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He is Dead, and He is Continuing to Die: A Feminist Psycho-Semiotic Reflection on Men's Embodiment of Metaphor in a Toronto Zombie Walk

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ABSTRACT

Every October, the dead rise in Toronto; approximately 3,500 to 5,000 individuals take to the street as a unified social body of death through dressing as zombies. In this essay, I explore the affective state of men in the Toronto Zombie Walk from a feminist psycho-semiotic perspective. I emphasize the ways in which costumes and space allow for the embodiment of various metaphors, which are always polysemic—simultaneously metaphors of death, metaphors of birth envy, and metaphors of the unconscious rising. I conclude by bringing these points together in understanding the Zombie Walk, for men, as a ritual of working out the meaning of death, the meaning of birth, and what it means to be alive.

INTRODUCTION

The quote after which this essay is titled is a reflection by Barthes (1980) on the uncanny characteristic that lingers in a photograph of a young man about to be sentenced to death. He points out:

> The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *This has been;* I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake . . . there is always a defeat of Time in them (photographs): *that* is dead and *that* is going to die. (96)

In this, Barthes notes the paradox of the visual presence of the person in the photo juxtaposed upon his physical absence in the world outside of the image. Particularly, like I in this essay, he strives to examine the a-syncretism of representations. Death and life, *Thanatos* and *Eros*, are co-present, creating what Carroll (1996:213) calls "noncompossible homospatialities": two phenomena simultaneously occupy the same space in a manner, which, given physical laws and/or cultural understandings, is impossible. The Zombie Walk is a case of multiple noncompossible homospatialities, as the present attempts to pull in the past of the future, and people attempt to make sense of death and dying as it will occur to their, our, *bodies*.

Every October, the dead rise in Ontario. Approximately 3,500 to 5,000 individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 take to the shops and boutiques of Toronto to perform on the commodity-stage, taking attention away from processes of consuming and consumption as it relates to commodities. From realistically gory to what Sontag (1964) might refer to as *camp-ishly* real,[1] the zombies embody multiple forms of cultural critique—abortion, labor rights, women's rights, minority rights, QBGLT rights, alternative religious communities' rights, and so on.

In this essay, I analyze men's experience of the visual and spatial, and thus performative, metaphors present in the Toronto Zombie Walk through a feminist psycho-semiotic lens. While the Zombie Walk is a social critique with a multitude of critical narrative planes and embodied messages created through performative discourse, this costumed performance unilaterally affects the psyche, or conscious mind, of its male participants regardless of their intended protest-message.[2] In particular, I hope to show that the "mindless" trance state that many participants, myself included, experienced is the result of the libidinous Id-centric energy of the death drive being brought to the conscious level, with visual metaphors acting as the conduit. I begin by discussing my approach to both the study of the Zombie Walk and my writing of this paper. I then move on to a narrative of my experience, providing a brief snapshot to exemplify the premise of this paper—the symbols used in cultural critique allow for the surfacing of unconscious drives among males in the Toronto Zombie Walk (*The End of Us and the Beginning of the Walk*). Stemming from this, I discuss how the power of visual metaphors used in social movements are attached to the body, and how they alter affective experience (*Social Movements*,

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[1] In her *Notes on Camp*, Sontag (1964) suggests that "Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a 'lamp'; not a woman, but a 'woman.' To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role" (11), and "The ultimate Camp statement: it's good *because* it's awful" (58). It is characterized as "the failed sensibility of failed seriousness, of theatricalization of experience" (36).

[2] This research, given that it attempts to comment on the psychological through the phenomenological, is biased toward the masculine experience given this is my own positionality. I have, however, attempted to utilize a feminist framework for analyzing this experience given its critical power in understanding the masculine from outside of the masculine paradigm.

Social Affectivity, and the Absorption of Metaphor). I then divide the context into costume (*Dressing (as) the Id*) and place (*Place is the Space (or how the Real interrupted my Symbolic)*). *Dressing (as) the Id* addresses the way, specifically, that the metaphors used in the Zombie Walk discreetly facilitate the eruption of the unconscious into the conscious, causing the trance state described by most males. *Place is the Space* then describes how the landscape factors into this unconscious eruption by way of containing its own psychodynamic symbols (activated by the space becoming a ritual sphere), how this relates to the urban condition of modernity, and how—just as Bakhtin describes the grotesque—this reflects the social conditions of both the ritual landscape as a metaphor and as the physical place. I conclude by attempting to understand the larger role of the Zombie Walk, both in Toronto and around the world, within the modern Western psyche. This essay, thus, documents my struggle to understand the affectivity characteristic of the Toronto Zombie Walk; it is an exploration of the cause of trance states, arrived at through the connecting of performative and affective dimensions in creative and imaginative forms of social and cultural critique. For the Toronto zombie walkers, metaphor is not only the thing that they do, but is also the thing that makes them do it, and the thing that satisfies the need to make the metaphor in the first place.

Methods

Before moving on to the study of this phenomenon itself, something must be said by way of positioning, theory, and methodology. In this section, I outline where I locate this study within (what I consider fluid) disciplinary boundaries, my approach to conducting ethnographic study, and the theory that underlies the way in which I articulate, or ethnographize, the experience of a Zombie Walk.

I locate this research in the fluid, disciplinary borders between cultural studies (as much as it can be seen as a discipline) and anthropology. In it, I combine the strengths of cultural studies to focus in on the larger effect of one event in terms of shaping meaning and representation (often ignored by contemporary, politically focused anthropology) with the strengths of ethnographic, participant-observation fieldwork as used in anthropology (often lacking in cultural studies' use of personal interpretation, based on the assumption of a "universal reader" of cultural texts *from the outside*). It is from this that I proceed with a more refined way of understanding that meaning and textuality are *never* finished products. From Barthes's (1975) "writerly" text to Eco's (1984) understanding of the *Role of the Reader*, writings in cultural theory are much more attuned to the endless productivity of semiotic activities within the semiosphere. Highmore (2005) points out, "Cultural studies is also engaged in attempting a much wider, less pragmatic project: it is, like its anthropological ancestors, trying to register what culture feels like from the inside—what culture is like in terms of density and force, its thick complexities and its animating energies" (112).

It is these thick complexities that ethnography is positioned to examine, more so than the theoretical interpretation often practiced by cultural studies, where analysis is much more attuned to "reading" the text, not necessarily writing/practicing it. Furthermore, it is the position of the ethnographer as a participant-observer that allows for a better view of the "density and force" of cultural performances. It is also this that inspires the ethnographic approach of this paper. While it is only through interacting with people that the complexities, and indeed contradictions, of a Zombie Walk can be seen, it is only through speaking about the psyche—only knowable *through experiencing* the psyche—that one can understand the density and force these metaphors of death and dying have on the embodied experience and knowledge gained through the Zombie Walk.

Margaret Mead once pointed out, "In matters of ethos, the surest and most perfect instrument of understanding is our own emotional response" (Jacknis 1988:172). Rather than autoethnographic, this study might be better understood as what Ott (2007) calls *auto[erotic]ethnography*.

> On one hand, what I refer to as auto[erotic]ethnography entails a fairly traditional understanding of "ethnography," involving the study of behavior (in this case my own) in its everyday context, the gathering of data based on observation, and the subsequent interpretation of data (Hammersly 1998:2). On the other hand, my approach to "data" is somewhat unique, as it is being gathered not to give an account of "reality" (even an individual one) but to model, to teach, a mode of viewing. My data, or more precisely my Text, will consist of the televisual images and sounds I create by channel surfing and the intertextual associations I make along the way . . . So although my approach can be imitated or reproduced, my "Text" or data cannot be, for in the words of Roland Barthes (1998a), "the Text is experienced only in an activity of production" (157). I have included the descriptor [erotic] in the naming of my approach to emphasize that television viewing can be an ecstatic experience, or what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has elsewhere termed *flow*.

Like Ott, I create my own text through my experiences of the Zombie Walk. The concept of *flow*—a single-minded immersion in a task such that one's energies are positively aimed at its accomplishment—is figured and "worked out" explicitly in this research on the power of *creating* and sustaining metaphors of death with the body. As Wacquant (2004) puts it, this kind of research requires not only a "sociology *of* the body . . . but also a sociology *from* the body" (viii). Additionally, as this essay focuses on a psychoanalytic interpretation of sexual metaphors, the descriptor [erotic] seems beyond apropos.

Finally, the write-up of this ethnography emphasizes a grounding in Geertz's (1973) interpretive approach. What makes Geertz's work so stable in interpretation, and indeed makes it most readable, is his practice of *thick description*. Thick description is specifically adopted from psychologist Gilbert Ryle, and emphasizes that behavior is only meaningful in so much as it is related to a context of action, or universe of discourse.[3] To read the subtext in Geertz's writing, thick description is also a writing of the unresolved aspect of cultural interpretations, a struggle over what it "means" and what one wants it to *mean* for them. Thick description lies in the inherent contradictions afforded by interpretation of events. It is the contradiction that makes them thick; it is the contradiction that makes them *real*.[4]

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (5). (In thick description), what the ethnographer is in fact faced with . . . is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one

[3] We might see in this an alliance with Greimas's (1990) understanding of meaning as a process being located in the translation of signified | signifier between modes of expression. Meaning is not a thing, but an endless process of translation resulting in understanding signifiers | signifieds in multiple universes of discourse.

[4] This reading of Geertz is further supported by his use of metaphors and idioms: to "sort" through, "web" of significance, "pull apart," and the like.

> another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. (1973:10)

This essay, thus, carries forth with Geertz's notion of thick description. What follows is an auto[erotic]ethnographic account of the power metaphors have over the state of consciousness during street celebrations, and indeed parades, of the dead in contemporary, secular society.

The End of Us and the Beginning of the Walk

"Brrrrraaaaaiiiiiinnnnsssss," he moaned.

"BBBBRRRRRRAAIIIINNNNSSSS," he and I, and many others, collectively groaned and grumbled as we slipped into a vacant mindset that straddled the realms of conscious and unconscious.

"BRRRAAAAAAIIIIIIIIINNNNNNSSSSSSS," an ambiguous corporeality of zombie flesh, wounds, and blood moaned, as it writhed together in an endless sea, each of its fragments an individual attacking the Cartesian dualism that instantiates the very realm we cavorted.

"BBBBBBBRRRRAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIINNNNNNNSSSSSSSSS," it, no longer *we* in any form of the word, moaned as it became a body that was not subordinated to the reign of the cognitive and the cogito, a body that transforms thought and mind into mere flesh, one that transforms it into pure, material, consciously unconscious . . . "BBBBBRRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIINNNNNNNSSSSSSSSS."

It was a Sunday afternoon in 2008 when I arrived at the Trinity Bellwoods Park in Toronto. The sun was shining brightly and it was a nice, somewhat brisk, October day. Children were playing on playground equipment, couples took strolls through the park, and city-league soccer games went on in the distance. All of this I saw while sitting on a park bench with a bloody set of clothes stuffed into a bag.

The thought that came to my mind, nearly immediately, was uncanny—the same feeling that overcame Barthes while looking at the photograph discussed in this paper's introduction. The term, in its Freudian sense, describes that which is so homely, it is unhomely; referring to the ways in which things that are too normative take on extranormative qualities, making them extra abnormal. Did people know what was coming? Did they know that the park would be filled by people pretending to be the living dead, people often associated with the outer circles of "productive" society given their fascination with the dead and dressing up in the park? Were they themselves conscious of the uncanny? Did they know *why* it was uncanny, or that it was just uncanny?

Little pointed to this. Aside from one radio advertisement for a "Zombie Parade," which I heard three hours' distance from Toronto, there was little evidence of the activities. From previous interactions with Zombie Walks, I assumed that the information was restricted to the blogsphere, and those "subaltern" communities that looked for such activities.

At approximately 3 p.m. I stumbled upon a small group of zombies gathering in what was referred to as the "pit" of the park—a large trench, approximately 50 feet deep, that had been grassed over. This was to be the gathering and start point of the Zombie Walk.

After about 50 minutes, and a brief "box war,"[5] more than 2,500 zombies had accumulated in the pit, walking and talking as normal people, enjoying the opportunity to see various costumes and themes among people. Some partook in eating food, and others in various

[5] A box war is an event in which cardboard boxes are designed into armor, and people stage battles reminiscent of Roman warfare.

"substances," everyone passing gallons of fake blood around, playfully spattering it across friends, family, and strangers alike. The atmosphere was social, strangers introducing themselves, people excited to see old friends whom they had met in previous Zombie Walks, and various nonparticipants taking group photos of zombies with little in common besides the fact that they were dressed as zombies.

In a strange wave, with seemingly no origin, zombies started to gather at the north side of the pit in character. From above, it possibly looked as if a contagious virus spread throughout the crowd, one that turned their brains to mush, and reduced the subject to purely functional capabilities. From the moaning, the function was purely to gather "Braaaaiiiinnnnnssss."

We quickly compiled on the north side of the pit, opposite of the trail that led into it. As people compacted more and more, indiscriminately rubbing and writhing together, it seemed as if no others could get closer. As if a container filled with combustible fluid, zombies took to the hill, a steep 50 degree angle intended to keep people FROM walking up it, with moans and screams. Dirt tumbled downward like a river, mixed with blood from the bodies of the undead.

Climbing the hill, we had fully transformed into zombies. Groaning, staggering, and reaching, the libidinous energy—sexualized by the moans, the touching, and the lack of clothing on various zombies—passed through me and the rest of the participants. The libido was that contagious disease that caused us all to turn.

In an interview before the Zombie Walk, Ted, a 23-year-old male, described the feeling in terms of sexually charged energy, "When I describe it to my friends, I tell them it's like taking ecstasy . . . which a lot of people do here . . . being touched makes you want to do more touching, you're shouting, and your mind just shuts down because it feels so good to just do it. Over and over again" (personal interview, October 19, 2008).

In an anonymous group conversation with some other zombies, it was made clear that sexual transgression is a key to both who *does* the Zombie Walk (or the perception of such) and what fuels it. For these participants, the Zombie Walk was an event to bring recognition to the BQGLT (Bisexual, Questioning, Gay, Lesbian, and Trans-sexual) community, by using their costumes as a way to signify coming out. "It's kind of a good metaphor, if you think about it. Mindless people feeling each other up indiscriminately . . . we're all just sexual animals, and the Zombie Walk shows that when you lift sex norms, people'll get it where it's most convenient" (personal interview, October 19, 2008). Group members agreed, suggesting that many people participate in the event, partially, to "cop a cheap feel."

The libidinous energy weaved in and out of the wounds of the zombies as they pushed farther and farther up the hill. Unknowingly, my face had somehow been covered in dust and blood. Stopping to wipe my eyes, I was nearly trampled by other zombies. It wasn't until this moment, 15 minutes after the start of the Zombie Walk, that I realized the un-sentient state I had been occupying. In this moment, I attempted to ask other zombies around me what they had felt, with no responses besides those typical of zombies . . . "BRRRAIIINNNNSSSS." While I will by no means claim that they had slipped into such a subliminal state that they could not respond, I believe it safe to say that they *would not* respond, for matter of either subliminality or the fear of coming out of the subliminal state: "ruining the mood," as one person described it afterward. It was at this point I decided to rely on both traditional ethnographic methods and my own perceptions (and interpretation of these perceptions) in autoethnographic format.

However, such a task is not as easy as it sounds, especially in regards to the Zombie Walk. While the barricades of reflexivity and self-glorification often exist in this type of writing, my challenge was consciousness—trying to remain lucid throughout the walk.

We moaned, and we rubbed until we were near the edge of the hill, held back by the people at the front of the horde. It was there that a loudspeaker cut through the moans. They quieted, but did not stop, echoing from the bottom of the hill.

"THESE RULES HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO US BY THE CITY OF TORONTO POLICE DEPARTMENT . . ."

The announcement was over-ridden by a mixed moan of brains, and a nearby chant of "lunch, lunch, lunch, lunch . . ."

"NO ATTACKING THE HUMANS . . . STAY OUT . . . THE STREET . . . DAMAGES TO PROPERTY . . . ABIDE BY THE RULES . . . FORCED TO STOP . . ."

It became impossible to hear whether the rules were continuing to be read or not. I joined in a chorus of moans that had overpowered the volume of the loudspeaker. In a rigid motion, bodies began to sway back and forth, preparing to bust out of the container that was the pit—no longer grassed, but marred by the plodding of 2,500 zombies in place. The dirt continued to flow to the ground like a steady waterfall.

Again, I was brought to a moment of lucidity as the group pushed forward. Time had passed—five or ten minutes—but I was unsure. In escaping the pit, the zombie mass expanded; no longer forced to rub together, zombies staggered into one another by character of their inability to take normal steps.

As we came to the edge of the park, we entered the commercial district. Separating these two spaces, as with many urban parks, were two gothic gates. Entering the sidewalk, these gates compacted us into the unified body from which we had separated. Moaning and staggering, the teetering feeling of between consciousness and otherwise returned. In the unclouded moments of entering the urban district, one could not help but think of the plethora of zombie movies that structure the event. This time, however, instead of being the innocent bystander in the audience, transposing themselves into the soon-to-be victims in the streets, I was, we were, empowered by our own disempowerment. We could see the story from the zombie's eyes.

"It's my favorite part, looking at the way people look at us. Some point and gawk; some run away. I've seen a lot of little kids cry, and a lot try to come closer, and their parents snatch them up. We usually see this in movies from the third-person perspective, safe in our seats; in the Zombie Walk, we get to see firsthand what it's like to terrorize a community. It feels awesome to be the mob, instead of being the mobbed" (personal conversation, October 19, 2008).

It is this stage of the Zombie Walk that becomes the hardest to account for. Two and a half hours of walking, moaning, and staggering create the perfect conditions for trance-like stages. Only few moments, and one extended period (to be in the social interaction section), created conditions in which I could "check in" with myself—to think about what I felt, was feeling, and what to say about it. Doing so often hindered my ability to get back in the mode of the Zombie Walk, which was more enjoyable in the brainless movements of zombie-ing.

Through this paper, I want to interrogate the conditions of that allow for this trance-like feeling.[6] I am not so much interested in the trance itself, which has been so well discussed by other anthropologists (Grindal 1983; Winkelman 2000; Noll 1985; Long 1976), rather the conditions that make it possible. I propose that it is by the various metaphors—spatial and costumed, embodied and enacted—experienced throughout the Zombie Walk that fuels the ability to slip into trance, as the unconscious is triggered by metaphors of its own existence. In this, I will understand the text of textless-ness (the unconscious state) through the *con*text.

[6] Because of the limited space, this paper engages with how modes of critique set up the possibility for the trance state, but (unfortunately) not the trance state itself.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, SOCIAL AFFECTIVITY, AND THE ABSORPTION OF METAPHOR

Social movements are defined, very broadly, as a diverse networking of individuals whose engagement in collective action "is nourished by the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning" (Melucci 1989:70). They are ritual events, generally analyzed for the ways that they inscribe political messages on the urban landscape and conceptual media spaces. However, of particular interest in this paper is the way in which the Toronto Zombie Walk generates alternative planes of selfhood. Zombie Walks can thus be seen as social movements that allow for a collective affectivity, by linking together participants, the collective conscious, and the imagery of death and dying. In this section, I mobilize anthropological, sociological, and psychological discussions of affect in order to show the ways in which social movements allow the embodiment of images, which subsequently allow slippage into trance states. More specifically, it is in this section that I show that—through social movements—visual metaphors are attached to the body in a way that can (and do in the case of the Zombie Walk) alter affective states. Of particular emphasis is work done by Juris (2008) on the connection between counter-summit protests and affective states.

Social movements are simply those mass events wherein people challenge or unsettle dominant social norms. It requires little imagination to look at the Zombie Walk as fitting into this category. Alvarez et al. (1998) point out, further, that in many cases, "social movements do not demand inclusion into but rather seek to reconfigure the dominant political culture" (8). As was the case in Calderón's (1988) analysis of Latin American social movements, "Como entrar en la modernidad sin dejar de ser indios" (225), the Zombie Walk mobilizes discourses of what it means to be different not accessible through paradigms of "Western public modernity."

In the working out of this problem, being modernly different in a way that modernity cannot describe, we find a special kind of social movement. Handelman (1990) distinguishes between two types of events: those that "present the lived-in world" and those that "re-present the lived in world." Where social movements of the first type protest political meanings by confronting the "protested" or that move against, social movements of the second category are ones that re-figure the social world into the carnivalesque to "reveal the concealed meanings of the political encased in the social" (Slater 1998:385). The Zombie Walk re-presents its political movements in the image of death, as a struggle between the fast-moving exterior of capitalism and the cumbersome interior of animate decomposition. These metaphors become more than political statements; their visual form, with its gaping wounds and anonymous corporeality, is a catalyst for the unconscious state spurred by this modernly un-modern ritual of the dead.

Pulido (2003) examines social movements as distinct types of rituals that have two specific effects: "exterior" effects are those that involve the alteration of social, cultural, economic, and political structures, and "interior" effects are those that alter "emotions, psychological development, souls, and passions" (47). Juris (2008) states, "internally, they [social movements] provide terrains where identities are expressed through distinct bodily techniques and emotions are generated through ritual conflict and the lived experience of prefigured utopias" (62). Specifically, his reference, and the primary concern of this paper, is to Rosaldo's (1984) notion of "emotional force"—that deeply felt sensation of affective solidarity that is derived from the nontraditional modes of identification and commitment that stem from social movements.

Protests are specifically *image events* (DeLuca 1999) that utilize bizarre, often grotesque, visualization to garner public attention in both mediated and lived spaces. Schiefffelin (1985) suggests that these images are linked to emotion through embodied performances, by allowing participants to experience symbolic meanings in the context of ritual interaction. This is further complemented by Kapchan's (1995) view that, "to perform is to carry something into effect" (479). To examine the visual symbols and the affective state of zombie walkers is to analyze the ways in which theatrical spaces of inversion are created in the formation of not identity, but of subjectivity, a subjectivity that transcends the body through "techniques of the body" (Dewey 1929, Mauss 1973). In this light, the Toronto Zombie Walk creates a performative space for critiquing social orders and enacting new social bonds that enable affective solidarity. Play and performance in this new social space links bodies, emotions, and lived worlds (Lancaster 1997) through *metaphors*.

To privilege the metaphorics and enacted poetics of ritual is not to turn away from the *real* world behind; it is not to privilege a fictional space over the physical one, but to insist that those experiences of the "real" are entangled in networks of dense metaphorical meanings (one only need refer to Geertz's above quote of cultures being "webs of significance"). It is the tangle of the physical world and the symbolic, the sedimentation of various histories into the signs of spaces, and the mingling of imaginings and experience that constitute ritual. However, this is not to suggest that ritual is simply the overlaying of poetic codes onto experience. Quite the contrary, poetic codes constitute the very reality of that experience, which we perceive as separate from those very metaphoric codes. This is to insist that the experiences we have in *the real* are punctuated by an accumulation of images and signs.

These signs, as Juris (2008) has shown, influence states of affectivity through the embodiment rituals of social movements. In what follows, I show how this embodiment moves performers into subconscious states in the Toronto Zombie Walk. I consider two distinct metaphorical realms: the embodied and the enacted. I show that the Zombie Walk connects minds with visual metaphors of death, what Freud (1922) terms *Thanatos,* or the death drive. I will also show in what ways *Eros* and *Thanatos* are merely the visible face of a polysemic metaphor that also carries with it notions of birth envy and the structure of consciousness. It is this connection that allows for a rise of the unconscious to surface level, inducing trance states as the unknowable advances to the behavioral level.

Dressing (as) the Id

> *The symbol manifests first of all as the murder of the thing, and this death constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire.* (Lacan 1977:144)

Costumes are a primary mode of embodiment in ritual, allowing for persons to not just disguise themselves for the purpose of "hiding," but also allowing for a process of becoming, a process whereby the represented (the thing of the costume) takes precedence over the representer (Pollock 1995). In this becoming, not just the body alters, but also the mental state of the actor. They become the thing that they are costumed as, and are subject to all of the bodily processes, metaphors, and metonyms that the represented is subjected to in myths—be they movies, histories, or mythologies (Munn 1973). In this section, I show that the zombie costume creates a bodily metaphor that allows for slippage into the unconscious. I argue that costuming is not merely a replacing of the sign of the body with the sign of the zombie—an unconscious sentient being—but also a subjecting of the hidden body of the individual to the metaphors of

unconscious desire, which are symbolically represented and mediated by the zombie facade. I interrogate questions of the zombie costume, much as others have done with the costumes involved in ritual clowning (Levine 1961; Charles 1945; Stoeltje 1985; Rodriguez 1991). I begin by examining the role of blood as part of the costume of the zombie, contrasting it with a notion of blood as a community costume. I then move on to discuss other psychodynamic symbols embedded in men's costumes, specifically pointing to the ways in which the costumes reflect anxieties over the man/woman culture/nature dichotomies, the breaking of which further fuel (and may require) delving into the unconscious. I finally tie these both together in the suggestion that the costume is one thing that must be considered a dynamic symbol within the ritual sphere, which I address more meticulously in the following section. The eruption of the unconscious into the conscious, or the slippage from awareness to trance, is derived from two metaphors of body: anonymous corporeality and birth metaphors.

Blood and Libidinous Energy

Mike is a 27-year-old male whom I met before the Zombie Walk, and who had participated for the past two years. He described himself as an "intellectual not tied to a 'uni' (sic). Someone smart enough to know those places mess with your head" (conversation). He was dressed as a "run of the mill zombie," meaning that his costume was not themed. In a pre-walk interview discussing his costume, he expanded on why his outfit was aestheticized in this specific way:

> I felt obligated to design my costume in this way . . . It's kind of liberating in a way. How often do you get to kill yourself off and see the aftermath (jokingly)! It's fun though, because you're also giving birth to a new alter ego for an afternoon. If you're a preacher zombie, then you're a preacher for the afternoon, bound to whatever preachers have to do, as zombies. You have to make that part up—being a zombie that is. Everyone knows what a preacher does. There's this hideous thing that *stands for you*.

Given this, I became curious about the politics of costuming for the Zombie Walk, and when the costuming and its resulting semiotic replacement (its "standing for" the person) came to an end. In response, I questioned him as to whether, after the Zombie Walk, he stood for the zombie.

> It's not philosophical like that—it's not like a part of you necessarily stays with you afterward. At least I've never thought of it like that. There's two big things the Zombie Walk is "about" (he said while gesturing quotation marks): it's about getting fucking bloody, and it's about the energy that you feel that comes from getting bloody. It's like a blood orgy with your clothes on.

Mike's relation between the energy felt and the blood used is an important juxtaposition. The blood of the zombies, often applied *en masse* to a large group both before and during the parade, serves to unite the zombies as a corporeal whole—a unified body—according to many participants. I would argue that, in this connecting of bodies, it also serves as a conductor that allows the libidinous energy to flow through the various bodies. As many participants suggested, and as Mike later articulated quite well, "Once you all of the blood covered people into a tight enough space, that's when it's game-on. Even when you're putting on the blood you're getting

excited, especially as you pour it all over yourself. Like that feeling you get when you just jump into a cold pool in the summer time." The question then is whether (a) the blood itself conjures up this libidinous energy for each person (functioning unilaterally as a psychodynamic symbol), or (b) it is, rather, the pathway through which it flows because of the way it symbolically unites the bodies. Another way to ask the question might be whether the blood is an individual part of the costume, or an act of putting on a community costume. The answer that I put forth is that both are essential and true.

The first question is most closely connected with the Freudian notions of *Eros* and *Thanatos*. Freud (1922) introduced the concept of the death drive, later called *Thanatos* in relation to the Greek figure *Death,* in an inability to understand the problem of masochism within the theoretical construct of the pleasure principle; he was further influenced by the "war to end all wars" that had devastated much of Europe in an orgy of senseless bloodshed—"how could a world want to destroy itself after building itself up?" he asked. His reasoning behind this self-destructiveness was the concept of the drive for death—in which humanity was attempting to destroy itself in order to fulfill some sort of gratification. Gratification, being the sole need of the Id, then is expressed by two means—*Eros* and *Thanatos*, sex and death. The important point for Freud was that all the drive "cares" about is discharge; the form and nature of the discharge is unimportant to the Id from which the drive emerges.

In the Zombie Walk, then, it takes little imagination to transpose the orgy of blood to the bodies of the individual(s) wearing it. In this, the blood is the thing, the metaphor, which causes the slippage into subconscious. Under the cover of the faux blood, the ambiguousness of this drive becomes satisfied. For reasons to be discussed, the costumes of zombies often emphasize an eroticism of the social skin—from this, *Thanatos* (the blood, the death drive) comes to be juxtaposed with *Eros* (the woman's body, the male's wounds, the sex drive). This constitutes a deconstruction of the two drives onto one another, exemplifying Freud's claim that the pure motivation of the drive is to satisfy the Id, regardless of how it is done—the drive is merely the means to an end.

Should we consider the blood on the bodies to be indirectly controlled by those very bodies, the connection between unconscious states and the blood becomes lucid through the scholar-poet Clay William's account, inspired by the philosophy of Giordano Bruno:

> The manipulation of sexual energy is control over life and death. When life is He and death is She, then death is never more becoming. Vampiric death in body beautiful is euphoria—an incredible, indescribable joy at coming death. One dies a love attack . . . "I am dying of Love" is carved in flesh and blood. This exercise in dying is not to be confused with sexual flirtation with death. The creation of the libidinous energy body is concerned with ecstatic knowledge at the time of many musical "deaths" and not sexual excitement at a moment of intense life.

Miguel, a 24-year-old actor, had an experience that was similar to what is depicted above. He was quick to suggest that

> The blood is one of my favorite parts. It reminds me of this sex scene from Otto, where all of these gay men—supposedly zombies—are rubbing together. You can't tell if they're eating one another or getting off. It's intense . . . the ambiguity is what makes it

> so sexy. You don't quite get the hard, nude bodies rubbing together here, but it's close enough for me.

What is important here is the connection drawn between blood and the erotic. Further, in its construction of the body extreme, the blood creates the amorphous sexual body Miguel refers to, and what Stewart (1993) calls the grotesque gigantic: through the blood, the zombies exhibit a sense of infinite exteriority. What is "of the body" and "in the body"—the blood—is blurred between multiple bodies. The zombie, covered in blood, becomes both container and contained. In this, the zombies are made a single corporeal body, dedicating their consciousness to something of which their consciousness is not a part, a corporeality in which their consciousness is no longer necessarily needed. The constant contact of bodies, and the close spacing to inspire that contact, is needed for the continued homogenous corporeal whole. Bakhtin is further relevant: "The object (grotesque) transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of one with the other and the surrounding objects" (1984:310). The wounds of the zombie come to be both symbolically and quasi-physically the transgression of the world onto the body; they open the body to merging with other bodies for the purpose of reproducing themselves, their death.

Dressing Around the Blood

While the blood plays a significant part in generating the libidinous energy of the Zombie Walk, the bodies' open orifices—or those implied by such a gratuitous amount of blood—should also be examined in this section. I take the wounds to be a multivocal symbol (Turner) in the sense that it carries with them multiple meanings, and thus multiple routes of exposing the unconscious. While above I discussed the unconscious eruption as being caused by the inside of the body becoming outside, and the flow out from such, in this section I discuss either castration anxiety or birth envy as being a potential source.

Something must first be said regarding the characteristics of men's and women's costumes. I draw this dichotomy because there was a distinct gender aesthetic between the two, occasionally violated. Men's costumes typically featured large, open wounds on the face and torso, and generally an excessive covering in non-blood makeup. "You can tell some guys are pussies based on their costume—where's your wounds, fairy boy? That's what you have to ask them." His friend chimed in, "You're not a man without an open wound . . . man up." Men's costumes, of course, also featured gratuitous amounts of blood. As one girl described her male partner's costume, "Guys overdo it most of the time. They're like little boys. They want to wear makeup, and this is the only chance they get (laughs). And then, you tell them that they get to be dead, and they spend hours doing makeup and putting on wounds. I say, 'Let's go on a date,' and he throws on a smelly t-shirt and crappy jeans. Irony?"[7]

To return to Bakhtin (1984), the grotesque is characterized as an "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" of phallic imagery in the carnivalesque (303). Further, it is a

[7] Women's costumes were typically opposite of this, emphasizing what would be socially construed as an "excessive" amount of skin. "We get to wear makeup all of the time, and sometimes we dress up (alluding to fetish costumes, said with a wink). Why do it here . . . the point for some of us, I think, is not to get dressed at all (laughs)." My own interpretation is as follows: while men seek to bear the unseen vagina through their ritual costuming, women use the event to liberate their bodies from the body politics of social skin and remind men of who truly has the power to create. In this, their skin is not a disempowering "strip-tease" brought about by the subjectification of the zombie genre, rather, it is a leveling mechanism in the Zombie Walk to show men "who the real women are."

reproduction of the social phenomena occurring around the body: the law of reversal that governs the essence of carnivalesque events, like the Zombie Walk, impacts the topography of the body. It is turned upside-down, inside-out in the case of the zombies, the emphasis (in Bakhtin's Carnival) put on the exaggeration of the male genitals as opposed to the male face.

However, most noticeably, the phallic object is missing from the body of the zombies. In fact, in the upside-down emphasis of the Zombie Walk, the displaced lower half of the body mapped onto the zombie's face resembles more an exaggeration of female genitals than male genitals. One can compare this to the phantasmagoric paintings of Bosch, where the emphasis is placed on bodily openings and exaggerated yonic imagery.

Similar to Bakhtin, Freud (2005) discusses in his work on dreams and neurosis that one of the most common methods of disguising an unconscious wish and desire is through "displacement upward," such as replacing part of the head with genitals. In the case of the Toronto Zombie Walk, the large, open wounds, prominently displayed on the upper torso of the masculine body, is vaginal imagery displaced from below the hips to above the hips—on the arms, face, and torso. In this, Freud and Bakhtin intersect to suggest that multiple inversions are taking place in the ritualized social imagination of the Zombie Walk—inversions of Cartesian logic, by which libido takes over thought; bodily topography, whereby the bottom becomes the top; and social norms, where death is now a public phenomenon. Concerning the inversion of the phallic, of most interest here, one Freudian explanation might be read as the double inversion of sexual desire; the penis is displaced upward, and then displaced inward. Such a reading, however, requires a stretched reading of the Freudian notion of inversion.

The visuality could also be read as the facial-ization of castration anxiety. According to Simmel (1959), the face is the largest concentration of signifying space on the body, and thus it would be prime real-estate for signifying inversion. In his work on fetishism, Freud (1927) divulges the greatest anxiety in life as the discovery of the mother's lack of penis. Aside from the horror of what was always assumed by the child, there is also the constant anxiety that leads the child to conclude that the penis has been cut off in punishment. Perhaps, then, we could use Freud to read the zombie wounds of male bodies as the social signifier of the ever-looming castration experienced by the mother—be it mother nature or mother civilization.

Instead, however, my experience lends to a different interpretation than Freud would necessarily allow for; the masochistic explanation of castration anxiety has no proof in the actions and atmosphere of the Zombie Walk. Instead, we might turn to Mead's (1949) re-interpretation of Freud in cases of cultural production—an instance of uterine, or womb, envy. In this, Mead suggests that men hold an unconscious desire for the ability to create in their own image. Because they are unable to do so biologically, men must imagine the cultural realm as their own—a segregated domain of creation that they believe to solely be their own. While feminism has transcended this understanding of culture/nature dichotomization, the device of "culture as (re)creation" is still useful to think through.

We can also find Mead's notion in Freud's work. Freud frequently remarked that landscapes, in dreams, often symbolize the female genitalia. Given the bodies' merger with the landscape through its wounds, we can begin to see the possibilities of this interpretation. Through the anonymous corporeality created by the flowing out of the body, the body becomes "of" the landscape, of the woman's genitals that form the unsymbolized ground against which the symbol of the phallus emerges into significance. As Benson (1994) states in terms of Medusa's slaying, "from her spilled blood springs Pegasus . . . imprecated in this myth, therefore, are symbols for the origin of art and the protective power of images" (113). Death, the

zombie, the Delphic body, becoming one with the landscape is a means for creation. The zombie costume is an expression of womb envy. In this way, we might understand the gaping wounds as the orifice from which life springs forth, referred to above as the *yonic* symbol.[8]

Through the psychodynamic symbology of wound = womb, men are given the opportunity to live out their fantasy of being able to directly create in their own image—the Zombie Walk is a way of satisfying womb envy, the drive for creation, the feminine *Eros*. In satisfying the Id-based desire, as Freud had discussed with numerous patients, the unconscious springs forward and the body is taken over with the ecstasy of being in trance.

In this way, we might also understand the Zombie Walk, as a whole, in a similar way to Bakhtin's understanding of Carnival: as a release valve intended to pacify the envy of bodily procreation in a world where this drive is beyond imagining. While simultaneously a collective way of working out death and establishing a means of coping with the anxiety of what it might be like to die—as will be discussed—the Zombie Walk also enables men to live out their fantasy of (re) or procreation. Perhaps, as if to say what they cannot do in life, they dream to be enabled to do after death. In this, we might further speculate that men *seek* to conquer death and birth through their experience of the Zombie Walk. It is in this structural inversion, and replacement, that we begin to see how altered conscious states are made available through the Zombie Walk: as with the satisfaction of the drive, there is a slip into the Id (Freud 1922).

We can, thus, return momentarily to the blood to understand how it is imprecated in this process, aside from connecting the wounds of birth envy to other wounds, acting as a conductor of the electric libido. As is all liminal space, that between the dichotomous genders is dangerous. Men were only able to master this mask of femininity through the use of a protective shield—the blood. In his discussion on the two distinct types of blood—controlled and uncontrolled—Levi-Strauss (1983) attributed the first to agentive and the second to unwanted, a dichotomy he labeled then as masculine and feminine, or power and menstrual. The blood of the Zombie Walk is most comparable to the agentive; it is that of power, of violence, actively applied to the social skin. Under the guise of this masculine blood, men were able to gender-swap, as the group was made inherently masculine based on its overcoating in masculine blood.

In this section, I have attempted to address the ways in which libidinous energy is characteristic of the masculine experience of the Zombie Walk, as describe by most (if not all) of my informants and myself. In covering the body with blood and openings, men embody psychodynamic symbology that is activated by the narrative of zombies. Blood unites the bodies, creating an anonymous corporeality, while the open wounds serve both to allow the libidinous energy to flow through the blood-ether and to satisfy fantasies encapsulated by the collapse of *Eros* and *Thanatos*.

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[8] However, to be clear, this yonic imagery embodied by men is not merely a vagina. In the activation of an *Eros*-centered mythology, *Thanatos* cannot be embodied unchanged. In this, and adding to the unconscious state and libidinous energy, *Eros* and *Thanatos* collapse on one another. The zombie's "yonic" does not give birth in the production of life, of which the yonic is representative. Rather, it consumes in order to bring death, serving the persistence and advancement of death as a state of being—a painful, bloody death accompanied by eternal moans and screams for release. Thus, the zombie *aesthetic* of gaping wounds on the face and hands is rather the *vagina dentate*.

Place is the Space (or, how the Real interrupted my Symbolic)

Barthes's (1980) *Camera Lucida* provides a very unique vocabulary for discussing the phenomenology of visual images: the *studium* and the *punctum*. By *studium*, he refers to the range of meanings available and obvious to everyone; it is at once a self-contained whole of meaning to be taken in at a glance and a sign system whose meaning is universally comprehensible. It is that which bridges the self-contained thing and our own subjectivity. Opposite of this, however, is the *punctum*. It is the intensely private meaning of the image, an indexicality of the photograph that transcends the "self-contained" in its locating of the referent in the spectators' subjectivity. *Punctum* is the connotative impact of certain photographic particulars that exist in the denotative public meaning (the *studium*) of the photograph as, not a sign, but an image.

Punctum is, most interestingly, a Latin word derived from "trauma." As such, and given its experiential dimension, it transcends the process of looking and is itself an experience. In this section, I discuss the ways in which the visual metaphors created by the Zombie Walk enable a collective *punctum*—an "interruption" of the image of a group of people already inhabiting a collective subjectivity. In my reference to it as an indexical that finds its referent in the subjectivity of the individual(s), I refer to the ways in which what the metaphor points to, in the Zombie Walk, is not something self-contained in the image, rather a metaphor that already exists in the costumes of men—the notion of birth and womb envy. The Zombie Walk, spatially speaking, alters the Toronto landscape through the creation of metaphors. These metaphors are not purely written on the landscape, however; they are already inscribed in it through the imaginings of the ritual participants. These metaphors and their implications become embedded on the landscapes, as a cognitive element of the taskscape, which continues to alter the ways in which people engage with, and further activate, the landscape.

Anschuetz et al. (1999) define ritual landscapes as "the products of stereotyped actions, including specific acts and sequences of acts that represent the socially prescribed orders" (178). Despite being a rather simplistic definition, it highlights a very specific point in regards to the nature of place in ritual: it is bound to ritual *through meaning*. Wrapped into this is Sennet's (1996) notion of the *spatial metaphor:* a metaphor not created through explanation or discourse, but through the occupation and performance of bodies in space. This kind of performance often defies analytical reasoning. In this section, I am concerned with two particular metaphors in seemingly dichotomous settings: the park and the city.

Parks are themselves metaphorical space. Historically speaking, they arrived in the midst of the green space movement in the 1800s: as the places of the dead became environmental sculptures of what heaven might look like, people came to feel as if they too deserved beautiful spaces (Schuyler 1983). Foucault (1967) suggests one explanation for the systematic removal of graveyards from the core of cities—in the creation of what he calls *heterotopias*—was because, as the places of the living resembled the places of the dead, one might not be able to tell the difference between the two.

Through the Zombie Walk's setting, we see a collapse of the present on the past and the past on the present. It is often commented that urban architecture is the assault of the past on the present (Greimas 1990). In this instance, could we see the present assaulting the past? As more and more zombies arrived at the "pit," more and more corpses entered the subterranean, only to claw their way out in order to enter the city.

Participants often drew the relationship between nature, as signified by the park, and femininity.

> They don't call her mother nature for nothing after all! She's beautiful, and she's given birth to a beautiful day for the walk. It's kind of the space of regeneration here in this side of the city. If you're feeling mopey, and it's a nice day, mum will cheer you right up with her soccer games, innocent fun, and blood gushing zombies! (anonymous interview)

Such an understanding begs us to question the relationship between the pit, the zombie, and the nature.

In many Native American myths, the transcendence from the earth can be seen as a testament to men's ability to give birth to life (Roheim 1992). Freud (2005) supports this notion, noting that pits or holes in the earth, and the earth's occasional swallowing up of a person, is directly tied to feminine control in dream analysis Given, however, that the earth does not swallow up, but puts forth, zombies, we might approach the zombie walkers' emergence from the pit as yet another birth metaphor. In responding to a question about a described "feeling of lost-ness," Sayeed suggested that, climbing out of the pit,

> That's when I started to feel *it*, you know, when we started climbing out? It had already started before we got out, but once we were out of that pit I was in that space where you don't feel the weight of the world anymore; where you are a zombie and loving every minute of it.

This, again, harkens back to my notion of the *punctum* as an indexicality whose object is within the subjectivity of the individual, and whose referent is beyond comprehension. It "shoots out of it [the photograph] like an arrow and pierces me" (Barthes 1980:26). It lies in, for Barthes, "that initatic path which led me to that cry, the end of all language" (1980:109). It is the *punctum* which suddenly "makes strange," as Freud (2003) would say; it brings about the *unheimlich*, or the uncanny: that which is so real, whose presence is so affective, that it transcends the comfort of reality and becomes an over-presence. The *punctum*'s escape of language, in Barthes's case as well as our own, and its relation with a "real" through the uncanny point us to a juncture with Lacan: Might we conceptualize the *punctum* as an affective resultant of Lacan's *Real*—that area of consciousness that can never be known but is always present, and occasionally felt? The *punctum* that defies, while un-deify-ing, language, embodies the collapse of the symbolic and belongs to that Lacanian category that "can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization" (Lacan 1998:93). Myers's (2003) discussion is applicable, if one considers his use of AIDS as a *punctum*-esque object:

> Aids is an eruption of the real. It is meaningless in itself and all these interpretations of it are attempts to symbolize it, attempts to divine a message in the Real where none exists. The Real is meaningless and senseless—it just persists and meaning can only be found within the reality of the symbolic order.

In this sense, then, I am arguing that in the Zombie Walk, the spatial metaphor—that instance of acting birth with the body, comes to be so embroiled with the presence of the subject, so uncanny, that it causes the Real to erupt into the Symbolic, the unconscious into the conscious. The indexical of "birth" and the resulting *Eros* are so satisfied that the Symbolic stops mediating, and the *studium* fades to *punctum* and pleasure.

In being asked to describe the flowing out of zombies, many people, like Mike (see above), referred to it in sexual terms.

> It's like she (the pit) just exploded in orgasm from all the stimulation. It was complete with moaning and screaming. That's really when you start to feel the slippage. It's like a time machine, but you don't know where you're going. You wake up on the other side and remember bits and pieces from the middle.

Where does this zombie explosion discharge? The city, of course. Rolling and trolling out of the fences that are held over from the cemetery-like design of the park, the zombies deeply penetrate the heart and belly of capitalism, only to succumb to more spatial metaphors.

Alongside this horizontal metaphor of "entering" and "exiting," we must consider the vertical plane, to which Simmel (1950) is particularly well attuned. The city, built on a Cartesian logic system, acquires moral value based upon the level, or height, at which events occur. By viewing the city as a body, the locus of reason exists in the lucid, conscious upper strata of the mind. As Simmel suggests, the city is not the place of the emotional, but the rational—where the city "happens" is not in the sewers but in the skyscrapers. To phrase this in the notions put forth by Sennet (1996), the zombie, coming from the libidinal underground, which represents the repressed Id of the city, invades logic and rationality as a critique of the monsters that lurk in the shadows of such cultural logic. Their attack on corporate and commercial centers, then, resembles the dream described by Jung (1963) in a letter to Freud:

> Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated . . . What chiefly interested Freud in this dream were the two skulls. He returned to them repeatedly, and urged me to find a *wish* in connection with them. What did I think about these skulls? And whose were they? I knew perfectly well what he was driving at: that secret death wishes were concealed in the dream. (155)

Uncannily, my own reflection, from a note written immediately after the walk during my car ride home, parallels this letter:

> After the dirt settled from dragging myself out of the pit, I wondered what was going on—why do people do this. I thought I was losing myself in my wondering, but many of my interviewees suggest they feel this too. Are they wondering as much as I am? Could we be enacting our own deaths, or those of our "enemies"? Who are the enemies?

What is important, however, for both the Zombie Walk and Freud, are not necessarily the deaths represented, but rather, what those deaths represented themselves represent. It is an incursion of the Id, the Real, on the logical and the Symbolic. We are, in fact, our own monsters.

In the closing of this section, we need to more tightly bind the notion of unconscious states and acted spatial metaphors. What I am arguing here is that space serves not as a stage for the costumes of subconscious metaphors, but rather, as an enacted mirror. Through the spatial metaphors created by people—metaphors that pervade the zombie literature and media, and ones known by many of the male participants interviewed—the zombies-turned-people work out what it means to be a zombie; what it means to be unconsciously conscious; what it might mean to be

dead. While the landscape carries a *studium* for all of its participants, its *punctum* penetrates that specific subjectivity occupied by the trance states of individuals performing space. Spatial metaphors do not create that sense of unconsciousness, but do fuel it by making it aware of itself.

CONCLUSION

Instead of solely reviewing my primary points, as so many scholarly articles do, I would like to use my final lines to bring together my points on various bodily and spatial metaphors in order to speculate on, from a French structural perspective, the role of the Toronto Zombie Walk in Canadian, secular society.

I propose, as structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1974) and psychoanalytic philosopher Zizek (2007) have previously proposed in regards to other cultural elements, that these secular "festivals of the dead" are intended to mediate, indeed, fill, a space left vacant by the secularization, and spiritual-desemanticization, of death in secular Euro-American life. The Zombie Walk is itself a way to find the world of the dead among the living, to reintroduce death into society, so as to confirm what life is. Their fear is summarized best by Zizek's (2007) playful manipulation of Hegel and Nietzsche: "God is dead, but He doesn't know it."

As I have tried to do, we must ask what the role of the Zombie Walk is in terms of both the needs of society, especially those needs for critical discourse surrounding ideas of oppression and exploitation of biopolitics, and the needs of the psyche. The Zombie Walk is most importantly a form of social protest, a protest that is at once a floating signifier of a signified form of exploitation or oppression and simultaneously a grounded signified—whose signifier lies in its dichotomous opposite—of desire to know life through experience of death. Protests happen on a regular basis around the world—why does this one have to include zombies? A shallow explanation might be made on grounds of attention and spectacle, but this fails to explain the passion by which people adhere to, and pursue, what Sontag (1966) refers to as *camp*.

In this essay, I have attempted to show that this phenomenon of "playing zombie" and "deathly protest" is directly related to the absence of death in society. As has been argued by other scholars, the absence of death is equivalent to the absence of life—one is beyond definition without the other. Using self-reflection in an auto[erotic]ethnographic framework, I have reflected on the power of metaphor to affect trance states within the body. But to do so, to enter trance, means that something is buried deep inside the body that must find a way out—death. The inability of modern secular society to address the liminality of the death experience, through its constant creation of heterotopic spaces (Foucault 1967), through death being seen without being seen, we have been forced to cope by fetishizing the body to fill the gap left by the absence of death—the body is dead—as "he is dead, and he is continuing to die."

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