan, an American girl whose deep coma became a well-known story in the 1980s; he claims her as an example of “pure *zoē*,” or pure “life.” But rather than seeing this pure, merely biological life as an essential form of the living, Agamben identifies Quinlan as “death in motion” and tells us that “life and death are now merely biopolitical concepts” (*Homo Sacer*, 186).

54. John R. Searle, in his review of Christof Koch’s *The Quest for Consciousness*, states, “Philosophers have invented the idea of a ‘zombie’ to describe something that behaves exactly as if it were conscious but is not. . . . Many of the mental processes going on inside a conscious subject, according to Koch, are entirely nonconscious” (“Consciousness: What We Still Don’t Know,” *New York Review of Books* [January 13, 2005], 7).

only that she was unable to communicate but that she was unaware of her surroundings.

This kind of court case pronounces cognizance the determining factor of what constitutes life. If consciousness is found to be illusory, the person in question is decided not to be a “person” at all. The Schiavo debate became the location for a battle between the jurisdiction of the state and the sovereignty of the individual human subject. Therefore, Terri Schiavo’s case illustrates a limit set on human existence wherein those without social power, or those deemed to have inferior consciousness (like the mentally ill), are considered legally dead.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it seems an eerie coincidence worthy of mention that *schivo* means “slave” in Italian, given the origins and continued characterization of the zombie as a slave.

We offer these real-life zombies in direct contrast to Haraway’s cyborgs.<sup>56</sup> For Haraway’s examples of real cyborgs—a seamstress at her sewing machine and a quadriplegic in her wheelchair—becoming cyborg is not purely a material experience but involves a discursive transformation: we become cyborgs when we decide to be cyborgs. Haraway thus requires a moment of cognition, a moment of consciousness, that always insists upon subjectivity. The zombie may entail a material collision of living and dead tissues, as with the women with puerperal fever, or it may merely be a symbolic or figurative construction, as we might say of the Schiavo “zombie,” a comparison that was certainly bandied about in online blogs. Regardless, in the zombii’s purest form as an ontic/hauntic object, transformation must be created outside the body, proclaimed by others. The zombii cannot see itself as such, much less claim a zombie identity for itself.

## 5. The End?

We have looked at many different ways in which the zombie can be conceptualized: we see the zombie as *animal laborans*, the reified laborer of capitalist production, and the zombie as threatening body, the zombie as brain-dead, the zombie as brain eater, the zombie blindly following its

55. Terri Schiavo was determined to be in a purely vegetative state by a Florida court on March 18, 2005, and her feeding tube was subsequently removed. She died on March 31, 2005.

56. Some might claim Schiavo as a cyborg simply because her body was dependent upon machines to sustain her life, but both the zombie and the cyborg are often figured as having suspect consciousness; the automaton and the animate corpse may be the kissing cousins of the fantasy world.

own primal urges; the zombie that is pure necessity, the zombie that is anti-productive, the zombie that is female, the zombie that is avid consumer; we have looked at the zombie as cyborg, the zombie as postcyborg, the zombie as posthuman, the zombie as slave, and as slave rebellion. We have mentioned the zombies of folklore and of cinema, as figurative, as symbolic, as literal, as analogy.

Some might be tempted to say that there is, within these various instantiations, something like a “bad” zombie (which has been reduced to an object by the capitalist system, which works as a slave for others, which loses itself in the machine) and something like a “good” zombie (which resists being a tool of capitalism, which is destructive rather than productive, which resists the rational, which becomes the anti-individual, antsubject). Yet judgment always exists outside of the zombie, as a part of the rational ordering of the world: the “goodness” or “badness” of the zombie only exists within thinking “consciousness.” If the potential of the posthuman subject exists in its collectivity (and in its multiplicity and its hybridity), then the posthuman zombii is that which forfeits consciousness as we know it—embracing a singular, swarm experience. What the zombii reveals, therefore, is that the inauguration of the posthuman can only be the end of capitalism. This is not a utopic vision, nor is it a call to arms. We are merely noting that capitalism and posthumanism are more linked than has been previously articulated: one has to die so that the other can begin. The zombii “knows” (of course, the zombii *knows* nothing) that the posthuman is endgame: it is a becoming that is the end of becomings. This is why the zombii must remain antiresolution, anticatharsis, and cannot speak.

Capitalism depends on our sense of ourselves as having individual consciousnesses to prohibit the development of a revolutionary collective and to bolster the attitude that drives it: every man for himself. Appositely, posthumanity can only really be attained when we pull the trigger on the ego. To kill the zombie, you must destroy the brain, and to move posthuman, to lay humanism and its legacy of power and oppression in the grave, we have to undo our primary systems of differentiation: subject/object, me/you. In fact, these terms cannot be separated—like the deathlife of the zombie, the capitalist superstructure and the posthuman fantasy have been yoked together in a monstrous body, the existence of one state prohibits the presence of the other. It is important to note that the ego has not always been implicated in capitalism’s imperialist, colonial history. Indeed, the slave defied Empire by claiming his individuality, by transgressing the line from object to subject. However, to challenge global capitalism, which

has achieved such a stranglehold on the subject position that there is no outside of ideology, the answer may be to throw off the illusory chains of an “identity” based on the division of subject and object. If the subject survives the apocalypse, so will capitalism. As we see in one recent zombie film, Danny Boyle’s 2002 film *28 Days Later*, the Haitian Revolution is rehearsed with the effect that the individual is spared.

While *28 Days Later* has been identified as a zombie flick, this claim may seem to require some justification. The “monsters” in this picture are not the resurrected dead, though they are people who have lost their rational senses. One of the pivotal scenes occurs near the end of the film. The protagonists have encountered a group of soldiers that prove to be more monstrous than the zombies. The humans are holding them against their will and are about to rape the two women of the group. The soldiers have kept one zombie, a black man, chained up in the courtyard for observation. Here we see zombie “subjectivity” on display, for *it* remains the subject of scientific observation and the powerless subject of dominant force; still the Queen’s subject, the medical subject, and subjected to violence, this zombie has ceased to be an agentic subject and now belongs to the object world. Until, that is, *his* rebellion. With the iron and chains around his neck, this figure cannot help but recall the slave and the origins of the Haitian zombie. When Jim, the protagonist, sets the zombie free to attack the soldiers, we see a replay of the slave rebellion in Haiti, as European soldiers are pitted against the unruly native. Selena, a beautiful black woman and the film’s love interest, even wields a machete, obviously alluding to the triangle trade. If our future involves this kind of zombie, the zombie rebelling against its servitude, it suggests the possibility that we can combat the forces that determine our subject status, but this would be a humanist rather than a posthuman future. In the film, the zombie body is sacrificed to save the last humans, and at the end of the film we get the sense, as a military plane flies overhead, that everything—humanity, government, and most likely capitalism—has survived the attack.<sup>57</sup>

Thus we are left with yet another tantalizing paradox, and without the promise of a completely satisfying ending. When the Haitian slave took up arms, he was rejecting his status as object and claiming the position of the subject; thus, to overcome imperialism, the individual had to assert himself as having agency. Here, in an era where global capitalism forecloses

57. At the time of writing, production of a sequel was announced, thus seemingly confirming our interpretation of the film’s ending.

all attempts to withdraw from the system, the only option is to shut down the system, and the individual with it. So, to reformulate Franco Moretti's question: will the end be monstrous, or will it be liberating? This is an unanswerable question, but regardless, it is a question that can only be posed in the future tense. When we become zombiis, when we lose our subjectivity and the ability to rationalize, there will be no difference between the two. Therefore, when we truly become posthuman, we won't even *know* it.