

Agency of the Flesh

Humanness, Obscenity, and Death in Bruce LaBruce's

Otto; or, Up with Dead People

By

Pınar Büyüктаş

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Supervisor: Professor Erzsébet Barát

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Abstract

In my thesis I explore the normative orderings of humanness and sexuality and take issue with the discursive accounts of the possibility of corporeal agency. I focus on the fleshiness of humanness which provides new possibilities in rethinking the body, and it demonstrates that the body is not a monolithic term that can be taken at face value. Thus, my focus is not merely on the agency of the body which is already a central concern in the feminist literature as part of the debates on mind/body distinction; I focus on the fleshiness of humanness and how it gets invoked in relation to death and sexuality by the imagery of the zombie figure. I see the figure of the zombie as a productive antidote to how the human in liberal humanist discourse is commonly defined. I use the fictional figure of the zombie as a conceptual tool to investigate the limits of our thinking about the corporeal realm. I have chosen the director, Bruce LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008) and do a visual analysis of the movie. LaBruce handles the topic in a playful and sarcastic way and provides an alternative approach to exploring the exclusionary workings of normative and binary understandings of livingness through the personal narrative of a zombie.

My profound thanks to

Erzsébet Barát,

illet,

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And all my families and lovers

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In my thesis I explore the normative orderings of humanness and sexuality and take issue with the discursive accounts of the possibility of corporeal agency. The time that I started to think about and work on my thesis project is marked by the eternal absence of a beloved friend. My personal experience is reflected throughout these pages: the reality of the death and the feeling of loss were haunting every corner of my mind. In the meantime I have come to the understanding that the feelings and ideas in response to losing a beloved member of my chosen family can never be expressed properly; these pages are thus not a journal of my mourning. Nevertheless, the experience of facing chronic illness, the days and months spent together at the hospital, and soon after, the loss itself; all these memories certainly remain and reshape my understanding of life, and ultimately my thinking in this project. The insidious disease that lied under the flesh, in the flesh, eventually dismantled the flesh and the person himself, Ali, whom I loved and keep loving eternally. This thesis has been shaped and reshaped by the lived experience of nearness to the passing of a beloved friend; and by seeing, smelling, touching his slowly departing body.

My initial interest was on the mind/body distinction that works in the hetero-patriarchal system through the dominance of the mind and its association with (male) masculinity. The topic of my thesis is oriented towards the concept of death as my personal experience was marked by questioning the understanding of death. In this sense, I decided to maintain the thread of my initial concern by interrogating the constructed meanings of humanness and human sexualities that usually function in very exclusionary ways. After I decided to focus on the agency of the body that is to be freed from the binary thinking of mind/body distinction, I had to reach out to fictional narratives in order to have a larger scope of rethinking the articulation of the meaning of humanness and sexuality that could be imagined beyond the binaries, and freed from normative orderings.

The reason of the shift my focus from the body to the flesh is that the fleshiness of humanness provides new possibilities in rethinking the body, and it demonstrates that the body is not a monolithic term that can be taken at face value. I use the fictional figure of the zombie as a conceptual tool to investigate the limits of our thinking about the corporeal realm. Thus, my focus is not merely on the agency of the body which is already a central concern in the feminist literature as part of the debates on mind/body distinction; I focus on the fleshiness of humanness and how it gets invoked in relation to death and sexuality by the imagery of the zombie figure. I see the figure of the zombie as a productive antidote to how the human in liberal humanist discourse is commonly defined.

In my thesis, for a particular production, I have chosen the director, Bruce LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008) and do a visual analysis of the movie. My interest in this film lies, first of all, in its main concern with and a challenge to the normative understanding of humanness. LaBruce handles the topic in a playful and sarcastic way and provides an alternative approach to exploring the exclusionary workings of normative and binary understandings of livingness through the personal narrative of a zombie. I focus on three main themes of the film: critiques of the normative accounts of humanness – fleshiness and temporality; the question of obscenity and the sexual representations that help identify the constructed meaning of humanness and sexualities; the cultural fears and desires in modern capitalism that are provoked by the conception of death through the figure of the zombie. I discuss each theme in three consecutive chapters, combining my theoretical discussions with an analysis of selected scenes from the film. In Chapter 2, I focus on the symbolic boundaries of the definition of humanness. The main question of this chapter is: What happens if we consider that the flesh has some strange kind of agency? I explore this question by rethinking the normative orderings of humanness and the claims about the mind/body distinction in order to find out if this query might be useful for overcoming the

normative conceptualizations of human corporeality. Liberating the conceptualization of agency from the predominance of the mind, which is generally associated with masculinity, is identified as the means through which this binary can be overcome.

The distinction between the human and the animal and the machine is at the core of post-humanist theories. While taking these theories as a resource for questioning humanness, I focus on the corporeal realm or the fleshiness of human existence. The chapter investigates the ways in which the conceptualization of humanness gets invoked by the imagery of the zombie. In the first section, I examine the normative orderings of humanness that define the boundaries of the modernist conceptualization of the human, and I analyze the ways in which the figure of the zombie might provide alternative conceptualizations of humanness. In the second section, I look at the critiques of normative orderings of temporality and homonormativity within the field of queer theory. I further examine the different possibilities of understanding the signification of death outside of a normative understanding of time. I argue that the linear timeline of the normative orderings gets invoked by the fictional threat of the figure of the zombie that offers new ways of exploring temporalities and the corporeal realm, which has a strange kind of agency on overcoming normative orderings of temporality.

In Chapter 3, I explore how filmic pornography can be used as a tool to investigate the fleshiness of humanness. I argue that the sexual representations and the conceptualizations of the corporeal might indicate the wider fears and desires of a culture. First, I examine the conceptualization of sexual representations and how the understanding of sexuality might function as an exclusionary mechanism in the course of drawing the boundaries of a normative understanding of corporeality. I situate my argument within feminist debates on pornography and argue against the idea of framing pornographic products as mere representations of sexuality as such a frame takes for granted a specific definition of sexuality

bound by a normative understanding of what is human or not. Second, I examine the zombie figure in filmic pornography and I argue that this figure can provide a playful response to the attempts of the anti-porn approach, which try to preserve a certain constructed meaning of sexuality. In this section, I focus on the question of monstrosity and feminization with regard to the corporeal realm of the zombie figure and how it is interpreted by LaBruce in order to elaborate the fictional possibilities that might expand or decentralize constructions of sexuality as they relate to pornography.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the cultural fears and desires in modern capitalism that are provoked by the conception of death through the figure of the zombie. First, I examine the cultural and political spatiality of corporeality through the conceptualization of death. I argue that the figure of the zombie, which has its roots in Haitian culture based on the practices of slavery, might resonate with cultural fears about the loss of identity in modern capitalism. In order to explore this issue, I continue reflecting on LaBruce's film *Otto* and discuss how our own sense of corporeality and being works according to late-modern capitalist society's definition of humanness. Second, I explore ecological apocalyptic narratives that identify the modern anxieties of the human and I focus on the figure of the 'eco-zombie' that can be seen as the embodiment of the fear of an ecological apocalyptic future that endangers the corporeal integrity of humanness.

Chapter 2 Human/ness and Zombie/ness

The figure of the zombie is now part of daily expressions such as feeling like a zombie or acting like a zombie. Due to its success in popular culture, *zombieness* has become part of our lives, describing the feeling of “being” kind of dead yet still alive or vice versa. This fictional monster inhabits both our fears and our fantasies. We might all know what a zombie looks like, how it walks, what it is after, and most strikingly, none of us has (presumably) witnessed an actual zombie walking on the streets or running after the human flesh. Still, this fear of the undead creature which was a human being before its death is haunting the imagination of the human kind. Not only do they remind us of our death that is to come but more importantly, these corpses in motion instead of “resting in peace” are haunting us by perverting the very idea of humanness. The zombie can be defined as undead, living corpse or as living dead. It is apparently different from the human in so far as it is considered to be dead; or is it?

This chapter investigates the ways in which the conceptualization of humanness specifically gets invoked in relation to death by the imagery of undead corpses which are able to trigger some strong emotions in the living. In this sense, the fictional figure of the zombie might help to further deconstruct the allegedly self-contained boundaries of humanness which is already being questioned mainly by queer, post-human and, queer post-human theories. As an attempt to understand the limits of humanness in relation to its fictional threat, I will be focusing on the challenges provided by the figure of the zombie in describing the human. I will examine only the reasons of uneasiness in relation to the zombie that are articulated in Bruce LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008), while other possible challenges posed by the zombie figure, such as reflections on necrosexuality or considering the zombie as posthuman will be left out of the scope of this chapter.

In the first section I will focus on the corporeal realm or the fleshiness of the human existence in order to examine the symbolic boundaries of the constructed meaning of the human. I will discuss what the zombie figure might allow us to understand about the modernist conceptualization of humanness. Diverse reflections on the figure of the zombie are already existent in the literature; here I will focus on alternative conceptualizations of human corporeality that is not bounded by the normative understanding of humanness, and what might the zombie figure can provide us in regard to the debates on the body/mind distinction.

In the second part of this chapter I will look at the critiques on normative orderings of temporality, specifically within the field of queer theory. I will discuss queer theories of temporality and critiques of homonormativity in order to explore how it could be possible to understand the signification of death and queerness outside the normative understanding of time.

2.1 The zombie subject

Kevin Boon¹ in his essay “*The Zombie as Other: Mortality and the Monstrous in the Post-Nuclear Age*” claims that the zombie figure itself has been evolving since it has entered the American popular culture in the first half of the twentieth century. As Boon underlines, the figure of the zombie has its roots in African tribal mythology and Haitian folklore and superstition. These aspects of its historicity have been analyzed by various writers in terms of its connection to colonization and discrimination. The early movies made in the USA on zombies draw on these historical and cultural origins by showing the zombie as a monster yet (partially) human that is coming from the unknown, be it death or the mysterious cultures that

¹ Kevin Boon, “The Zombie as the Other: Mortality and the Monstrous in the Post-Nuclear Age” in S.J. Lauro & D. Christie, eds. *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011

haven't been discovered fully². But I think that referring only to the history of the zombie figure in order to understand the split within the conception of human and consequently the mechanism of othering remains simplistic and reductionist for the explanation of the strong emotions such as fear and disgust that the image or the imagery of the zombie generates in contemporary popular culture.

The Otherness of the zombie is part of how the human is constituted by separating itself from the animal and the machine and also how humanness is defined in counter distinction to a kind of none or lesser humanness. Post humanist theories focus on these boundaries and the blurring of them while examining the humanness³. My aim here is to incorporate those arguments within the framework of zombie studies that address the figure of the zombie as the ultimate other of both the human and animal and, maybe, that of the machine. I shall argue that the very distinction between our understanding of the human and the other may be the effect of our fascination with and fear about the zombie which is in some ways similar to most of the other fictional creatures such as vampires or werewolves but the ease is given by the fact that, no matter what, we are to believe that the zombies as presented in modern horror fictions do not and cannot exist while we might not be so sure about the non-existence of blood sucking vampires or werewolves which can be considered as some other species.

The authenticity of the zombie lies in its questionable humanness and at the same time its lack of it. It is not wandering around on the boundaries between animal and human like

² Deborah Christie, "A Dead New World: Richard Matheson and the Modern Zombie" in S.J Lauro & D. Christie, eds. *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011

³ For example see Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, and Patricia MacCormack, "Queer Posthumanism: Cyborgs, Animals, Monsters, Perverts" in Noreen Giffney and Micheal O'Rourke, eds. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009

werewolves⁴; nor does it signify some kind of immortal predator like vampires which are mostly associated with animal figures such as reptiles and bats⁵. Whether the zombie is perceived as disgusting or scary, it is the human origin that creates the very problem about the zombie. It is not interspecies, not really alive nor dead. I would argue that the figure of the zombie can be examined not merely as post-human, nor as a queer becoming but as a tool to investigate the limits of the conceptualization of human as being-ness (either as human or non/human) which is to be freed from living-ness.

In LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008), Otto, the title hero believes that he died and came back to the earth from his grave. He agrees to play a part in a movie directed by Medea Yarn. Medea's movie is the movie with the movie *Otto*. Medea's movie is about a gay zombie revolt. The other characters in her movie are playing the parts of gay zombies that revolt against consumerist society. We learn that when he was alive Otto was a vegetarian gay son of a butcher. As a zombie then his first challenge consists in consuming flesh and he can't immediately bring himself to eating human flesh. His difficulty about eating flesh is not actually connected to his everlasting love to human kind or prescribed taboos that the modern western subject shares about cannibalism. In fact, Otto, the zombie doesn't enjoy other humans' company that much. In the opening scene, after rising from his grave, Otto explains us (with a voiceover) his ideas about the living/human beings very clearly: "It's not easy being undead. The living all seem like the same person to me, and I don't think I like that person very much."⁶ Nevertheless, in the next scene he follows a smell;

⁴ Phillip A. Bernhardt-House, "The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves" in Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, eds., *Queering the Non/Human*, Ashgate Press (Queer Interventions Book Series), 2008

⁵ Robert Azzarello, "Unnatural Predators: Queer Theory Meets Environmental Studies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird eds., *Queering the Non/Human*, Ashgate Press (Queer Interventions Book Series), 2008

⁶ Otto, in Bruce LaBruce, "Otto; or, Up with Dead People (a screenplay)", *Incognitum Hactenus, Living On: Zombies*, Vol.3 [Online] Available at: <<http://incognitumhactenus.com/volume3/>> [Accessed 12 April 2014]

the smell of flesh, the smell of human density, and goes in the direction where it comes from: Berlin.

LaBruce uses an alternative way of evoking the fleshiness of human existence. He uses the zombie character Otto as the hero of the film and the audience follows what Otto does and listens to what he has to say, not the other way around as in many other zombie movies where the zombies are not the main characters and narrators. Otto tells the human kind what they are, what the body is capable of and vulnerable of. We are reminded of the fleshiness of humanness not by the other humans who are running away from zombies, vampires, or werewolves that chase them, but through the focalizing perspective of a zombie. Actually, what makes the film different and interesting is the narration from the perspective of the zombie. The humans are no longer able to cover up the corporeal realm of humanness by their higher or sometimes lower intellectual capacities. LaBruce's change of perspective reminds the audience of the smell, the density of human flesh, and the city where the bodies move around, and which might at any moment become an open kitchen for the zombies.

Peter Dendle⁷ focuses on the evolution of the zombie figure in the movies and he suggests that many zombies became more intelligible and fast compared to the past representations of screen zombies that are "originally slow of mind and of foot"⁸. Nevertheless, there are still many zombie figures in cinema that conform to the original template. Dendle mentions that in Dan O'Bannon's film *Return of the Living Dead* (1985), a captured zombie explains that eating the brains of the living helps her overcome "the pain of being dead"⁹. Dendle connects this quote to his analysis on the relation between the audience and the question of temporality for the 'millennial generation' who according to Dendle, "reached adulthood around the turn of the millennium. [...] Millennials are well known for

⁷ Peter Dendle. "Zombie Movies and the 'Millennial Generation'" in S.J Lauro & D. Christie, eds. *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011

⁸ Ibid. p.175

⁹ Ibid. p.176

short attention spans”¹⁰. Dendle's remark shows an important shift from the classical zombie figure to a more sophisticated conceptualization of zombies who can accurately explain their needs and feelings and also their pains on an ontological level.

Unlike other zombies in the genre, Otto as a zombie is, however, not after the human brain. The main nutrition for him is the flesh: at first he eats dead animals then the alive. Yet, Otto suffers from another kind of pain that we can call the pain of being undead. He calls himself a zombie with an identity crisis and until he figures this out, he consumes ‘whatever non-human flesh was available’.

LaBruce articulates his general stance on the fleshiness of human existence combined with a political stand on consuming meat through the instructions given by Medea, the film director character in the movie: she is shooting her own movie about Otto in the movie. When they are shooting in a supermarket, she tells Otto to eat the meat in the freezers: “I want you to focus on meat. Because the world is meat. We are meat. Do you understand?”¹¹ The human as meat, the fleshiness of human is a claim what LaBruce offers in his movie, my concern is what happens if we consider that the flesh has a strange kind of agency?

As Foucault¹² argues, the body is no longer subject to torture however, it is subject to forces of control and discipline by various technologies that affect the body into docility. But not without the possibility of resistance. Regarding the movie, Bruce LaBruce is not so much interested in the brain, the mind is not the primary component of the being but a relational part of the human subject. In my opinion, LaBruce succeeds in showing the unspoken reality of how the human body, just like other living beings, is in fact a piece of ‘meat’.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.179

¹¹ Medea, in Bruce LaBruce, “Otto; or, Up with Dead People (a screenplay)”, *Incognitum Hactenus, Living On: Zombies*, Vol.3 [Online] Available at: <<http://incognitumhactenus.com/volume3/>> [Accessed 12 April 2014]

¹² Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard. 1975

The figure of a zombie itself here comes closest to the idea of the flesh endowed with some strange agency, a ‘human’ that is not reduced to meat but hyper aware of its corporeality. Differently from the vampires which are very much investigated by their gendered and sexual representations within popular culture, nor like werewolves which are considered as hybrid beings – semi human, semi animal, the human origins and human corporeality of the zombie (even if it is decomposing or dismembered) is significant compared to the other monstrous figures in popular culture.

New materialist feminism¹³ focuses on the agency of the body and the relatedness of the beings, breaking the law of considering the mind as the superior component that defines the human. The modern association of the mind with masculinity is thus can be overcome without the need of supporting the mind/body distinction. In this sense, I see the figure of the zombie as an antidote of how the modern human is commonly defined and a rich field of research for feminist scholars to rethink the constructed meaning of humanness that usually functions in very exclusionary ways.

2.2. Queer critiques on normative orderings of temporality

Mathias Clasen examines the modern zombie figure in his paper entitled “The Anatomy of the Zombie: A Bio-Psychological Look at the Undead Other”¹⁴ and he observes that “the notion of an undead creature is interesting” to humans as species who have “tendency to view the world in binary terms”.¹⁵ By unsettling this tendency, the zombie figure violates “our intuitive understanding of death as the cessation of self-propelled motion

¹³ For example see Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Cambridge: Polity, 2002

¹⁴ Mathias Clasen, “The Anatomy of the Zombie: A Bio-Psychological Look at the Undead Other”, *Otherness: Essays and Studies 1.1*, October 2010

¹⁵ Ibid, p.16

and agency, as well as death as an irreversible event.”¹⁶ This argument suggests that in order to understand the temporal location of the zombie that results in the dislocation of humanness, there is a need to have another kind of concept of temporality which is not bounded, which does not draw on such a (disrupted) normative linear temporality. In order to do that, I am suggesting to consider the theories of queer temporality to underscore and emphasize what it entails to call the zombie a “living dead” without appealing to a normative timeline which clearly (and maybe rightfully) differentiates life and death and sees “living dead” as an oxymoron.

On one hand, questions raised by queer theorists on temporality and space, and their arguments on how homonormativity along with heteronormativity shape the understanding of life and death, can be productive for the criticism of the alleged sovereignty of Time over living bodies. On the other hand, reconsidering the conceptualization of the body in terms of the (bio) power exercised on its shaping and the estimated time of life expected from the living human body which is to survive according to the normative conditions, can show another aspect of this understanding of life and death.

Queer temporality, for queer theorists who work on the rubric of time, marks the critique of temporality’s social and political normative force on living beings. In the roundtable discussion¹⁷ moderated by Elizabeth Freeman in 2006, Carolyn Dinshaw’s focus is on the relationship between past and present and how queer communities are formed across time. She defends a refusal of linear historicism. In the course of questioning the linearity of time and historicity, other theorists at the roundtable such as Ferguson points out the fact that the critique of progress(ive time) lets us think about the “figures outside the rational time of

¹⁶ Ibid, p.4

¹⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Elizabeth Freeman et. al. “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13.2-3, 2007

capital, nation, and family”¹⁸. Hoang, in support of Ferguson’s position, underlines the importance of exposing the homonormative timeline which is created by homosexuals, outside the heteronormative timeline. Ferguson agrees with Hoang and both theorists, while challenging the linearity of time and historicity, problematize temporal homonormativity. They suggest that the critics of the sovereignty of time over living bodies should take into consideration. In this sense, I would argue space, for instance in the form of nation, and temporal normativity can be created even by figures, such as queers, outside the domain of rational time. The queering of the boundary between life and death can be best explained by Carla Freccero’s concept of the “future dead person”¹⁹; which she describes as turning away from the passing of time rather than from time itself. To sum up, queer temporality signifies, as Nealon puts it, the possibilities of “thinking through or around or against the dominant form of the social organization of time” and “unmaking the forms of rationality we think we know”²⁰. The theories on queer temporality are useful for locating the conception of humanness in a different timeline, which serves to better understand the limits of the conception itself.

It might be useful to follow the claims of Judith Jack Halberstam²¹ on queer time and space while thinking about how the course of time might be organized for non-normative subjectivities. Halberstam argues that the usage of queer time and space, at least partially, evolves against the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction. Halberstam tells that the dignity related to being normal emerges as and is supported by the understanding of temporality of the middle class which is based on reproduction. Thus, according to this sense of time, a mischievous adolescent grows mature and becomes an adult, and a long lifetime is

¹⁸ Ibid, p.180

¹⁹ Ibid, p.184

²⁰ Ibid, p. 188

²¹ Ibid, p.181-182

constructed as the most desirable thing of human life. To the extent that, no matter under what circumstances, living a long life is hailed and the lives that are not necessarily oriented towards this aim could be marked as pathological. In opposition to this logic, Halberstam , embraces late childhood or immaturity in place of adulthood or responsibility; instead of following the normative social script as a “perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence – early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – child bearing – retirement – death”²².

Jasbir Puar, in her short essay “*Coda: Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoint*” published in 2011, discusses the mainstream discourses that reproduce “neo-liberalism's heightened demands for bodily capacity”²³ through the examples of “it gets better” campaign and “gay youth suicides”. Puar carefully elaborates her criticisms of the campaign which lets her go beyond a critique of queer neoliberalism. Her main idea is that the future is colonized by death and she looks at the interdependent relationship between bodily capacity and bodily debility to build her arguments. Puar focuses on how these gay youth suicides can be understood in another and more elaborated way which also questions the normative temporal assumptions which are being produced through the “event” of suicide and for this she examines the questions of bodily capacity and debility as well as disability, precariousness, and populations. In her view, queer suicide might be considered as an escape from slow death by offering “different temporality of relating to living and dying”²⁴. Puar does not suggest that queer suicide is an act of rebellion against the socially sanctioned forms of slow death but rather critical gain of considering temporalities other than linear and normative temporalities.

²² Ibid, p.182

²³ Jasbir K. Puar, “Coda: The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoint,” *GLQ*, 18:1, 2011, p.149

²⁴ Ibid, p. 152

Puar argues that “in neoliberal, biomedical, and biotechnical terms, the body is always debilitated in relation to its ever-expanding potentiality”²⁵. She argues that our political landscape would better transform toward switch points of bodily capacities and multiple temporalities, and becomings²⁶. This point resonates with the arguments on queer temporalities and the post-humanist idea of destabilizing the practices of categorization which would also serve as a tool to rethink the bodily capacities outside neoliberal health discourses and normative temporalities.

LaBruce’s attempt to keep Otto’s timeline with blank spaces and vague memories resonates with Lee Edelman’s arguments about the relationship between queerness and temporality; “the place of the social order’s death drive”²⁷ Edelman’s claim of queerness as refusal of reproductive futurism and as having the task of redefining notions like “civil order” through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity²⁸ is embodied by the metaphor of a zombie. Otto’s story is in fact a hopeful one; he is considered as a revolutionary zombie, by challenging the temporal and corporeal normativity of the living and even the conformism of the other zombies. In the end, Otto leaves Berlin and heads to the north, to “discover a whole new way of death”, being aware of the privilege he’s got: he doesn’t even have to worry about dying.

Even though the theories focusing on a non-normative temporality can create a way to better analyze the signification of the transgression or maybe perversion made by the figure of the zombie, I am not suggesting here that there is a direct analogy between queer subjectivities and zombies. Yet, we need to reflect on the fact that in LaBruce’s *Otto* all of the characters that are playing the zombies, including Otto, are gay. Furthermore, although

²⁵ Ibid, p. 153

²⁶ Ibid, p.156-7

²⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Duke University Press, 2004, p.3

²⁸ Ibid, p.16-17

Otto is considered as an outsider by the other zombies as he is homeless unlike others, he is still welcomed to be part of their gay zombie revolution plan. The characters that are playing in Medea's film (I call them "fake zombies" in order to distinguish them from Otto) are described as "a small army of gay zombies who recruit members by fucking, killing, and partially devouring vigorous young men, not necessarily in that order". These zombies are fighting against the living, who finds them, as Medea says, "to be an irritating and irksome reminder of their own inescapable mortality". However, Otto is unwillingly or unintentionally doing his one man revolution: he is not conforming to any kind of normative understanding of time. He keeps talking about his past, the time that he was or he thinks that he was alive as 'the time before', by putting the event of death in the middle of the timeline of his life.

Chapter 3 Obscenity

This chapter is based on three points of argumentation to explore the image of gay-male-zombie in pornography. First, I will examine the conceptualization of representation and discuss the question of sexual representation in filmic pornography. In this part, I will challenge the easiness of thinking about pornographic products as mere representations of sexuality and how these products, more precisely, sexual representations, as part of modern mass culture, create tensions in feminist debates in so far as explicit sexuality is seen as problematic for anti-pornography feminists.

Second, I will discuss the figure of the zombie in gay zombie porn movies and see how it can be connected to the feminist debates or “sex wars”, as the image of ultimate sexual other. I shall argue that the zombie figure in pornography is not only a very successful product of popular culture but it also might function as a sarcastic formation of the oppressed porn subject according to (feminist) anti-pornography approaches. I will focus on the question of monstrosity and feminization with regard to the corporeal realm of the zombie figure and its interpretation by LaBruce.

Thirdly, I will analyze the strange kind of agency of the flesh in relation to Otto’s bodily transgression that allows for considering him as rebellious. I will analyze how LaBruce uses filmic pornography as a tool to investigate the fleshiness of humanness as a matter of eating/being/desiring meat.

3.1 Ob/scene and On/scene

Linda Williams coins the term on/scenity to describe how obscenity as a term which literally means 'off-stage' is no longer applicable in today's intermingling public/private

realms. "On/scenity: the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene."²⁹ She goes on to establish what she means by on/scene. It is "one way of signaling not just that pornographies are proliferating but that once off (*ob*) scene sexual scenarios have been brought onto the public sphere."³⁰ I find this term very useful in order to understand the state of affairs in the (feminist) discussions about pornography.

Bruce LaBruce explicitly calls his film pornographic. Although his films happen to have pornographic sexual representations, this is not enough for LaBruce to call himself a porn director. As much as these sentences might sound quite simplistic, I take this statement from an indie film director very seriously. LaBruce positions himself and his work in a place where most people try to avoid being or categorized in. Furthermore, pornography, as an industry is not always a welcoming space for indie productions; promoting, distributing, and screening the films are already hard enough for small scale directors without being labeled like that: potential legal restrictions might be too luxurious. In fact, LaBruce gives us some hints about his take on the effects of the labeling in the film through the character Medea when she talks about the adversity of getting funding. In the scene, Medea shows her previous works to the other zombie characters and before filming the last scene of her film *Up with Dead People* she talks about her experience of the unfavorable disposition of the industry: "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."³¹

As my main interest in pornographic representations is about the gay-male-zombie sex scenes in *Otto*, I will be focusing more on how these images of gay zombies in *Otto* can

²⁹ Linda Williams, *Porn Studies*, Duke University Press, 2004, p.3

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Medea, in Bruce LaBruce, "Otto; or, Up with Dead People (a screenplay)", *Incognitum Hactenus, Living On: Zombies*, Vol.3 [Online] Available at: <<http://incognitumhactenus.com/volume3/>> [Accessed 12 April 2014]

be understood as on/scene instead of ob/scene and what we could gain out of such a move. The fleshiness of the zombie figure orients the zombie sex scenes towards a more raw sexual encounter than what we could call 'erotica'. The body parts which are sometimes disembodied, the organs and blood all over the surface, and the hard-core sex acts, certainly differentiate zombie sex in LaBruce's movie from any other kind of explicit sex scenes, for example in vampire movies. The excessive corporeality and the fleshiness of the zombies are the key features that turn the sex scenes into pornographic images while the intense level of violence is not necessarily present in every sex scene of the film.

3.2 Representations of the corporeal in pornography

At first, writing and thinking about pornography seemed like the hardest part of this work. In my personal life, my relation to pornographic cultural products was limited. As a feminist, I was aware of the historically conflicting, ongoing and everlasting discussions on pornography within feminist scholarship and movement. So far in my academic life, my only concern was about the means of production and distribution of pornographic products and whether or not the people that work in the porn industry (not only the actors but the crew and all the rest that participate in the production and post-production) as a matter of exploitation like in the case of any other job in the labor market. Unlike the anti-porn feminists who in general defend the idea that women and/or the image of woman are at any rate degraded and exploited in pornography by the sexual representations it provides, I will defend the idea that, first of all, we need to specify and agree upon what we mean when we say “sexual representations”. More specifically, my concern is not that much to achieve some agreement. Even if we disagree in the end, what I consider missing in these debates is a reflection on how representation might work according to the difference in the perspective of the actual

approaches as the same term might have different significations as an effect of those very differences.

The figure of the gay zombie in pornography is political even when all that he does is fucking. While it is not easy to say that zombies are fully self-conscious subjects, as a metaphor (whether that of a human or of a monster), the figure of gay zombie in porn films is gendered and sexually oriented; thus they have a sexual agency that is politically situated within power relations. Nevertheless, saying either that his figure should represent actual gays, or, challenging this empiricist approach, counter-argue that the homophobic discourse on gay sexuality is not that simple: the question of representation in the field of pornography still can be examined from multiple points of view that are sometimes even contradictory and so the claims on sexual representations need to be handled carefully. My aim is to unfold what I think about the workings of representation and then to see how it functions when applied to the field of visual pornography. The following section therefore is an attempt to develop my stand on pornography that differs from the anti-porn feminist view mainly because I do not agree with the empiricist idea that considers the sexual representations in pornography as the *re-presentations*, or as mere depictions of a pre-established meaning of (pornographic) sexuality.

As I have established, feminist debates about the representation of sexuality in pornographic visual products sometimes fail to take into account the complexity of the question of representation. In order to better understand the question of sexual representation in pornography, first I would like to examine the conceptualization of representation itself.

According to Stuart Hall³², there are two systems of representation which work together for the production of meaning to succeed. First, there is a process of classification and organization of the world by a set of mental concepts that we are equipped with, enabling

³² Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation" in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. The Open University, 1997 p.4

us to recognize different things by referring to conceptual images of these objects in our minds. Second, to communicate these meanings we need another system of representation in the production of meaning, which is different from but related to the first one: language. The system related to the concepts means that whether we see an object or not, we can identify it. Through its mental image we have in our minds – *mental representation* –, we can still conceptualize an object and visualize it in our “mind’s eye” any time we come across that object in any form. Having said that, Hall emphasizes that we also have concepts of rather abstract things like love, pain, or death, or concepts of things that we have never seen and will never do, like, for instance, zombies. However all these concepts make sense in relation to what is called “shared meanings or shared conceptual maps”³³ that he defines as culture. It is only possible to have similar mental representation of (imaginary) things if we share similar conceptual maps. Hall argues that the role of *signs* (*iconic* – visual, *indexical* – written, or spoken³⁴) are important in that they provide the representation for our mental concepts.

Hall also explains the importance of Foucault’s thinking on signification, his shift from self-sufficient relations of meaning to relations of power in the production of knowledge when analyzing the actual discourses of science which construct the topic in a specific historical period³⁵. In this regard, objects are to emerge as meaningful only within the actual discourses and their historical context. Foucault’s focus on the role of power in the production of knowledge in the interactional relation of power/knowledge is important in understanding the question of representation of sexuality in pornography, and the debates around this question. For Foucault, body is the scope of representation; it is disciplined in the institutional apparatus of power/knowledge. As Hall notes, for Foucault, discourse produces

³³ Ibid, p.18

³⁴ Ibid, p.7

³⁵ Ibid, p.28

two different subjects; one that is representing a specific form of knowledge, and the other that is observing this knowledge representation and interprets it. The question of representation as put by Hall and the mechanisms involved in the collective production of socially regulated meaning, which he takes from Foucault, are much more complex than considering it as a mere reflection of either a concrete object or idea or a self-contained purely textual construction. In this sense, as Hall points out, it is important for me to consider the visual materials in *Otto* as cultural products that are intelligible by/through the shared cultural concepts which are circulated among people in the apparatus of knowledge production and power relations.

Linda Williams in her book on hard-core pornography also defines pornography in Foucauldian terms as “one of the many forms of the ‘knowledge-pleasure’ of sexuality”³⁶. She suggests to leave aside the question whether pornography should exist at all or not but: as it exists, we should rather study what kind of effects it has for viewers when we consider it as “the pleasure of knowing the pleasure”³⁷ and not simply as a (problematic) representation of sexuality. Williams points out that pornography as a genre is not the only one that elicits certain body reactions. She refers to Richard Dyer’s³⁸ point on this issue who notes that there are “other film genres aimed at moving the body, such as thrillers, weepies”³⁹. That is, we can argue that these diverse genres may have something in common and so it is not possible to define the specificity of pornography as a simple matter of representation of sexuality. We should rather broaden our perspective and point out the similarities and argue that the porn, just like the thriller, *moves us* either to arousal or to fear, or to both.

³⁶ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, University of California Press, Berkeley Los Angeles, 1989, p.3

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Richard Dyer, “Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms.” in *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 30 (March) 1985 p.27 cited in Linda Williams: *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, University of California Press, Berkeley Los Angeles, 1989

³⁹ Linda Williams, 1989 p.5

Williams in her more recent book *Porn Studies* not only suggests to move away from the most common either/or definitions of pornography that are “assuming it’s either a liberating pleasure or an abusive power”⁴⁰ but she also adds that today, because of “a veritable explosion of sexually explicit materials”⁴¹, there is a need for better understanding the porn as a genre and as a main event. The editors of the recently published new journal, *Porn Studies*⁴² also highlight the necessity to move beyond the discussions that are either antagonistic or celebratory about porn, instead they look for within the field of porn studies are the works that engage with pornography as texts, productions and performances. I think these moves away from the moralizing understanding of porn as a form of sexual representation may create an open space for more fruitful discussions.

3.3 Sex wars and the zombie in gay zombie porn movies

In my exploration of the figure of the gay-male-zombie in porn, I argue in this thesis that it can be seen as a queer response to anti-porn feminists’ historically constructed meaning of porn. Lisa Duggan in her book, *Sex Wars*⁴³ tracks down the debates on sexual politics and discusses some efforts by anti-porn feminists to convince the legislator about their case. The most important aspect of her study for my paper is the fact that the anti-porn feminists actually showcased gay porn movies to persuade the legislator to make a decision against pornography and Duggan also shows how the judges defined obscenity in relation to this event. Ironically, by showing gay porn to judges to convince them about the obscenity of these products, the anti-porn feminists were actually blurring the boundaries of what they in fact want to define as obscene. The juridical decision making process of on calling a visual

⁴⁰ Ibid.14

⁴¹ Linda Williams, 2004, p.1

⁴² Feona Attwood, Clarissa Smith, “Porn Studies: an introduction” in *Porn Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1-2, 2014

⁴³ Lisa Duggan, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, Psychology Press, 1995

cultural product as obscene occurs in the opposite direction of the real aim (of anti-porn feminists): by making it *on/scene*.

Duggan tells the story of anti-porn feminists' intervention in Canada⁴⁴ and quotes Kathleen Mahoney of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) describing how they succeeded in influencing the Supreme Court of Canada in 1992 to modify the obscenity law to a harm-based approach from a morality-based approach. Mahoney tells that they (LEAF) showed to the judges some "horrifically violent and degrading gay movies"⁴⁵ by pointing out that those abused men were treated like women in order to make the judges understand their point – assuming that if they refer the judges to cases that involve men, by the force of the extensive logic, *as men themselves* they should understand what is at stake in the "similar" case for women. After that, the decision of the judges defined obscenity as "images of sex with violence or sex which degrades or dehumanizes any of the participants"⁴⁶. Here again, I find that the sexual representations in pornography are taken into consideration as the mere reflections of a constructed meaning of sexuality. In my opinion, the most evident failure of this approach is that while trying to *disinfect* and *sterilize* the visual cultural products about sexuality from certain signs and images of oppression, it serves to draw strict boundaries on the definition of sexualities in general.

Duggan also points out another important point, namely that these terms of obscenity are very easy to apply by homophobes to any form of gay sexuality by using the normative conceptualization of sexualities. Maybe, it is better to say that these terms are applicable by any kind of authority to any kind of sexuality that is considered as non-normative as an effect of their elasticity. I would say that the mirror-image understanding of sexual representations in pornography thus constructs a normative and exclusive meaning of sexuality.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.9

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

For my part, it is interesting to see how this definition of obscenity matches perfectly the figure of the zombie in porn movies. As I prefer Williams' term on/scenity as a conceptual tool to investigate what LaBruce's film can be seen as LaBruce as a director who works on pornographic images is probably aware of these definitions of obscenity and the everlasting debates on pornography. My guess is that LaBruce quite playfully juggles with these terms and creates his own way of political statement on obscenity by pulling down the walls of corporeality and pleasure, even by taking the risk of disembodiment of the bodies and being left with nothing more than blood and flesh.

Following from the above ideas, the gay-male-zombie figure in porn movies might not be seen to be representing a specific sexuality but can be considered as a popular metaphor, a discursive site used in porn movies by perverting what is and what is not dehumanizing. Also, as mentioned before, the identity that this semi-subject gains within these visual porn products might have an aspect other than representing simply *zombieness* in a negative sense of gay male sexuality or sexual identity in general. It is rather to be seen as a possible response of porn industry to legislative decisions on censorship and everlasting debates about the harms of pornographic images.

In LaBruce's movie, the character Medea Yarn who plays the role of the director of the movie she is making ("*Up with Dead People*"), describes Otto as "lonely, empty, dead inside", who fits the typical porn profile according to her: "the lost boy; the damaged boy; the numb, phlegmatic, insensate boy willing to go to any extreme to feel something, anything." At the same time, Otto's zombieness is combined with the pornographic representation of the corporeal realm. The zombie sex shown in the movie can be discussed with the help of Patricia MacCormack's discussion of necrosexuality that questions the definition of the

corpse itself. If the body of the zombie is considered as a corpse then how to define it? "Meat? Flesh? What can one do with a corpse? Is traditional sex with a corpse queer?"⁴⁷

Considering the bodies in LaBruce's movie, the scenes of zombie sex by the corpses in motion (in Medea's movie) and at the same time the sexual act itself, for example, the sex scenes of Otto with the gay boy that he meets in the club, become hard to distinguish in the actual movie. The corpse or the zombie flesh is hard to define but as it is considered to be monstrous by its excessive corporeality, it is this excess that distinguishes it from the normative understanding of the human body.

Historically, the definition of the human body has been very much discussed. Grosz⁴⁸ points out that the human body in a normative framework is considered as (male) masculine. According to Grosz, the idea of its alleged "neutrality" is linked to the corporeal realm by "the male body and men's pleasures". According to this logic, what is left outside the "neutral body" can be considered as monstrous or feminine. The question of feminization and monstrosification is posed in the movie in that the figures of "fake zombies" that are playing the parts in Medea's movie are all shown to have assumed an excessive masculine look, while Otto is more androgynous compared to the other characters. Medea says "There was something different about Otto. Something more... authentic". In my reading, the authenticity of Otto may be referring to his monstrosity that is different than the performative monstrosity of the fake zombies who are actually trying to show basic characteristics of the body that are conventionally attributed to the male masculine: muscular, healthy, (relatively) clean and powerful. While the fake zombies are trying to stick to the neutrality of the human body which is traditionally considered as male masculine corporeality, the Otto figure moves away from this profile and comes to rest in between corporal monstrosification and feminization.

⁴⁷ Patricia MacCormack, "Necrosexuality" in Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird eds, *Queering the Non/Human*, Ashgate Press (Queer Interventions Book Series), 2008, p.341

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994

LaBruce is said to be concerned with subverting the masculine stereotypes in his movies. In this regard in *Otto*, the hyper-masculine performativity of fake zombies might be thought of a move away from femininity. While playing the zombie roles, the body's monstrosity is approaching to feminization through the deployment of a "neutral body": monstrosity thus leads to femininity and a lack of masculinity. *Otto* is then authentic by not escaping the monstrosity of his corporeality, by not disavowing his femininity, but becomes a rebellious zombie as Medea calls him. It does not take place by some rebellious act itself but through the way his flesh is situated in the political discourse of (hetero)normative corporeality.

Disgusting, degrading, dehumanizing; the gay-male-zombies in porn movies might be perfectly obscene but as they are male and gay, by having these identities, they are political subjects and instead of considering these figures as *re-presentations* of sexuality, I am more convinced to see them as an ironic response to anti-porn discourses on obscenity. As the on/scene figures of pornography, through the figure of the zombie it might be possible to reclaim the terms 'dehumanization' and 'degradation' as one of the many forms of the 'knowledge-pleasure' of the sexuality.

Chapter 4 Cultural fears and desires through the zombie figure

In this chapter I will mainly focus on the cultural fears and desires that are provoked by the conception of death in modern capitalism through the figure of the zombie. According to Dendle, the zombie underscores current social anxieties in the social contexts that are “marked by concerns over environmental deterioration, political conflict, the growth of consumer capitalism, and the commodification of the body in contemporary medical science.”⁴⁹ In order to situate my previous discussions about the normative understanding of the conceptualization of humanness and the meaning of sexuality, both of which I argued are normative and exclusive in a specific context, in this chapter I will try to situate the corporeal realm by taking into consideration the political and cultural contexts within which it emerges. In other words, in addition to the dimension of temporality here I shall address the matter of queering spatiality.

First, I will investigate the cultural and political spatiality of corporeality especially through the conceptualization of death by looking at the critiques of late-modern capitalism that focus on the fear of *depersonalization* seen as being socially dead. Again I will be using the figure of the zombie as a tool to highlight cultural fears about the loss of identity and becoming some sort of a mindless body. In this part I will look at the roots of the zombie mythology and try to see what this monstrous figure – which is originally connected to slavery – might help us understand the individuals' fears in late-modern capitalistic society. I will continue my reflections on Bruce LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2004) in order to see how the fictional zombie narrative in this film might be helpful to deconstruct

⁴⁹ Peter Dendle, “The Zombie as a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety” in N. Scott, ed., *Monsters and the monstrous: Myths and metaphors of enduring evil*, New York: Rodopi, 2007, p.45

the ways our own sense of being and corporeality situated within late-modern capitalist society work.

In the second section, I will look at the ecological apocalyptic narratives that simultaneously provoke and shape cultural fears and desires. The question I shall explore is to see, if it is possible to understand our modern anxieties about the environmental changes through the figure of the zombie.

4.1 Cultural and political spatiality of corporeality

The zombie figure is introduced to Western culture by the colonial interaction between the Haitian and American culture in the early twentieth century⁵⁰. Kevin Boon shows how the Haitian zombie mythology went through changes when it is modified by the colonialist discourse of Americans when the colonialists themselves were exposed to this unknown culture's myths and religious practices. The Haitian zombie mythology is originally based on the practices of slavery in which the zombie is actually a slave, a body that is “capable only of following basic commands”⁵¹. After being seized by the American control in 1915, these myths and beliefs, including the voodoo practices that is also the base of the zombie mythology in the Haitian context, and the figure of the zombie go through changes when entering American culture in the early 20th century.⁵²

This colonialist contact of two fundamentally different cultures creates a major change in the conception of the zombie. According to the Haitian culture, it mainly signifies the slave's highly reduced control over their own body. When introduced into the American

⁵⁰ Kevin Boon, 2011, p.54

⁵¹ Sarah Juliet Lauro, “For the Ethical Treatment of Zombies”, *Incognitum Hactenus, Living On: Zombies*, Vol.3 [Online] Available at: <<http://incognitumhactenus.com/volume3/>> [Accessed 12 April 2014], p. 8

⁵² Kevin Boon, 2011, p.54

culture through colonialist discourse, it becomes a representation of Otherness, 'the less human' that later becomes a horror figure representing the social and cultural anxieties of the individual in late-modern capitalism.

Under the directive of faith, the zombie represented an external force that invaded human form, under the directive of reason, when faith shifted to rationalism and an increased confidence in the physical world, the zombie came to represent a loss of internal reliability, a loss of being, which results in a human shell occupied by nothingness.⁵³

Boon's approach might be simplistic in explaining the status of individual in modernity but the historical shift about what the zombie represents is nevertheless crucial to understand that the cultural fears and desires are relative. Thus, there is certainly a need to situate the figure of the zombie in a specific cultural, political and economical context in order to evaluate its reception and what it tells us about the collective cultural fears.

The zombie figure in Western popular culture now has a relatively long history. The first zombie films come from the first half of the twentieth century, such as *White Zombie* (1932), *King of the Zombies* (1941), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), and *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943). They are mostly based on the idea of human shell, the body occupied by nothingness⁵⁴. As Boon discusses, after the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, Western thought enters into a nuclear age where a new zombie period begins. "The post-nuclear zombie is the manifestation of the post-nuclear hero's greatest ontological insecurity: the loss of the "figure" of self in his or her engulfment by the "other."⁵⁵ The fear of zombie in post-nuclear age is mainly based on a "more intimate fear of being undead, and that the living

⁵³ Ibid p.55

⁵⁴ Ibid p.54

⁵⁵ Ibid 57

death of the zombie is more monstrous than the grave.”⁵⁶ This goes together with the post-nuclear individuals' instinctual fear of physical death that is coupled with their fear of the disconnection with the body and considering it as a shell. These interconnected fears of the individual in modern capitalism are not merely a corporeal crisis but mostly suggest an identity crisis. In my opinion, this is a crucial point to see how cultural desire in modernity on hailing the values and notion of identity at the same time creates its own personal fears such as anxieties about the loss of identity.

In the opening titles of the film *Otto*, we can see that the film is produced by Existential Crisis Productions. Bruce LaBruce, the director of *Otto* is the president of this company. The main theme in most of LaBruce's films is the *existential crisis*, or the existential despair of the individual in late-modern capitalism. Peter Dendle tells us that “[p]ost-apocalyptic zombie worlds are fantasies of liberations”⁵⁷. The forms of social organization that are shown to be ruined thus create the main anxiety for the survivors of these zombie worlds. The forms of social organization that are ruined thus create the main anxiety for the survivors of these zombie worlds. In the film *Otto*, for instance, the social organization is not threatened by Otto's existence but it is the social realm itself that is threatening for Otto. He doesn't fit in and he has no intention even to try anymore. At the same time, Otto keeps observing and participating in the social realm. In other words, he is not a total outcast, nor is he a fully integrated member of society. He is wandering in the limbo; trying to decide whether he wants to be part of the society that he doesn't like, or just leave it all for good. In the final scene, he eventually decides to leave Berlin as he doesn't want to stay with the living anymore. He heads to the north, wondering if he could find there others like him. LaBruce doesn't give details about why Otto decides to go to the north but in

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Peter Dendle, 2007, p.54

my opinion the north might mean the North Pole, where it is (probably) possible to survive outside the capitalistic society.⁵⁸ Even if he decides to leave the city in the end, Otto is portrayed as the zombie that survives the apocalyptic world of (metropolitan) living.

In *Otto*, the title hero Otto describes his condition as “a zombie with an identity crisis.”⁵⁹ According to Dendle⁶⁰, the life of the zombie figure revolves around the issue of what he calls *depersonalization*. Sarah Juliet Lauro agrees with Dendle's claim, and describes the zombie as “a body that has been stripped of the person it once was, acting in a manner that is completely out of character, or seemingly devoid of what we used to call a soul.”⁶¹ In accordance with Dendle and Lauro, I find the issue of depersonalization or a form of existence that entails being socially dead as the core of the cultural fears related to the conception of death. The individual constantly has to face and challenge these fears in order not to lose their identities, as that loss in many cases this may equal social death in late-modern capitalistic societies.

What renders Otto different regarding his sense of identity is his disinterested attitude towards the social realm in general terms. Unlike Otto, the “fake zombies” that are playing in the embedded movie, that is in *Medea*, the film director character's film, *Up with Dead People* are more familiar zombie figures that can be found in traditional fictional zombie narratives. This film within the film is following the basic characteristics of common zombie narratives; it passes in a post-apocalyptic zombie world where, exceptionally this time the zombies are gays and preparing themselves for a revolution against homophobic society.

⁵⁸ It might be a coincidence but I found the destination interesting as one of my favorite fictional characters, the monster in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1823) goes to the North Pole as well. Also, it is interesting to see that the title of LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with the Dead People* (2008) and the title of Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* have the similar style, which makes the intentional resemblance of their endings look more probable.

⁵⁹ Otto in Bruce LaBruce, “Otto; or, Up Dead People (a screenplay)”, *Incognitum Hactenus, Living On: Zombies*, Vol.3 [Online] Available at: <<http://incognitumhactenus.com/volume3/>> [Accessed 12 April 2014]

⁶⁰ Peter Dendle, 2007

⁶¹ Sarah Juliet Lauro, *Incognitum hactenus* vol 3, p.9

Medea explains that this small army of gay zombies that she calls the “purple menace” is only concerned with society’s paranoid and violent attitudes towards homosexuals. In the final scene of *Up with Dead People*, the leader of this army of gay zombies, Fritz, celebrates the revolution by having an orgy, or maybe the orgy itself is to be considered as the revolution conducted by gay zombies. Medea describes this scene as “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.”

LaBruce's emphasis on the interplay between capitalist commodification, conformism and pornography as a genre is given through the critical engagement of the character Medea Yarn who plays the director of a gay zombie porn *Up with Dead People* within LaBruce's film. Medea's political stand is in a sense caricatured: her lines in the film are mostly in forms of slogans that are aimed against consumerism and any sort of discrimination. At the same time, as a director of a porn movie she is portrayed as a figure who is trying to produce transgression through the mechanisms of capitalistic means of production. Her precariousness leads her to find different ways to achieve her goals while she is shooting the movie; she shoots some scenes in a supermarket without permission and in the end the crew is being kicked out by the shopkeeper; in another scene, she enters a massive garbage dump with Otto and her brother Adolf who works voluntarily as the cameraman in her crew. After shooting the scene, she suddenly shifts from her director/actor coaching style to her everyday attitudes and tells Otto to be quicker as she doesn't have all day. She indeed doesn't have all day, unlike Otto, as time is money and paying Otto his daily wages is part of the deal that she needs to consider. Both in Otto's story and through Medea's mediation, LaBruce makes a strong claim by showing the audience that producing transgression, sexually-ridden or not, is somehow bounded by the normative orderings of modern-day capitalism.

4.2 Ecological apocalyptic narratives and the “eco-zombie”

If the Human is bounded by the inescapable mortality that feeds the corporeal, individual, cultural, and political fears and desires, then it is not a surprise to see that the theme of environmental changes comes up quite often in zombie narratives. In these fictional ecological apocalyptic narratives the figure of the undead creature, “eco-zombies”⁶² as called by Lauro, reflects “anxieties about humans overreaching their natural sphere”⁶³, one of the most important contemporary concerns of civilization. Ecological apocalyptic narratives in zombie films can provide us some insights into the complex relationship of humanity with its own self and with the space where it exists. As discussed in the second chapter, while the liberal humanist version of the human subject is being imposed as the Human by defining it as firm as possible and trying to prevent any kind of perversion or transgression which could supposedly endanger this constructed meaning of Human, the fleshiness of the human existence is considered to be endangered not by the outside forces but by the humans themselves.

It is interesting to see how in some fictional zombie narratives, the zombies that are considered to be the worst enemy of humankind can be seen as the embodiment of the fear of an ecological apocalyptic future. In fact, the ecological catastrophes are happening not because of the zombies, but mostly because of the humans themselves.

As a move away from this dilemma of ecological apocalyptic narratives that are mainly represented as horror images, I suggest a rethinking of ecology and the place of the human corporeality in it. I think it is a necessary move as it can provide new perspectives on our understanding of spatiality of corporeality and the Nature which is also defined by the similar boundaries as the conceptualization of the Human. Timothy Morton challenges the

⁶² Sarah Juliet Lauro, “Afterword: Zombie (R)evolution” in S.J Lauro & D. Christie, eds. *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011, p.234

⁶³ Ibid

idea of considering catastrophes to only inflect them with a negative value. Morton's conceptualization of queer ecology⁶⁴ considers the matrix of power production and norms as materializing particular subjects. Morton conceptualizes the roots of queer ecology as an intersection of non-essentialist biology and queer theory from the perspective of authenticity. Morton moves from the ideas of the non-authentic life-form by the anti-essentialist view of evolutionist theory and claims that life-forms which he calls "mesh" are liquid. In his understanding, queer ecology is based on the idea of interrelatedness of everything and the concept of mesh is informed by this relatedness, the intimacy of life-forms which are argued to be liquid. He also finds a connection between deconstruction and his approach to queer ecology in that the latter is based on the multiplicity of differences that are interdependent, in opposition to the idea of reducing everything to sameness.

I believe Morton's approach might be as scary and threatening for the dominant discourses as the idea of the zombies inhabiting the world together with the living. But in my reading, his attempt at rethinking futurity is able to free the zombie figure from the role of the Other – both culturally and naturally:

“Nature looks natural because it keeps going, and going, and going, like the undead, and because we keep on looking away, framing it, sizing it up. Acknowledging the zombielike quality of interconnected life forms will aid the transition from an ideological fixation on Nature to a fully queer ecology.”⁶⁵

This claim is important because queer ecology shows that the ontology of being entails relationality. Consequently, nothing is self-contained to be seen as outside or inside of the other but everything is to emerge as inter-relational. This is why he argues that rather than

⁶⁴ Timothy Morton, “Queer Ecology”, *PMLA*, March, 2010

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 279

seeing things as distinct parts of something bigger such as Nature, we should be considering the formation of intimate relatedness.

In *Otto*, during the shootings of Medea's film which is about Otto himself, at one point Medea, Otto and Medea's brother Adolf who works as the cameraman go to a massive garbage dump. Medea's enthusiasm about the garbage dump resonates with what Morton identifies as the discourse of dark ecology. Medea says: "Garbage cluttering the environment and demeaning the nature". As how Morton perceives the Nature as undead, according to Medea, humankind is as garbage dumps, with the rest of what exists, or what is left. The garbage dump thus is the only sign of the apocalyptic narrative in LaBruce's movie but then again, he playfully turns it into a kingdom for zombies. Medea tells Otto that the world, full of garbage dumps, is "the earth that you and your kind will inherit. Some day all this will be yours!"

LaBruce successfully connects the modern fears of civilization to the "civilized" humans' failures. Garbage dumps out of our sight are only one of the ignored sites of late-modern capitalism that keep growing and growing. According to Medea's logic, maybe it is not such a problem if the zombies are the ones who are going to inherit a world that is no longer livable for humankind. Nevertheless, as the ironic presentation of Medea's logic implicates, we may be already living in the same conditions that we keep projecting onto the future, in the horror narratives. Medea calls the garbage dumps as "the great mass graveyards of advanced capitalism", but in a zombie film, the graveyards are the least peaceful places so ignoring the mechanisms of modern capitalism, it is never easy to understand individuals' cultural fears, who constantly try to avoid their contribution to the existence of these fears. As

Lauro says “how to better judge a civilization than by its bogeyman?”⁶⁶ The figure of the zombie in modern capitalism is always this political bogeyman.

⁶⁶ Lauro p.235

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In my thesis I have tried to deconstruct the liberal humanist conceptualization of both humanness and sexualities. In order to do that, I tried to examine the normative orderings of humanness and sexualities in late-modern capitalism. I have engaged in an exploration that focuses on the functioning of these orderings by using the fictional figure of the zombie as an antidote to how humanness is commonly defined. Given the topic of my thesis, I have chosen to focus on the corporeality and the fleshiness of human existence due to the fact that one of my major challenges in exploring the boundaries of humanness was to explore from a feminist perspective, whether or not it was possible to overcome the mind/body distinction.

As I argued, the predominance of the mind is associated with masculinity. In my thesis, following the feminist debates, I took this as a given, even though this might be challenged and objected by others. I think that there can be many new ways and imaginative possibilities for rethinking the mind/body distinction. I believe and hope that my attempt in deconstructing the conceptualization of the body and refusing to consider it as a monolithic term can be useful in further explorations of this binary. My focus on the fleshiness was thus only one of the several interrogative lenses capable of illuminating new understandings of humanness and sexualities.

As I argued, I see binary thinking as a mechanism of the normative orderings. My aim was to explore other possibilities of thinking the livingness itself. My method in this query was to use the conceptualization of death, but not as the opposite of life itself. I considered death and life not as distinct parts of livingness but as a form of intimate relatedness. The character Otto in Bruce LaBruce's film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* was a fruitful example for me in pursuing my exploration of the definition of humanness, due to the fact that the zombieness of this fictional character remained disputable throughout the film.

I examined the question of sexualities as a major part of how the symbolic boundaries of the definition of humanness function. I further examined the debates on pornographic sexual representations, by focusing on the biased understanding of the concept of representation. Here obscenity became the most significant topic, as the definition of the term itself turned out to be relative and its use was mostly political. Through my examination of gay-zombie porn and feminist debates on porn in general, I discovered that what gets invoked is humanness and inhumanity according to different sides of the debate. I argued that anti-porn claims, by referring to the inhumanity of pornographic images, were actually functioning as gatekeepers of the symbolic boundaries of humanness and operating in very exclusionary ways. I would agree that my outcomes might be seen as questionable as they do not provide an exhaustive exploration of the literature nor the issue's historicity over the past prolific decades filled with debates on pornography. Nevertheless, I believe that my attempt to highlight the biases of certain anti-porn feminist claims could potentially be useful as a reminder for considering how the concepts such as inhuman or degrading can also be predefined and reinforced by patriarchal normativities.

During my research, I realized that new veins of scholarly work on these specialized topics are emerging, such as Porn Studies or Zombie scholarship. I see my thesis as an attempt to contribute to these new waves of interdisciplinary scholarship. Further space remains, in both depth and scope, for the cross questioning of humanness and sexualities in already established perspectives such as new materialist feminism or post-humanist theories, as well as in the emerging fields of porn studies and zombie scholarship.

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