

Porn of the Dead

Necrophilia, Feminism, and Gendering the Undead

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Zombie porn straddles the boundary between discourses — of philosophic concerns regarding zombies as non-conscious animated entities, of misogyny and non-consent associated with necrophilia (MacCormack, 2008: 123), and of feminist concerns regarding pornographic representations. The phenomenon problematizes all of these fields of thought, and it is this very complexity that draws my interest, raising the following questions (among others): how do we gender the zombie, and to what ends? Does an animated body (which may or may not be capable of conscious thought) hold any claim to aspects of identity such as gender, even if those zombies are sexually engaged with individuals that do claim such faculties? Can a zombie be sexually violated, and can we utilize terms such as “misogyny” when dealing with the partially formed zombie-subject? What are the implications raised by combining the graphic depiction of sex with horror motifs?

I will begin by situating the current study in relation to these points, focusing on the binary division of male from female, and discourses that seek to animalize, subordinate, and de-humanize women. Historically, women have been framed as a locus of both disease, and of impending social disaster — I draw attention to these discourses to make the case that the traditionally “blank” zombie is implicitly coded female, written out of patriarchal fear of feminism and women’s increased social empowerment. I then relate this to a brief history of zombie cinema, concentrating specifically on changes in zombiedom occurring after the mid-1980s, when the zombie became a figure increasingly invested with identity (pointing to gender as a key facet connoting subjectivity). I will then move on to outline a brief history of zombie sex-cinema before addressing my central case study, *Porn of the Dead* (2006). In hardcore zombie pornography, the bodies are explicitly sexed, and so it is no longer a case of reading gender into a “blank” figure, but instead investigating how the zombie motif is used in relation to normative gender ideologies that correlate male with masculinity and female with femininity. Where the first half of the essay is attentive to the zombie as metaphorically symbolizing a (male) fear of feminist politics, my reading of *Porn of the Dead* is concerned with what impact the graphic portrayal of zombie sex has on our model of undead subjectivity and the politics of gendered bodies. *Porn of the Dead* is a film that depicts violent heterosexual intercourse, and this leads me to consider how we might scrutinize these images for what they reveal about contemporary gender politics — particularly whether we have moved on from the subordinating discourses outlined in the first section of the essay concerning women and disease, social disruption, sexual difference and animalism. Furthermore, the excessiveness of the zombie (in its refusal of the fundamental alive/dead binary) is probed in terms of its radical potential, and whether it can lead us to reassess ideological boundaries, or if it ultimately reconstitutes normative hegemony.

The Zombie as Gendered Metaphor

Historically, the zombie has been a monster tied into identity politics; racial concerns were seemingly unavoidable given the zombies’ Haitian origins (Russell: 9–16), a topic later revisited via the lynching motifs of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).¹ It is also no surprise that critical perspectives on the zombie have followed the trajectory set out by Romero’s follow-up *Dawn of the Dead*, a key example of an expressly political Horror film that investigates the negative effect of capitalism upon

the self.ⁱⁱ Communal issues are inherent to the zombie-lineage because, “[l]ike humans, zombies aren’t social isolates”—an observation that highlights the uncanny nature of these doppelgangers; “there is always something ‘nearly me’ about the monster” (Webb and Byrnannd, 2008: 84). It is thus clear that the zombie is apposite to represent facets of our own social identities that require cultural “processing” in order to work through the horror they represent.

Zombies appear to aptly allegorize the position of the subject under ideology due to their dual nature as unconscious and instinctual beings. Zombies also embody active potential, since they at once unwittingly follow the established order, and also threaten to overthrow and defamiliarize “normal” relations to that system. While my own reading will not dwell on psychoanalysis, Webb and Byrnannd’s suggestion that the zombie “gestures towards who and what we might be: someone with the capacity to reject the symbolic order,” clearly embodies such a revolutionary ethic, probing the relationships between “physiological requirement” and how “desire is mediated by culture” (Webb and Brynannd: 87–8). Such potential is the result of the zombies’ presence as body evacuated of selfhood. Thus, another key branch of zombie studies (epitomized by the work of Kirk, 2005; Heil, 2003; Dennett, 1995; and Locke, 1976) is concerned with what zombies reveal about human consciousness.ⁱⁱⁱ

I am not concerned with ontological, post-colonial or Marxist readings directly, instead I aim to locate the current study somewhere in-between; the issue of Otherness, especially when tied into body-politics, is exacerbated in *Porn of the Dead* via the zombies’ attainment of a specific identity marker — gender. The body is a “socially inscribed surface” (Horner and Keane, 2000: 2), a crucial battleground that may be “potentially subversive” (Currie and Raoul, 1992: 2). Zombie gender is a matter that has received little scholarly attention, but one that (I hope this study will prove) offers important insights into the cultural climate that spawned representations of gendered zombies (illustrations of which I will come to in due course).

Before I turn to specific examples, let us apply the gender reading to the zombie in general terms. The zombie has been traditionally formulated as asexual, offering no clearly gendered traits. However, we should consider that the zombie is typically soft-bodied, and largely passive, invading and attacking based on opportunism rather than intent and pre-meditation (of which they are incapable). It is also a creature that is wrought in binary opposition to the present humans, who are active (who plan in order to facilitate their survival), who tend to carry weapons and tools (thus evincing their evolutionary “superiority,” and perhaps even possession of the phallus if one is psychoanalytically inclined), and who are repulsed by the irrationality and potential threat to civil order that the zombies embody. In this reading, in accordance with a prejudicial history of gender stereotypes established and maintained by patriarchal discourse, the zombie is a creature that may be gendered female, and the binary opposite (human) gendered male.

This follows the claims that “adult women were generally seen as: ‘more submissive, less independent ... more easily influenced... [and] less objective’” than men (Boverman et al. cited in Ussher, 1989: 73). While I do not wish to suggest that such ideological precepts are accurate (in fact my intention is to debunk such assumptions), it is interesting to consider what the political “message” of the zombie narrative is in such a light. It is the group might of the zombie (coded female) that threatens to overturn the ordinances of human (coded male) dominance, leading to the apocalypse; the zombie may then embody patriarchal fear of increasing female liberation, suffrage, and the rise of feminism. In such a reading, taken from the perspective of the patriarchal order (the humans with which we identify, as opposed to the inarticulate zombies), it is the violent potential of the Other that overpowers the accepted system, inevitably dominating via an unstoppable reproductive regime. This interpretation overturns MacCormack’s assertion that “zombie films

frequently disregard gender for viscera”; that “the focus on gore necessarily challenges reading gender through the flesh, because when the flesh is destroyed or reorganized these aspects become arbitrary” (MacCormack: 104)— here, the reorganization of the flesh embodies a specifically socio-political reordering, gore linking the violence of social injustice to the substance of the body.

Such readings have been overlooked by the academy, but seem distinctly appropriate given the history of discourses that have demonized and disempowered women. The zombie is a creature that is like, yet Other to, their human counterparts, and this similarity/difference is akin to the sexed binary; both sides (male/female, or human/undead) belong to the same genus, “our closeness” being indicated by the fact that “viruses (mostly) travel between like species” (Webb and Byrmand: 84). The scientific approach may allow us a point of entry into the social inequality argument, because “[t]he separation of mind and body as the basis for ‘objective’ knowledge led to additional masculine/feminine dualities: reason or unreason, universals or particulars, subjective or objective, doing or being, culture or nature, order or disorder” (Currie and Raoul: 3); tropes which are readily applicable to the binary of human/undead that I have already outlined.

Science has historically attempted to define non-genital physical difference between males and females that signify their biological differences (see Schiebinger, 2000: 25), and this has been interpreted by feminist scholars as an attempt to “reflect natural rather than social processes, and to justify gender inequality” (Currie and Raoul: 1). Moreover, this is coupled with a cultural imbalance that insists that “apparently ‘neutral’ presentations of the ‘human’ body” have “functioned as a veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm” (Grosz, 1994: 188). “The neutral body” then, according to Grosz, is “filled in by the male body and men’s pleasures” (ibid: 155–6). This bias has been so readily accepted (“proven” by the discourses of “objective” science) that “unfair assessments” of women’s “abilities and potential” came to be “embodied in law” (Currie and Raoul: 8), making the gendered body a site of political contention. Bronfen equally avers that the body is the pivotal point where “physical materiality and its visual or narrative representation” interface, being inextricable from “aesthetic as well as diverse scientific discourses ... involving the distinction between masculinity and femininity, but also ... where to draw the line between the living and the dead” (Bronfen, 2000: 112).

Historically, gender discourse -led by a patriarchal ideological outlook -has vilified femininity. Barbara Creed observes that “[t]he feminine imagination is seen as essentially non-violent, peaceful, unaggressive. This is the very argument that patriarchal ideology has used for the past 2000 years to control women” (1993: 156). As Creed goes on to explore (an argument to which I will return specifically in relation to *Porn of the Dead*), women have also been represented in opposition to this stereotype — as violent and uncontrolled. The zombie embodies both tropes at once, being both simultaneously passive and aggressive. In fact, zombie lore is gendered, and this is based on the same ideological subordination that Creed describes; Marsella proclaims that according to Haitian beliefs, “females are more likely than males to have the ‘possession’ experience” (Marsella, 2008: 229), and this seems to be directly related to Sydnie’s observation that women are stereotyped as “naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit,” being “feebler both in mind and body” (Sydnie, 1987: 5).

The central bias at hand is “[t]he mind/body dualism” that situates “males [as] the guardians of culture and things of the mind,” while “associat[ing] females with the frailties and contingencies of the mortal body” (Schiebinger: 1). It is perhaps apposite then that the monstrous female is represented as an animated, degenerated corpse because women have been historically “conceptualized as being ruled by their ... unstable and inherently weak” bodies (Ussher: 1). The suggestion that “autonomy ... is synonymous in western culture with maturity, independence, and

full subjecthood, but for males only” (Raoul, 1992: 267) is the norm, renders that dualism of existence (segregation between mind and body in the constitution of selfhood) a gendered division. Feminists have fought for recognition that this binary is evidence of patriarchal bias. My contention is that the representation of the zombie as “[t]he same, yet not identical ... ‘people without minds’ ... both us and not us” (Webb and Byrnan: 85) reveals the same bias (that normalizes “us” as male, in the same way that the inert body is assumed to be male)— being uncannily similar to assertions that “women are essentially irrational, rooted in a determinate bodyliness, unable to maintain a proper distance between subject and object, and not fully agents of their own will” (Shildrick, 2002: 36). Shildrick continues to make explicit this connection between gender bias, the impossible split inherent to female positioning, and an aura of menace; “[m]onsters ... [l]ike women ... refuse to stay in place: they change shape, they combine elements which should remain separate” (ibid.: 29). Female sexuality has been rendered a dual point of desire and horror in such theorization, and this will be of central importance to my reading of the sexual zombie in *Porn of the Dead*. As Ussher avers, “One of the ways in which this contradiction operates is in the categorization of women within the Madonna/whore frame-work, which describes the pure, virginal, ‘good’ woman ... unspoiled by sex or sin: her counterpart, the whore, is consumed by desires of the flesh” (Ussher: 14). Again, it is apposite that the ambiguous figure of the zombie is the cipher for this split; “as an asexual creature, woman is moral ... as an incipiently sexual creature, woman is always a sexual resource ... this move, which entails separating female feeling from consciousness ... suggests how amenable the figure of woman was to representational manipulation” (Poovey, 1990: 36). The instinct to feast then, may be replaced with another “animalistic” urge — to copulate — equally signalling the threat to ideological hegemony that supposedly arises from women becoming “uncontrolled.”

The zombie’s perpetuation of disease is indicative of such a fear being inextricable from unregulated reproductive capacity, thus connoting that female sexuality is a social ill. Creed observes that “horror involves a representation of and reconciliation with, the maternal body” that aims to “eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between human and non-human” (Creed: 14), yet here reproduction involves a characterization of the reproductive body that is partially destructive, complicating the lines between life and death, the abject corpse and the human. As Creed notes, Margaret Miles stipulated that the “image of woman” is “quintessentially grotesque” because of her “associations with ... sex and birth” (Creed: 43). However, when Creed discusses the potential pleasures of Horror as being akin to “returning to that time when the mother-child relationship was marked by an untrammelled pleasure in ‘playing’ with the body and its wastes” (13), she does not account for the literalization of the reproduction motif found in explicit (rather than metaphoric) zombie sexuality; that births and aborts simultaneously, that produces and yet renders the subject as waste, that propagates and signals an end, that is sexual and profoundly rewrites maternity. Because of its excess (usurping the “quintessentially grotesque” status of women by combining a form of sex and birth which has no nine month incubation delay), the sexual female zombie is so excessive as to be seditious. This becomes all the more pertinent in light of Shildrick’s assertion that “the pregnant female body itself is always a trope of immense power in that it speaks to an inherent capacity to problematize the boundaries of self and other” (Shildrick: 31).

Lest we stray too far from ideological stereotypes, we ought to also note that Aristotle claimed that in reproduction “the body is from the female, it is the soul that is from the male” (cited in Currie and Raoul: 2). Thus, since zombie representations seem to support the pejorative mind = male/body = female dichotomy, it is unsurprising that this female form of reproduction (without semen) should produce soulless young. Moreover, this destructive form of duplication only appears to recreate the undead mother’s image, bolstering the fear that “the womb” is “the matrix of all problems,” and that “women’s sexuality is dangerous and threatening” (Ussher: 3 and 15). We return then to the

zombie as a figure that designates revolt, threatening the patriarchal order — the reproductive motif thus acts as a metaphor for increased power, infecting the populous, overturning the world order of the “majority” with disease and chaos.^{iv} As Sceats delineates, “if a woman is infected with desire, she ... ceases to be [a] passive recipient of kiss and penetration and becomes instead active and penetrative herself.... [G]ive a woman a taste of the vampiric/erotic, and she will become depraved and may even run riot, infecting the whole of society” (Sceats, 2001: 114–5).

In summary, the zombie encapsulates a number of fears propagated by patriarchal discourses of gender difference. Since “they” lack rational control, if “they” are permitted power and freedom, “they” will become unstoppable. The correlation of female sexuality with disorder that needs to be restricted is nothing new — science’s patriarchal bias has been implicated in the historic oppression of female freedom; “[a]s nineteenth-century women became increasingly vocal about their discontent their doctors began to” apply diagnoses of “hysteria and neurasthenia ... to every woman who spoke of women’s rights or who attempted an independent act” (Ussher: 138; see also Schiebinger: 26). The central terror in the zombie narrative is that humans will be infected, and this exposes “male fear of female sexuality” (Sceats: 114), more generally.^v

Thus, the zombie is horrific according to a patriarchal stance, and the narratives ask us to conspire with such a position, coding the zombies as a monster. As Creed would have it, “the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender positions from those who do not” (11)— a division that Shildrick utilizes for its revolutionary potential; “[t]he issue is not so much that monsters threaten to overrun the boundaries of the proper, as that they promise to dissolve them” (Shildrick: 11). The very presence/existence of the monster, Shildrick argues, is enough to disturb the expected normative binaries, even if only by offering an alternative that does not fit the system where norm is measured against Other (Shildrick: 75).

The possibility of social change is made all the more plausible by these manifestations of ideological fear, despite their attempts to define female empowerment as hostile and ugly. After all, “the Undead corpse is the nemesis, but also the product, of a repressive civilization” (Clark, 2006: 199, my emphasis), and the fear embodied in a model of increasing power demonstrates the potential of unity against forces that seek to enforce subordination. The first stages of change are discourse-based, that is stemming from feminism itself. This reading of the zombie acts as a logical extension of feminist interventions that “reinserted the body into history, bringing to light issues that had previously been considered too vulgar, trivial or risqué to merit serious scholarly attention” (Schiebinger: 1), including the “bodiliness” of women, and its associated inferiority to the rational concerns of “male” discourse. Indeed, the take-over is such that Horner and Keane suggest that “[i]n feminist literary and cultural criticism, ‘the body’ crops up with such regularity that the overprivileged ‘mind’ seems to have had its day” (Horner and Keane: 1).

All of this overturns Grant’s assertion that “Romero’s undead demand the suspension of normal (bourgeois) values, particularly those of patriarchy” (Grant, 1996: 211). However, the problem that I am yet to address is the investment of agency in the “blank” zombie — that the zombies’ very balance between conscious/alive and unconscious/dead states may be read in terms of political motivation, that the zombie may be decoded as gendered, and relevant to concerns of disempowerment. This comes to the fore when we investigate what happened to the zombie after the mid-1980s.

The Return of the Thinking Dead: Identity, Sexuality and the Zombie

Savini's remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (1990) is explicitly influenced by feminism. Even if the zombie continued to be asexual, Barbara, who remained catatonic for the majority of the running time in the original film, became the sole survivor, her rationality implicitly critiquing the fruitless destructive bickering of her male counterparts. In Grant's reading of the reinvention of Barbara, he insists that Romero's oeuvre signals that the zombie is coded male; "*Dawn* self-consciously uses the zombie as a conceit for macho masculinity and conspicuous capitalist consumption" (Grant, 1996: 202). However, his later citing of Johnston is revealing—she states "here is only the male and the non-male: in order to be accepted into the male universe, the woman must become a man ... [s]he is a traumatic presence which must be negated" (Johnston, cited in Grant, 1996: 207). In this case, it is apparent that both Fran in the original *Dawn of the Dead* and Barbara in the remake of *Night of the Living Dead* are not necessarily counterpoised to the men they inhabit spaces with, but are phallused (both coming to occupy active, gun-toting positions). In the case of *Day of the Dead* (1985), Sarah begins the narrative as a leader, attempting to maintain her position as active weapon wielder, despite Rhodes' attempts to impose patriarchal dominance. In all three cases, it is the female protagonist's violent agency that marks them as human—a category implicitly gendered male in juxtaposition to the monstrous Other (the zombie) that is as catatonic as the original *Night's* Barbra. Again, a stereotyped vision of femininity is aligned with zombiness.

So far I have discussed the zombie in abstract terms — what the monster embodies in the general sense as a metaphor for gender bias. However, this does not account for the ways in which the zombie has shifted in meaning in the cinematic landscape. As stated at the outset, the zombie began as occupying a racialized Other position — as a Haitian slave figure, the kind of mindless or hypnotized zombie found in *White Zombie* and *I Walked with a Zombie*. Other "zombies" of the period, those found in the Universal monster pictures (*The Mummy* [1932], *Dracula* [1931], *Frankenstein* [1931]), were rather more invested with identity and conscious motivation — especially seeking partners of the opposite sex, which is a key drive for all of these monsters (even if Frankenstein's creation had to wait until 1935 to encounter the *Bride of Frankenstein*).^{vi} When the zombie resurfaced (in its most influential form) in 1968 with *Night of the Living Dead*, it became an expressly political or metaphoric beast. This trend continued throughout the 1970s and early 1980s via vehicles such as Romero's sequels *Dawn* and *Day of the Dead* as well as returning to its Haitian roots via Lucio Fulci's unofficial Italian sequels to *Dawn of the Dead*, the *Zombi* films (1979 and 1988), *Zombie Holocaust* (1980), and the explicitly racialised "third-world" zombies of *Zombie Creeping Flesh* (1980). However, it is *Return of the Living Dead* that saw the advent of a new breed of zombie. Romero may have reinvented the zombie in the 1960s and set the evolutionary wheels in motion, but it is O'Bannon's post-modern reinvestigation of the monster that signalled a shift in what the zombie signifies. *Day of the Dead's* Bub may have begun to show signs of conscious (rather than simply robotic) behaviours, but it was *Return's* version of zombiehood that portended zombie-subjectivity; here, those infected (Frank and Freddy) bemoan the onset of rigor-mortis, a zombie torso asserts that it "hurts" to be dead, and the zombies request "more paramedics" in gambits that reveal complex strategic ability. Here then, the zombie becomes a far more complex creature, and their manifestations of subjectivity make the zombie less irrational (or simply "pure motorized instinct" as proclaimed by the doctor of *Dawn*), and more akin to their supposed binary — the human.

What followed was the literalization of gender into zombie identity, overturning McCormack's assertion that "[z]ombies are bodies, nothing more," having "[n]o race, no gender, no sexuality" (McCormack: 104). The previously asexual walking flesh — blank bodies that I have read in relation to femininity — became inextricable from defined gendered roles (both masculine and feminine), manifesting as the "ladies' man" Bud the Chud (of *C.H.U.D. 2* [1989]), the "ladies who lunch" found in *Flesh Eating Mothers* (1988), and the eroticized self-harming Goth, Julie in *Return of the Living*

Dead 3. By 1992, audiences were treated to the sexually active (and reproducing) priest and nurse of *Braindead*. It is perhaps worth noting that all of the above examples fall into the cate[-]gory of Horror-Comedy, as does the teen sex-comedy, *Night of the Living Dorks* (2004), in which the central protagonist Philip loses his genitals during his quest for intercourse with Uschi (having to then staple them back on). The same can be said of the heavy-handed satire *Zombie Strippers* (2008), in which the strippers become the ultimate meat-objects (and better dancers) when they are infected by the zombie-virus. They are juxtaposed with the mindless patrons of the club who continue to “consume,” declaring the women to be “beautiful” despite (or because of?) their degeneration. Arguably, these examples indicate the horrific potential of such a manifestation, requiring carnivalesque humour to dispel or excuse the disruptive, repulsive potential of the gendered zombie.

While on first glance these narratives may appear to conform to Castronovo’s suggestion that the presence of the “eviscerated subject, starved of history and culture, provokes questions about the desirability of political emancipation” (Castronovo, 2000: 141), I argue that the point is to delineate the need for social metamorphosis — even if the narratives are unable to offer a solution, they can inform us of the basis on which change is necessary. Contrary to Briefel’s assumption that the “gendering of ... pain felt by monsters [in Horror film] and the sadistic acts they subsequently commit provides an unfortunately reassuring stability,” it is the gendering of monstrosity that may cause us to question (rather than submit to) the “safe parameter around the spectators’ alleged masochism in choosing to sit through a horror film” (Briefel, 2005: 25). Even if we dismiss cinema’s potential to signal ideological dissatisfaction on the basis of the “knowability” of texts belonging to genres (i.e. that in Horror we expect to be horrified, and can pass over any real-life potential for change on the basis that the film’s depiction of alternative belongs to the fantasy and its modes of representation), the case may be very different when we combine the gratifications of Horror with the sexual pleasures offered by zombie pornography.

Before we move on to investigate the implications raised by specific examples of recent zombie sex, it is important to note that the zombie had been juxtaposed with sexual activity prior to *Porn of the Dead*. As Russell delineates, Amando de Ossorio’s Spanish *Blind Dead* films (*Tombs of the Blind Dead* [1971], *Return of the Evil Dead* [1973], *The Ghost Galleon* [1974], and *Night of the Seagulls* [1975]) “build up a thematic link between the zombies and the sex-obsessed narratives in which they appear ... repeatedly foreground[ing] the issue of sexuality” (Russell: 88), while D’Amato’s *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead* (1980) “plays like a dated porno flick cut with bouts of zombie violence” (Russell: 134). Yet it is worth noting that the zombies do not participate in intercourse in these films. Although some have referred to the monster of D’Amato’s follow-up *Porno Holocaust* (1981) as a sexually active zombie (see Bishop, 2010: 185; Russell: 135) it is not made clear that the being in question is undead per se in the film itself. That aside, Russell’s research pegs *Erotic Orgasm* (1982) as the first zombie porn film, although it is notable that the other examples of legitimate zombie porn he lists (rather than films that juxtapose sex and zombies) are made after *Return of the Living Dead*’s post-modern revival; these include *The Revenge of the Living Dead Girls* (1987), *Night of the Living Babes* (1987), *Gore Whore* (1994), *At Twilight Come the Flesh Eaters* (1998), and *Zombie Ninja Gangbangers* (1998) (Russell: 135). Other more recent entries include *The Necro Files* and its sequel (1997 and 2003), *Repenetrator* (2004), *Otto; or Up with Dead People* (2008), and my central case study *Porn of the Dead*. In these pornographic examples, the zombie is unambiguously sexed, and this is a key marker of the zombie’s entry into subjectivity.

Fucking Horrible: Consent, Predation, and Disease in Zombie Porn

My aim is to explore the problems outlined above in relation to *Porn of the Dead* and its fantasies; how the sexualization of the undead complicates the zombie identity (especially in terms of consent), how gender binaries are revealed and negotiated in this space, and whether the representations of sex on offer are only to be read as misogynistic, as this may not be a term readily applicable to the zombie, and may be problematized by the excessiveness of the text's fantasies. Pornography, being concerned with fantasy, neglects some of the more problematic aspects of the sexualized zombie, or at least turns them into a positive. One may immediately be struck by the use of necrophilia as a motif, especially since "necrophilia is one of the few sexual taboos that remain in the secular, post-modern Western world" (Downing, 2003: 157). The intent is probably to shock, and market differentiation has no doubt acted to increase the sales of the product, despite the controversy inherent to such a release.

The fantasy that zombies are animated corpses in part negates the necrophilic taboo, which is based upon the principles of defilement and consent. As Dudley observes, "[t]he offense of necrophilia is that it attempts ... to convert a subject that has become an object back into a subject again" (1999: 289)— here the connotations of the sexualized object make the split more complex, as it revolves around a fantasy of the object's coming into being. The inarticulate undead person is situated somewhere between points of discourse—they are neither human nor non-human. They are unable to consent (or to withhold their permission) without an understanding of human socio-sexual politics, or retention of an identity that ties into that schema. Bourke avers that "some types of people are deemed to be unable to consent to sexual intercourse in the first place.... Slaves, for instance, were simply not human enough for the concept of 'consent' to be relevant.... They were inherently rapable" (Bourke, 207: 76),^{viii} and this summates the quandary raised by fantasy which treads a line between necrophilic fetishization of the corpse, enjoyment of a lack of consent or of power exploitation, and perhaps even desire for the assent of the person/body being fucked. In the non-porn film *The Stink of Flesh* (2005), Nathan keeps a female zombie (hereafter, fembie) captive in a shed to "look at" her, and eventually rapes her, only to be later killed by her in retaliation. In such cases, it is clear that the zombie has some form of subjectivity — she is not only animated, she is aware of her body, feels pain, and is able to protest against her situation. Fundamentally, it is worth noting that both human and zombie understand that the animated corpse is a she, and this is not because of her genitals per se, but his investment in and labeling of her gender. In *The Stink of Flesh*, her protests are articulated by Nathan's memory of murdering the woman in the first instance, her struggles (verbal and physical) against his advances, and the chaining of her body to prevent her from harming him and to keep her in stasis. Nathan then understands he is raping her, and is aware that this is why she kills him at the finale.

Porn of the Dead works in a slightly different way because while some of the zombies retaliate, biting their human sexual partners is an extension of the sexual moment rather than an attempt to avenge themselves on the humans. This is indicative of the fantasy of porn; as Williams observes "rape, considered as a violent sexual crime that coerces its victims, is an impossibility" in porn's "separated utopia" (Williams, 1989: 164). Indeed, the zombies tend to make the same kind of consensual noises that the humans do — Sierra Sin clearly says "oh yeah" during the first half of her scene, then appears to have been told that zombies cannot speak, as she spends the second half making remarkably similar sounding affirmative growls that are not quite words. Just as the human males (hereafter, hu-men) are clearly not disgusted or fearful enough to inhibit their arousal, the male undead display their consent and gendered responses to the situation via their erections. Again, Williams' vision of the porn utopia, where participants are ever-ready for sex (in this case, whether they are living or dead), rings true. This negates the physiological problem faced by the undead Dan of the non-pornographic film *Shatterdead* (1994), who complains that he "can't get hard without blood," and where the gun strap-on his partner Susan fashions for him has to suffice.

Shatterdead is a film that centralizes the physical and philosophical problems faced by the conscious undead that can remember, emote, articulate, and be aware of their physical degeneration, but cannot die. *Porn of the Dead* does not dwell on such concerns, although their disavowal speaks volumes about the film's bodily fantasies. I will return to the issue of consent, as this problem is exacerbated by the gendered binaries of the text, which first require detailed exploration. *Porn of the Dead* is complicated by gendered difference in its scenes — three sequences feature fembies with hu-men, while the remaining two involve human females with male zombies (hereafter, manbies). As I have already outlined, a crucial trope of gendered binaries includes attempts to designate male and female bodies as physically divergent. These centre on considerations of sexual organs (and genital horror), reproduction, and disease. Throughout my delineation of these tropes, I will aim to highlight how *Porn of the Dead* problematizes male as well as female bodies.

I have already highlighted how patriarchal discourses have historically framed female bodies as monstrous, or metaphorically aligned with the zombie — let us now consider how women's genitals have been vilified in particular. Barbara Creed's treatise on the Monstrous Feminine is one of the central academic texts to explore the implications of the female body in Horror film. In keeping with the zombie-as-female reading I have already established, Creed envisages a negotiation of male fear of the female body that visualizes female genitalia in forms such as the razor-teethed cannibalistic mouth — the vagina dentata that seeks to castrate (Clark: 203; see also Grosz, 1995: 293; Creed: 105–21). This psychoanalytic trope is invested in framing the female body as problematic for men, but castration serves a more complex function given the zombie motif and the pornographic context of *Porn of the Dead*.

Creed suggests that typically male castration/death is framed differently to the female rape (as it is associated with pleasure/eroticized), to reveal “the film's ideological purpose —to represent woman as monstrous because she castrates” (Creed: 130). However, in *Porn of the Dead*, the fembie is already (sexually) monstrous, and the hu-men are equally horrific, being aggressive towards the fembies seemingly because they lack the ability to protest their exploitation (other than through post-coital penile mastication). However, by including the film's only castration in its opening scene, what is accentuated is that the males are lacking inasmuch as porn frames men as fundamentally constituted by their penis,^{viii} ever-ready to aggressively exploit women, be they alive or otherwise, who are depicted in their entirety. The men of pornography are intent only on fucking, and are thus portrayed as even more one-dimensional than the zombies (who are only partially formed subjects). They also lack the ability to facilitate their own subjectivity because that is all they are present for — this especially evinced in the film's opening castration, whereby the male performer's semi-presence as erection is removed. Thus it is clear that the fembie certainly is not the less formed half of the coupling here.

Moreover, the film is bookended with a similar motif: the final scene features a fembie biting off the hu-man performer's finger (as an echo of the opening castration), and disemboweling him after his climax (which, like the castration, serves to undermine male desire for sex by evincing its futility in the face of zombies' continued existence). That the male performer persists with intercourse after losing his finger (in fact it spurs him on) underlines that the hu-man desire (supposedly rational and superior according to patriarchal discourse) is wilfully impetuous and short-lived. It may be argued that the aggressive fembie resembles the black widow spider or “the female mantis”, which “devour[s] the male in the act of coitus” (Grosz: 282). Yet her animalistic response to sex -which again evokes subordinating discourses that surround female sexuality -is hardly sufficient to affirm that only the female is framed as animalistic predator here. The male performer (zombie or human) is equally found guilty, and is reminiscent of Callois' description of “male sexual drive” as “automatic”. Even when “headless” the male mantis “doggedly persists in its automatic sexual

movements” (cited in Grosz: 283), much like the pumping porn male who impulsively persists despite their partner’s resurrection from the dead, or the threat of physical injury. Thus, Dirty Harry’s screams of “no, anything but that” quickly turn into “yeah” as Sierra Sin exposes his penis — his erection is instantaneous and uninhibited by her monstrousness, usurping her outward hideousness.

The lines of predator and victim are ambiguously wrought here, reversing the typical coercion trope that we see elsewhere in the film; Trina Michael’s fearful screams at the presence of the zombies quickly turn into the same automated affirmative statements that preceded it in her human-human sexual interaction. Again, even if it is just signalled by porn’s “separated utopia” (as William’s suggests), some subjects (as Bourke asserts) are inherently “unrapable” — though this goes for the male performers as much as the females here. Yet this is not to suggest that “[w]hen a man is raped, he too is raped as a woman” (de Lauretis, 1987: 152), because his role is otherwise defined according to an expressly stereotyped porno-logic; male pleasure is central to the assignations. Greer’s reading of the male body as invested with “aggressive, conquistadorial power, reducing all heterosexual contact to a sadomasochistic pattern” (cited in Currie and Raoul, 1992: 18) then is valid, but the “power” is rendered fragile. The lines of sadism and masochism in the coupling are interchangeable (both parties being violent or submissive at different junctures), and the zombie is the ultimate conquering victor.

The tenets of power, dominance, and agency are tied into an ideo-logic of blaming that Poovey discusses in relation to prostitution; “syphilis turns prostitution into a crime; in making the sublimely unselfish woman a carrier of disease, it transforms female susceptibility into active agent of death” (Poovey: 36). Disease may act as an extension of the societal/moral corruption posed by women according to this model. Here, the fembies are largely passive to male lust, yet they are “blamed” for their physical manifestation of disease. They are capable of embodying this form of agency only because they are partially conscious. Grosz stipulates that “[i]t is not the case that men’s bodily fluids are regarded as polluting and contaminating for women in the same way or to the same extent as women’s are for men” (Grosz: 196–7). However, what we have so far neglected is that in the gender balance of *Porn of the Dead*, the zombies are not only feminized; male fluids are equally responsible for the spread of contagion, just as male desires are implicitly as blameworthy as female sexuality. Both are rendered monstrous, whether human or otherwise, and it is the explicit sexualization of the zombie that calls us to question this.

What we may note is that sexual difference is key — be it human-zombie or male-female. This echoes Douglas’ claim “that in certain cultures each of the sexes can pose a threat to the other, a threat that is located in the polluting powers of the other’s body fluids,” something that Grosz goes on to suggest “may prove a particularly significant site for an analysis of sexual difference in the era where sexuality has become reinvested with notions of contagion and death, of danger and purity, as a consequence of the AIDS crisis” (Grosz: 193). Via its use of castration/disembowelment in conjunction with popshots, *Porn of the Dead* maintains an “abjection toward bodily waste, which reaches its extreme in the horror of the corpse; and abjection toward the signs of sexual difference” (Grosz: 193). Yet, in doing so it aligns semen — which usually connotes pleasure in pornography (Williams, 1989: 101)— with disease. Semen is thus abject, rejected from the body, answering Grosz’s claim that “[t]here are virtually no phenomenological accounts of men’s body fluids ... the come shot functions primarily as a mode of metaphorization of the invisible and graphically unrepresentable mysteries of the vagina and women’s interior” (Grosz: 198). Here, because at key moments (that book-end the narrative) the comeshot is juxtaposed with the exposure of male interiors (thus making the male body a site of horror), semen acts in as an extension of the same motif, exposing the “unrepresentable mysteries” of the unexplored male body. This is crucial if we

are to avoid the trap that Schiebinger identifies; that “[b]y leaving male bodies unscrutinized, feminists have tended to reinforce the notion of the male as the unmarked sex, the human standard of perfection from which the female can only deviate” (Schiebinger: 14).

A binary is maintained that is bodily — be it alive/dead or male/female because there are no scenes that focus on sustained human-human or same-sex interactions. Both sexes are portrayed as unclean and abject, yet this balance is concerned with infection across binary divisions. This is made clear because the film contains no zombie-zombie sex, only human zombie couplings. The spread of disease is accentuated by the make-up that smudges off the zombie participant and onto the human during each sex scene. In preserving a figure with full conscious capacity (if we can assign such status to the humans here), one participant retains agency. The blame for spreading disease is shared by men and women in the film, only because there is an equilibrium of male and female humans in the narrative. Strangely though, because of their status as a more fully formed subject, the human participant is arguably more responsible for their own infection than the zombie is.

So far I have predominantly focused on the hu-man/fembie scenes of *Porn of the Dead*, yet the film is notable for the balance it strikes; two of the film’s five scenes involve manbies with human females, and it is here that the sex-difference becomes crucial. The manbies may be ugly and one dimensional, but they are (make-up aside) virtually indistinguishable from the hu-men performers, where there is a marked distinction between the growling fembies, and the highly vocal female human performers. This divergence is most notable in the contrasts between Sierra Sin’s zombie (that, as aforementioned, has to stifle routine groans of “oh yeah”), Ruby’s virtually silent corpse-like zombie, and the endless labored dialogue of humans Trina Michaels and Hillary Scott (“that’s a big fucking zombie cock in my fucking pussy”). Another series of disparities are evident in comparing Trina’s manbie counterparts who say “oh yeah baby” and “suck my cock” quite openly, in the same manner that Dirty Harry does in the first scene (whose sophisticated dialogue includes such timeless gems as “come here you fucking crazy fucking whore zombie fucking bitch”), where Rob Rotten’s human mortician role blurs the line further; being virtually silent, his disinterested pumping makes him more robotic than his fembie lover.

If there is a confusion inherent to the zombie-human matrix then, because of its insistence on heterosexed couplings, it is played out along gendered lines. The human and zombie males blur roles — some humans being zombie-like, some zombies being too human — while the women are markedly different in their articulations of zombiedom and humanity, even if they are equally exploited and subordinated. That said, both the human and zombie versions of femininity are as animalistic and ugly as each other here, just as the human and zombie males are undifferentiated in their mechanical routine of thrusting. While the human women are more expressive, what they do articulate is an assent to aggression (such as Trina’s “feed me” referring to three loads of zombie-semen), or a determination to frame their bodies in abject terms (exemplified by Hillary’s lengthy discussion of her “ass juices”).

Perhaps this should be read as passing comment on women’s complicity in their own subordination and the rise of what Levy terms “*Female Chauvinist Pigs*” (Levy, 2005)—while I will return to the misogynist implications of *Porn of the Dead* shortly, it is sufficient to note for the point in hand that the human females here self-suffer to a remarkable degree. Hillary Scott audibly choking herself on the male performer’s member and being soaked in her own saliva (while common in recent porn) is made exceptional by its situation amongst the Horror tropes of the film. The exaggeratedly light, soft-focus version of her masturbation (and the “innocence” connoted by her pig-tails) in the preceding moments are transformed into a contrasting nightmare (literally, one from which she awakens after the pop-shot) that is dark, and originally began (as seen in the title-sequence) with a

contrasting crucifix masturbation, the red lighting even obscuring what juices are meant to be blood and which are vaginal moisture. The challenge to hegemony arises in the complexities of how atrocity functions — monstrosity is embodied both in the zombies (of either sex), and the tacit deal struck by performers in the “porniverse” that pleasure is everything, even death. *Porn of the Dead* then, rather than hiding its mistreatment of women, makes a point of it (to whatever ends), and in doing so, demands that we pay attention to its negotiation of sexual inequality. Where Sceats observes that the “nongenital” penetration of the vampire lends itself to “ambiguity”— “[t]hey can be of either sex and any sexual orientation ... they confuse the roles of victim and predator” (Sceats: 107)— in zombie porn, the identification of gendered identity is manifested exactly as genital penetration. There is no confusion of sexual orientation here, and despite the fembies’ attacks on the hu-men, the tone is biased towards male domination.

This reading of *Porn of the Dead* contradicts Downing’s contention that “[t]he strategy of setting necrophilia up as an ‘identity’ allows for the dominant hegemonic categories of gender and hetero- or homo-sexuality temporarily to take a back seat” (Downing: 166), because despite the deviance insinuated through necrophilic overtones, the film still functions according to a hetero-sexed binary and appears to maintain, rather than challenge, normative ideologies. Alternatively, we may wish to interpret adherence to heterosexuality as somewhat more confrontational, insinuating that zombies enter into the identity system in a recognisable way, inasmuch as they discriminate between sexes, and conform to a human mode of sexual identity (here, heterosexuality) rather than a new sexuality (which is “beyond” a hetero/homo/bisexual axis) that one may expect to arise from living/undead interactions. According to its own logic, that system is exposed as brutal and perverse, inequality being literalized by the violent sex and decomposing beings of both sexes. Gender is of evident importance to the film, not only because of its genital focus, but because there are no same-sex couplings — it is thus presumed that the sex of the zombie and human matters to the participants and the viewer (no matter how repulsive the couplings might be).

Utilizing standard pornographic tropes makes those places where the formula deviates even more jarring. Those standards that are adhered to *Porn of the Dead* include genital close-ups, the habit of framing the women as speaking to and looking at the camera (an implicitly male viewer) during the sex act, and a routine of standard sexual behaviours that typify the current genre trends (oral sex, doggystyle, missionary, reverse cowgirl, anal, facial comeshot). Even the extreme porn trends for skull-fucking, ass-to-mouth insertion, and cock gagging are persistently worked into the habitual intercourse. Yet despite these, the film makes use of many jarring techniques that are unusual in hardcore pornography. Visually, the standard over-lighting (see Poyner, 2006: 27; Willemsen, 1992: 179) that typifies porn’s desire to “show” is replaced with grimy darkness, smoke, and red/blue lighting — the over-lighting of Hillary Scott’s masturbation scene only accentuates this. Her clean bedroom equally draws attention to the barren, vandalized padded cell of the final scene, or the filth of the pit in the first scene (the newspaper lining the pit that sticks to the performers’ legs embellishes this). The aural landscape is constituted by a stark juxtaposition of death metal music and diegetic sound that are panned hard left and right, augmenting each other. The “natural” sound includes the thunder effects (a standard Horror trope), fly noises (adding to the sense of dirt and rotting, again in contrast to Hillary Scott’s masturbation scene which is accompanied by the twittering of bird song), the animalistic grunting and screaming of the performers, and ludicrous dialogue (“Yeah that’s a good zombie ... suck that fucking cock, fucking zombie”). Visual effects are also employed such as stuttered motion (achieved by altering the shutter-speed), slow motion (accompanied by decelerated sound, again magnifying the animalism of the performer’s grunts), and a grainy filter added in post-production (making the film appear to be bleached/over-exposed and damaged, including regular pubic hairs chasing across the frame). Most obviously these audio-visual effects are combined with literal juxtapositions of sex with bloodshed and non-reanimated cadavers

(in scene three). As may be apparent, the film does its utmost to counter its routine porno-tropes with jarring alternatives to the norm.

If more proof of this agenda were needed, the central third scene begins as an explicit attack on the norms of porn which it opposes. The scene begins with a disinterested crew filming Trina Michaels copulating with an unidentified (human) male performer: one crew member even picks his nose, which expresses his boredom. Prior to the interruption of the zombies, Rotten finds time to explicitly (and not particularly subtly) critique the porn industry's self-imposed limitations, the director of the faux-shoot telling the performer to "grab those titties ... not too hard!" Moreover, the faux-director's swearing is bleeped out (a trait only utilized in this scene), and this is made all the more conspicuous by the misbleeping of some words — hence it plays out "**** her doggiestyle, yeah fuck her doggiest***," implying that censorship is both erroneously and arbitrarily imposed. In addition, in the scene that follows (featuring director Rob Rotten as the human performer), he audibly directs Ruby (his co-star). Regardless of whether this is intentional or accidental, its inclusion adds to the disruption of normalized standards occurring here.

The conventional conflicts with the unfamiliar here. This acts as an extension of the film's desire to be two things — both porn and horror — simultaneously. That, in turn, parallels the problematization of other binaries — male/female, alive/dead — the film evokes. It is perhaps testament to the success of this balance that the film was not favorably received, being dubbed as "so grungy and nasty to be a total turn off " by *DVD World's* reviewer (2006: 83) and "one big unappealing mess" by Zach Parsons (2006).^{ix} In part, this may arise from a realization that by exposing the routines of porn, the film is attacking its unquestioning, zombie-like consumers — befitting Marianne Valverde's fear that porn turns its consumers into "selfish, disengaged, univocal individuals" (cited in Currie and Raoul: 195). Regardless of how aggressive and offensive the representations are, the argument that the film is solely misogynistic or of no interest on this basis overlooks the complexities of its modes of representation, and what this may reveal about gender politics.

Res-erection: Misogyny, the Viewer and the Limits of Equality

At this stage it is worth qualifying that I am whole-heartedly among those who found *Porn of the Dead's* treatment of women to be offensive. The persistence of cock-gagging in all scenes (especially where coupled with strangulation), spitting (particularly a manbie spitting into Trina Michael's mouth), dual oral (coupled with the dialogue "slap me with those cocks"), fish-hooking, come gargling, and hair pulling are activities I find to be particularly deplorable. I am, however, less than convinced that the film should be read simply as a misogynistic statement that purely takes pleasure in this hatred, simply because the filmmakers combine horror and porn with relish. Displeasure is, after all, inherent to the combined Horror-porn form. I am also aware that I am writing as a heterosexual male, and that all of the films I have considered here are male authored. I am less interested in justifying Rob Rotten's cultural politics than I am in investigating the complexities raised by this text. There is every reason that we should read the film as a critique of current pornography, since it presents male pornographic pleasure as vile, and interchangeable with the horror it evokes. As Russell contends of the *Blind Dead* films, the "catalogue of sexual abuse is not necessarily simply misogynist"—it "plays an integral role in the[ir] ... thematics" (Russell: 89). *Porn of the Dead* is difficult to stomach, and its propensity to move is the source of its power; the potential of that power requires exploration rather than avoidance, however gruelling it is to witness. The point of zombie porn may be to awaken us from passivity, or thinking that we are living in a state of

gender equality. As Castronovo declares “[n]ecrophilic scenarios arise when the formal principles of freedom are compromised by material histories that attenuate and embed political subjectivity” (Castronovo: 129). For this reason, it is important that offensive behaviours are so brazenly flaunted, as the evocation of such representations fundamentally signals that everything is not okay.

Before we delve into misogyny, it is worth considering what the appeals of Horror-based zombie pornography might be. It may be inferred that the appeal of the zombie is that the male viewer can fill the partially blank space left by the creature — either the manbie that they may wish to be, or the fembie in which they may invest their desire. Integral to the fantasy here is the nature of the zombie as passive aggressor, in combination with sexual stereotypes (those that unite female sexual animalism/voraciousness and vulnerability, in conjunction with stereotypes of male sexual aggression). The attractions of such an amalgamation may be explained by Sceat’s observation that “transposition of women into penetrators and men into passive recipients is a reversal that not only casts women into a rapacious role, but explicitly emphasizes the pleasures of passivity for men” (Sceats: 188). Thus, the over-assertion of male dominance in the narrative may connote its opposite — a desire for passivity on the part of the (presumed) male viewer, which is in keeping with the nature of pornography as a medium that requires the viewer’s distance from the onscreen fantasy. Alternatively, we may wish to consider that the male-female dichotomy is set-up in a typed fashion to expose the problem of that very duality (especially since the zombie highlights and exacerbates such tropes). The fantasy (whether intended as radical or not) hinges on sexual difference, and we should not overlook that while the zombie may offer a potential liberation for women (in becoming free to explore and perform aspects of aggression and sexual freedom typically denied from femininity, via the fantasy-space of the monster), the males (alive or dead) continually re-inscribe a traditional gendered system via overt sexual aggression. Here then, the zombie porn model seems to epitomize Dworkin’s fear that “the female body” is a “terrain upon which hostility towards the female sex is re-enacted by men” (Currie and Raoul: 18).

Part of the problem is that the fantasy evoked is necrophilic, a desire typically associated with sadism — that is “sexual pleasure from inflicting physical or mental pain on others” (Berest, 1970: 210). Solomon suggests that necrophilia is among the sadistic perversions that are “excessive” in their “expression of ... domination, perhaps mixed with hatred, fear, and other negative attitudes” (Solomon, 1974: 344). Part of the sadism here involves the political oppression of women, which is manifested as the necrophilic desire to reduce the subject to object. This is connoted in MacCormack’s discussion of the out-lawing of necrophilia, which asks that we “invest the cadaver with volition, thus in necrophilia the corpse is a victim of rape against its ‘will’” (MacCormack: 119). The zombie is a figure that resists such objectification (thus partially overturning the desire to oppress here) because of their inherent sexual identity — they cannot be simply reduced to the status of animal “whose consent or lack of it cannot exist” (Levy, 1980: 195). The misogyny of the activities depicted in *Porn of the Dead* may then not necessarily rely on sadistic investment in the pain of the female, but in a negation of their ability to feel pleasure or pain — the fembies being interchangeable from the human females in this respect. Just like the zombies who return to the mall in *Dawn of the Dead*, these are animated bodies simply going through the motions (though the males in the film, as I have already delineated, may also be accused of automation in the same sense).

Despite his focus on Jacobean theater, Dudley’s reading of the necrophilic motif proves enlightening here, especially in relation to the potential gender-politics at play and the overturning of the “natural order.” As Dudley states, “necrophilia is often destructive, misogynist, obsessive, totalitarian. It is also nostalgic”— it is thus a trope associated with ideological oppression, and a resistance to (political) change; “necrophilia is the displaced, uncanny desire to dig up the past and

make it live again — to recover a trace of the lost other in order to fill the cultural and institutional gaps created by new ideologies” (Dudley: 291). Part of the fear evoked is also implicitly that the past, while revered and longed for, is just that — past, not present. Thus, what is evoked is a fear for the end of the patriarchal order. If this is implicated as part of the male pleasure here, it is linked with the notion of “playing at” the overturning of patriarchal hegemony, which finds a parallel in the utilization of the animated dead. This is a complex balance, especially since its enactment involves dominance over and submission to female power. It also entails coming to terms with, rather than an “attempt to distance themselves from, the very kind of corporeality — uncontrollable, excessive, expansive, disruptive, irrational — that [men] have attributed to women” (Grosz: 200).

The zombie metaphor seems apposite for a revolutionary reading. As Clark identifies, “[t]here’s no going back for the survivors of the zombie plague; their only option is to disregard the previous system and move on in an effort to pioneer an alternative social order” (Clark: 206), a view shared by Webb and Byrnan — “there is no (evident) way out. Your only option, when faced with the zombie menace, is to kill or be killed. Either way you’re screwed, because you are dead, or you have become what you fear” (Webb and Byrnan: 91).^x Given that zombies are presented as ugly/unknowable to the current order, and that the dominant regime is typified by violent responses towards women (enforced through aggressive sexual acts), there is little to suggest that we would choose to be part of such a system — and this reveals the lack of freedom we have in conforming to such ideologies. The zombie cannot be read as a purely revolutionary icon, as we may argue that its pre-linguistic nature may instead signal its regressive status, thus rendering the zombie immediately inferior to “civil masculinity” and the full autonomy of the conscious subject. Another consideration worth making is what occurs if there are no survivors to herald the new order — the zombies are the new way, again making them an object of fear for those who depend on the established order to constitute their identity (that is, all of us). Here, the zombie make-up may be an ideological red-herring. The sexed zombie at first appears to offer us a potential point of fracture, however fantastic; the zombie narrative begins with conscious, non-rational beings who escape discourse because they designate a space “outside the symbolic order” (Webb and Byrnan: 97, n. 1). Yet, there is no way of escaping the ideological, and this is arguably why *Porn of the Dead* does not shy from the normative aspects of gendered identity. As the make-up smudges between performers during these sex scenes the true monster is revealed — and most terrifying of all, it is within us all; those ideological and discursive pressures that encourage both men and women to behave in ways that subordinate women.

However, it is the complexity of the zombie-presence that threatens patriarchal hegemony in combination with the narrative’s modes of representation that offer us a less restrictive outlook. Because the couplings are human/zombie, inequality is stressed, especially as living females seem to be inferior even to the undead males. The fembies are the amplified enactment of femininity as positioned by subordinating patriarchal discourses; in centralizing genitalia (and thus sexed difference), the film uses the physical to distract from the real point (which is behavioral). MacCormack notes that because it is in part an “onanistic practice,” necrophilia “confus[es] subject and object” (MacCormack: 118) (and perhaps this is the implication raised by utilizing the motif in pornography). The confusion here is not one of investing an object (cadaver) with subjectivity (part of the fantasist’s self), but a slippage between poles of the gender binary — the discourses that separate men as being “of the mind” and women “of the body,” together forming a whole; the androgyn that is the apex of desire envisaged in Plato’s *Symposium* (Raoul: 267). The attempted over-exertion of sexed stereotypes equally heralds that the system is in jeopardy — gender slippage is manifested via the undead’s life/death convergence and the explicit balance of male and female zombies. This is a pantomime of gender difference, enacted as monstrous intercourse. The zombie-human interactions are excessively normative. While the formal disruption indicates that we are to

find the couplings strange and horrific, the behaviours enacted are uncannily in keeping with ideologies that seek to retain masculine power, and so it is dominance that is ultimately critiqued.

Read in this political light, zombie porn counters hegemonic discourses that declare us to have “stable bodies with complementary sexual organs” and that “only a few body parts are allowed to be invested with sexual significance and then pronounced complementary” (Lindenmeyer, 1999: 51). Pornography’s inherent eroticization of genitals may be thus read as an appropriate mode by which to critique a fascination with sexual difference — after all, the usual stark lighting that exposes and prioritizes genitalia is debunked in *Porn of the Dead*. Sexual difference is fundamentally excessive to the zombie-being (the nature of zombiedom is of being without identity), and zombie-desire inherently hinges on a devaluation of genital difference. As Clark observes, “[t]he Undead refuse any sort of curfew on their erotic pleasure; they want it bad, and they want it all the time. They will bite any flesh ... this reactivates the entire body as an erogenous zone and takes the focus away from civilized genital contact” (Clark, 2006: 202). Indeed, the film ends with Nikki Jett’s zombie enacting just that — an investment in the bowels as her erotic goal. So the zombie, being eternally hungry, is perfectly suited to the utopia of porn, where the participants refuse to curb their bodily urges, but here the subjects repudiate adherence to restrictive foci on specific areas of bodily pleasure or disgust. “The desire found in and for these [zombie] bodies,” as MacCormack argues, “goes beyond any recognizable sexual structure” (103), even disrupting the expected formal motifs of hardcore pornography.

In this sense, the fabric of the body is resurrected, becoming a new political cipher —and the extremity of the depictions is in keeping with this agenda. As Bronfen delineates, “[r]eclaiming the body as a site of self-empowerment” involves “staging an enjoyment of excess, self-consciously enacting a liberation from the constraint of final, totalizing and authoritarian categories” (Bronfen, 2000: 120). Bronfen also observes that “images of the body” are crucial in such power moves, because they “function as the medium for formulating and perpetrating cultural prescriptions and forbidding,” becoming “the site at which a given culture can repeatedly renegotiate its privileged collective self-representation as well as its hegemonic values” (Bronfen, 2000: 112). Thus pornography -a genre concerned with explicitly exposing, scrutinizing, and perhaps even shaping the body (Schiebinger: 2) -again proves its appropriateness in this respect. However, the final threat to the stability of patriarchal norms arises from another aspect of *Porn of the Dead*’s adherence to porn-norms. While Webb and Byrmand contend that the zombie-narrative closes when “something is reconciled; the horror is put back into the closet, out of sight—until the next relapse” (Webb and Byrmand: 89), *Porn of the Dead* rejects narrative trajectory, having no closure, offering no explanation for the plague or any explicit connection between the scenes. Because there is no narrative drive, there is no change—even if we witness the repercussions of immanent shifts. That is to say, we see the dead coming back to life, but not directly as a result of zombie attack. This suggests that it is beyond the film’s ability to articulate change within its own span because its disconnected moments refuse to assign agency — thus cause and effect cannot be gendered. The problem/cause is not identified, and so there can be no “hope” for reclamation of the old human order. Zombies are present, they are everywhere, and no-one can do anything to stop it. If we are to read this as a feminist call-to-action, it is also worth noting that the humans here are unfazed by the presence of the monsters. They may perceive the zombies as monstrous and may be harmed by them, but in their current state, the zombies are unaware of the power they hold, behaving as humans do, and so may be understood as a warning against complacency.

Conclusion: The Radical Potentials of Excess

To summarize the complex problem we are faced with, let us return to the issue of necrophilia; “necrophilics view the corpse as a safe object that offers neither resistance nor opposition, eliminates all risks of rejection and retaliation, and enhances their sense of being alive because the dread of annihilation is projected onto the corpse” (Dujovne, 2004: 635). So at once it is the case that necrophilic fantasy is seemingly sadistic; that males (and Dujovne explicitly refers to necrophilics as male, and the corpses as female) are willing to entirely negate female subjectivity. But hidden therein lie the seeds of destruction — an admittance of “potential annihilation.” We then have to consider that the corpse is animated — while inarticulate, the zombie is able to demonstrate resistance, and so the danger of overthrow becomes more apparent (given that the framing scenes of *Porn of the Dead* end in the destruction of male sexuality, it is implicit that usurpation is a certainty). But we also need to account for the presence of manbies in a heterosexualized space, and the fact that this is, above all, a fantasy — thus it may be a case of “playing at” danger with the knowledge that the status quo will remain. If one side is exaggerated (the radical potential of overthrow of the normative sexual system, embodied by the zombies), so is the other (male sexuality becomes monstrous, too aggressive).

Although MacCormack suggests that “masculinity is already so culturally transparent that it does not bear on identity” (MacCormack: 130), here the representation of masculinity is so excessive (even beyond the grave) that it draws more attention to itself than femininity does. The necrophilic taboo provides a critical space in which male desire becomes unwieldy, abnormal and defamiliarized even to the male viewer. After all, critical dissatisfaction with the film suggests that Freud was mistaken in his insistence that “[t]he sexual instinct overrides resistances such as “shame, disgust, horror or pain” with the result that the object of sexual desire is raised to the status of the sacred” (Freud, 1957: 152)—not least since the bodies here are degraded rather than valued. Because of its status as pornography, and the insistence of performers looking into the camera, the viewer is implicated in the deviance of the necrophilic mode; “necrophilia ... calls to mind the marginal and the extreme. It points to the guilty or the sick few, and allows the rest of culture to escape to the moral high ground, where it may continue to indulge its duplicitous fantasies” (Downing: 168).^{xi} The film’s refusal to allow us to distance ourselves from aberrance suggests that we must come to terms with the ideological binaries that the film seeks to destabilize — our disgust then, should issue us into recognizing our own complicity in the same ideological systems that seek to justify social biases.

The situation is thus more difficult than Downing’s assertion credits: “[t]hat [necrophilia] should operate as a silent coda for the male possession of the female is inherent in the logic of disavowal subtending such strategies” (Downing: 168). In *Porn of the Dead*, it is important to note that the human females do not instigate sex with corpses as the hu-men do — Hillary Scott is awoken by oral sex, and Trina Michaels is pounced upon. No matter how willingly they go along with it, this is a far cry from the male desire for the corpse as seen in the final two scenes. The first three scenes thus frame the assignations as a kind of reverse necrophilia, where the corpse desires the human. Either way, when the human is the instigator, it is explicitly rendered as a male fantasy, and the imagery of degradation (if it is to be read as erotic) is concerned with female submission to male desire. Thus necrophilia is framed (both in *Porn of the Dead*, and in Downing’s view) as a male fantasy (an imbalance in itself), but one that is framed as psychologically abnormal — therefore missing the point that it places salient images of “normative” sexual relationships/inequalities under scrutiny. This is because “[s]exual difference entails the existence of a sexual ethics, an ethics of the ongoing negotiations between beings whose differences, whose alterities, are left intact but with whom some kind of exchange is nonetheless possible” (Grosz: 192). The “exchange” in question must occur between fantasy and political reality, life and death, as well as male and female here. While Clark notes that “Eros is the instinct that brought humans together and created civilization in the first place ... reproduction and the continuation of the species are only incidental by-products of the

overwhelming urge to obtain total physical bodily pleasure from other humans” (Clark: 201), it is worth remarking that while the fantasy of porn seems to centralize male pleasure, that indulgence is correlated with horrific aggression in *Porn of the Dead*. Moreover, the fembie bite (and it is only the females that we see biting in both *Porn of the Dead* and *Repenetrator*), divests the hu-men of their central ideological status as phallic controller, directly disturbing male bodily boundaries, and evincing the blurred line between apparently binary poles by subordinating male pleasure (manifested via the preceding popshot) to female aggression. This is the true climax, as women exceed the male capacity to subdue them, and it is unclear (given its status as the new “money-shot” in this Horror-porn climate) if this is a moment of terror or pleasure.

Briefel argues that “the female monstrous body is completely knowable ... once the female body bleeds, it will breed a very predictable form of horror ... compound[ing] our identification with the female monster — her changes and pain become our own” (Briefel: 24). But perhaps in *Porn of the Dead* the results are not so predictable. Firstly, there is no change — there are static positions due to a lack of narratorial direction. We must then also question if the pain does “become our own” in an identificatory sense, or if it becomes ours to own, as we (whomsoever that may be) are expected to gain pleasure (or horror) from it. The very slippage between porn and Horror is what makes the response unpredictable. Finally, it is worth noting that the “female monstrous body” to which Briefel refers is confused with the non-monstrous (standard porn-body) of the human females here, and potentially even with the manbie-bodies, depending on which binary we favour (be it male/female, or alive/undead). That the human female bodies are made monstrous in ways that differ from the degeneration of the fembie bodies, and that the hu-man bodies are made vulnerable (made to bleed) here, complicates the matter further. My argument is that it may be easy to discount or disavow *Porn of the Dead* with accusations of misogyny, but to be distracted by its over-exerted fantasies is to miss the pertinent political commentary its excessiveness offers.

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ⁱ For an example of reading the zombie in relation to post-colonial politics, see Castronovo (2000: 113–148).

ⁱⁱ See Webb and Byrland (2008) for a reading of the zombie in relation to "neoliberal economics ... globalization," and "capitalist production" (85).

ⁱⁱⁱ See also Beisecker, forthcoming.

^{iv} The capitalism reading may become more palatable in this sense, as it relates desire to unalloyed greed.

^v See Sceats (2001) for a dissection of the vampire (another undead creature) in relation to gender, and in terms of infection of male sexuality.

^{vi} For more on gender in zombie films of the 1930s and 1940s, see Dendle, 2007: 48.

^{vii} By way of a useful comparison, Braidotti (2004: 92, 95–7 and 107–10) discusses the nature "technophilic anthropomorphism" and the automaton as erotic object.

^{viii} While I am unconvinced by the reading, Clark's assertion that the "swaying ... engorged" bodies of zombies are like penises (Clark, 2006: 203) makes for an interesting point of comparison to the porno-landscape and its male performers that are like one-dimensional permanent erections.

^{ix} See also reviews by Devon Bertsch (2008) and Robert Cettl (2008) that complain of the same problems.

^x While the authors are concerned with economics, it is worth considering what happens when "screwed" is literalised in the zombie porn narrative.

^{xi} Other authors concurring that necrophilia is a deviant activity include Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla, 2007: 854–5; Canter and Wentink, 2004: 491; and Balint, cited in Levy, 1980: 191–2.