

Resurrections

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

It was a time, not much different from today, when zombies had become, if not commonplace, then certainly unextraordinary. Zombies had evolved over time and become somewhat more refined. They had developed a limited ability to speak, and more importantly, to reason. Some say it was primarily owing to the fact that the practice of embalming had fallen out of favour. In the old days it was the embalming fluid that drove the zombies to their frenzied, deranged and sometimes retarded behaviour. Others say it was simply a natural process of evolution. Each new wave of zombies was beaten down and killed by the living, who found them to be an irritating and irksome reminder of their own inescapable mortality, not to mention an echo of their own somnambulistic, conformist behaviour. But the few zombies who survived annihilation managed to pass on the intelligence they had acquired to subsequent generations, perhaps through some strange telepathy only shared by the dead... or perhaps by a kind of clandestine guerrilla activity born out of resistance against the violent and unceasing hostilities of the living. Still others say it was, and always had been, just a metaphor.

(Medea Yarn, in Otto; or, Up with Dead People)

Translation by Julia Heim

Several of Edelman's illustrious interlocutors have had some criticism for him that is similar to mine. De Lauretis (2010: 87), for example, took her distance from the prescriptive meaning of the death drive in *No Future*. While Dean has maintained that Edelman is conditioned by a restricted and static vision of the symbolic, which impedes him from imagining the kinds of relationality that challenge the Oedipal law of reproductive futurism. In his opinion, Hocquenghem and Bersani have instead shown themselves capable of a larger imaginative force¹ and a greater contact with reality. In fact, in the concreteness of gay existences, the breaking of the Oedipal social tie generally follows the construction of a new relationality, of which *barebacking* is only one example:

Everyone knows that homosexuals throw fabulous parties. Far from antisocial, we are in fact adept at practicing sociability in its myriad forms. (Dean 2006: 826)

Finally, Jack Halberstam (2006: 823–824), who perhaps more than any other has sought to link his own thought to “antisocial queer theory,”² has contested Edelman and Bersani's recourse to an elite “gay male archive,” limited to “a select group of antisocial queer aesthetes and camp icons and texts” that are far from the pop tastes of the queer community—not to mention his personal punk sensibility. Recalling that “Bersani's work... has also been useful for the theorization of femme receptivities (Cvetkovich) and butch abjection and lesbian loneliness (Love),” Halberstam contrasts “Tennessee Williams, Virginia Woolf, Bette Midler, Andy Warhol, Henry James, Jean Genet, Broadway musicals, Marcel Proust, Alfred Hitchcock, Oscar Wilde, Jack Smith, Judy Garland and Kiki and Herb” with “antisocial writers, artists, and texts, like Valerie Solanas, Jamaica Kincaid, Patricia Highsmith, Wallace and Gromit, Johnny Rotten, Nicole Eiseman, Eileen Myles, June Jordan, Linda Besemer, Hothead Paisan, *Finding Nemo*, Lesbians on Ecstasy, Deborah Cass, SpongeBob, Shulamith Firestone, Marga Gomez, Toni Morrison and Patti Smith.” The intentions of the two different archives correspond not only to two different levels of culture—the first to “high” culture and the second to popular culture—but also to different affective choices: Halberstam prefers “dyke anger, anticolonial despair, racial rage, counterhegemonic violence, punk pugilism” to the boredom, indifference and irony that permeate the “comfort zone” of gay references. In Halberstam's opinion, the former have more to do with “the undisciplined kinds of responses that Bersani at least seems to associate with sex and queer culture.”³

While in the previous chapter I formulated criticisms that had been put forth differently by de Lauretis and Dean, in this chapter I will draw on

Halberstam's polemic. It raises important questions, which, in addition to style, taste and emotional tone, interrogate the possible consequences of antisocial theories in queer life practices, and their ability to echo beyond what I have called the ivory tower of the university. I will not surreptitiously assume positions to which I do not belong, and I will remain within the archive that Edelman and Bersani seem to share more than Halberstam seems to recognize—which, furthermore, as Jose Esteban Muñoz notes, is not just gay, academic and snobbish, but also “white.”⁴ I will thus attempt to contaminate this archive with “less cultured” references that bring it closer to the contemporary gay community and to the new hybrid (mixed race) and postcolonial generations, in an effort to suggest that the present can, for them, be a time of political queer action. The choice could seem surprising, if not bizarre, but there is one figure in particular that seems capable of both joining this archive and reopening the horizon: the zombie, a creature that in the recent past more than any other time has represented, and not by chance, the nexus between death and jouissance, and to which, in the last few years, gay cinema has given a vital new ironic meaning.

4.1 THE JOUISSANCE OF THE LIVING DEAD

The zombie is the most abject of the contemporary “monsters” of horror, not only because the zombie's natural habitat is comprised of not-so-prestigious movies geared toward younger audiences—B-movies and low-budget productions of the splatter or gore subgenres⁵—but also because of its modest origins. Vampires, Frankenstein and werewolves can boast their noble genealogies, that date back to the gothic novels of the 1800, and even ancient Greece or ancient Egypt⁶; “zombie” instead is the Anglo-Saxon transliteration of the Creole-Haitian term “zonbi,” which derives from the Bantu “nzumbe” and designates a voodoo character easily read as a symbol of slavery. The Haitian zonbi is, in fact, a newly dead human that a wizard (or to be more precise, a *bokor* priest) exhumed and brought back to life, stealing parts of his soul, annihilating his will, increasing his physical resistance, and reducing him to blind obedience so as to essentially transform him into a docile and enhanced workforce for the plantations. This is the version of the myth that was initially cannibalized by popular US culture after making landfall there in 1929 through the travel stories of occultist journalist William Seabrook (who was actually a cannibal⁷). This version would shortly thereafter become a cinematic attraction: in 1932, in Victor Halperin's *White Zombie*, which takes place in Haiti, Bela Lugosi—who played Tod Browning's *Dracula* just one year earlier—impersonates Murder Legendre, the colonialist wizard who, with

the help of mysterious extracts and voodoo dolls, zombifies not only black slaves, but white settlers as well, to procure manual labor for his criminal undertakings, or simply for his mill.

For the US public, in addition to representing a fear of the *metisage* of the Creole culture (Moreman and Rushton 2011a; Phillips 2011), the metaphor lends itself to an initial slippage, from slavery in the fields to work in the factories.⁸ And that is only the beginning: a few years later, with the Second World War and then with the cold war, the figure of the zombie begins to reveal its extraordinary versatility.⁹ Other films that insert new fears are added to those that stem from the Caribbean tradition¹⁰: at times the role of the wizard is played by mad scientists or even Nazis,¹¹ or ex-Nazis that bring the dead back to life with the help of nuclear radiation.¹² At times in the place of zombies, there are alien-controlled human bodies¹³ which are easily read as a caricature of Soviet totalitarianism. But symptomatically, it was not until 1968—the year Martin Luther King was assassinated by a shot to the head, and youth protests popped up all over the West while the United States was busy with the war in Vietnam—that a very low-budget film with nearly unknown actors definitively revolutionized the zombie look, turning them into the partially decomposed, devoid of any intelligence, hungry for human flesh and, luckily, very slow moving cadavers that we all know. I am talking about *The Night of the Living Dead*, created by George Andrew Romero, a director born and raised in New York by a Cuban father (descendent of Spaniards) and an American mother of Lithuanian origin. Just like his genealogical makeup, Romero's living dead are the product of a complex syncretism. They inherit very little from the zombies of the Hispaniola island, initially not even their name (they aren't called zombies in the film), while they seem to draw from the folklore of the Arab world, where numerous myths tell of shape-shifting demons, known as ghouls, that wander through cemeteries in search of human flesh.¹⁴ Furthermore, the director declared that his inspiration was Richard Matheson's novel *I Am a Legend* (1954), which was actually about a vampire epidemic, and his terrifying creatures gesticulate much like Frankenstein.¹⁵ Finally, there is no lack of science fiction references: a space probe returning from Venus reanimates cadavers and turns them into cannibals as it spreads mysterious radiation throughout America. The theme remains however only the background, giving the film the possibility of developing the *topoi* that will later mark the genre and make *The Night of the Living Dead* a film classic (of which at least two remakes were later produced, one official and one unauthorized,¹⁶ but of which many

other films with different titles could also be considered remakes): a group of unknown people finds itself facing an invasion of living dead cannibals that can only be neutralized by a blow to the head, and who, for the duration of the film, enact disgusting performances, voluntarily displaying the signs of their decomposition as well as the insides of their victims to the camera. In this case, the protagonists barricade themselves in a farmhouse near the cemetery, and after having displayed the more noble and altruistic sides as well as the more wretched and selfish sides of their personalities, they all die. The last one, Duane Jones in the role of the heroic Ben, who, in the history of cinema, is the first “nonethnic” character played by a black actor, survives the nocturnal assault of the zombies only to be killed the next morning by a bullet to the head, fired by a policeman on the hunt for the living dead. Ben thus dies just like Martin Luther King, in a finale that makes the zombies’ fury the apocalyptic symbol of the uprising of the poor.

The global success of *The Night of the Living Dead* gives way to a great number of productions, in which horror is inserted in romantic, erotic or screwball stories, which at times replay the “hot themes” of timely political debates: from the war in Vietnam to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, from black people’s claim to rights, to ecological threats, to the condemnation of the unequal distribution of wealth that are still present in advanced societies.¹⁷ Over the years, zombies not only infest B-movies (a large number of which, filmed in the eighties, are Italian¹⁸) and mainstream ones,¹⁹ they also infest videos by pop stars²⁰ like Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*²¹ and Lady Gaga’s *Born This Way*,²² extremely popular video games, successful television series, and finally, they become the object of a vast array of literature: Their suspended lives inspire authors of novels and comics, and are the subject of serious philosophical analysis. Within this uncontrollable proliferation, some fundamental mutations make the voracious walking cadavers very fitting for a discourse on queerness, the death drive and pleasure.

The first, which is perhaps more of an evolution than a mutation, was enacted by Romero, who in 1978—always with a low budget and fairly unknown actors—filmed the sequel of his saga: *Dawn of the Dead*.²³ This time, with the United States reduced to total collapse, four survivors, who escaped toward Canada in a helicopter, are forced because of lack of fuel, to land on the roof of a zombie-infested mall in Philadelphia. They manage to rid it of the living dead—two of them, Peter (David Emge) and Rover (Scott Reiniger), are members of a SWAT team, and know their way with weapons—and block all the entrances. They thus find themselves sheltered

amidst the toys, and surrounded by life's comforts. While the world is being devoured by chaos, they live out a lush existence, surrounded by fine wines and foods, elegant clothing, ice-skating and video games. After a while, it is a motorcycle gang wishing to ransack the mall, along with the protagonists' efforts to protect what they now considered their property, that will reopen the doors to those terrible creatures for the final slaughter.

What links the living dead of *Night of the Living Dead* to those of *Dawn of the Dead* (and the many other films inspired by them), and separates them from the Haitian zombies, is that they are not subjected to anyone else's will. In the former, the dead are awakened by a radiation that came from outer space, in the latter, the cause of their resurrection remains unknown, but there are no voodoo wizards, Nazi scientists or artificial intelligences to control them: Romero's zombies don't take orders from any authority. This does not mean they are endowed with free will (to the contrary, it is their almost total lack of consciousness that make them so interesting to philosophers of the mind²⁴): rather, they are confined to their dulling spasmodic predatory activity of insatiable and meaningless hunger, and this is the only thing that keeps them united in a horde (in the recent television series *The Walking Dead*²⁵ the term "herd" is used) though they lack any relational or social competency almost completely. Their "impersonal intimacy" could perhaps appeal to Bersani, but what seems most noteworthy to me, keeping the aims of this discourse in mind, is that from night to dawn, from the cemetery to the mall, the metaphor undergoes a meaningful contortion. In the first film, the cannibalistic drive that pressures the living dead reignites the death drive that nests in all of the unfortunate ones barricaded in the farmhouse, leaving no salvation for any of their relationships or any of their lives: Barbara (Judith O'Dea) enters a catatonic state after losing her brother Johnny (Russell Streiner), and when she finds him, having become a zombie, he wastes no time attacking her; Tom (Keith Wayne) causes his and his girlfriend Judy's (Judith Ridley) death by accidentally setting fire to the pickup truck with which they, and the others, were supposed to flee; Ben, the protagonist, ends up being really skilled at finishing off zombies, even when they are his ex-comrades, but not skilled enough to prevent Karen (Kyra Schon) from devouring her parents (Karl Hardman and Marilyn Eastman) before he can break all three of their skulls.

The antisocial and antirelational function embodied by the zombies does not fade in *Dawn of the Dead*: not only because the struggle between the protagonists and motorcyclists clearly alludes to the end of civilization,

but also because, more subtly, Romero turns his living dead into a threat to Oedipal planning time. In fact, when Stephen (David Emge), believing he is safe in the mall, gives his pregnant girlfriend Francine (Gayle Ross) a ring, she refuses him, maintaining that the presence of the living dead makes the promise poorly timed (“No, Stephen, not now...”). In retrospect, can you really say she’s wrong? In the last scene, Francine will escape in the low-fueled helicopter with Peter, far from Stephen, who has become one of the zombies, as she carries her unborn child toward an unknown future. What constitutes a significant innovation is that the setting of *Dawn of the Dead* makes the hungry zombies’ jouissance of human flesh seem like a warped reflection of the protagonists’ jouissance of merchandise: all of them, the living and the dead, claim the mall as their own. This correlation evokes a question: what do the zombies do with all that bounty? As Peter observes in a line that hardly masks Romero’s disapproval of consumerist society, if they return to the mall it’s because “this was an important place in their lives”—an expert on TV explains in fact that the living dead preserve vague reminiscences of their past existence.²⁶ Romero’s zombies do not, therefore, free themselves from the voodoo wizard to gain their freedom, but to subject themselves to the drive and to jouissance. To cite Lacan, they pass from the slavery of the master’s discourse to the slavery of the capitalist discourse, that is to say, “from the frying pan into the fire.”

It does not end there; the AIDS crisis arrives, and then September 11th, the anthrax threat, the fear of biological weapons being used by terrorists, and, as if that wasn’t enough, the ever-growing intensity of transportation and exchange that brings with it the risk of new pandemics: SARS, the bird flu and the swine flu. The zombie is there, the sponge of the imaginary, ready to absorb the new anxieties of an increasingly globalized world, ready to acquire a viral nature after having already infected all the cinematic genres and all areas of cultural production. But let us proceed in an orderly fashion. In the first two films of Romero’s saga, whatever the cause of the return of the dead on Earth, every deceased person will shortly come to life hungry for human flesh. Both Karen in *The Night of the Living Dead* and Roger in *Dawn of the Dead* die because of an infection caused by a zombie bite, but do not become zombies because of it: they die because of the infection, and then, like all the other dead people, they transform into cannibalistic monsters. In a long series of other films, however, the zombie is produced by a virus that turns only the infected humans into cannibals: In some cases the zombie still remains

a living dead, in others the zombie becomes an infected and infectious living being. Already, in *Apocalypse domani* [*Cannibal Apocalypse*] directed by Anthony M. Dawson, aka Antonio Margheriti, in 1980—following the success of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Ruggero Deodato’s *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980)—we see an epidemic of cannibalizing rabies transmitted through bites. A few Vietnam veterans initially start the epidemic, rendering it a symbol of posttraumatic stress, or even the war itself (or the death drive that Freud links to the origin of every war, reflecting on the symptoms of the veterans of the First World War), but in a short time the viral metaphor will be charged with additional meanings.

The next year, the first case of what would later be called “AIDS” is diagnosed in the United States: before 1982, the American press referred to it using the homophobic acronym “GRID” (*Gay-related immune deficiency*), while the CDC (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*), more pluralistic in distributing the stigma, preferred the wording “the 4H disease” based on the initial letter common to the four communities that were predominantly struck with the disease: not just homosexuals, but heroin users, hemophiliacs and... Haitians. HIV is identified in 1983, and in the following years its history is reconstructed: a mutation of an African monkey virus, which would reach the United States by first passing through the island of Hispaniola. Thus, it is perhaps not by chance that in what is considered the most successful example of a film about viral zombies,²⁷ namely, in Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* (2002), chimpanzees are the ones to start the epidemic: Used as test subjects in an English laboratory, infected with modified rabies, the primates spread the virus to a group of animalists that rush to free them in the night. The first to be bitten is a girl who immediately begins to vomit blood and show signs of a deranged aggressiveness; one of her companions tries to help her, but a squirt of blood she spits out hits him in the eye and immediately triggers the monsterification process in him. The extremely aggressive virus that is probably contained in all the bodily fluids, but definitely in blood and saliva, has an incubation period of just 15 seconds, and in the span of a mere 28 days will throw England into total chaos.²⁸

Another mutation finally occurs when the zombies begin to regain self-awareness. The process is activated once again by Romero—who, furthermore, has always given his creatures traces of the memory of who they once were. Already in *Day of the Dead* (1985), medical doctor Matthew Logan (Richard Liberty), called Dr. Frankenstein because of the truculent nature of his experiments on the living dead, has a certain amount

of success domesticating and returning zombie Bub (Howard Sherman), who was a soldier in life, to humanity. Bub will in fact be able to utter the word “hallo,” and will remember the uses of a few objects (a razor, a book, a telephone, a cassette player... and a gun), and above all, at the end of the film, he will kill Logan’s assassin by shooting him with the precision of the well-trained soldier he once was—and not by chewing him up with the fury typical of the living dead creature he is now. Later, in *Land of the Dead* (2005), the zombies even organize a revolt against the survivors of the city of Pittsburg, who live barricaded in a militarized community governed by the corrupt and rapacious Paul Kaufman (Dennis Hopper) and occasionally go on expeditions in the city in search of food and medicine and to hunt the living dead. Leading them is the zombie Big Daddy, played by the African American actor Eugene Clark, who we see at the beginning of the film loitering around a pump of what perhaps used to be his gas station, and throughout the film, aside from his memory, he develops the personality of a leader.²⁹

Like many of Romero’s intuitions, even the “conscious zombie” theme will have its success, making a fundamental change in narrative perspective possible: From anonymous and undifferentiated catastrophes, the living dead will acquire not just the dignity of their own names, but even the role of protagonist in a few films. For example in Jonathan Levine’s *Warm Bodies* (2013), the narrating voice belongs to the young R. (Nicholas Hoult), whose name reflects his living name only in the first letter. The film, based on the homonymous novel by Isaac Marion and produced by the same producer of the *Twilight* saga, is a romantic comedy for teenagers that draws significantly from *Land of the Dead* (2005), while reversing its meaning. Instead of turning against the survivors, here the living dead join forces with them to fight the “boneys”; fleshless, voracious and super-fast zombies in their last stages. What will make them recuperate their sense of belonging to humanity, literally making their hearts beat, will be the love that blossoms between R. and Julie (Teresa Palmer), the daughter of the military leader General Grigio (John Malkovich). The new Romeo and Juliet meet when he eats her boyfriend’s brains, but, as we know, the young quickly forget, and in the end the two will live happily ever after³⁰. Once the boneys are exterminated, the young couple looks at the horizon of a new future while the wall that protected the human community from the zombies is torn down.

When compared to the bleak ending of *Dawn of the Dead* in which a pregnant Francine, after refusing the engagement ring, flees from her

zombie companion on a fuel-less and destination-less helicopter, *Warm Bodies* seems like an attempt to close the cinematic trajectory of the living dead with the triumph of Oedipal civilization: The zombies pass the death drive onto the boneys, contribute to their extermination and are definitively reintegrated into humanity through a love pact which is also a social pact. Even after returning human, the protagonist does not remember his original name and refuses to choose a new one: He decides to continue calling himself R., preserving for himself and for the others the memory of his zombie existence. But his difference is accepted by the human community not only following the neutralization of the threat that he represents (one can presume that R. and his companions will change their feeding habits), but also at the price of his normalization, aesthetically set forth by the acquisition of a decidedly more pleasing appearance, and symbolically by the “benediction” that the patriarch, General Grigio, gives the heterosexual couple, a price that not all zombies can afford to pay.

4.2 BRUCE LABRUCE’S ZOMBIES

Recent gay cinema has used the new *topos* of impossible love between a conscious living dead being and a human in the opposite way, to denounce the excessive cost that current gay communities ask of their members.³¹ Poor zombie Miles (Brad Bilanin), the protagonist of Michael Simon’s *Gay Zombie* (2007), gets dejected by his psychotherapist (Robin MacDonald)—who at the beginning of the film encouraged him to live out his homosexuality by going to gay locales—just as, after various vicissitudes, his friendship with Todd (Ryan Carlberg) begins to take an amorous turn.³² The film seems to want to indicate that only by concealing the upsetting aspects of homosexuality (embodied by Miles, who, in one scene terrorizes Todd by flaunting his cannibalistic instinct against the homophobe Scorpio, aka Andrew Miller), and therefore renouncing what, in keeping with Bersani and Edelman, is his gay specificity, is it possible for a homosexual to be accepted into a gay community in a world dominated by hetero values, or better yet, by their redefinition as enacted by contemporary consumerism. In addition to showing clear signs of decomposition, Miles is in fact visibly “unfashionable” and must make himself presentable to go out with Todd: his promisingly large package and a thorough application of makeup are not enough, he must also dress like a metropolitan gay—taking on a style that the others choose for him after a fashion show in which we see him experiment with different looks (from the drag

queen, to leather slave, to cowboy, to a seducer in a smoking jacket, to fashion victim, to good boy). This attempt at uniformity proves useless: Todd displays a momentary willingness to question his own system of values for the sake of the feeling he develops for this new arrival, but when the object of his love is irreparably taken from him, he immediately comes to terms with it, accepting what happened as a necessary sacrifice in order to return to his future as a young ambitious gay.³³

In its lightness, as Alessandro Grilli has shown, *Gay Zombie* can be read as a shrewd critique of the homonormativity of metropolitan gay sociality, and more generally “as a very general and very relevant paradigmatic representation of aporia born from the contrast between the individual and society as they each fight to safeguard their own needs” (2009: 172).³⁴ The operation carried out by Bruce LaBruce (aka Justin Stewart) seems even more interesting to me. Bruce LaBruce used the zombie not only as a symbol of the negativity of homosexuality, of the parts within it that escape every hetero-homogenizing and homo-normativizing effort, but also as a figure representing the possibilities of its surprising resignification—a queer resignification that, far from passing through abstract symbolisms, remains anchored in the materiality of the sexual, without trying to ennoble it through amorous feeling or sublimate it in language. Both Simon’s *Gay Zombie* and LaBruce’s *L.A. Zombie* (2010) are aimed at gay audiences, but while the first can be considered a coming-out comedy, the second is a porno,³⁵ or better yet, a post-porno almost entirely devoid of dialogue.³⁶

The association between the zombie and the queer, while initially surprising, is justifiable on multiple argumentative levels. First and foremost, from a formal point of view, we are dealing with two “floating signifiers.”³⁷ The former, as I have tried to show, evolving over the span of several decades from the Haitian legends to the latest cinematic productions, has at times symbolized a multitude of social fears, and the rebellion against different forms of oppression and homogenization. While the latter, as I illustrate in the first chapter of this book, was originally used as a qualitative adjective like “strange” to refer as much to people as to things, and then became a pejorative epithet to be used against sexual minorities, and was finally used as a political tool by these minorities themselves both in theory and in political practice. It is important to keep in mind that, since the early nineties, those who choose to use the word “queer” instead of “gay,” “lesbian” and “trans,” do it to enact a sort of dislocation of the categories with which modernity defines and regulates sexuality—and not to substitute them with a new concept endowed with semantic stability:

from de Lauretis to Butler, Bersani to Edelman, queer has been redefined nearly each time it has been used theoretically, to then be further reinterpreted by different movements, groups, collectives and individuals who, following Queer Nation's example, have defined themselves as queer. The semantic mobility is thus a constitutive characteristic of zombies as well as of queers, and as such both can easily be used with irony, where irony is meant in the way I have previously attempted to define it, not à la de Man and à la Edelman, as a dissolution of signification, but as the possibility to plurivocally and even ambiguously signify and thus to fluidize signification.³⁸

I have already discussed the ironic ambiguity of the queer. Now, instead, I would like to highlight how the zombie is a dual and paradoxical monster. First and foremost, in the zombie's suspended condition in which life and death are co-present, instead of the usual reciprocal exclusion, structurally the living dead represents an oxymoron (Grilli 2009: 178, 175). This ambiguous position derives, furthermore, from the position that the zombie occupies in relation to mankind: liminal but potentially central, particular and yet universalizable. Like vampires, zombies are in fact originally human, but unlike vampires their monsterification process does not entail being a part of a restricted circle of noble *élites*: anyone can become a zombie, just like anyone can "discover" they are lesbian, gay, or trans, or can be suspected of being so by others—acquiring in this way not a superhuman status but a minority one; existing as both human and "less-than-human." The zombie can therefore easily lend itself to substantialize the queer in a figural representation that emphasizes the ambiguous ontological status recognized by Hocquenghem and Kosofsky Sedgwick³⁹ and that, however, emerges from the juxtaposition of Bersani and de Lauretis to Foucault and Butler. Their existence "questions again and again the certainty of existence" (Hocquenghem 1993: 53), not unlike what happens with the identities of gays, lesbians and trans people, at once both concrete in the urgency of sexual drives that characterize them and abstract because of their nature as constructed sociocultural products of the modern sexuality apparatus.

Indeterminacy is not the only characteristic common to the two categories in discussion. Other traits become evident if we move from the analysis of the form of signification to the analysis of the denotation and connotation of the contents. Like the queer theorized by Edelman, the zombie is also a creature of the real. Every step, every grunt, every bite of the living dead rips open the veil of Maya of our projections into

the future, showcasing the cadaver that we will all soon become: if the zombie's hunger for human flesh threatens our lives, his/her almost-life threatens our imaginary.⁴⁰ In its evolution through time, however, the zombie has learned to do more: when the zombie develops fragments of consciousness after having been at the mercy of the death drive and pleasure, he/she shows that it is possible for the subject to rise up from dissolution and for meaning to reemerge from deconstruction. The conscious zombie, the "metamonster" to use Grilli's term (2009: 154–155), squares the paradox; reacquiring speech and becoming gay addresses a question to antisocial queer theories that is at once both simple and radical: "I gained awareness of the negativity that I represent, of the drive that operates in me, of the death that awaits me: now what do I do with these tragic truths?" The queer zombie essentially leads Cultural Studies to the limit where ontological psychoanalytic discourse gives over to ethical–political discourse, until theory gives way to practice. Consequently, the zombie can personify the dilemma of the LGBTQIA movements, perennially split between assimilation and contestation, between requesting social recognition and a refusal to recognize the values of sociality.

LaBruce exploits the rich aporetic potential of the conscious zombie to the maximum, leading our monster toward further paradoxical mutations: The protagonist of *L.A. Zombie* is starved not for human flesh (in one scene he drinks milk), but for gay sex, he does not belong to a herd, but is solitary—so much so that no one in the film utters his name and in the director's notes he is simply referred to as "Zombie"—he doesn't bring death, but reanimates people. He is played by François Sagat, one of the most popular gay porn actors, who can easily be considered the symbol of the commercialization of the body in advanced capitalist societies: In addition to having made more than 30 hardcore films,⁴¹ and never hiding his use of anabolic steroids to sculpt his hypertrophic muscles, Sagat has modeled for both a realistic dildo and a Ur3 ass equipped with a penetrable anus sold by TitanMen on the Internet and in sex shops all over the world. It would therefore be easy to "use him" to spread a moralistic condemnation of the commercialization of the body in the porn industry, but his function in LaBruce's film is much more complex: to show the possibility of an artistic and liberating use of pornography and resurrect subjectivity in societies of jouissance. In Sagat's professional life, sex was an instrument to obtain fame and money⁴²; the character he plays with his porn star body, meanwhile, offers his sexual partners as well as his spectators an opportunity to reawaken their dormant singularity. As

LaBruce himself has declared, *Zombie* is a salvific figure, in a technical “Messianic” sense. And like the Jesus of the Christian tradition, and if possible even more so, he is an extremely ambivalent being. The Christians know for certain that Jesus mysteriously participates in the human and the divine; little, however, is understood about the nature of *Zombie*: Perhaps he is both human and zombie (and thus still human but alive and dead at the same time), or he is a mutant alien come from who knows where, or perhaps he is simply a misfit gay, a schizophrenic inventing it all.⁴³

At the beginning of the film he emerges from the Pacific Ocean completely nude,⁴⁴ in some scenes he appears as a defenseless homeless guy wandering with others through the streets of Los Angeles—pushing a shopping cart full of objects he has pulled out of the trash, bathing where he can, stealing clothes that are hung out to dry—in other scenes his skin is bruised, at times fangs poke out of his mouth, other times they poke right out of his face, disfiguring his features (makeup and special effects were done by Joe Castro). When he is a zombie/alien the most interesting, disturbing, macabre and off-color things happen. At the beginning of the film, the surfer who gives him a ride (Rocco Giovanni) dies in a serious car accident. We see him lying in the middle of the street with his thoracic cavity open, and his exposed heart slowly stops beating. *Zombie* then inserts his large hooked phallus in the wound: the spurts of his black sperm reactivate the surfer’s heart, bringing him back to life. Analogous scenes then follow in which *Zombie* stumbles upon the bodies of attractive recently dead gay men and brings them back to life by penetrating their wounds or by spraying them with his black sperm. His partners are different kinds of humans who, in their complexity, paint a portrait of a gay community dominated by hedonism, *lookism*, money and the pleasure industry: a yuppie killed by a shot to the back because he was involved in a scam (Wolf Hudson), a black man with a crushed skull who is thrown to the street from a van after having perhaps participated in an orgy (Eddie Diaz), an older homeless guy who died of an overdose in his cardboard shelter (Andrew James), four bondage S/M porno stars (Erik Rhodes, Matthew Rush, Francesco D’Macho and Adam Killian) massacred by their dealers. In the last sequence we see *Zombie* in a cemetery. He is moved as he is reminded of the victims he has saved and the disadvantages of his reject-life: his eyes, both human and monstrous, shed tears of blood. He begins to dig a hole in the dark ground. On the tombstone an enigmatic “LAW” is engraved.

The metaphor of gay-zombie sex in *L.A. Zombie* lends itself to multiple readings. First and foremost is the attempt to dismantle, but not destroy the association between homosexual sex, disease and death.⁴⁵ In *Unlimited Intimacy* Dean (2009: 50, 55–56) shows how the bareback community produces a meaningful reversal of values, according to which being infected with HIV becomes desirable in that it is a mark, not of vulnerability but of strength, and anal passivity is associated with hyper-virility and not femininity. But LaBruce's imagination in this film goes much further: Here the monster, who in cinema has represented the death drive and infection more than any other, radically reinvents itself, while remaining the same—a zombie, as its name indicates. Some kind of virus is evidently present in his black sperm: But it is a virus that resuscitates.⁴⁶ What's even more interesting is that he does not infect. What is striking about the characters of the film is that they meet but remain alone: *Zombie* does not make his partners like him, and after each sexual act he distances himself. And his partners, once resurrected, greet him with astonished, surprised and grateful expressions, as if that unusual sex had ripped them away from their previous existence—which is most certainly zombie existence à la Romero, hypnotized by the capitalist discourse—and elevated it to a more authentic existential state, that even in the awareness of death, makes them feel alive, each one unique among other unique subjects. Because if it is true that, as Lacan said time and again, “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship,” then experimenting with the impossibility of the encounter with the other in sexual jouissance can, paradoxically, provide the occasion to recognize having come up against the otherness of the other and one's otherness to the other, other people's and one's own miraculous living singularity.⁴⁷ As LaBruce has also declared in his way, *L.A. Zombie* enacts the critical, creative and relational potential (which he still calls “revolutionary”) of sex (to which antisocial queer theorists remain largely blind):

AIDS has very effectively changed the course of the revolution. Now we are experimenting with a conservative resurgence in which extreme sexual behaviors and hedonism are not very well accepted by the gay community. Pornography is truly the last bastion of gay sexual radicalism. Having lived my formative years during the heart of the homosexual revolution, I am still in sync with that kind of sexual energy and militant style that really gives strength to more revolutionary movements. I continue to use pornography in my films precisely for this reason. But the specter of AIDS, that I fear has been used in some way—both literally and metaphorically—to kill the gay

revolution, still torments my films. Anonymous gay sex, for example, has always excited me, but from a certain point of view it could seem, looking at it from the outside, a zombie world. I have seen many “gay zombies” wander the parks and saunas at night, and I have become like that at times. There is always a dark side to every revolution. (2011a, Translation Julia Heim)

The metaphor of gay-zombie sex basically allows all the contradictory elements of the sexual, and thus even antisocial queer theories and Foucault’s thought, to be kept together; and at the same time it allows the imaginary to be freed from that obsession with anality that a certain psychoanalysis and a certain gay thought share with the most reactionary homophobia, without, however, releasing gay sex from the abjection that it assumes in a heteronormative context. Because if it is true that sex is the death drive that dissolves the subject, it is also true that it is an activity within which, to the contrary, the subject could prove his or her own consistency, creativity, and relational ability: first and foremost by demanding awareness of their own desires and tastes, and then by inventing new forms of pleasure (and pain) for themselves and for others, eventually “inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body” as Foucault writes about sadomasochism (1984c; Eng. trans. 1994: 165). LaBruce has also proven himself well aware of this when he declared: “Zombie porn is practical: you can create your own orifice” (2010: 3).

While Bersani and Edelman, in unidirectionally and dogmatically interpreting some fundamental psychoanalytic texts, remind us that the sexual is the tomb of subjectivity and relationality, the anarchic imagination of *L.A. Zombie*, which is irreverent toward any kind of truth about the sexual, reminds us that this tomb is also a cradle from which the renewed subject can be reborn, escaping from the forces that push for the subject’s narcissistic implosion, whether these forces come from drives or the imperatives of consumerism. Their encounter with *Zombie* returns his lost partners to the responsibility of their existence, to the search for a personal “law” that accounts for their antisocial needs in addition to their need for sociality.

The dialectic between solitude and relationality also dominates LaBruce’s previous film, which marks his entrance into the gay-zombie-hardcore genre. The film makes explicit the ideological perspective that orients his poetic and simultaneously allows one to look beyond this viewpoint.⁴⁸ While *L.A. Zombie* (2010) is a guerilla film, produced very quickly, and with modest means, *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008) instead

enjoyed the benefits of greater financing, and consequently the film was conceived of, planned and filmed with relative ease. While in the former many scenes were improvised and the film almost totally lacks dialogue, the latter followed a detailed storyboard with words taking a leading role, often in the form of bulky political rhetoric that borders on didacticism.⁴⁹ In the first scene, in black and white, we see Otto, played by Jey Crisfar, just 18 at the time, come out of a tomb; immediately afterward we see him in color, he wanders through a bright field of yellow flowers, reaches a German state highway, feeds off the carcass of a hare that has been hit by a car, and then hitchhikes.⁵⁰ It will be revealed later in the film that Otto is afflicted by mental disorders. He left, perhaps fled, a psychiatric clinic, but does not remember it: Instead he believes that he is a zombie, and following the smell of human flesh he heads where the scent is most intense. He tries to get to Berlin (the city where the wall fell in 1989). When he reaches his destination, his scruffy appearance and the musky stench emanating from his body makes him an easy target for insults and harassment: In one sequence some children throw rocks at him, in another he escapes from a band of lowlives. He is then picked up by a synthetic drug-loving skinhead (in the credits the actors only appears with the pseudonym “Mo”) in front of the club *Flesh*, where a zombie-themed costume party is taking place—the boy, to dissuade Otto from entering the club and to invite him to his house, describes the party by saying “It’s dead.” The young clubber ends up partially gutted, his bedroom stained with blood like a slaughterhouse, but he doesn’t mind any of it (“That was amazing. Can I see you again sometime?”).

After this experience, Otto decides to abandon the dangerous and disturbing street life. To try to make some money, he answers an ad⁵¹ and does an audition with Medea Yarn (Katharina Klewinghaus), a feminist, anticapitalist lesbian director who—with the “immoral support” of her girlfriend Hella Bent (Susanne Sachsse) and the physical help of her cinematographer brother Adolf (Guido Sommer)—has been perpetually filming “the politico-porno-zombie movie” *Up with Dead People*,⁵² in which a band of conscious gay zombies,⁵³ led by actor Fritz Fritze (Marcel Schlutt), who plays the “gay Che Guevara of the undead,” plot a revolt against the packs of zombie exterminators.⁵⁴ Medea is so enthused by Otto’s mental discomfort that, instead of casting him as an extra in *Up with Dead People*, she decides to shoot a film with him as the lead and sole actor (we find out later that the initial black and white scene in which Otto emerges from a tomb, is the first scene in Medea’s film). Considering him so valuable, but

intuiting that he may be untrustworthy, Medea puts Otto in the care of Fritz who, despite fearing for his safety, agrees to watch out for and host him throughout the filming.

A certain anxiety, however, distracts Otto from his new job: Slowly memories of his past life surface, until he finds the phone number of his ex Rudolf (artist and singer Gio Black Peter) in his wallet and calls him and asks to meet. The two of them meet on the bench where they had met three years before, while Otto was reading Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, a book that he then lent to Rudolf who now returns it ("I didn't get a chance to read it. Little too depressing for me"). With great superficiality, without (wanting to) realize his stupefied, amnesiac state, Rudolf reminds Otto that he left him right when Otto was beginning to feel bad, right before his admittance to the clinic for eating disorders, depression, schizophrenia and "disorders of the soul," and he justifies himself with these words:

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

OTTO: Better off without you.

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

OTTO: Nice seeing you again.

After this conversation, in a sequence whose dramatic tone is heightened by the warm and hypnotic voice of Anohni Hegarty of *Antony and the Johnsons* as she sings *The Atrocities*,⁵⁵ Otto wanders through the streets of Berlin hugging his book, with more of a lostness about him than ever. Again he meets a band of thugs, but he does not escape from them this time. He lets himself get beaten up without putting up a fight, until they leave him bloody on the asphalt. He goes back to Fritz who greets him with affection and care. They make love with sweetness, but the next morning he wakes up alone. Otto—who, as a zombie, never sleeps—sneaks out of the bed to go film the last scene of Medea's movie: we see him, in black and white, dose himself with gasoline and set fire to himself, though he actually sets fire to a mannequin dressed in his clothing. We then see him

in the last scene of LaBruce's film, hitchhiking on a state highway—just like in the beginning, but this time he is leaving Berlin and headed north.

Even more so than *L.A. Zombie, Otto; or Up with Dead People* lends itself to a multilayered reading. In *Dead and Live Life: Zombies, Queers, and Online Society* (2011: 184–186), keeping the theoretics of Edelman's *No Future* and Bersani's *Intimacies* in mind, Shaka McGlotten interprets the film as a metaphor for the virtual intimacy of gay men on chat lines and their dependence not only on sex but on the Internet. In the essay, which takes an ethnographic approach, the author reports that many of the young gay men he contacted via chat have said they feel “dead” and that the predominant feeling in chat rooms is boredom, accompanied by hints of foolishness and uselessness. In McGlotten's opinion, Otto, who has the appearance of a “chemically zoned out hipster,”⁵⁶ represents “queer emptiness,” and LaBruce's intention is to enact a “polyvalent critique” of “boredom and the boring”:

The new gay is boring, already zombified and getting deader.

LaBruce's generational critique of new metropolitan gay communities seems to me, in reality, to have a much farther-reaching range. Otto can easily represent a young man in an existential crisis—the director himself defines him as “a very sensitive, vulnerable and authentic gay teenager.”⁵⁷ Coming from a small town he is attracted to the gay life of a big city like Berlin, but it ends up deluding and hurting him. He is caught up in the whirlwind of gay nightlife pleasure, in wild, drugged sex (represented by the skinhead clubber), he is deluded by a love that turns out to be superficial (Rudolf), and not even the comfort of a group of alternative youngsters (Medea & Co.) is able to keep him in the city. A narrative element that should not be overlooked is that through the course of his experiences in the city, this sensitive young gay discovers that he is *ill*, and that his illness in the story functions as a reagent that reveals the pathologies of the world around him. Medea's first film, in fact, contains a double condemnation: not only of the homophobia within heteronormative civilization, but also of the serophobia⁵⁸ and the homonormativity of the gay community. In *Up with Dead People*, their viral nature and the stigma of their illness differentiate the gay zombies from the living gays. Rudolf more than any other character, in his inability to take care of Otto's unease, the candor with which he admits to having never “been good with sick people,” and in his utter disinterest for the great works of literature, becomes a symbol of

the emptiness of the new generations of metropolitan gays. Following the introduction of HAART (highly active antiretroviral therapy), fortunately AIDS, while remaining a deadly syndrome, lost its primal identification with immediate death in the imaginary of advanced countries. This misled the mainstream gay community—certainly not the bareback one—which was busy affirming its own respectability and working to claim marital and parental rights, into thinking that it could definitively sever the association between AIDS and male homosexuality. In the late eighties and early nineties it was nearly impossible for a HIV-negative gay man not to feel an instinctive solidarity for those like him who had contracted the infection and would soon die from it; today, instead, associations working to fight AIDS and create solidarity with HIV-positive people have trouble finding volunteers, and gay associations no longer consider prevention campaigns a priority. The dramatic consequence is an increase in HIV infection among gay metropolitan populations.⁵⁹ Thanks to advances in medicine, HIV-positive gays, who once carried clear marks of the relentless virus on their bodies, today have acquired a sacrosanct right to anonymity, but this brings with it a sentence of invisibility and an alienating isolation. In post-repressive, post-patriarchal societies where the uninhibited gay nightlife represents none other than the obscene double of the acquisition of gay respectability in Oedipal civilization, the HIV-positive people do not find support for their unease within the gay community, just as Otto does not find it in Rudolf, and only a few queer activists and theorists prefer to stay on their side instead of pursuing their own social affirmation.

This interpretation, however, does not exhaust the richness of the film. Otto's illness has, in fact, a multifunctional character. We must not forget that, while it can legitimately be considered an AIDS metaphor—as the evolution of the theme in *L.A. Zombie* shows—there is a clear literal interpretation of this mental illness produced by the film. In two different scenes, Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964) appears: The zombie Maximilian reads it as he has breakfast with his partner Fritz, who is also a zombie,⁶⁰ and Hella reads it during her birthday party picnic in the cemetery—a paradoxical scene that Edelman would enjoy, in which the repetition that most symbolizes “futurism” is neutralized by the awareness of mortality.⁶¹ As if that wasn't enough, Medea makes no mystery of the anti-psychiatric ideology of Marcusian-Freudomarxist inspiration that motivates the film she is making about Otto:

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

Medea’s film about Otto is a critique of consumerist society, represented by its alienating, repressive and anti-ecological aspects: One scene, which Edelman would also appreciate, is filmed in a supermarket (as Otto steals and gnaws on raw meat, a little girl (Laura Berger), interferes with the scene and Medea shoves her⁶²), one scene in a slaughterhouse where a team of workers debones an enormous quantity of chicken, and one scene in a garbage dump.⁶³ After all, LaBruce (2011a) has never made a mystery of the fact that he considers himself an anticapitalist and “Marxist sympathizer.” He furthermore declared that even *his* film about Otto, like Medea’s, is inspired by Marcusean theory, which states that “the individual who functions healthily as a citizen of a sick society is sick himself,” and that the young “great” director must be considered his mouthpiece. The ironic tone of LaBruce’s interview, of his cinematic works in general, and of *Otto; or Up with Dead People* in particular, nevertheless legitimizes a reading that forces the filmmaker’s declared Freudomarxism to take a markedly queer direction.

There are, in fact, other markers of the distance that LaBruce takes from his “mouthpiece.” First and foremost, the narrative device of the film within the film creates various levels of reality and multiplies the possible

points of view, fragmenting the identity of the director (does Medea's point of view really coincide with LaBruce's? And is it the same in the two movies that she films within LaBruce's film?). Secondly, the young director's very identity hides an alias: In the scene of the macabre picnic, while Hella reads Marcuse, Medea leafs through a book with the evocative title, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. It is an ethnographic piece, considered a classic in Haitian voodoo studies, published in 1953 by Vanguard Press. Its author, who is of Russian origin, is called Eleanora Derenkowskaia (1917–1961), but assumed the nom de plume “Maya Deren,” which is an anagram of “Medea Yarn.” Like Medea, Maya was a versatile intellectual, an author but also a dancer, choreographer, photographer and avant-garde director: *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* is also the title of her documentary film—in black and white, just like Medea's works—about dance and possession in voodoo rituals, filmed in Haiti between 1947 and 1954, as always with the help of her camerawomen whose last name was Heyman, and first name was... Hella. McGlotten suggests that Maya Deren can be considered the symbol of intellectual and boring cinema, without however emphasizing how this would make the cohesion between LaBruce and the contents of Medea's films ambiguous. It also seems meaningful that Eleanora Derenkowskaia was born in Ukraine to Jewish parents the year of the Russian Revolution; that five years later fleeing the anti-Semitic pogroms they moved to the United States, where they abbreviated their last name to distance themselves from their origins; that once she became an adult Eleanora, chose a name that means illusion in Sanskrit (the veil of Maya, that has been evoked more than once in these pages) and became a radical socialist, even if her experimental style, heavily imbued with psychoanalysis and often surreal, would have been labeled “degenerate bourgeois art” in her homeland. LaBruce's name choice for his alter ego is essentially a symbol that is rich with ambiguity and offers the public a variety of interpretations. It is not chance then if at a certain point in the film, in a game of Chinese boxes, Fritz plays the role of narrator for Medea and recounts his meeting with Otto in these words:

Otto intrigued me from the very beginning. I considered his particular form of mental illness a healthy response to a materialistic world that had become soulless and deadening. I knew immediately that Otto was, for this reason, the perfect subject for Medea. He was the hollow man, the empty signifier upon which she could project her political agenda.

Thus, like the zombie and like the queer, for LaBruce, Otto occupies the position of the empty or floating signifier. And like “Medea,” his name reveals his narrative function. Its palindromic nature allows us to read it from left to right or right to left, looking at the future along with the past. It thus evokes a very particular temporality. Unlike what happens for Medea, in this case it isn’t the name “Otto” that carries out the function of floating signifier, it is Otto himself, in (foul-smelling) flesh and bones: in a subjective sense he is a signifier, a signifier entrusted with the responsibility of renegotiating his signified with the context, in an ever-open and never definitive process. For too long, as Foucault and Butler teach us, queer existences have been categorized by others, but this does not stop them—after rebelling against the psycho-police that defined them, and after crossing the desert of the absence of meaning to which they were condemned by the capitalist discourse’s imperative of *jouissance*—from taking up speech in order to construct new narratives of themselves: as Italian trans men and women did when they united at Castiglione degli Ubertini in May of 2008, not to hide the “stubborn” nature of their drives (de Lauretis 2010), but to joyously celebrate it by singing together beneath the moon. If, as Lacan teaches (1978a), the symbolic order and the drive coincide, it is because the sexual is the psychic and bodily area where the social and the singular meet, what can most dispossess the subject and that which characterizes him as unique.⁶⁴ Queer is thus that event that bursts into the Oedipal temporality in which the future is already written in the past and present, giving the subject back the responsibility of himself or herself even in the multiple determinations to which he or she is... subject. And, still, queer is the subject that straddles this event, that upsets its molds, that challenges the principle of non-contradiction, affirming itself as “an excrescence of logic” to use Butler’s words in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997: 17). Queer, for example, is the opening here and now of the apocalyptic zombie temporality, in which death and life, *Thanatos* and *Eros*, are mysteriously kept together.

After becoming aware, through the violence of the thugs and Rudolf’s careless words, of the irreducible negativity that he embodies, Otto could give himself up to solitude and despair by setting fire to himself as his alter ego does in Medea’s film. Or he could try to neutralize his negativity by coupling himself with Fritz, who, unlike Rudolf seems willing to accept him for what he is, but who perhaps—not unlike the skinhead of the casual encounter—is attracted to him because of the transgression he represents. The queer, however, refuses to stabilize itself within a meaning (in this

sense, Edelman's thought is not queer enough), and resumes its trip, its floating. Otto prefers not to run the risk that Miles does in *Gay Zombie*. Once the shooting of the last scene is done, the following conversation occurs between him and Medea:

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

Otto: I'm not sure. All I know is, I can't un-live in the city anymore.

Medea: Why not?

Otto: Because the living have no respect for the dead.

Medea: So you still think that you're dead?

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

We then see Otto again, just as in the beginning, along the highway. Thumb raised. A rainbow behind him. We hear his last words conclude the film:

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

The finale does not exclude a communal solution that starts with the creation of new ways of life à la Foucault, but doesn't coincide with a call for only the positive nature of pleasure either. Paradoxically, it is the cohesion of one's negativity, the reaffirmed awareness of being dead, of occupying the position of the death drive within the social, that saves Otto from suicide. Like Lacan in *Seminar XX*, Otto seems aware that sexual jouissance does not need to coincide with deadly jouissance, nor with obedience to the injunctions of the capitalist discourse (injunctions to the jouissance of the thing, which is another name for deadly jouissance).⁶⁵ The last word has not yet been said about jouissance, and it is thus possible here and now for us to enjoy ourselves for who we are, subjects that are continually renewed by the dissolution of drives which opens up the possibility for unplanned encounters. Perhaps the rainbow alludes to this cheerful awareness. Perhaps if Andrea, the 15-year-old from Rome who was made fun of by his classmates for wearing pink pants, had shared it, he wouldn't have felt so overwhelmed by their insults; perhaps he wouldn't have given those around him the right to judge his right to exist. Perhaps

on the 22nd of November 2012, he wouldn't have hung himself.⁶⁶ And if Marco, the 16-year-old in Rome, had shared it, perhaps he wouldn't have defenestrated himself.⁶⁷

The conscious gay zombie reemerges from the society of jouissance and from the apnea of the drive by himself, capable of tolerating the marginalization and even of enjoying it, yet not resigned to a desperate isolation. After the slender Crisfar, it will be the hypertrophic Sagat to impersonate the messianic queer that translates himself into experimental casual encounters.⁶⁸ And if a porn star can sit on Christ's throne, if it is possible to use the porno industry to attempt to revolutionize the sexual-political imaginary of the gays, then it is also possible to continue making queer theory after Edelman likened the queer to the imperative of jouissance and the death drive, and after the consumerist society turned queer into a marketing product.

After the close of SeriesQ in the United States, new book series have been created,⁶⁹ even in Italy, which trails Europe in terms of rights for sexual minorities, where the recent blossoming of queer initiatives seems to attest that there is a certain desire for "resurrection." It is not, after all, about a cultural colonization, if anything it is an interesting return that is full of potential: around the mid-seventies, thanks to Bersani's invitation, Foucault's philosophy made its way from the old continent to the French Literature Department of California universities, beginning, among other things, that passionate debate about the foundations of psychoanalytic knowledge in Cultural Studies, which I briefly summarized earlier. In a rebound move, antisocial queer theories have crossed into Europe, and in France and Italy as well, mainly by Anglo-American Literature and Film professors, awakening interest in the subject among scholars of psychoanalysis, to then find a place within the philosophical debate from which they originally arose. Thus far, this study has sketched out a brief survey of these theories and attempted to respond to them on their terms through the examination a body of "popular" genre films in an effort to follow Halberstam's directions. Now it will abandon psychoanalytic metapsychology and turn to the instruments of political philosophy.

NOTES

1. "What I find crucial here is that the shattering of the civilized ego betokens not the end of sociality but rather its inception. This point has been missed by many of Bersani's readers too. The movement of coming together only

- to be plunged into an experience of the nonrelational represents but the first step in Bersani's account of relationality. The second, correlative step is to trace new forms of sociability, new ways of being together, that are not grounded in imaginary identity or the struggle for intersubjective recognition" (Dean 2006: 827).
2. A belonging that Edelman (2006: 822) criticizes: "Affirming, however, as a positive good 'punk pugilism' and its gestural repertoire, Halberstam strikes the *pose* of negativity while evacuating its force ... For violence, shock, assassination, and rage aren't negative or radical in themselves; most often they perform the fundamentalist faith that always inspirits the Futurch: the affirmative attachment to 'sense, mastery, and meaning,' in Halberstam's words. *No Future*, by contrast, approaches negativity as society's constitutive antagonism."
 3. The reference is particularly to the essays that were collected in Halberstam 2011 and 2012, but also to Halberstam's previous works from 1998 and 2005.
 4. "[T]he antirelational in queer studies was the gay white man's last stand" (Muñoz 2006: 825).
 5. The term "splatter cinema" was coined by director George Romero in reference to his film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). The zombie filmography is uncontrollable; there are, however, optimal guides, each of which promises to be the most "complete" or "the latest": Dendle 2001; Russell 2005; Kay 2008.
 6. Just think of the etymology of the word "lycanthrope," of the myth of Lycaon and the depictions of the god Anubis.
 7. Seabrook himself narrates that in Paris, before visiting Haiti and after a trip to Africa, he was able to procure a piece of meat from a healthy human who had recently died in an accident. Motivated by curiosity, he cooked and ate it, declaring that human flesh has a taste similar to that of veal (Seabrook 1930).
 8. In recent times, following the changes of the labor market, there is no lack of people who have made zombies the symbol of the exploitation of the cognitariat (cognitive-proletariat) in cultural production: Bang Larsen 2010.
 9. Zombie studies have already produced a vast literature. Among the more recent, see, at least: Moreman and Rushton 2011a, 2011b; Boluk and Lenz 2011; Smith? 2011.
 10. In addition to Jacques Tourneur's classic *I Walked with a Zombie*, 1943, other examples are *Voodoo Island* by Reginald Le Borg, 1957; *I Eat Your Skin* by Del Tenney, 1964; *The Plague of the Zombies* by John Gilling, 1966.
 11. For example in: *Revenge of the Zombies* by Steve Sekely, 1943; *The Frozen Dead* by Herbert J. Leder, 1966.
 12. For example in *Creature with the Atom Brain* by Edward L. Cahn, 1955.

13. For example in: *Quatermass 2* by Val Guest, 1957; *Invisible Invaders* by Edward L. Cahn, 1959; *Plan 9 from Outer Space* by Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959; *The Earth Dies Screaming* by Terence Fisher, 1965.
14. The similarities stop here: ghouls in fact, like hyenas, whose shape they often take, feed mostly off the flesh of the dead (rarely defenseless children), and are not dead themselves.
15. Like what happened in previous films. One oddity: in 1936, to impersonate the living dead in *The Walking Dead*, Michael Curtis wanted Boris Karloff, who, in 1931, had played *Frankenstein* for James Whale (and in 1932 had played a mummy in the homonymous film by Karl Freund).
16. *The Night of the Living Dead* by Tom Savini (1990) and *The Night of the Living Dead 3D* by Jeff Broadstreet (2006), respectively.
17. Within this vast production, naturally there is no lack of Hitchcockian references: *Killing Birds* is one example, also known as *Zombi 5*, filmed by Italian director Claudio Lattanzi in 1987, in which the theme of zombies is mixed with that of killer birds.
18. Dario Argento never engages personally in the genre, but convinces his brother, producer Claudio Argento, to co-finance Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (in exchange for distribution rights for languages other than English), which was screened in Italy with the title *Zombi*, after undergoing a few edits. It is a great success, and a source of inspiration for directors like Lucio Fulci (whose *Zombi 2* from 1979 is worth remembering, as it returns to Haitian origins of the zombies, together with *Paura nella città dei morti viventi* [*Fear in the City of the Living Dead*] from 1980), Umberto Lenzi, Bruno Mattei and Claudio Fragasso, Joe D'Amato aka Aristide Massaccesi (Slater 2001).
19. Like Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) by Zack Snyder, *Zombieland* by Roben Fleisher (2009), *Warm Bodies* by Jonathan Levine (2013), Marc Forster's *World War Z*, starred in and produced by Brad Pitt (2013).
20. The theme becomes very popular in heavy metal culture (just think of Eddie, the zombie that appears on numerous Iron Maiden LP covers, among which the cover of *Live After Death* (1985) in which we see him rising from a tomb) and even the American alternative metal band *White Zombie*, which was active from 1985 to 1998. After the group's separation, lead singer Rob Zombie, aka Robert Bartleh Cummings, has a solo career and directs two horror films: *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) and *The Devil's Rejects* (2005). The dark wave musician (and dark cabaret artist and professor at the School of Visual Arts in New York) Voltaire, aka Aurelio Voltaire Hernandez, takes inspiration from the living dead in singles like BRAINS! (2003), *Day of the Dead*, *Cannibal Buffet* and *Zombie Prostitute* (2006).

21. 1984, directed by John Landis. It is the first music video in the current sense, equipped with a narrative and choreography.
22. 2011, directed by Nick Knight, is a very complex video. In one of the scenes Lady Gaga appears with Rick Genest, the Canadian artist and model known as Zombie boy. Her makeup mirrors the tattoos he has all over his body; she is made to look like a decomposing cadaver—with the addition of an unwieldy pink horse's tail.
23. Zack Snyder will film the remake in 2004. The third, filmed in 1985, is entitled *Day of the Dead* (*Day of the Dead* is also the title of a 2008 film by Steve Miner, inspired by the environments and situations of Romero's film, who, however, uses it as a background for a different plot, cf. *infra*). But Romero is not able to give up his creatures and will return to them 20 years later with *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007) and *Survival of the Dead* (2009).
24. To be more precise, the zombies that philosophers of the mind, starting with two articles by Robert Kirk (1974a, b, see also 2005), brood over are the hypothetical beings that are by all accounts similar to humans and endowed with their same cognitive system but devoid of "phenomenal consciousness": thus they would respond to a stimulus (for example, a hand's contact with a red-hot iron) the same way humans do (by pulling back the hand), but without feeling it and without any awareness of what had happened. The so-called zombie argument is used in polemics with the hypothesis of physicalism (a philosophical branch according to which every mental activity is explainable starting with neurobiological cognitive processes), by those who maintain, to the contrary, that consciousness is not a simple epiphenomenon of the cognitive system, but something that is added to it: demonstrating that beings can exist that possess our same cognitive system but are devoid of consciousness, is equivalent, in fact, to excluding the possibility that consciousness comes from the cognitive system. The argument has been laid out more systematically by David Chalmers (1996), but is also present in the works of Thomas Nagel, Daniel Dennett, Kyla M. Flanagan and many others. No one has been able, to be honest, to definitively demonstrate that zombies could exist; what the entire debate seems to prove, instead, is that today neurobiology and the cognitive sciences are quite far from being able to explain the complexity of human consciousness, but are able to give an account only of a few simple functions of the zombie mind.
25. Created by director Frank Darabont and produced starting in 2010, the television series is reaching its third season as I write this, and is inspired by the homonymous comic series written by Robert Kirkman and illustrated by Tony Moore and Charlie Adlard.

26. The interpretation of *Dawn of the Dead* as a critique of consumerist society has become canonical by now. Already present in Hardy 1984, today it can be found in all the zombie filmography guides and encyclopedias (Dendle 2001; Russell 2005; Kay 2008).
27. Paul W.S. Anderson's *Resident Evil* (2002) is another example, inspired by Capcom's homonymous serial video game for Playstation, that has had four sequels (inspired in turn by the sequels to the video games): *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* by Alexander Witt (2004), *Resident Evil: Extinction* by Russell Mulcahy (2007), *Resident Evil: Afterlife* by Paul W.S. Anderson (2010) and *Resident Evil: Retribution* by Paul W.S. Anderson (2012).
28. The film changes the zombies in another way: the infection, in fact, instead of slowing their reflexes and movements, enhances them. The idea of super-fast infectious cannibals was already present in *Nightmare City* (1980) by Umberto Lenzi, in which the virus was caused by a nuclear accident, but the fact remains that this characteristic will be particularly successful only after Boyle: it will return, for example, in the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* directed by Zack Snyder in 2004 and naturally in the sequel to *28 Days Later*, *28 Weeks Later* directed by Juan Carlos Frensedillo in 2007.
29. In 1985, the same year *Day of the Dead* was released, *The Return of the Living Dead* was also distributed, and the director, Dan O'Bannon, was one of Romero's collaborators at the time of *Night of the Living Dead*. O'Bannon's film, aimed at a teenage market, chooses an ironic and light register, and to make the film even more attractive to audiences, contains a woman's striptease. Here, the zombies are even able to talk: they mostly shout out "Braaaaaaiins!" as they attack the preferred organs of their victims, but they also use the radio of an ambulance to call others, so as to procure fresh nurses in order to eat them, and converse with the young punk protagonists to explain to them that only the brains of the living can alleviate the pain of the dead.
30. Even the lesser-known *Deadheads* by Brett Pierce and Drew T. Pierce (2011) develops a romantic plot, but in this case the atypical zombie protagonist, Mike (Michael McKiddy)—who not only maintained his consciousness, but has no appetite for human flesh—does not make new conquests, but goes in search of his lost love.
31. Remember that, according to the now classic anthropological theory developed by Ernesto de Martino (1958), collective mourning rituals serve the cultural function of preventing an excessive attachment toward the dead that could produce the antisocial effect of subtracting the individual from the life of the collective.
32. Both the living and the zombie protagonists are also gay in the film *At Twilight Come the Flesh-Eaters* by Vidkid Timo (a pseudonym of Timothy

Paul Ritchie, 1998), *Zombies* by Alex Dove (2003) and *Creatures from the Pink Lagoon* by Chris Diani (2007), but the three films, the first being pornographic, the second a thriller and the third a comedy, do not develop the theme of the conscious zombie (as an aside: *Zombies* in fact takes up the “Haitian” theme of the zombie controlled by an evil magician, and the protagonist Christian, aka Jonathan Williams, is torn between the duty to obey, which he cannot resist, and remorse for the homicides—the homicides—that he is forced to commit). What is very interesting, however, is the use of this figure in the BBC television series *In the Flesh*, written by Dominic Mitchell and directed by Jonny Campbell (which has broadcast two seasons—2013 and 2014). The protagonist is the gay teen Kieren Walker (Luke Newberry), who died of a suicide, came back as a zombie, and “reinserted” himself into the family: In the series, in fact, “partial death syndrome” can in part be cured with the help of a pharmaceutical just as HAART allows HIV-positive people to live a “normal” life. There are many amateur productions about gay zombies that can be found by doing a quick YouTube search (Fürst 2012). A separate chapter is designated for the relationships between lesbians and zombies. A lesbian character, Tomboy (Athena Karkanis), is present in Romero’s *Survival of the Dead* (2010), and lesbian sex scenes are present in Mario Siciliano’s *Orgasmo esotico [Exotic Orgasm]* (1982), but above all it is literature that has developed the theme in romantic and softcore plots. There is even a series of *eBooks* from the publisher Noble Romance entitled *Lesbian vs. Zombie*.

33. Miles is killed right as he tries to kiss Todd for the first time, and Todd’s initial reaction is to accuse the psychotherapist of being a monster. But she quickly reminds him: “There was no future there. You’re ready to move on now.” He thinks for a moment and responds: “You’re right. Thank you.” She responds: “No, thank you.” After which, caressing Todd’s chin, the psychotherapist uncovers her arm exposing a rotting lesion, and thus—she, the representative of the principles of reality and homonormativity—reveals her true zombie self.
34. The article was reworked in both German and English translations: Grilli 2012a, b.
35. The syncretism of pornography and horror is not new, Claude Pierson’s pioneering film *La fille a la fourrure* (1977, in which aliens possess the bodies of newly dead young women to have human sexual experiences) was a start, and *pornography* and *zombie-hardcore* can be considered real subgenres. Already in 1980 the Italian filmmaker Joe D’Amato—a pseudonym of Aristide Massaccesi, the director of the first Italian porn movie, *Sesso nero [Black Sex]* (1978), and the cult horror film *Antropophagus* (1980, in which even a fetus gets devoured)—makes *Le notti erotiche dei*

morti viventi [*The Erotic Nights of the Living Dead*] and *Porno Holocaust*, both set on the island of Hispaniola: in the first film, the actor Mark Shanon is bitten up by a kind of sorceress zombie leader (Laura Gesmer), in the second the zombies rape and eventually kill several women. Another Italian director, Mario Siciliano, inserts lesbian sex scenes in his *Orgasmo esotico* (1982), in which once again it is a sorceress who transforms the unlucky protagonists into porno-zombies. Other non-Italian examples of zombie-hardcore are *La revanche des mortes vivantes* [*Revenge of the Living Dead Girls*] by Pierre B. Reinhard (1987), the previously mentioned gay film *At Twilight Come the Flesh-Eaters* by Vidkid Timo (1998), that pokes fun at *Night of the Living Dead*, and *La Cage Aux Zombies* by Kelly Hughes (1995), a zombie-trans and gender-bending parody of Jean Poiret's theatrical production *La cage aux folles* (that Edoard Molinaro drew from in his 1978 comedy *Il viziutto*). There are many softcore productions that associate the figure of the zombie with the prostitute or the stripper, from *Night of the Living Babes* by Jon Valentine (1987) and *Gore Whore* by Hugh Gallager (1994), to *Planet Terror* (2007) by Robert Rodriguez, *Zombie Strippers!* by Jay Lee (2008) and *Zombies! Zombies! Zombies!* (2008) by Jason M. Murphy. "The link between pornography and horror isn't as odd as it might at first seem. Both genres deal in the forbidden and the fleshy and both are 'body genres' that try to produce a physical reaction in their audiences (pleasurable arousal and/or pleasurable fear). What's more, both genres also deal with extreme images of the body, the kind of images that are usually kept hidden behind the locked doors of the bedroom or the morgue" (Russell 2005: 135; see also Jones 2011).

36. In reality, there are two versions, a hardcore one and a softcore one, but even the first is post-pornographic if by "post-pornographic" you mean the use of hard scenes for ends other than the mere sexual excitement of the spectator, in particular with the aim of experimenting with creative subversions of the erotic imaginary. In the director's notes for *L.A. Zombie*, LaBruce (2010: 3), who furthermore is the author of an autobiography which is symptomatically entitled *The Reluctant Pornographer* (1997), declares: "Against all professional advice, I've been making porn movies ever since, albeit reluctantly (I'm not a particularly avid consumer of porn, and I don't follow the industry; not unpretentiously, I consider myself not so much a pornographer as an artist who works in porn)."
37. The term "significant flottant" was first used by Claude Levi-Strauss in his *Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss* [*Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*] (1950) to qualify the Polynesian term "mana" that vaguely references the realm of magic but lacks a precise referent and a shared meaning, and is thus at times redefined by its use. From anthropological lexicon "floating signifier" then entered into the realm of semiotics along with its

- synonym “empty signifier” to indicate words that in virtue of their vagueness makes symbolic thought possible because of their innate ambiguities and contradictions.
38. As evidenced on the one hand by queer theory and on the other by a fast production of cinematic and literary works on zombies in which the horror register blends with the parodistic or grotesque.
 39. See paragraph 2.1 *Homos/Thanatos*, supra: in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990, 2008²) Kosofsky Sedgwick shows how since the late 1800s, in medical and psychological knowledge and cultural representations, the concept of homosexuality was marked by a threefold contradiction (essentialism vs. constructivism, particularism vs. universalism, inversion vs. separatism) which, it seems to me, no theoretical position, not even Bersani’s or Edelman’s, has been able to rectify.
 40. In addition to *Dawn of the Dead* and *Gay Zombie* (cf. note 33, supra), the reference to the future is also present in many other zombie films. For example in *28 Days Later*, the leader of the military troops that live barricaded in a villa—Major Henry West played by Christopher Eccleston—promises that he will bring them some women, “because women mean a future,” and snidely remarks that comrade turned zombie is “futureless” as he keeps him chained up in a courtyard so that he may find out how long the living dead can survive without eating. In *Zombie Strippers*, when Jeannie the stripper (Shamron Moore) decides to become infected by the zombies who are closed in the basement of the club where she works, she responds to the question “Aren’t you afraid of looking like that in the future?” with another meaningful question: “What future?” Finally, in *Zombieland*, the most that Columbus, the young protagonist (Jesse Eisenberg) learns from the catastrophe is to “enjoy little things” and it isn’t hard to translate that into “enjoy *now*, don’t worry about what will happen later.”
 41. And not only: he also had a small part in Kevin Greutert’s horror film *Saw VI* (2009) and the role of protagonist, alongside Chiara Mastroianni, in *Homme au bain* [*Man at Bath*] (2010) by Christophe Honoré.
 42. As you can read in the previously cited director’s notes for *L.A. Zombie* (LaBruce 2010: 3): “After studying fashion for two years in Paris and working briefly as, what he called a ‘slave assistant’ in various fashion houses, Sagat left the profession. He felt that he had not been given the opportunities he deserved, and has claimed that it actually cost him money to work in the fashion industry, since he was often not paid for his work. Around age twenty-one, Sagat looked into working in the adult film industry. He did photographic work for several French companies, but felt he was poorly treated and put his career in front of the camera on hold. At the age of twenty-five, he was contacted by a French pornographic studio

called Citebeur while chatting on a gay chat line. He accepted the offer and, a few weeks later, performed in his first movie. It became an instant success, and Sagat decided to seek a fulltime job in the porn industry. Six months later, he was invited to move to the USA and, there, shot his first scene in a porn movie.” In 2011, Sagat was also a director and producer as well as an actor for Titan Media: the film is entitled *François Sagat’s Incubus* and was distributed in two parts, in December 2011 and in March 2012. In May 2013, at 33 years of age, he published a 16-second video on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ujyb2rxiYfE), filmed in Magic Kingdom, in front of Sleeping Beauty’s castle, in which he announces his decision to give up red-light films to launch a line of T-shirts and perhaps underwear. While he never made declarations in this regard, his choice has been connected to the heart attack and death (probably caused by steroid abuse) of Erik Rhodes, who acted alongside him in *L.A. Zombie*, and to the chain of suicides in the last few years that include other gay pornography stars: Roman Ragazzi, Wilfried Knight and Arpad Miklos.

43. “It’s about a zombie alien, a kind of chameleon that dresses like a homeless person and takes on a variety of forms. Furthermore he brings the dead back to life instead of transforming them into zombies, and that makes him a sort of Messianic figure. He could also be interpreted as a ‘Martian on Earth’, a creature who came to our planet to observe the behavior of humans and to try to help them. His observations operate as a critique of our culture” (LaBruce 2011a, translation Julia Heim; see also 2008; and Brinkema 2006 on LaBruce’s previous work).
44. The scene has its predecessors. In some of the advertisements of Fulci’s film *Zombi 2* (1979), there is a photo of an obese zombie that emerges from the water in front of Manhattan, though there is no trace of this image in the film. Most likely it was a shot that depicted the actor Captain Haggerty as he returned to shore: he had just filmed the scene in which his zombie character is shot down by a spray of gunfire and falls into the ocean. The film was supposed to contain a scene in which a herd of zombies comes out of the water, but this was cut as well. A very similar sequence appears, instead, in Romero’s *Land of the Dead*, where, to surprise-attack the survivors of Pittsburg, the zombies, led by Big Daddy, cross a river by walking along its bottom and reemerge on the other shore—from which we can deduce that the zombies do not need to breathe.
45. “The black sperm that is ejaculated from the zombie’s alien penis ‘infects’ the dead people that come in contact with it, bringing them, for all intents and purposes, back to life. It is a reverse metaphor for AIDS, with the monster who gives life instead of death through gay sex” (LaBruce 2011a, Translation Julia Heim).

46. LaBruce (2011b) has explained that the idea of a gay-zombie-alien that brings the dead back to life by having sex with them derived both from personal intuition and was the product of a re-elaboration of preexistent horror themes. Listing his references, he paid particular homage to the Italian director Mario Bava: “I had a kind of dreamlike vision of a creature that emerged from the ocean around Los Angeles and had a sort of connection with dead bodies that had just been found [...]. I had begun to think of a film by Kiyoshi Kurosawa called *Cure*. I had seen it when it came out in 1997 and I wanted to conjure it. I remembered the scenes in which people in trances murdered and this reminded me of somnambulism and death. Plus, shortly before I had seen the film by the Canadian director Daniel Petrie called *Resurrection* [1980], with Ellen Burstyn, that tells the story of a woman who is able to heal people after they have had terrible car accidents. This gave me the idea for the zombie that fucked dead people in order to bring them back to life. Then, finally, I rewatched the sci-fi horror film *Planet of the Vampires* [1965] by Mario Bava, which left me practically dead with fear when I was young. The creatures in that film are a kind of alien species capable of colonizing other people’s bodies whether they are dead or alive. The production design was fantastic. This is the same film that the creators of *Alien* borrowed a lot from in terms of their production design” [Translation Julia Heim].
47. That sex can provide an occasion for “anchoring oneself” through the encounter with the other has been confirmed by specialists as well. Referring to Herry Sullivan (1962) and Jose Bleger (1967), Italian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Cristina Faccincani (2010: 52) has shown, for example, the “perspective importance” that “sexual acts” can have for subjects affected by psychoses, maintaining that they can represent attempts to “control the confusion and the psychotic fragmentation” (Translation Julia Heim).
48. In addition to having done these two films, LaBruce also developed this theme in photography and the plastic arts. The show *Hardcore Zombie Project* began with a performance by François Sagat and Tony Ward (model and Madonna’s “boy toy” briefly) on May 23, 2009, at the Peres Projects Gallery of Los Angeles. The director (2010: 3) declared that his previous production in a certain sense already touched on the gay-zombie-hardcore genre: “After making three sexually explicit feature films (NSOMA, Super 8½, and Hustler White), in 1999 I wrote and directed my first ‘legitimate’ porno film, *Skin Flick*, made under the auspices of the German porn company Cazzo Films. The subjects were neo-Nazi skinheads, characters that, one could argue, have a certain zombie-like quality. The hardcore version, released under the title *Skin Gang*, was a full-on pornographic product, shot in a relatively conventional porn style, and packaged and promoted

with an adult entertainment industry audience in mind. [...] My following film, *The Raspberry Reich* (2004), about a gang of extreme left wing would-be-terrorists—another zombie-esque bunch—was conceived as a porn product [...] (The hardcore version, entitled *The Revolution Is My Boyfriend*, was released by the porn company Wurstfilm.) In 2008 I finally stopped pussyfooting around the living dead theme and made an actual zombie flick called *Otto; or, Up with Dead People*.” LaBruce’s latest film deals with the connection between sex and death from a different perspective: it’s entitled *Gerontophilia* (2013) and is about a young man’s attraction to old people, and in particular to an old man at the nursing home where he works.

49. “*Otto* had a storyboard, *L.A. Zombie* was filmed like a guerilla movie. *Otto* had a screenplay filled with dialogue, *L.A. Zombie* was filmed based on three pages about the theme and without dialogue. *Otto* has strong lesbians among its characters, *L.A. Zombie* doesn’t have any female characters. [...] *Otto* had a consistently larger budget, and because of this I could work on its aesthetic with accurately arranged scenes and a precise lighting plan. *L.A. Zombie* had a micro-budget and was filmed in a guerilla-style with a lot of documentary sensibility. The two filming experiences couldn’t have been more different” (LaBruce 2011a, Translation Julia Heim).
50. The theme of feeding develops through the film. Though he feels the desire, *Otto* is not able to eat human flesh and feeds off small animals that he finds already dead or that he kills (aside from the run-over hare, a pigeon, raw chicken meat he steals from the supermarket, and a cat that purrs at him): there is only one scene in which he bites a gay skinhead. It will come out later that *Otto* was a vegetarian, his father is a butcher, and eating disorders are among the reasons for which he was hospitalized.
51. The ad reads: “Calling all zombies. Open call. Low budget zombie film. Call Medea Yarn 69555555.”
52. Before filming a gay-zombie orgy, which is the last scene of her film, Medea turns to the actors and utters these words: “All right, boys. Listen up. I’ve gathered you here to participate in something historical. Today we film the final scene of *Up with Dead People*, the politico-porno-zombie movie that I’ve been working on for too many years to count owing to the fact that no one would give me the funding. My brother Adolf, whose dedication to the project has been unwavering, will be behind the camera, as usual, and my long-suffering girlfriend, Hella Bent, is here to provide immoral support.”
53. LaBruce naturally has an excellent mastery of the cinematic evolution of zombies and the multiple meanings they have assumed, and he explicitly presents his zombies as the product of these continual mutations. The film that Medea shoots about *Otto*, in fact, opens with the narrative voice of the director reciting the words that are the epigraph of this chapter.

54. Medea sums up the plot of the film with these words: “Fritz, our anti-hero, returns home after a long day of forced labour in the fashion mines, ever vigilant of the marauding gangs of youth who hunt down and annihilate anyone they suspect of being undead or homosexual, having become indifferent to the distinction between the two. Entering his apartment, Fritz finds his longtime companion, Maximilian, dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on the kitchen floor. He could no longer live in an environment of persecution and paranoia, a topsy-turvy world in which the living, deadened by an increasingly materialistic, corporatized world, exterminate the undead, who have become more humane and sensitive than their living counterparts. The bullet to his brain, however, does not prove enough to prevent Maximilian from being reanimated. After recruiting his lover, Fritz, into the homosexual army of the undead by making sweet zombie love to him, the necromantic duo begins to plan an uprising against living civilization. While writing graffiti to spread the word, they are interrupted by a gang of thugs brandishing baseball bats. Maximilian is shot in the head again and, this time, permanently exterminated. FRITZ escapes and, inspired by the martyrdom of Maximilian, begins his rise to infamy as the guerrilla leader of the homosexual zombies, the gay Che Guevara of the undead. In the beginning he recruits his followers one by one, luring homosexuals into dark alleys and fucking them into immortality. Soon he has recruited enough members to form a gang of his own, a small army of gay zombies who recruit members by fucking, killing, and partially devouring vigorous young men, not necessarily in that order. In the final scene, FRITZ has gathered together his insurgent sissies from beyond the grave, his macabre Mujahideen, to prepare them for their last stand against the overwhelming forces of the deadened living. He has brought them together for a final orgy of the dead.”
55. The song lyrics are a condemnation of civilization: God visits the “lost souls” and cries for the atrocities committed by the human race throughout history.
56. Throughout the film, Otto wears a white shirt with a black tie, a light v-neck sweater with black-and-white horizontal stripes, a black hooded sweatshirt and tight black jeans. The edges of his clothing are all dirty and frayed.
57. “Jey Crisfar, who played *Otto*, was not a professional actor, he was a student I found on the Internet. I wanted to entrust the part to someone who was very similar to the character he had to play—a very sensitive, vulnerable and authentic gay teenager” (LaBruce 2011a, Translation Julia Heim).
58. This term refers not to the fear of HIV but the discrimination against HIV-positive people, and in particular against HIV-positive gay people. There is a blatant association between the zombie epidemic and AIDS in *Up with*

Dead People. In the first scene Fritz, who is still human, worriedly checks his appearance in a window and then swallows a large dose of pills, which makes one think of him as a young gay man who needs to take tranquilizers to deal with the mounting social homophobia, as a young gay man with AIDS, or as a young gay man with AIDS who also needs to take tranquilizers to deal with mounting social homophobia and serophobia. Later on, Medea's narrative voice says: "In a superstitious age, many believed that the return of the dead signified a punishment of mankind by God. A theological explanation such as this gained even more popularity when it became apparent that the latest cycle of zombies was homosexual. A gay plague had descended on humanity."

59. To give a European example, see the *Bulletin de Santé* published by the Observatoire regional de santé Île-de-France in December 2012: "The Prevagay inquiry data conducted by the InVS in Paris in 2009 in gay conviviality locations allow for the estimation of the incidence of HIV in the men who frequent them at 3800 every 100,000, which is double what can be observed on average among men in the region that have homo-bisexual relations. [...] The epidemic is only modestly shrinking in the last few years (see the Bulletin de Santé 2011). Among men who have homo-bisexual relations, it even seems to be growing" (1). Remember that Île-de-France is the region of Paris, a city where, in January 2013, lesbians and gays celebrated the approval of gay marriage with much enthusiasm (Translation Julia Heim).
60. Cf. note 54, *supra*.
61. LaBruce's intention is clear, as evidenced by Medea's joke: "I love birthdays. Each year they bring you closer to death."
62. Medea indignantly addresses her with these words: "Get out of here, you little brat. You're ruining my shot." LaBruce, however, is well aware of the difference between the Child-fetish of futurist rhetoric and flesh and blood children and young people and shows them respect. In fact, though *Otto*, like *L.A. Zombie*, contains sexually explicit scenes (in *Up with Dead People*, for the first time in LaBruce's work, a zombie, Maximilian, penetrates a wound—the one caused by his biting Fritz's stomach), Crisfar never appears entirely nude. During the filming LaBruce, in fact, gave the young actor the choice of being the protagonist of the "hard" sequences, and in the end he wasn't up for it.
63. "Garbage, garbage everywhere. Garbage as far as the eye can see. Garbage piled to the heavens and buried to the depths of hell. Garbage cluttering the environment and demeaning nature. Spent nuclear fuel rods containing radioactive isotopes with half-lives of a thousand years or more seeping into the earth. Plastics with irreversibly linked molecules effortlessly achieving the kind of immortality that men can only dream of. Garbage dumps are the great mass graveyards of advanced capitalism, repositories of all the

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

64. With a different vocabulary and different nuanced meaning, Grilli (2009: 178) also stresses the paradoxical foundations of identity with these words: "The zombie becomes, by virtue of its structurally contradictory nature, the most appropriate signifier for this pluralistic and open identity, an identity capable of adopting the other as an integral part of the self."
65. In Lacan the concept of "jouissance" has many meanings, which evolve through the course of his teaching, and which are systematized and clarified in Recalcati 2012b: 495 et seqq. In *Seminar XX* (1975), Lacan distinguishes first and foremost between sexual jouissance that implies the other though not in terms of "relationship," and deadly jouissance, that cancels the subject within the thing. He then distinguishes between the jouissance of being, inaccessible to the human, phallic jouissance (male sex), jouissance of the other (psychotic or paranoid) and other jouissance (female sexual jouissance).
66. It is not at all important to establish whether Andrea was gay or not: he was a victim of homophobia all the same. As are his relatives, not only because they lost him so tragically, but because in the face of such unbearable grief, their first reaction was to deny the talk of his homosexuality, as if wanting to ease their memory by freeing him from such dishonorable accusations. Like Andrea, Otto too is recognized as queer by homophobic thugs regardless of whether he is aware of being queer or not. Suffering from amnesia, not remembering his failed love story with Rudolf, initially Otto just feels like a zombie, an unreal character who exists only in films like Medea's. As much zombie, as homosexual, Otto is thus both real and unreal, defined by an instinctiveness over which he has no control and by a meaning that others attribute to him. At the beginning of the film the spectators are inspired to ask themselves: "is he a zombie or a human?" just as often it is asked of people "but is he gay or straight?" A good question would instead be: but in what way is "gay" something that you are?

67. Luckily the boy survived, though he suffered fractures in his lower limbs. Before throwing himself out the school window, Marco (a made-up name chosen by the newspapers) left a goodbye message on his Facebook wall in which he declared his homosexuality, he affectionately bids farewell to his mother and saves very harsh words not only for his classmates, but for his father as well.
68. Medea explicitly references Jesus Christ, when she provocatively asks Fritz, a participant in Otto's partial memory recovery: "What are you trying to do? Resurrect him? Lazarus was the first one and Jesus Christ the second. Are you planning to complete the Holy Zombie Trinity?"
69. Edelman himself, along with Lauren Berlant, edits the series "Theory Q" for Duke University Press.

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