
LC EXPRESS



The Zombie Epidemic: A Hypermodern Version of the Apocalypse

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*Speech given before The New York Freud Lacan Analytic Group
September 25, 2013 | The New School (New York, NY)*

Jorge Assef, psychoanalyst and head of Cinema and Psychoanalysis at the University of Cordoba, Argentina, presented on a topic ubiquitous in current American popular culture: the zombie. The seminar focused on the zombie's perpetuation into the hypermodern era (from "Night of the Living Dead" (1968) through to the current "World War Z" and the AMC TV series "The Walking Dead"), examining its manifestations as pandemic and apocalyptic from a psychoanalytic orientation. In light of the theme of the upcoming IX Congress of the WAP, A Great Disorder in the Real, in the 21st Century, the zombie reveals that death itself has been contaminated by the laws of nature.

Introduction

March 2013 - Córdoba, Argentina: the University's television discourse research team proposed that I should include the series *The Walking Dead* in the analysis. I refused by using a neurotic limit as an excuse: "disgust."

May 2013 - Bogotá, Colombia: in a conference on psychoanalysis and Hollywood movies, a question was asked about horror movies (vampires, zombies, exorcism). I explained that I wasn't knowledgeable about the genre.

June 2013 - São Paulo, Brazil: I was invited to the movies to watch *World War Z*. I turned down the invitation.

July 2013 - Buenos Aires, Argentina: I got an email with the subject "Zombie Apocalypse" and the proposal for this seminar. That very same afternoon, I went to 3 movie theater complexes. There were no tickets left for *World War Z* in any of them. I had to buy one for the following day and go back home to download *The Walking Dead* on my laptop.

August 2013 - I had already given in to the global epidemic...and here I am!

The LC EXPRESS delivers the Lacanian Compass in a new format. Its aim is to deliver relevant texts in a dynamic timeframe for use in the clinic and in advance of study days and conference meetings. The LC EXPRESS publishes works of theory and clinical practice and emphasizes both longstanding concepts of the Lacanian tradition as well as new cutting edge formulations.

I would like to greatly thank Robert and Cyrus for this invitation. I would also like to greatly thank Maria Cristina Aguirre, who has always welcomed me so warmly to this city and has let me share the work and learn from her. I would also like to thank them because Jacques Lacan used to say that our challenge as analysts is to live up to the subjectivity of our times and I, thanks to you all, have found out that if we analysts don't know anything about zombies today, we end up being zombies ourselves.

I have divided my lecture into six parts. The first one introduces us to what I'll be calling the "hyper-zombie" and its background. Then we'll be looking at the psychoanalytic, sociocultural, political and subjective implications that I have been able to interpret about the zombie phenomenon so far, a phenomenon which appeals to children and grown-ups of all sexes and which even gathers big crowds such as the "zombie walks."

Since this seminar is about culture and psychoanalysis, I will avoid going deeply into psychoanalytic clinic, although we will be able to deduce a few issues. In addition, I will do my best to introduce the psychoanalytic concepts I will be resorting to in the simplest way possible. However, in some cases I will only mention them for those of you who might want to do further research later on.

1. *The Hypermodern Zombie*

The zombie is probably the most popular horror character born on the American continent. It originated from the Afro-Caribbean traditions stemming from the voodoo religion

that became deeply rooted in Haiti. That's why the first movie about the topic, ***White Zombie*** (1932), is set on this island.

However, the association between the figure of the zombie, the epidemic and the end of humankind was not a result of the original tradition, but originated from the work of George Romero, who, in 1968, released ***Night of the Living Dead***, a reference of the genre, which entered the *National Film Registry's* list of "culturally, historically and esthetically important" movies in the US Library of Congress. In this film, it was already possible to realize that Romero was using the horror genre—which generally went unnoticed by censor boards—as a vehicle for social criticism, targeted at racism and the Vietnam War in those days.

After his first work, Romero produced ***Dawn of the Dead*** (1978), the story of a group of survivors who take shelter in a shopping mall, and in 1985 he released ***Day of the Dead***—which closes his "original trilogy."

From then on, the genre became unstoppably widespread until the '90s. When in 2004—it is no coincidence that it was post-9/11—Zack Snyder released ***Dawn of the Dead*** (a remake of Romero's 1978 movie of the same name), the genre was reborn. According to the critics, that's when the zombies' "Second Golden Age" started.

Romero returned in 2005 with ***Land of the Dead***. The movie was understood as a metaphor of President Bush's foreign policy, since it is about a population with a rigid social class stratification who live behind walls, while there are crowds of zombies everywhere outside the walls. At the premiere, Romero said: "Today the zombies are our neighbors."¹ Thus, the figure of the zombie has changed since 1968. Over four hundred movies have been made about this topic over the last ten years. There are also comics, TV series, literary works, video games, etc. While in every narration the zombies have particular traits, on the whole, they may be characterized as follows:

1. Zombies are dead people who have come back to life en masse (like a plague) as a result of nuclear radiation, the leak of a virus, defective scientific-military experiments, or some other unexplainable reason.
2. The only way of wiping zombies out is usually by blowing their heads off or burning them up.
3. The only motivation of the zombies is to feed on human flesh.
4. They don't have a language, which is the reason why their intelligence is very limited. They have no subjectivity at all, and they might use rudimentary instruments from time to time.
5. Their danger lies in their number, persistence and voracity.

¹ Vidable, M.: "Sobre Héroes y Tumbas"

However, Romero's zombies are not characterized by the speed and the almost instant global spreading that can be seen in the latest examples of the genre. What I will call "hyper-zombie" (strong, agile, fast, powerful, with the ability to infect others immediately) is the more current version of the character which can be found, for example, in *World War Z*. The hyper-zombie is a purely American product, born from an absolutely contemporary fictional apparatus, which is fostered by the cultural audiovisual industry worldwide.

My approach will focus specifically on the "hypermodern zombie" as an almost unbeatable force, some sort of anthropomorphic plague, in which man has become the pathogenic agent of man as a result of a mistake or carelessness on the part of science, a hypermodern decline of Hobbes' thinking ("Man is the wolf of man").

II. *The Uncanny and Hypermodernity*

Let us clarify two key concepts first:

1. The Uncanny

In 1919, Sigmund Freud turned the German word *unheimlich* into a concept. Translated as "uncanny" in English, the term refers to an affect which is perceived as distressing by the subject. But what is peculiar about this word is clearly visible in the German language: *unheimlich* has the term "heim", that which is familiar, intimate.

Thus, Freud states that "the signifier *unheimlich* has a double antithetic and paradoxical sense: it is the most familiar and the least familiar and, in this sense, it articulates with the Lacanian concept of extimacy."²

Jacques Lacan returns to the notion of "the Uncanny" in his seminar *Anxiety*, where he works on it in relation to object *a*³. To Lacan, the uncanny emerges when that object belonging to the subject's unconscious phantasmatic world appears in reality. According to Lacan, this experience "cannot be told."⁴ It is an experience that exceeds language.

What is interesting to us here is that Lacan states that these kinds of situations occur in reality in a passing manner, and that the subject readapts quickly in order to avoid them. That is why he characterizes these kinds of phenomena as something "fleeting", which justifies the fact that Freud needed to resort to fiction, such as E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Sand-Man," in order to prove it and explain it better.

As to the notion of "extimacy" mentioned above, it was introduced by Lacan in Seminar 7, where he said, "this central place, this intimate exteriority, this extimacy, which is

² Furman, M.: "Unheimlich". Scilicet. Los objetos a en la experiencia psicoanalítica. Grama, Bs. As., 2008. p. 288

³ I will quickly say that Lacan's explanation is that the *unheimlich* phenomenon appears when object *a* —that which in the subjective operation the subject had yielded to the field of the Other, and which then remains integrated in the subject's phantasmatic framework— returns suddenly and unexpectedly in its oral, anal, gaze or voice modalities.

⁴ Lacan, J.: El Seminario, Libro 10, La Angustia, Paidós, Bs. As., 2006, p. 86

the Thing.”⁵ We can see that the formal composition of the term shows a new third dimension: it is something external which is also the most internal.

This is where Jacques-Alain Miller is going when he explains: “If we use the term extimacy in this way, we can consequently make it be equivalent to the unconscious itself.”⁶

Therefore, if you can follow the rationale I’m introducing here, I’m trying to say that the zombie, like other horror figures, causes an uncanny effect; yet this isn’t only the result of the representation of the zombie that we see on the screen, but also the result of what the figure, in turn, moves in our own unconscious aspects.

Then, we need to rethink Romero’s statement, “The zombies are the neighbors.” We’ll get back to this point later on.

2. Hypermodernity

I take the classification of postmodernity essentially from Jean François Lyotard (1979), who defined it as “the state of culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts.”⁷ He placed the crisis of the grand narratives in the center of his approach, and this is what we refer to as the fall of the Other in psychoanalysis.

Twenty years later, the French social philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky revisited Lyotard and stated that “Lyotard defined the postmodern as a crisis in foundations and the decline of the great systems of legitimation. That was of course correct, but not absolutely so. (...) It would be necessary to show that something was being recovered and restored in the new references and ways of life.”⁸ According to Lipovetsky, the key of our current times is in the “passage from a capitalism of production to an economy of consumption and mass communication, the substitution of a strict and disciplinary society for a ‘fashion-society’, restructured from the bottom up by the techniques of the ephemeral, of renovation and of permanent seduction.”⁹

This issue was also anticipated by psychoanalysis. In the ‘70s, possibly ahead of his own times, Lacan announced the rise of the object to the social zenith. When the Other was the reference of social discourse, our society had ideals, ideas, principles, repressions, etc. When the object organizes discourse, our society is commanded by the so-called “surplus-jouissance.” What does this mean?

⁵ Lacan, J.: El Seminario, Libro 7, La Ética del Psicoanálisis, Paidós, Bs. As., 2006, p. 171

⁶ Miller, J-A.: *Extimidad*. Paidós, Bs. As., 2010, p. 218

⁷ Lyotard, J-F., *La condición posmoderna: informe sobre el saber*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1989, p. 9

⁸ Lipovetsky, G., *Les temps hypermodernes*, Grasset, Paris, 2004, p. 80

⁹ Lipovetsky, G., *Les temps hypermodernes*. Grasset, Paris, 2004, p. 15

To put it simply, it's a type of subjectivity which is organized around the achievement of satisfaction, a satiety which is never fully accomplished, but which people believe blindly in because the discourse of the times promises it to them. Thus, contemporary subjects go after different types of objects and satisfaction experiences, changing from one to another, unceasingly, doubling down each time, a little bit more, a little bit more..., which inevitably leads to excess, to the "hyper."

If the subjects pursue more objects, science and technology create them, the mass media spread them globally non-stop, the market sends them to every corner of the planet, gets the profits and restarts the cycle all over again.

Then, Lipovetsky states that the prefix "hyper" marks our times, times in which the three foundational factors of the modern era —individualism, the market and technology—are overdeveloped, globalized and deregulated.

In view of the above, I think you now understand why I have called the genre's contemporary character "hyper-zombie". In the figure of the contemporary zombie we can see the effect of hypermodern discourse: beings who are completely alone, who do not create bonds with one another (individualism), who are the result of technoscientific excess taken to an extreme (defeating death itself), who move around en masse (that is, without the possibility of thinking) after their consumer objects (eating human beings).

If we go back to the category of the Uncanny (Unheimlich) now, we can begin to deduce a hypothesis about what is "familiar" between the zombie and the hypermodern subject.

Therefore, the zombie is no longer the "neighbor" and it is clear why it touches our own intimacy, since, as in Frankenstein we saw the dreadful return of the dark side of the technological progress achieved in modernity, in the zombies we might see the dreadful return of the effects of hypermodernity. We human beings have become consumer objects of our own devouring drive.

Thus, the "hyper" factor of our own culture returns as a voracity that destroys everything we know (even ourselves), embodied by a being that has lost its humanity and treats us like prey. That's when we become those human beings who locked themselves up in a shopping mall in *Dawn of the Dead*; we go from being consumers to being consumer objects, and we become the waste of the operation.

Then, we can say that the zombie frenzy, the big audiences attracted by this character in today's fictions, its esthetics, its merchandising, the zombie walks, etc., all occur because the zombie touches something deep in contemporary subjectivity. We find it uncanny because

it's a figure that embodies something that traverses us without us knowing; it works as the semblance of a real¹⁰ that traverses our epoch and as a cultural interpretation of our times.

III. The Zombie Non-Body: A Machinery that Becomes Widespread

The body, as psychoanalysis understands it, is different from organism. The body is the effect of language and the imaginary construction that is made of it. Thanks to that image that we get to recognize as our unity, our "ego," we eventually forget that we are a complex machinery made up of different biological tissues programmed to work accurately, as a whole, and autonomously most of the time (it doesn't depend on our volition).

In *Detached Pieces*, Jacques-Alain Miller clears up the place that the body has in Lacan's last teaching in *Seminar 23, The Sinthome*.

As you know, the central point of Lacan's ideas in his first teaching was the symbolic, the unconscious structured as a language. Thus, the center of subjectivity was \$, the barred subject. In Lacan's last teaching, the notion of *parlêtre* —speaking being— took the place of that of the barred subject. This means that *jouissance* is added to the \$ constituted by language.

Then, Miller wonders: What is cleared up as the first consistency of a being that is not a subject but a *parlêtre*?, and he answers: the body, not the signifier: "The body is the only consistency of the *parlêtre*; it's what holds it together." Further on in the text, he adds: "This consistency is undoubtedly imaginary, and here we can return (...) to the mirror stage. But this consistency is based on a relationship of the *parlêtre* with his or her body."¹¹ This relationship that Miller is referring to is what Lacan, in Seminar 23, calls a relationship of "adoration", the adoration of one's own body.

Well then, the relationship of adoration that human beings have with their own bodies is threatened by the zombies, and that's the other aspect of these characters' uncanny effect.

With its translucent skin, its missing pieces, its broken bones, its rotten parts, the zombie brings the machinery of the organism to the forefront, the one we tend to veil through the image of the body which provides the consistency that Miller referred to.

But this is not all. Part of that consistency has to do with the fact that the body works as a refuge of the being, a boundary with the world. It is "our home". In contrast, the zombie "non-body" has a limitless materiality, with holes on the outside, ready to become assembled into others in each bite. That's why the zombies, without taking any precaution, expose their organism to the worst, which is due not only to the fact that they are already dead and cannot

¹⁰ I am introducing two categories that I won't be developing. They are for you to do further research: that of the register of the "Real" (which is not the same as reality) and that of "Semblance."

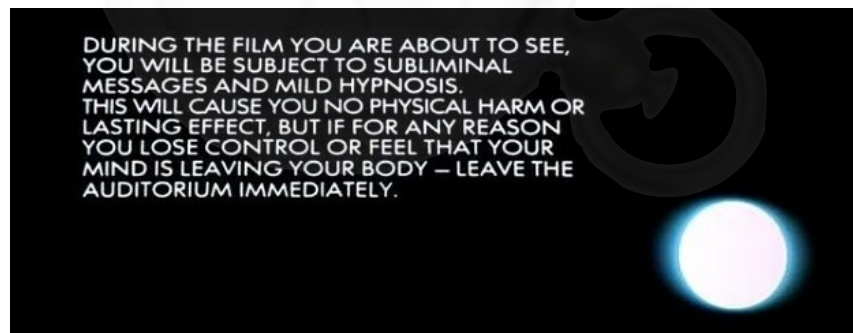
¹¹ Miller, J-A (2013): *Piezas Seltas*, Paidós, Bs As., p. 417

be killed, but also to the fact that they don't feel that such materiality belongs to them. They aren't conscious of that; they aren't libidinally-loaded bodies; nor are they bodies tied to an imaginary harmony. They are non-bodies, machines that advance on their prey with an absolute disregard of whether they lose an arm or an organ, or whether they are shot or burned along the way...

But at the same time, I think that the popular phenomenon of this zombie non-body which has come into fashion takes us back to the interpretation about hypermodernity and its excessive care of the body.

As Jorge Castillo explains, here the zombies end up showing us that "actually we are all zombies living in fiction, a fiction that we build through a complex symbolic mechanism that we call culture —the uncanny is that this fiction is always a bite away from extinction. The image of our body and that of the world which we build in its likeness isn't but a fragile glass."¹² According to this author, the popularization of the zombie non-body might even be a defense reaction or a symptom of a world that promotes stereotyped forms of the body: "At the peak of the popularity of the gym and "light" or "diet" food and beverages; of fitness as a way of life; when biopolitics demands a healthy population without obese people or smokers increasing the health care system expenditures; when the ideals of beauty combine anorexia, athletics and surgery, (...) the zombies and their pathos remind us about that which we want to forget every time we look at ourselves in the mirror."

Therefore, while we're using all the technological developments that the market makes available for the production of hypermodernity's perfect bodies, the zombies disorganize them for us. Their "unheimlich" effect is that they're here to show us the fragility of our biological matter, which is inexorably worn out by time. The zombies set limits to the all-powerful fantasy of capitalist discourse, science and hypermodern culture, and they remind us about the fragility that the consistency of our bodily ego is made of.



¹² Castillo, J.: "Sin miedo a los zombis"

IV: Outside of Language, Only Biting. Pure Animality without Desire

Perhaps the only point in common between the zombies of the Haitian tradition and today's zombies, which originate from Romero's movies, is that neither has the possibility of deciding: the former are at the mercy of their master, who brought them back from death through magic; the latter seem wild animals guided by a voracious drive. To say it in psychoanalytic terms, what we see in that inability to decide is a being ruled by the drive. In the case of the zombies, it's a being ruled by the oral drive; it isn't desire or need; it's an inexhaustible inner drive.

A comparison of the figure of the zombie with that of the vampire will help me show you what I mean.

The famous figure of the vampire, which also fascinates contemporary narrative, has an erotic side. The vampire is a sensual figure which uses the subordinate forms of the oral drive: it licks, relishes, sucks. But it doesn't deform the flesh: it makes it immortally young. The vampire creates a community; it makes the new disciple join its rituals; it has established codes. In vampire narratives, there's eroticism; there's a circulation of the demand-desire logic; lack is experienced; there are intrigues of passion.

In the case of the zombies, there's no community because they cannot create bonds with one another. Although they throw themselves on the same prey, they don't interact; they act as a horde. The zombies don't desire anything either; they cannot taste the flavor of what they eat; they don't know what they eat. In fact, for example, the zombies in *World War Z* don't even eat; they bite and go on like ferocious animals, insatiable in their biting drive.

What happens is that the difference between the zombie and the vampire or other horror beings is that the zombie has been left outside of language. This is the central issue about this character, and if the zombie is outside of language, humanity is out of the question, because we human beings are basically beings of language. Lacan calls us "parlêtres": speaking beings. That's why we psychoanalysts work with the main materiality of the human condition: language.

Therefore, we might consider a new "unheimlich" aspect of the figure of the zombie, which is the fact that, being outside of language, it is reduced to a living being only moved by the oral drive, without this drive being able to find a form of satisfaction through culture, through the Other, through others. Thus, the zombie brings another characteristic of human beings to the screen: the pressure of the drive, but without the wrapping of culture.

This is so much the case that the stories in this genre often end up unleashing the most brutal side of the surviving human beings. Crammed in shelters, frightened, fighting for survival, they finally show the worst in them. Consequently, the zombies unveil the "inhuman" nature of even the people who haven't been infected yet.

Now, if the zombie is a being outside of language, moved by an insatiable voracity which makes it run from one object to another, bite one and then another, and then another, non-stop: it's impossible not to recognize there the pressure to consume in hypermodernity — a pressure in which we end up being consumed ourselves, becoming addicted to everything: the PlayStation, shopping, sexual encounters in erotic chat rooms, candy, anxiolytics, etc.

In that respect, Jorge Fernández Gonzalo states that “the Cartesian ‘I think, therefore I am’ has become ‘I eat, therefore I subsist’”. The zombie would be, then, the perfect icon of our insistent cultural habit of considering not only reality but also our neighbor, our companion, our friend, our lover, or our relatives, that is, others, as mere fuel at the service of our jouissance. Market economy reduces each and every one of us to consumers and, in that reduction, we aren't very far from the non-dead, those other consumers par excellence.”¹³

This is exactly the zombie's *unheimlich* effect, and this is where I also see one of the keys of its popular success, because the zombie interprets the social climate of a time when consumption covers everything, and the voracity often unleashed in the form of addiction has become one of the main characteristics of contemporary subjectivity, a subjectivity which favors the satisfaction of the surplus-jouissance over the preservation of the lack that promotes the circulation of desire. And there's no way out of this hypermodern condition; it spreads out universally, like the zombies, an epidemic effect which leads us to our next topic.

V. *The Epidemic and the Policy of Fear*

Several authors consider that the zombies' “Second Golden Age” was promoted by a series of factors that contributed to the feeling of collective insecurity. Ferrero and Roas explain it as the conjunction of factors such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy — commonly known as mad cow disease— (1996), global terrorism (2001), avian flu (2004), the different types of swine flu (2009), the successive economic crises, etc. The authors add that today we shouldn't be surprised at catastrophic narratives; after all, we live in a society where it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.¹⁴

The fact is that there exists a link between a frightened society and the fictions that circulate in it. One isn't the result of the other: they feed on each other.

In 1975, Lacan visited the United States. In his conference at Yale he said: “What is called history is the history of epidemics.”¹⁵ To Lacan, the plague is what becomes established as the social discourse of a time. In this respect, the zombie epidemic has

¹³ Gonzalo, J.: *Pensamiento Zombi*. Barcelona. Anagrama. 2011, p. 53

¹⁴ Reference to F. Jamson. Ferrero, A., Roas, S. URL: http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/nomadas/32/ferrero_roas.pdf

¹⁵ Lacan, J. (1975): “Conferencia en la Universidad de Yale”. Scilicet 6/7. Seuil. París.

already broken out because it has become established in social discourse. I myself tried to avoid it for years and I am now talking about zombies here.

The strength of an epidemic is defined by its propagation power and we could say that Hollywood manages one of the most powerful propagation sources on the planet.

This is partly the reason why in *The Other Who Doesn't Exist* Eric Laurent holds that the United States is the best place to examine what a contemporary hysterical epidemic is, because there are large-scale hysterical epidemics in the country¹⁶, and also because they are exported to the rest of the world from the United States. In fact, Jean-Claude Maleval presented one of these epidemics at the Angers colloquium of the Paris Clinical Section. In the text published in Spanish by the title *Los inclasificables de la clínica psicoanalítica*, Maleval analyzes the growing number of patients that declare to have been abducted by extraterrestrials.

Incidentally, Samuel Card explains that the conventional extraterrestrial was so different from the zombie that it would have been unthinkable not to defeat it. According to Card, the superiority of the extraterrestrial was finally solved in language, thanks to the constitution of a theoretical knowledge about it on the part of scientists. However, as stated above, the zombie is outside of language: "If the zombie is unavoidable, if its progression is inexorable, it's because it remains unmentionable."¹⁷ Indeed, in most stories about zombie epidemics, the end is uncertain; there's never a "happy end".

“Hollywood manages one of the most powerful propagation sources on the planet”

Therefore, the zombie epidemic has a much gloomier and more apocalyptic impact than any of the other narratives produced by the audiovisual industry.

However, the zombie isn't the pathogenic agent; the zombie is only the visual representation of the problem; the epidemic is fear. Fear causes effects on the life of subjects and on public policies;¹⁸ it promotes the proliferation of suspicion about others, the sensation of vulnerability, and paranoid defense. In this context, Romero's statement "Today

¹⁶ Laurent, E. (2005): *The Other Who Doesn't Exist*. Paidós. Buenos Aires. p. 43

¹⁷ Card, S. (2012): "Pour en finir avec l'espèce humaine. Hollywood et les paradigmes de la post-humanité". Unpublished.

¹⁸ Note that in 1835 the zombie myth gained so much strength in Haiti that the country's criminal code included a law — still in force today— which makes it unlawful to turn people into zombies. A closer example is a BBC news item dated June 10, 2011: Lynn Wyeth, Head of Information Governance at Leicester City Council, had to reply to a request based on the Freedom of Information Act, which allows a right of access to recorded information held by public authorities. A concerned citizen requested that the City Council informed the community what provisions they had in place in the event of a zombie invasion. Ms. Wyeth replied that she was unaware of any specific reference to a zombie attack in the council's emergency plan. She added that, however, some elements of it could be applied if the situation arose.

the zombies are our neighbors”¹⁹ makes sense. And what is the solution to the fear of others?

Both in *Land of the Dead* and in *World War Z*, walls are built to separate the zombies from human beings. In both cases, the zombies win; they not only go into the city, but the walls become a deadly trap that prevents human beings from escaping. The memorable sequence in *World War Z* where the zombies climb on top of each other to make a mountain in front of the Jerusalem Wall and manage to go over it reveals that there are no walls against fear, and the zombie represents the epidemic propagation of the fear of others in an era when international policies aim at keeping the planet on permanent alert.

VI. Salvation through Science

If we go on analyzing *World War Z*, we can recognize that the actual bet on the solution to the epidemic is not the wall; nor is it religion. On the contrary, the greatest hope for the protagonists of *World War Z* lies in science.

Like Miller, we might say: “This is all coherent and implies a devotion to science in the face of which even our conquering Catholicism backs off (...) such devotion to science is called scientism.”²⁰ In fact, as we have already declared God dead, we have science left. Paradoxically, here lies the root of what Lacan announced as “The Triumph of Religion”.

In *The Third*, Lacan states that what we see of science are its gadgets, the objects made possible by scientific research and which are then put into circulation by the market. Therefore, we still don’t know the actual effects that scientific expansion will cause.

This is the central theme of many zombie movies. Let’s see, in the movie *28 Days Later* (2002), a group of animal liberation activists break into a laboratory doing research on animals and a virus is released which infects all humankind. In *Zombieland* (2009), hamburgers are the cause of the epidemic and in the remake of *Day of the Dead* (2008), the plague breaks out as a consequence of “Wildfire”, a government project in which a biological weapon is designed to paralyze the enemy.

¹⁹ In the animated television series *Ugly Americans*, the protagonist, Mark Lilly, a social worker at the Department of Integration in New York City, helps immigrants integrate in society before they become US nationals. Although there are humans among them, they are a minority in comparison with the supernatural beings – vampires, robots, mutants and other stereotypes of the genre— who are part of the population in the series, who meet in social therapy sessions where they are helped to face their monstrous preferences and get ready for a job in the low-salary sector. Randall, the protagonist’s roommate, is a zombie from New Jersey, a fiercely anti-zombie community, so he has been forced to hide his condition from his parents (his own father is a veteran of the Zombie-Human Civil War). Randall feeds on different human flesh substitutes, but he sometimes gets cravings for flesh, causing him to go temporarily insane with desire, and is in a program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous to deal with his cravings. Jennifer Stange points out that *Ugly Americans* is “an acute satire on the US immigration policy, both in Bush’s and Obama’s administrations” (Stange, J: URL: <http://www.freitag.de/kultur/1109-medientagebuch>).

²⁰ Miller, J-A (2013): *Piezas Seltas*, Paidós, Bs As., p. 320

Miller states that “capitalism and science have combined to make nature disappear, and what is left of the vanishing of nature is what we call the real (...) The real is touched on all sides as the capitalism-science binary advances, in a disordered way, randomly, and it isn’t possible to recover an idea of harmony.”²¹ That’s exactly what becomes evident in the movies mentioned above and in almost all “hyper-zombie” stories. That’s why I said from the beginning that the hyper-zombie is the dreadful return of the push to *jouis* of our culture — the *jouis* of science in this case— which advances without respite on everything that exists.

But Lacan points out —and we can verify so— that, eventually, when science begins to show the effects of its discourse: that the natural order doesn’t exist but is contingent, when science opens that hole in the traditional sense of the knowledge about nature, the discourse of religion appears and demands “Let’s not touch the order of nature”; the discourse of religion fills with sense the hole which science opened. And that would be the triumph of religion.

Within this framework, psychoanalysis plays another role. As Graciela Brodsky explains, “Lacan’s ambition is for psychoanalysis —a product of science— to be, at the same time, the discourse that shows the limit of science, because where science finds knowledge in the real, psychoanalysis must verify the missing knowledge, prove the impossible by means of the contingent.”²²

“the hyper-zombie is the dreadful return of the push to *jouis* of our culture”

VII. *Final Ideas*

In the TV series *The Walking Dead* (released in 2010), one day Rick Grimes wakes up from a coma and finds himself immersed in an apocalyptic world where the dead have come back to life as zombies. In one of the episodes of the series, Rick discovers that all human beings are infected with the virus that brings back the dead to life; therefore, everyone will become a zombie. In a scene full of drama, a defeated Rick says: “We are the walking dead.”

I found Rick’s statement interesting for the conclusion of this work because it involves different meanings among which we can find several that have a direct impact on certain types of contemporary subjectivities. Let’s have a look at three examples:

²¹ Miller, J-A (2012): “Presentación del tema del IX Congreso de la AMP.” http://www.congresamp2014.com/en/template.php?file=Textos/Presentation-du-theme_Jacques-Alain-Miller.html

²² Brodsky, G. (2013): “Contra la ilusión religiosa.” <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/rosario/21-40247-2013-08-22.html>

1. In my country, there's a serious problem with an addictive substance known as "Paco". Made from leftovers of cocaine production, it's very cheap and highly toxic. On the outskirts of Buenos Aires City, it's called "the hour of the zombies" at dusk, when Paco addicts begin to wander the streets in search of a dose at any price.²³
2. In the movie *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), in addition to the zombies, there's Shaun, a human being who leads his life between the apathy toward his job, the PlayStation and always drinking at the same pub. Thus, this character shows there are human beings who live like zombies.
3. In an episode of *The Simpsons*, a zombie epidemic breaks out.²⁴ At the end, Marge says it's a relief not to have become infected. So her family, sitting hypnotically in front of the TV, ask her to keep quiet and not to interrupt them: a caricature of everyday zombification.

These are just three examples of the multiple scopes that the figure of the zombie has today as an interpretation of our contemporary subjectivity. That's why Rick's words are revealing.

²³ In relation to this issue, I'd like to mention the work of Mariano Lusim, "Psicoanálisis de los Zombies" (Zombies' Psychoanalysis), in which he deals with a type of subjectivity that might be characterized by means of the concept of "zombie". The author recognizes several characteristics such as stereotyped movements and gestures, restricted fine motor skills, peripheral vision (blank, empty look), etc. According to this author, "psychological zombies" are subjects who appear to be dead in life, devitalized. He considers them a representative metaphor, not only of an epoch, but also of some meaningful traits shared by drug-addiction, traumatic and psychotic pathologies. He then proposes a hypothesis: "Perhaps the new zombie outbreak in popular culture is partly the result of the proliferation of or the interest awakened by this type of pathologies."

²⁴ Treehouse of Horror III, episode 64, season four, 1992.

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Discussion of Assef's *The Zombie Epidemic*

Cyrus Saint Amand Poliakoff

I would like to continue by examining a central signifier of the Zombie genre: *living dead*. Early on, Lacan attested to the mortifying effects of the signifier. Through the function of language, he was able to locate what is sacrificed in exchange for the letter. Marie-Helen Brousse has pointed to a central paradox in the phallic operator: 'The phallus is the signifier of the feeling of life as it results from signifying mortification.' By localizing jouissance within a mortifying symbolic matrix, the phallus also installs the feeling of life.

In treating suffering with the effects of the signifier, psychoanalysis could attest to the zombie coupling of *living* and *dead*. In the clinic and on the streets, we are the living dead as we embody the transactions of Jouissance and language. However as Jorge reveals, it is ultimately desire that distinguishes us, even as the living dead, from the zombie. Oriented by desire, psychoanalysis holds the keys to immunity from the zombie epidemic.

Jacques-Alain Miller introduced the theme of the next Congress of the WAP with the title: 'A Great Disorder in the Real.' This follows the Congress last year on the status of the symbolic in the 21st Century. Given the decline of the institutions of the Name-of-the-father, at the level of the symbolic, the apocalypse has already occurred. Our era of the other who does not exist is a post-apocalyptic era. We now have to consider a real which is in trouble.

Miller highlights the effects of the discourses of science and capitalism on nature, nature which once was the name of the real that returned to the same place, 'Nature was the name of the real when there was no disorder in the real.' In film, the zombie epidemic is often caused by atomic radiation or biomedical experiments. The genre already attests to the anxiety produced by science's interventions in the real in the 20th century. But if we take *World War Z* as an indicator, the epidemic now spawns from nature itself. The ordered cycles of life and death have been transgressed and infected by a virus, but the virus seems to evolve out of the laws of nature. The real has been contaminated. A real which we discover in the 21st century is an unnatural nature, a mutant nature no longer subject to the laws science once imagined it could inscribe as knowledge in the real.

I will finish by quoting Guy Briole in his orientation text for the upcoming Congress: "And so the real continues on its way, alone. The discovery of stem cells in corpses up to seventeen days after death gives rise to a mad hope, that of remaking life out of death. This transgression of man with regards to death, which touches on a reification of the body, can only return to him in the form of an impossible to fill abyss that stretches to infinity."

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Discussion of Assef's *The Zombie Epidemic*: An Undying Defense Against the Real

Robert Buck

"We came to put a wreath on father's grave" is how a character describes her purpose in the opening scene of George Romero's "Night of the Living Dead", the 1968 film that unleashes the zombie of the hypermodern era. Shambling, not yet up to speed, but persistent, a zombie rises to better her task of memorializing the dead father by resurrecting him. The zombie father. As J. A. Miller states in his 1996 seminar, "The Other That Doesn't Exist and His Ethical Committees", "One can only make do without The-Name-of-the-Father qua real on condition that one makes use of it as semblant" – the zombie epidemic as A Name-of-the-Father.

In the same seminar, Miller refers to Freud's 1930 "Civilization and Its Discontents" in order to distinguish the malaise of the Victorian epoch from the unease of our own, which, because the real has broken free from nature by the so-called advances of the binary of capitalism and science, he identifies as an impasse. "Capitalism and science have combined to make nature disappear. The epoch is caught in an ever-accelerating movement of vertiginous dematerialization", from which we can "see the judgment being written on the horizon – at the horizon rather than on the wall – that everything is nothing but semblant. Indeed, the immersion of the contemporary subject in semblants henceforth makes the real a question for everyone. A question about which, it would not be too much to say, that it takes shape against a background of anguish" – much like the backdrop against which hordes of zombies take shape.

Freud implicates civilization when he comes to speak of the drive. According to Miller, "civilization is a mode of jouissance, a system of the distribution of jouissance through the use of semblants". Embodying the impasses wrought by science and capitalism, the zombie is an undying semblant for this jouissance. In our age of the Other That Doesn't Exist, the superego is not the Freudian one of prohibition, duty, and guilt, which makes the other exist, but one of "jouis", the imperative, as the media giant Time Warner advertises, to "Enjoy Better". For the survivors, the zombie throngs may be construed as this voracious super-ego, "in so far as it rivets the subject to the pursuit of surplus-jouissance". Picture the familiar scene of humans looting a shopping mall, hoarding commodities, or gorging themselves on stockpiles of canned goods, as zombies amass outside. Indeed, void of language, predacious, fragmented, zombies are pure drive, death drive.

If the zombie is a semblant, par excellence of our times, able to invoke the great disorder in the real, it is only by appeasing it. If for almost fifty years legions of the living dead have been able to keep pace with the growing impasses of civilization, then it's due to their capacity to cipher them: atomic radiation, civil rights, consumerism, reproduction, over-population, pandemics. Capitalism's marketing of the fiction of the zombie colludes with science having destroyed "the fiction of the real."

The predominant feature of the wasteland through which droves of the undead roam, and where their combatants must subsist, is one in which the traditional institutions of civilization – church, government, army, hospitals, police, television, radio, shopping malls – are rendered vacant, derelict, useless – husks laid bare explicitly as semblants. The “walking dead” – the living, speaking beings – the ones who we might say are not duped by The-Name-of-the-Father – wander a shadow world in which the symbolic has been ransacked by the imaginary, the remains of an empire flooded “industrially with semblants, of which the ever accelerating production comprises a world in which the idea of nature is left no other function than nostalgia”, in which over population is rampant and waste has outstripped production. Or as a Tele-evangelist in “Dawn of the Dead” expresses it, “there is no more room in hell.”

But as Jorge so well makes clear, the zombie is not the remainder, the waste product, of globalization, we are. Yet this surplus, anal object is *not* a semblant, which may explain why the unrelenting zombie masses can provoke anxiety. And this presents a paradox, for it is with anxiety that we, “the walking dead”, infected by language – for, as the AMC website states, “whatever it is that causes the zombies, is something everyone already has” – have certitude of our existence in the world. As Eric Laurent stated during the last PULSE seminar in his address to the New York Academy of Medicine, “The Body and Its Organs in the 21st Century”, anxiety deprives us of the functional use of the body. Yet one is sure this anxiety is one’s own, and with it certainty of one’s existence in the world. This anxiety cannot be quantified or counted, recorded or pictured via X-rays, MRIs, or CAT-scans, despite advances in medical technology and attempts by ethical committees to do so. Nor can it be explained neuro-scientifically. It escapes science, but not psychoanalysis.

As Miller writes, “the use of semblants is in vain, ineffective, even harmful, if it results in an impasse on the real in question. But this real is not the real of the discourse of science, not the real made gangrenous by those semblants that emerge from it, which one is reduced to approach by numbers in order to locate it.” It is the real specific to the unconscious.

Again Miller, “in the 21st Century, psychoanalysis will have to be centered on dismantling the defense against the real, of disordering it.” This is exactly what Jorge has begun to do with his lucid work on the zombie epidemic of our hypermodern civilization and its impasses.

The LC EXPRESS is produced and distributed by *The Lacanian Compass*

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Gary Marshall, Co-Editor

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The Lacanian Compass is a group dedicated to the development and promotion of the Lacanian Orientation of Psychoanalysis in the United States, psychoanalysis as first described by Sigmund Freud and further elaborated by Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller.

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