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Dead as a Doornail: New Materialism and the Corpse in Contemporary Fiction

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Abstract

The human corpse has become a familiar and increasingly prevalent icon within the contemporary cultural and narrative landscape. Although several academic works perform an analysis of the dead body in contemporary literature and culture, to date none have done so in conversation with the 'new materialisms', a diverse body of scholarship aiming to reappraise traditional perceptions of matter in response to the radically changing conditions of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The current project sets out to remedy this critical deficit.

Conceptualising the literary corpse as a subject that stages critical encounters with the materiality that always already subtends human existence, this thesis explores how textual depictions of the deceased body provide an imaginative space through which to explore new materialist modes of being in the world. Reading a diverse corpus of representative texts ranging from 1987–2016 through a selection of new materialist theoretical lenses, the thesis analyses a variety of 'necro-corporeal' figurations that frequently recur within the contemporary literary landscape — dissection, mutilation, reanimation, preservation and decomposition. Over the course of three sections, it examines how the literary corpse's complex ontology manifests and is managed within contemporary fiction, the role of such representations in facilitating encounters with the non-human and the insights they disclose about literature's capacity to induce such encounters.

In doing so, the thesis argues that the corpse constitutes a paradoxical '(non)human subject' that simultaneously grants insight into the material world with which we are intimately entangled and problematises the possibility of unmediated access to that world. Encouraging a more proximal relationship with matter whilst ultimately respecting its unassailable otherness, this thesis demonstrates that the literary corpse fittingly encapsulates the productive challenges that characterise new materialist thought in the twenty-first century.

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Introduction

Dead as a Doornail

"One last look.

…

I was in error when I saw him as fixed and stable and thought I would have him forever. He was never fixed, nor stable, but always just a passing, temporary energy burst…He had never stayed the same, even instant to instant"

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, 244)

Confronted with the corpse of his dead son, the fictionalised Abraham Lincoln of George Saunders' Pulitzer prize winning novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) undertakes a radical materialist meditation, in which he is compelled to reconsider the relationship between spirit and body, life and death, energy and matter. Initially, Lincoln's contemplation of corporeal and spiritual transience is induced by the juxtaposition of his son's previous animate vitality and the dumb "*meat*" (Saunders, 246, original emphasis) of his corpse. However, within the wider context of Saunders' afterlife, an imaginative space in which spirits continuously undergo grotesque metamorphoses and becomings[1] (27; 111; 298), this "most unfortunate conclusion" (246) is ultimately undermined. If the corpse of Willie

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[1] Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's original definition of 'becoming' as "a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage" (272), this thesis' use of the term coincide with new materialist theorists such as Coole and Frost to denote an ontological orientation in which "matter is no longer imagined here as a massive, opaque plenitude but is recognized instead as indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways" (10).

Lincoln is to be considered 'meat', it is one which resists the conceptualisation of meat as inert or passive matter. Rather, it is a meat imbued with transformative vitality through the constant molar and molecular processes of decomposition. In Saunders' text, the classical juxtaposition of body and soul gives way to a deeper synchronicity. Both are passing, both are changing, Willie's corpse, no less than his living personality, no less than his dead soul.

Given the fate of Abraham Lincoln's corpse as one of the prototypical subjects of embalming, the novel's enthusiastic acceptance of transience and decay carries an intense irony. Whereas the elder Lincoln would be posthumously preserved and paraded throughout the United States as a representation of the immortality of the union (Schwartz, 30), Saunders' Willie Lincoln is ultimately permitted to decompose and become reconstituted within his discursive and ecological environment. In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Saunders re-writes the body of the nation, not as the preserved corpse of a singular 'great man', but as a shifting polyphony of peoples and times. That is to say, Saunders' provocative reimagination of American history and national identity is grounded in a consideration of the materiality of the corpse and, ultimately, in a rethinking of matter *through* the corpse

Corpse as Ontological Interface

This project begins with the deceptively simple premise that encounters with the corpse, whether direct or artistically mediated, provide a visceral confrontation with human materiality. Not only the matter that we will become in death, but the materiality that always already subtends the human bio-organism and is continually repressed to maintain the illusion of the human subject's ontological purity. Not just the dust to which we shall return, but the dust we are, have always been, are constantly in a state of being and becoming.

Predominantly defined by its "objecthood and passivity" (Doig, 48), the powerful affects[2] evoked by the corpse often revolve around its seeming transition from active human subject to inert material object. Both recognisably human and not human (Blanchot, 256), the corpse confronts us with a sudden evacuation of the agency of the deceased individual. Yet the corpse subsists, eerily familiar, even exhibiting a continued organic animation through the processes of decomposition that demonstrates a qualitatively different kind of agency, a material non-human agency which is both alien yet familiar (Cohen 2017b, 389). The fact that the corpse both is and is not us generates a conceptual impasse, displaying the materiality that both defines (and fails to define) us. In doing so the dead body functions as an 'ontological interface' and a valuable subject with which to explore popular anxieties surrounding human materiality and the emergent possibilities of non-human agency.

Faced with imminent ecological catastrophe, radical advances in the postclassical sciences, the unprecedented proliferation of invasive bio-technologies and emergent models of geo-political control, the importance of critically re-assessing the material status of the human subject has never been more urgent (Pradhan & Singh, 90–91). Attuned to these shifting material demands, a trans-disciplinary critical field known as 'the new materialisms' has emerged in recent decades to reconsider and re-invigorate contemporary approaches to ontology, human-material relations and non-human agency (Coole and Frost, 4–6).

In the words of Jane Bennett, one of the new materialisms' most prominent and respected theorists, the primary issue plaguing modern approaches to the material world is the continued tendency to conceptualise "matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute or inert. This

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[2] Affect is here defined as "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement" (Gregg & Seigworth, 1)

habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, being)" (2010, vii). Both 'it' and 'us', both 'thing' and 'being', the corpse conspicuously inhabits the intersection of these binary divisions, rendering it a strategic site through which to investigate this problematic ontological divisions.

However, despite its privileged role as an ontological interface, "the corpse provides a significant but *thus far underexplored* nonhuman 'other' that is intimately yoked to the human and its inevitable fate" (Edwards, 3, my emphasis). This is especially true within the humanities, in which — as we shall see — there is a notable deficit of studies considering the corpse from a new materialist perspective. Such absences appear particularly conspicuous due to the intimate link shared by corpses and artistic representation. Since the Renaissance, the treatment of the corpse as anatomical specimen has had a directive influence on Western aesthetics (Klaver 2004, xiv) and, conversely, the aesthetic conventions of postmortem photography have shaped modern funereal practices (Schwartz, 18). That is to say, corpses and art have historically enjoyed a reciprocal relationship, each operating as 'actants' — that is, non-human agents (Latour 2005, 71) — upon the other. As such, it is crucial that new means of appraising the corpse as an ontological interface extend to analyses of its aesthetic representation.

In order to address this deficit, the current project explores how literary depictions of the corpse provide an imaginative space through which to explore new materialist modes of being in the world and, conversely, how new materialist concerns and sensibilities might be seen to influence aesthetic depictions of the deceased body. During this process several interrelated questions will emerge: How is the corpse's complex ontological status represented in contemporary literature? To what extent can these necro-corporeal

representations facilitate a greater understanding of material vitality? And, finally, what role does literature play in this communicative process? The thesis will attempt to answer these questions by examining literary representations of the corpse over three decades (1987–2016) as it appears in five different necro-corporeal configurations - dissection, mutilation, reanimation, preservation and decomposition.

The Corpse's 'Double Position'

In the course of answering these questions, I will explore the corpse's 'double position' as a paradoxical human object, or a '(non)human subject',[3] that grants insight into the material world with which we are intimately entangled[4] and simultaneously problematises the possibility of unmediated access to that world. It is my argument that, although the figure of the corpse certainly facilitates a visceral encounter with non-human materiality, this encounter is so powerful precisely because the corpse continues to function as the 'remains' of a previously existent human subject. Indeed, it is this 'residual anthropocentrism' that situates the corpse as such a useful subject of new materialist investigation.

As an ontological interface, the corpse violently confronts its viewer with the materiality that composes the human subject in a manner that is simultaneously liberating and unsettling. By providing this fundamental ambivalence, depictions of the corpse allow us to tenuously embrace the promises of new materialist thought, whilst also foregrounding the latent anthropocentrism through which such thought operates. In doing so, the corpse

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[3] This particular inscription has been used throughout the thesis to typographically demarcate the ambiguity by which the human subject is both distinct from, yet irreducibly connected to, the corpse. The alternative notations 'non-human' and 'nonhuman' have also been deployed to distinguish between imaginative configurations of the corpse as entirely separate from or entirely continuous with the human subject, respectively.

[4] The sense in which the term 'entanglement' is evoked in this thesis refers to Barad's observation that "to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" to the effect that "individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating" (2007, ix).

ontologically manifests the epistemological necessity that it is always *through ourselves* as human subjects, that non-human subjectivity can be thought (Tischleder 2019, 128). As explored below, the nature and extent of this epistemological limitation plays a crucial, yet contested, role in new materialist enquiry. As such, I would like to suggest that the corpse's propensity to signal the limits of human access to matter is not so much a limitation as a gift; a reminder to respect the insurmountable otherness of the material world in which we are always entwined, but can never fully know.

Introduction Outline

The remainder of this opening chapter will be dedicated to an indicative literature review that surveys and evaluates the relevant recent literature within the field. As there is very little literature available on new materialisms and the literary corpse — and *no* extended studies on its application to the contemporary literary corpse — this review will be somewhat circuitous by necessity, drawing on resources and concepts from a variety of related disciplines.

In the first section, it will consider the role of the corpse as it figures in the contemporary imagination. In doing so, it will investigate how the contemporary corpse inhabits a paradoxical position as an imaginatively omnipresent, yet materially absent, entity. In addition, it will briefly survey the current scholarly work on the literary corpse and identify the limitations of the existent literature for the purposes of this thesis.

The second section moves on to provide a general overview of the new materialisms, identifying its key features and situating the current project's own 'cautious materialism' within current debates and divisions emerging within this broad intellectual landscape. Specifically, it will argue that current new materialist approaches to literature, language and

material knowledge tend to occupy a spectrum ranging from 'sensible' to 'recalcitrant' positions on the possibility of non-human encounters, with the current project occupying a cautionary middle-ground between these poles.

The third section focuses on new materialism and the corpse, exploring anthropocentric tendencies within the current literature alongside the equally problematic transcendent sensibilities of several new materialist accounts of the deceased human body. This section closes with a consideration of Schwartz's approach to the 'corpse-as-remains' in conversation with Erin E. Edwards' *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* (2018), recalibrating Edwards' notion of 'corpse power' to account for the dead body's residual anthropocentrism.

The introduction concludes with a short summary of the chapters that follow. It should be noted that the literature review offered here is purely preliminary and deployed to establish the broader context in which this thesis takes place. It will be supplemented in each chapter by a more focused investigation into the critical literature regarding the particular novels and necro-corporeal configurations under discussion.

Conceptual Difficulties

Before continuing, however, it is germane to consider some of the conceptual difficulties that are inevitably encountered when attempting to think the corpse in terms of vitalism[5] and non-human agency. A significant obstacle to conceptualising the agency of the corpse is the deeply engrained linguistic and ideological configuration of the dead body as the

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[5] The term 'vitality' evoked, here, refers to Bennett's definition as "the capacity of things…not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own. My aspiration is to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans" (2010, viii)

quintessential symbol of inertia. Indeed, the history of the corpse's vilification as an inert object is deeply implicated in the Cartesian substance dualism through which Western Philosophy comes to conceive matter as "inert stuff emptied of all immanent vitality" (Coole, 94). The impact of Descartes' formulation cannot be overstated, as these "Cartesian precedents" incline Western thought to "understand 'the body' as so much inert matter" (Butler, 177). Furthermore, Edwards observes that Descartes' construction of an inert 'matter-body' is itself modelled on the figure of the corpse (12). Tracing this theoretical pairing back even further, Zimmerman argues that the 1563 homily 'Against Peril of idolatry and Superfluous decking of Churches' influentially crystallises the corpse as the axiomatic figuration of inert matter (Zimmerman, 8). Although such an assignation neglects the various forms of material animation demonstrated in the processes of decomposition, this association continues to exert its influence upon the contemporary imagination, in which corpses still function synonymously with inert passivity, both literally and metaphorically. Time and again within the realms of literary studies, the corpse is ontologically degraded to the "the dead shell of an absent life" (Elam and Pielak, 4), a "deanimated" (Bronfen, 5), "literal object" (Shapira, 220) in "a state of perfect passivity" (Close, 30).

In this way, attempts to foreground the corpse's non-human vitality constantly encounter ideological, conceptual and discursive presumptions that reaffirm its inertia. Put simply, thinking the corpse as a subject rather than an object is a very difficult thing to do, both epistemologically and linguistically. In fact, the pull of this conceptual habit is so strong that the corpse is sometimes situated as passive or inert within new materialist studies that advocate a sensitivity to non-human vitalism. For example, Leder's critique of Cartesian substance dualism hinges on his argument that Descartes falsely "models the living body first and foremost upon the inanimate [corpse]" (19). For Leder, Descartes' conception of a

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lifeless living body stems not from a misrecognition of the nature of matter itself, but the inappropriate comparison with a corpse which is itself assumed to be "passive matter" (Leder, 20). In attempting to chart a causal relation between Descartes' dissective methodology and his dualist conclusions, Leder subtly replicates the presumption that the corpse is a uniquely passive entity. Even the visionary forebear of new materialism, Donna Haraway, contributes to the corpse's conceptual de-animation, stating "the corpse is not the body. Rather, the body is always in-the-making; it is always a vital entanglement…always a becoming" (2007, 162–3, my emphasis). Such a juxtaposition clearly designates the corpse as a passive entity against which her vision of the vitally entangled 'becoming body' is illuminated.

Unsurprisingly, this epistemological and linguistic pairing of death and the corpse with inertia infiltrates popular discourse (Quigley, 31) and literary conventions (Miller 2017, 390). Consider, for example, the phrase 'dead as a doornail'. To claim that someone or something is 'dead as a doornail' is to emphasise the passivity of the deceased subject by linking it with the inert passivity of a material object — here, the doornail — through simile. Conversely and implicitly, the doornail's passivity and inertia is reaffirmed through comparison with a 'dead' entity that confirms its own lack of vitality. The phrase's cyclicality discloses a recursive logic of mutual affirmation that forecloses the possibility of thinking either matter or corpses as anything but inert. Accordingly, literary corpses are often figured as ontological metaphors to denote inactivity or anthropocentrically defined 'lifelessness'.

And yet, as we shall see in section one, the natural liminality of the corpse — its simultaneous conceptual and material instability — often enacts subtle forms of discursive and symbolic resistance that complicate the constraints of this representational and interpretive figuration. As such, rather than a metaphor that binds two figures under the

rubric of morbid inactivity, the figure of the corpse can also have the opposite impact, injecting a sense of instability or fluidity into entities that are otherwise prefigured as lifeless or inactive.

In this regard, the conceptual difficulty of thinking the corpse as an active subject also bestows a critical opportunity, for it is this very same conceptual association of the corpse with passivity that generates the dead body's utility as an imaginative tool with which to shift our ontological presumptions surrounding material activity. Therefore, returning to the common phrase 'dead as a doornail', we can see that if we are able to expand our current patterns of thought beyond this kind of circular syllogism — that dead things are matter and matter is dead — and instead start to view the dead as animate, vital entities, so too might we start to think the vitality of matter, and vice versa. It is precisely this inverted recalibration of the 'matter-corpse dynamic' that takes place in the mind of Saunders' Lincoln, whose acknowledgement of the corpse's vitality leads to the realisation that "I am not stable and Mary not stable and the very buildings and monuments here not stable and the greater city not stable and the wide world not stable. All alter, are altering, in every instant" (244). It is within this spirit that the present thesis aims to affirm that the corpse is, indeed, as 'dead as a doornail', in that it is teeming with non-human material vitality.

Situating the Contemporary Corpses

Invisible yet omnipresent, the corpse enjoys something of a paradoxical status in contemporary society. But once the looking starts, it can be hard to stop seeing the dead bodies all around us. From a purely scientific perspective, corpses are truly omnipresent entities, permeating our material surroundings and nourishing the earth with their decay (Sherman, 47; Elam & Pielak, 1). And yet, the corpse's ubiquitous presence is not just a

biological fact, but also a cultural and socio-political reality. Contemporary news coverage frequently displays images of dead refugees such as Alan Kurdi (Glavin, 2015) or Oscar and Valeria Martinez Ramirez (Thebault et al., 2019) as prototypical icons of geo-political crises and humanitarian atrocities (Schwartz, 54). The corpses of long-dead colonial subjects are exhibited in museums the country over, inviting ethical debate regarding respectful display and postmortem rights (Shariatmadari, 2019) whilst the spectacularised corpses of dead celebrities such as Michael Jackson (Schwartz, 130n4), Jade Goody (Davies, 150) and Anna Nicole Smith (Foltyn 2016, 252) circulate in popular media. Combining ritual, technology and environmental activism, emergent burial practices such as dead body composting (Elam & Pielak, 152), promession (148), alkaline hydrolysis (151), the *Capsula Mundi* (Citelli, 2013 – present) and *Infinity Burial* (Rhim Lee, 2008–present) projects attempt to offset the environmental impact of traditional burial rites by subjecting the corpse to ever changing sets of industrial conditions and technological augmentations. Meanwhile, corpses continue to operate as sites of medical and artistic wonder, with live autopsies broadcast on national television (Deans & Plunkett, 2004) and the anatomico-aesthetic cadavers of Gunther von Hagens' *Body World* drawing tens of millions of visitors worldwide (Desmond, 349).

Whether or not we choose to acknowledge them, corpses are everywhere, entangled in complex intersections of ritualistic, technological, ecological, political, social, economic and historical domains of signification and power. The multiple ways in which they navigate and are navigated by these fields of power testify to the cultural, symbolic and material potency of the corpse as well as the desire to domesticate and appropriate its power. Our imaginative and material worlds are both swarming with the dead, whose bodies occupy our minds no less then they occupy our graveyards. In the words of Jacques Lynn Foltyn, "this is the corpse's cultural moment" (2008, 155).

Crucially for the purposes of this thesis, this necrotic abundance can also be seen to extend to the literary sphere. Whilst various critics have explored the significance of the dead body in Classical (Segal, 1971), Early Modern (Zimmerman, 2005), Romantic (Shapira, 2018), Victorian (McAllister, 2018; Hotz, 2008; Bronfen, 1992) and modernist texts (Edwards, 2018; Sherman, 2014), it is notable that contemporary literature exhibits a continued fascination with postmortem corporeality. Consider the martyred corpses of Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' (1979) or Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* (2015); the cautionary corpses of Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) or Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006); the trophy corpses of Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018); the self-murdered and femicided cadavers of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) and Robert Bolano's *2666* (2004), the talking dead of Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* (1998) or Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* (2002), or the reassembled creatures of Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992) and Ahmed Sadaawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013). In its various guises, the corpse continues to circulate throughout the contemporary imagination with the same intensity, ubiquity and variety as in previous eras.

'Death Denial' and the Absent Corpse

However, despite the apparent omnipresence of such mediated corpses, it is possible for those living in the so-called 'first-world' to go their whole lives without encountering a single dead body, if so desired (Elam & Pielak, 6; Gorer, 172; Taussig, 310). This physical occlusion of corpses from public spaces is a relatively recent phenomenon. Developments in medical technology and sanitary practice throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to reductions in mortality, particularly in urban centres (Mooney, 54; Jay, 167), therein decreasing casual opportunities for necro-corporeal encounters. Attended by physicians rather than priests, the de-ritualised, increasingly secular dead and dying body became the

subject of medical regulations and technical procedures such as cremation and embalming. At the same time, the construction of new social spaces such as the hospice and the funeral parlour transferred the body outside of the family home into hidden and heavily regulated institutional spaces (Sherman, 27). As a result of these social, technical and institutional developments, the corpse has gradually disappeared as a regular feature of public life in the Western world. Established during the early – twentieth century, such concealment continues to this day, facilitated by the corpse's ongoing "spatial and social segregation" (Timmermans, 11) in which "experts alone, scientists, forensic specialists [and] death-care professionals are the only ones qualified to view the dead for any extended period of time" (Elam and Pielak, xvi). In the same way as twentieth-century society "banished death" (Aries 1980, 560), today "we exile and annihilate the corpse" (Schwartz, 106)

This occlusion of the corpse is often conceptualised as an indicative feature of the wider cultural phenomenon of 'death denial' (Aries 1974, 47; Foltyn 2008, 163; Kundu, 112), which — according to dominant thinkers in death studies such as Gorer (173) and Aries (1980, 13) — typifies twentieth-century attitudes to death. Within such a reading, "the refusal to see the corpse [is] not a denial of physical individuality but a denial of physical death" (Aries 1980, 171–172). And yet, it is necessary to note that the corpse is not only occluded *alongside* death, but also *by* death. That is to say, the corpse is regularly read (in both literature and criticism) solely as a signifier of death (Sobchack, 187; Elam & Pielak, 3), thereby overlooking its properties as a material subject in and of itself.

<u>Materiality Denial</u>

Whilst it is undoubtedly true that death constitutes a major component of the corpse's symbolic resonance, there is an extent to which this definitive attachment prohibits a fuller

investigation into the subject itself. The teleological conception of death is, after all, an anthropocentric construct which circumscribes vitality within a narrowly human frame of reference (Braidotti, 132; Webb & Webb, 211–212). But what is death for one subject is life for another, and the corpse's 'necro-ecology' constitutes a veritable breeding ground of bacterial, fungal and micro-organic vitality (Bezan, 199). Furthermore, as Edwards argues via Agamben, the integrity of *bios* — that is, the concept of human modes of life — "is defined and maintained through its ongoing exclusion of *zoe*" (18) — non-human modes of life. By primarily conceptualising the corpse as a locus of mourning and loss of *bios*, such criticism contributes to the denigration of *zoe* as ethically and ecologically significant modes of being. In this way, the thanatotic "framework of finitude" (Bezan, 192) that figures the corpse as a signifier of death and the *loss* of 'life' (anthropocentrically defined) obscures the corpse's non-human vitality and entails a host of ontological and ethical consequences (Edwards, 5). As Miller observes, this framework also infiltrates literary interpretations of corpses as figures that "concretize this understanding of death as the end-stop of both life and literary representation" (2017, 390).

Contrary to a teleological humanist mentality which relegates the corpse to an exclusive indicator of human demise, this thesis aims to examine the dead body as a figure of positive, (non)human vitality in and of itself. As such, part of the challenge of thinking the corpse as an active subject lies in the attempt to think the corpse beyond its overbearing determination as a signifier of death.

The thanatotic overdetermination of the literary corpse is aided by the fact that the figure is primarily analysed as a tangential, ancillary signifier within the context of wider examinations of death in literature. Taking into account Teodorescu's claim that

explorations of death in literature have diminished in recent years (1–2), the corpse's already marginal status in current literary academia (Elam and Pielak, xi) is compounded, effectively making the deceased body an under-explored sub-topic within an under-explored field. Furthermore, texts that do engage with death in literature such as *Death Representations in Literature: Forms and Theories* (Teodorescu, 2015), *Death in Literature* (Hakola & Kivisto, 2014), *Death in American Texts and Performances: Corpses, Ghosts and the Reanimated Dead* (Perdigao & Pizzato, 2010) *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Holland, 2000) and *Death and Representation* (Goodwin & Bronfen, 1993)[6] regularly reduce the corpse to a material manifestation of death itself.

As an illustrative example we might consider how, in Pedigao and Pizzato's text, the corpse suffers from its figurative comparison with ghosts and modes of reanimation. Whereas a degree of post-mortem vitality is identified through the resurrective strategies employed by ghosts (115) and monumentalisation (160–162) explored in the text's latter two sections, the corpse is left to "display the loss of the living person" (1). Here, as elsewhere, nonhuman materiality of the corpse is overshadowed by anthropocentric considerations of human absence and where this materiality *is* factored, it is framed as the "cold materiality of death" (2), rather than the active vitality of decaying matter. This kind of reductive account in which the corpse is diminished to a signifier of loss is entirely typical of analyses which consider the corpse in conjunction with death, since "death can only be represented in a visible and vigorous contrast between two states of the physical body: the body as *lived body*,

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[6] See also: *The Final Crossing: Death and Dying in Literature* (Han & Triplett, 2015) and *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* (Friedman, 1995).

intentional and animated — and the body as *corpse*, a thing of flesh unintended, inanimate,

static" (Sobchack, 186–187, original emphasis).

Therefore, it seems insufficient to simply label the contemporary disappearance of the

corpse as a cause and consequence of 'death denial'. Such a correlation replicates the

humanist tendency to reduce the corpse to its role as a signifier of death, overlooking necro-

corporeal occlusion's wider ethical and ontological ramifications. That is to say, the

thanatotic characterisation of the corpse disregards its propensity to not only stage a

confrontation with human mortality, but also with non-human vitalism, the animacy of

matter and the often-repressed materiality that comprises and composes the human

subject. Indeed, such an alarming encounter with the breakdown of the ontological

delineations that classically differentiate the active human subject from the passive material

object might be seen as the *trigger* of such mortal contemplation. As Kristeva puts it:

"corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this

defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of

death" (3, my emphasis).

In this regard, the corpse's material and conceptual obscuration not only participates in the

cultural logic of 'death denial', but also and indivisibly in a 'materiality denial'. Therefore,

whilst respecting the importance of contextualising the corpse's modern concealment

within changing attitudes towards death, this thesis places equal significance on its

ontological implications as a means of concealing the materiality that compromises human

sovereignty (Stommel, 333) and emphasises material entanglements (Byatt, 248). This focus

on the corpse's materiality will be revisited later.

Given the historical legacy of the obscured, institutionalised corpse, what are we to make, of its current imaginative proliferation? Is it a sign that the chokehold of 'death denial' is waning and that we live in a culture once more ready to embrace the materiality of death? After all, Perdigao claims that the heightened quantity of corpses represented in late-twentieth-century fiction indicates both a general "desire to represent materiality" (3) and a more specific need to "reasser[t] [the corpse's] materiality" (10). *Pace* Perdigao, I would argue that although there might be some mileage in such optimism (Robert & Tradii, 386) it is worth recognising that prolific representations of the corpse do not *de facto* indicate a heightened engagement with human mortality and materiality. On the contrary, such depictions might function as a means of extending this underlying resistance to material death by vilifying it as a threat to be rejected, or by disseminating and naturalising carefully curated visions of the corpse (Hakola & Kivisto, xv). That is to say, the denial of death and materiality is not limited to the erasure of the corpse but also extends to its particular symbolic management (Miller 2017, 390; Elam & Pielak, xii; Webb & Webb, 217) and the use of "aesthetic interventions to negate its 'reality' as decaying matter" (Muller, 2006) and domesticate death through interpretation (Guthke, 10).

In this regard, it is not only necessary to consider the artistic 'presence' of the corpse, but also its mode of aesthetic depiction and narrative interactions; the means by which the corpse's materiality might be softened and sanitised through beautification (Gilman, 150) or framed as a monstrous obstacle to be rejected and defeated (Hakola & Kivisto, ix). As we shall see in part one of this thesis, even texts that overtly embrace the corpse's materiality might be seen to deploy a range of 'objectification narratives' through which it might be curtailed, managed and contained.

Within this context, the contemporary corpse's 'paradoxical status' as an omnipresent absence might be understood in greater detail. Supplementing the material paucity of corpses with an aesthetic abundance, the deceased body occupies a complex 'double-position' in contemporary culture, in which the ubiquity of heavily stylised corpses makes it difficult to see them for 'what they are', allowing the dead body to hide in plain sight. Rather than subjects that testify to the inevitable triumph of death and materiality, such corpses often function as aesthetically managed signifiers that symbolically rehearse fantasies of human immortality and material conquest. "Innoculat[ing] the subject by giving him or her a small dose of what would be fatal" (Elam & Pielak, xv), the proliferation of mediated corpses entails a "death by proxy" (Penfold-Mounce, 20) that provides an illusion of necro-corporeal intimacy, whilst obscuring and disavowing the corpse's "material truth" (Schwartz, 86). Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the increasing prominence of corpses within mainstream narratives (Sobchack, 183; Perdigao, 10; Close, 9) has exacerbated this double consciousness by which the dead body is both familiarised and distanced, a tendency that has only increased according to Foltyn (2008, 154). On the one hand, then, the task before us is to estrange the corpse by drawing attention to these modes of stylisation through which it is initiated into familiar and established networks of meaning (that is, the corpse as inert object). On the other hand, it is also necessary to re-familiarise and re-contextualise an alternative vision of the corpse as a decomposing, animate multiplicity. It is in response to the contemporary corpse's paradoxical invisible omnipresence that this thesis explores the literary corpse spanning the three decades between 1987–2016.

The Contemporary Corpse

Perhaps the most notable feature that arises from a survey of the current critical work available on the literary corpse is an inclination towards historical readings. Although inferior in number to the texts concerning death in literature, it is worth noting that there are several book-length works on the literary corpse. The main publications in this regard are Erin E. Edwards' *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* (2018), Jacqueline Elam and Chase Pielak's *Corpse Encounters: An Aesthetics of Death* (2018) David Sherman's *In a Strange Room: Modernism's Corpses and Mortal Obligation* (2014), Lisa K Perdigao's *From Modernist Entombment to Postmodernist Exhumation* (2010), Susan Zimmerman's *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (2004) and Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992).[7] As demonstrated in this list, although several texts tangentially touch on the corpse's figuration in contemporary literature, the majority of texts considering the literary corpse are dedicated to historical periods prior to the twentieth century. As such, the contemporary literary corpse has yet to receive a sustained analysis of the extent and type offered here.

Given the heightened visibility of the dead body in terms of everyday encounters and the representational cultures of pre-twentieth-century Western societies, this historical bias is certainly legitimate. Consider, for example, the prominent necrotic iconography of the 'transi tombs' and 'danse macabre' of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Zimmerman, 130), the 'vanitas' and 'memento mori' of the sixteenth and seventeenth

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[7] See also: Glen Close's *Female Corpses in Crime Fiction: A Transatlantic Perspective* (2018), Brian Norman's *Dead Women Talking: Figures of Injustice in American Literature* (2013) Elizabeth Klaver's *Images of the Corpse* (2004), Yael Shapira's *Inventing the Gothic Corpse: The Thrill of Human Remains in the Eighteenth Century Novel* (2018), Mary Elizabeth Hotz's *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (2009), and Jeremy Tambling's *Becoming Posthumous: Life and Death in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2001)

centuries (Aries 1980, 327–8), the meditative graveyard poetry of the pre-Romantics (Parisot, 181) or the Victorian emphasis on dead body portraiture (Schwartz, 19).

It is not unreasonable to trace a correspondence between the greater historical visibility of corpses and their aesthetic prevalence. Indeed, Zimmerman suggests that the "proliferation of rotting corpses" (130) caused by the plague influenced the "iconographic blurring of boundaries between putrefaction and reproduction" (131) in the early modern imagination, whilst Shapira indicates that the frequent spectacularisation of the corpse in gothic fiction corresponds with its circulation as a commodity in the eighteenth century (15–16).

However, as the previous catalogue of literary corpses testifies, despite the comparative absence of 'real' corpses in our daily lives, the contemporary period appears no less enthralled by images of the fictional dead (Kundu, 101–102). Therefore, in light of this investigative discrepancy, the current thesis aims to break the comparative silence surrounding the contemporary literary corpse and argue that such a figure requires a more thorough examination.

The fact that the majority of pre-existing research on the literary corpse focuses on historical rather than contemporary representations necessarily prohibits engagement with the contemporary corpse's paradoxical position outlined above. As Elam and Pielak state "things change quickly – ideologically, legally, and technologically – in the deathcare world" (xviii). There are, however, additional factors that renders the chosen decades as a distinct period of interest for depictions of the literary corpse.

For example, critical works investigating Victorian or late modernist representations of the corpse such as Sherman (27), Edwards (3), Schwartz (15), Miller (2017, 384), Elam & Pielak (11) and Close (6) regularly examine how the institutional 'modernisation' of death is

reflected in the literature of the period. However, whilst the institutionalisation of the death industry has undoubtedly resulted in a greater estrangement from the corpse, more recently, this institutionalisation has itself received sustained and systematic critique. Classic works of social anthropology such as Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death* (1963), Geoffrey Gorer's *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (1965), Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* (1973), Phillip Aries' *The Hour of Our Death* (1980), Thomas Lynch's *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade* (1997) and Gary Laderman's *Rest in Piece: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (2003) have gradually foregrounded the potentially damaging impact of the modern dissociation with dead bodies as a matter of economic, social and environmental concern. This has led to a contemporary resurgence of 'death awareness' movements, such as 'Dying Matters' (2009–present), 'The Order of the Good Death' (2010–present), 'The Collective for Radical Death Studies' (2019–present) and 'Recompose' (2016–present), as well as the rising popularity of 'death doulas' (McVeigh, 2016), new modes of ecologically friendly disposition (Elam & Pielak, 2018) and other thanatotic cultural activities such as 'death cafés' (Miles & Corr, 2017), 'coffin clubs' and appropriations of 'Dias de las Muertos' celebrations (Cohen, 2017a). As such, the contemporary cultural landscape features increasingly visible and vocal resistance to the perceived hegemony of the medico-industrial professionalisation of death, encouraging new modes of encountering and conceptualising the corpse (Walter, 297; Sherman, 248–9n1; Elam & Pielak, 2). Although this resurgent interest in death encounters by no means necessitates that death and corpse denial no longer exerts any force within the contemporary imagination, it does indicate that we inhabit a transitionary period in which the significations and practices surrounding death and the dead body become sites of newly contested meaning.

Most influentially for this thesis, the three decades between 1987 and 2016 witness a host of unprecedented changes in biotechnological capability (Coole & Frost, 4) and ecological awareness (19) that have caused dramatic shifts in how matter is being thought in contemporary academia. Combined with the perception that postmodern discursive constructivism had resulted in political and theoretical stagnation (6), critical theorists and philosophers of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries have attempted to reconfigure traditional approaches to materiality and ontology in a movement that comes to be known as the 'new materialisms' (which shall be explored in the greater detail in the following section). As a result, this period oversees a concentrated anxiety over the human-material relations embodied and problematised by the corpse's ontological liminality. Therefore, an exploration of literary representations of the corpse during this period becomes a meaningful way of mapping how literary texts represent, react and adapt to these same conditions that inspire the new materialisms. At the same time, it becomes possible to see the potential impact that these parallel developments have on one another, to read literature through the new materialisms and read the new materialisms through literature.

New Materialisms and the Corpse

However, this thesis' interest in the new materialisms is far from purely historical. Rather, its intended original contribution to knowledge primarily lies in providing a specifically new materialist analysis of the corpse that recognises its vital capacities, whilst allowing the corpse to crystallise a particular vision of the new materialism.

As considered previously, the corpse functions as a site that viscerally articulates non-human vitalism and stages a confrontation with ontological deconstruction, which — as will

be explored later — characterises the new materialism. Indeed, the impact of the new materialisms on current figurations of the corpse can already be seen in a variety of disciplines, including political theory (Mbembe, 2003; Verdery, 1999; Uhall, 2019), human geography (Young and Light, 2012) social archaeology (Sorensen, 2010; Tung, 2014), material culture studies (Williams, 2004) and social anthropology (Harper, 2010). As Young and Light put it, this interdisciplinary trend is part of an ongoing attempt to "challeng[e] the conceptualisation of the corpse as 'merely' material remains, stripped of agency, identity and self" and provide a "consideration [of] their potential mobility and agency" (137).

It seems surprising, therefore, that despite the demonstrative utility of the corpse within this theoretical strand it has received little critical attention within the humanities, particularly literary studies. To date, Erin E. Edwards' *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* (2018) is the only book-length work analysing the literary corpse from a new materialist perspective. In this text, Edwards investigates how fictional depictions of the corpse foreground practices by which particular social groups are 'de-humanised', looking not to retrieve this 'lost' humanity but "to problematize the categorical privileging that has made such dehumanization possible" (Edwards, 2). Essentially, Edwards' text adopts a posthumanist perspective to exploit the critical opportunity afforded by dehumanising practices to expose the violence inherent within the construction of 'the human' as an ontological category. In doing so, she draws on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Bruno Latour to theorise the dead body's "corpse-power" (6) — a necrotic reconfiguration of Bennett's "thing power" (2010, xvii). Emphasising its ability to produce affects and desires, compel political action and demand ritual recognition, 'corpse-power' denotes the dead body's ability to "mov[e] and shap[e] the living world" (Edwards, 6). And

yet, as we shall see, this corpse power cannot be considered as entirely separate from human agency but rather irreducibly entangled within it.

Despite the productive affinities between Edwards' work and the current project, as evidenced in the book's title, *Modernism's Corpses* takes the literature of a very different period — the early-twentieth-century — as its subject of study, analysing texts that range from 1919 to 1936. Therefore, as explored previously, the technological, political and economic context of the contemporary corpse demand a reading of its literary import that necessarily diverges from Edwards' own.

Whilst it would be somewhat inaccurate to claim that the current project has been *inspired* by Edwards' work — *Modernism's Corpses* being recently published in 2018, when this thesis was in its third year of research — it has undoubtedly proved immensely informative and influential in constructing and refining the arguments presented herein. Indeed, many of the core principles that ground this thesis can be found illuminatingly articulated in *Modernism's Corpses*. As such, Edwards' text will recur throughout the thesis as a touchstone with which to ground, verify or distinguish my own arguments.

What this preliminary overview of the critical literature reveals, then, is a deficit of texts that provide a sustained investigation into the corpse's productive qualities within literature. The majority of theory and analysis on the literary role of corpses only engage with the figure peripherally in a manner that neglects its animate qualities. Where such critique *is* undertaken it is primarily oriented towards historical depictions of the corpse, retains an anthropocentric perspective or engages with cadaverous animation as a quality to be resisted rather than embraced. It therefore appears that a new materialist inspired evaluation of the contemporary corpse is both timely and necessary.

Having considered some of the features that impact the corpse's figuration in the contemporary imagination, I will now move on to consider the new materialisms in some detail. The following section considers the general features of the new materialism, lays out this thesis' position within the wider intellectual landscape and explores how this critical position manifests in its approach to literature.

The New Materialisms

Towards the end of the twentieth century, anxieties surrounding increasing rates of digitisation, environmental degradation, genetic manipulation, techno-scientific developments and advancements in the field of quantum mechanics necessitated a radical re-evaluation of conventional models of materialism. With postclassical physics and life sciences affirming the potency of matter independent of the human subject (Coole & Frost, 15–16) "contemporary materialism had to be redefined in the light of recent scientific insights" (Dolphijn & Tuin, 20). As a result, traditional notions of Cartesian, dialectic and historical materialism appeared too mechanistic, teleological or deterministic (Frost, 71; Dolphin & Tuin, 96) to remain credible. Moreover, the humanist anthropocentrism entrenched by these traditional materialist approaches became unsustainable in an intellectual environment freshly liberated from notions of the human subject "and its considerable metaphysical baggage" (Calarco, 15). Contemporaneous leaps in biochemical engineering additionally foregrounded concerns over genetic experimentation, bodily control and human manipulation of the material environment (Coole & Frost, 17), the extreme consequences of which became alarmingly apparent in the "radical reality" (Sullivan, 285) of the Anthropocene. All this is to say that the end of the twentieth century presented a stark paradox, a moment in which the limits of human agency seemed to

simultaneously shrink and explode. At the point when the technologically enabled human subject never seemed more capable of shaping himself[8] and the world he lived in, the value, wisdom and ultimate possibility of acting as an autonomous, ecologically isolated subject fell into disrepute.

Critiquing the contemporaneous intellectual landscape as excessively constructivist and idealistic (Breu, 12–13), thinkers such as Manuel DeLanda, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour (Dolphijn & Tuin, 93) argued that critical theory of the late-twentieth century "strip[ped] the world of any ontological or agential status" (Grusin, xi) by "privileg[ing] language, discourse, culture and values" (Coole & Frost, 2010, 3). Growing in popularity and number, these thinkers set out to provide a remedial counterpoint to the presumption of the subject's socio-cultural inscription, instead embarking upon a reconsideration of the determinate role of material forces such as bodies, ecologies and inorganic assemblages. Positioning themselves in contradistinction to the constructivism of the 'cultural' and 'linguistic turn', this loose affiliation of philosophers, scientists and cultural theorists turned their attention to a re-empowerment of materiality independent of the human (Dolphijn & Tuin, 93). Within a crucible of constructivism, this potent mixture of scientific, environmental and intellectual uncertainty gave rise to the 'new materialisms'.

In response to the conditions and challenges outlined above, the recent 'material turn' in critical theory has generated a plethora of innovative philosophical and theoretical interventions into 'the problem of matter'. Prominent examples of these new approaches include (but are not limited to) speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, actor-network

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[8] The masculine pronoun is adopted throughout the thesis when referring to the humanist subject, in recognition of Rosi Braidotti's observation that "[h]umanity is very much a male of the species" (24)

theory, thing theory, posthumanism, affect theory, material feminism and material eco-criticism. Given the diverse variety of perspectives, methodologies and objectives guiding these different fields that constitute the umbrella term 'new materialisms', it is, of course, impossible to engage with each of these perspectives in a single thesis. Nevertheless, this project eschews pursuing a particular new materialist sub-discipline to showcase the versatility of the corpse as an imaginative figure and conceptual tool for rethinking materiality. Additionally, I am acutely aware of the need to avoid the kind of conceptual parochialisms that might undermine the new materialisms' beneficial "transversality…[that] cuts across scholarly disciplines" (Dolpijn & Tuin, 101, sic). Employing such limitations not only risks sacrificing one of the material turn's key advantages, but also might impede this thesis' ability to deploy a variety of new materialist approaches as the literary texts demand. Therefore, although there are — regrettably — a number of interesting and relevant modes of new materialism which necessarily go unpursued, throughout the thesis I will be drawing on a number of schools of thought including thing theory, material eco-criticism, hauntology and critical posthumanism. This is done in the hope that those approaches that are underrepresented in the present study will certainly make worthwhile subjects for future research into the corpse's new materialist potential.

In lieu of a sub-disciplinary focus, this thesis considers the significance of the literary corpse in relation to several prevalent concerns that consistently recur within new materialist analysis. Though any attempt to accurately reconcile the manifold perspectives on offer within the new materialisms is necessarily flawed, we might consider the general affinities identified by Christopher Breu in his review article 'Why Materialisms Matter' (2016) as a useful starting point. Chief amongst these common threads is a penchant for ontologically oriented deconstructivism "in which oppositions between nature and culture, body and

mind, animal and human, discourse and materiality, and observer and observed are undone" (18). Exploring the repercussions and interrogating the validity of these traditional ontological boundaries that demarcate the world into particular subsections, new materialist analyses regularly expose how such divisions often entail hierarchical stratifications that privilege one conceptual term — usually that relating to the human — above and beyond the other. In response, new materialists tend to advocate a "flat ontology" (Bryant, 32) which affirms that these ontological visions don't truly 'matter' — in that they no longer enjoy legitimation through a coherent empirical foundation — whilst at the same time recognising that within another sense they very much *do* 'matter' — in that they continue to be of immense social and political importance. As Levi Bryant pithily observes, for the new materialists "all objects…equally exist while they do not exist equally" (19).

Another common feature identified by Breu is that the new materialist collapse of ontological categories "tends to foreground the interaction of the discursive and more recalcitrant materialities" (18). That is to say, rather than holding language and matter in opposition, new materialism inclines towards "material-discursive" (Barad 2003, 810) or "material-semiotic" (Haraway 1988, 595) encounters in which discourse and matter are irrevocably entwined in a continuous becoming. As we shall see, the particularities and expressions of 'material discursivity' often change depending on the sub-disciplinary context in which they appear, pluralising the role of language and literature within the new materialisms.

The final trend significant for this study is how "much new materialism emphasizes the agency of matter both as it intertwines with but also exceeds human agency" (Breu, 18). As

critics such Frost (70), Bowden (60) and Sullivan have noted, conceptualising matter beyond the subject/object divide often culminates in a desire to "emphasize above all the agentic capacities of matter in many forms and not just the human will" (Sullivan 2016, 289). As such, the new materialisms attempt to de-couple subject-status from the strictly human and rethink the relationship between the individual and his environment as a collaborative endeavour, a "*distributive* agency" (Bennet 2010, 21) that respects the dynamic vitality of materiality, spanning human and non-human subjects.

In relation to the corpse, then, these trends raise a variety of interesting and relevant questions. How might the corpse's status as an indeterminate 'human object' that entangles organic, technological and cultural entities (Schwartz, 24) facilitate such ontological de-stratifications? What form does the corpse's agency take? And, how does its particular 'corpse power' manifest through material-discursive entanglements? Although, at times, this thesis will be drawing on specific theorists and sub-genres within the wider new materialist cannon, it is these overarching concerns surrounding ontological deconstruction, the materiality of language and non-human agency that the current work looks to address.

Preliminarily, it is worth noting that although few texts directly analyse the corpse through a new materialist lens, much of the groundwork has already been cleared by the new materialisms' fundamental destabilisation of the ontological boundaries that have traditionally separated life and death. In doing so, new materialism's reminder that "death is a burgeoning of life by other means" (Cohen 2017b, 381) provides a remedial counter-balance to anthropocentric models of death which — as we have seen — continue to dominate literary studies on the topic.

Critics such as Braidotti (114–5), Mbembe (40), Hinton (236) and Morton (2017, 44–45) have examined various forms of political, psychological and social 'death', foregrounding "the difficulties in defining the exact limits between life and death" (Hakola and Kivisto, xiv) in the process. At the same time, some new materialist thinkers have responded to environmental catastrophe and commodity culture by contemplating the extension of ethical practices to "non-living beings" such as "earth, air, water, sky" (Ziarek, 24). Advancing such imperatives one step further many new materialists adopt a Deleuzian vitalist philosophy to extend a heightened sensitivity to the various forms of non-human life teeming within both organic and inorganic matter that had previously been considered 'inert' (Bezan, 194; Thacker 2010, 26). "Articulat[ing] the elusive idea of a materiality that is *itself* heterogenous, itself a differential of intensities, itself a life" (Bennett 2010, 57), such a move reconceptualises the boundaries between life and death by uprooting the concept of life "from its moorings in the physiological and organic" (53) and acknowledging emergent vitalisms within post-mortem subjects or entities that had never previously been considered 'alive' in the first place (Grosz, 150). Such a sensibility has obvious applications for considering the multiple forms of bacterial, cellular and mineral life that are always blossoming within - and as - the corpse during the processes of decomposition and decay.

Such new materialist accounts of death exploit the indeterminacy of pre-existing divisions between life and death and "erode the boundary between vitalism and mortalism in order to position the human along an embodied continuum of newly vivified things" (Edwards, 5). In doing so, they lay the foundations for thinking the corpse as an entity burgeoning with newly elevated models of posthuman, postmortem life, whilst at the same time as a model for re-thinking the contingent materiality that always already permeates pre-mortem existence.

Cautious Materialism

To clarify the current project's position within this wider intellectual landscape, it is worth noting the extent to which it resists certain articulations of the new materialism. There is, I think, a troubling tendency for certain strands of new materialism to slip into naïve realist terrain in their enthusiasm to "return to objects, to things in themselves" (Clemens, 57) and break "through the wall...which separated thought from the great outdoors, the eternal in-itself, whose being is indifferent to whether or not it is thought" (Meillassoux 2008a, 63). Whilst, a serious consideration of the role of 'noumena' in contemporary philosophical and critical thought is certainly desirable, some schools of thought — particularly speculative materialism — ultimately efface the 'otherness' of the noumenal in their attempts to do so.

Turning Kantian 'correlationism' on its head and radically embracing the 'principle of facticity',[9] Meillassoux's speculative materialism aims to "show why thought, far from experiencing its intrinsic *limits* through facticity, experiences rather its *knowledge* of the absolute through facticity", thereby conceptualising facticity as "not the inaccessibility of the absolute but the unveiling of the in-itself and the eternal property of what it is" (52). Peter Hallward provides a cogent summary of the complex ramifications of Meillasoux's conceptual move (2011); however, for our purposes, a sufficient gloss might be that speculative materialism interprets the non-human quality of noumena as its radical contingency, a quality that is legitimately perceptible by the human subject. As the prominent Object-Oriented-Ontologist Graham Harman identifies, Meillassoux's approach contains a dangerous tendency towards anthropocentrism as "for speculative materialism

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[9] Although Meillassoux abstains from providing a definition of his concept of 'facticity' in *After Finitude*, he subsequently defines it as "the impossibility of providing an ultimate ground for the existence of any being" (2008b, 8).

...knowledge is no longer finite. Humans are capable of the absolute; any qualities that can be mathematized are primary qualities that can be known absolutely, with no dark residue lying behind them" (2011, 172).

However, this mode of thinking is not entirely limited to speculative materialism, but also recurs in other formulations of human-nonhuman interactions. For example, Karan Barad's 'agential realism' similarly proffers a "reconceptualization of materiality…[that] makes it possible to take the empirical world seriously once again, but this time with the understanding that the objective referent is phenomena, not the seeming 'immediately given-ness' of the object world" (2007, 152). Likewise, Bill Brown — via Cornelius Castoriadis — advocates "understanding materiality as a materiality effect" (2001, 8). In the same way, Levi Bryant asks "if the question of ontology now becomes the question, 'what is being *for us*' it follows that there can be no question of what being might be *as such*, for we have resolved to treat being only in terms of our access to being such that what being might be apart from *our* access to being now becomes an entirely meaningless question" (35). Within such philosophies, therefore, the question at stake is less about whether the human has access to the noumenal, than whether or not the noumenal is worth paying any attention to whatsoever. That is, it recalibrates the meaning of the 'real' to have always been phenomena rather than noumena.

However, I find myself incredibly suspicious of this move. For one thing, it could all too easily be construed as a hubristic claim that nothing is beyond human comprehension, or perhaps nothing *worth knowing* is beyond human comprehension. Surely, there are things beyond human contact and thought that are nevertheless 'existent' and worth attempting

to think about, even if such thought is nothing more than an inherently flawed ethical gesture? (Connolly, 400)

Perhaps more problematically, the banishment of the noumenal to insignificance seems to dismiss the utility of recognising the epistemological limitations of the human and the fact that such a recognition does not necessarily advocate an indifference to that which is outside the human, but might actually form an impetus for our continued ethical engagement. As Bill Brown notes via Adorno "accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such" (2004, 12).[10] The futility of absolute knowledge does not necessarily mean that the *attempt* to envision reality beyond ourselves lacks value. Rather, it denies the idea of there being a teleological endpoint at which knowledge can be achieved and maintains an ever-present vigilance that forbids us from taking our own attempts to engage with the world as sovereign doctrine.

The issue of the human's capacity to epistemologically access the material world remains an involved and ongoing challenge for new materialist scholarship, extending beyond the aforementioned antipathy between object-oriented-ontology and speculative materialism. Consider, for example, how the strategic utility of Morton's 'hyperobjects' resides in their ability to make "the gap between phenomenon and thing…disturbingly visible" (2013, 2), whereas Bennett's vital materialism advocates a "methodological naivete" (2010, 17) that rejects such a gap to better "cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality" (14).[11] Similar methodological divergences can be identified in debates surrounding the critical utility of

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[10]In relation to the corpse, we might want to consider Edwards' instructive reformulation of Brown's statement: "accepting the otherness of the corpse is the condition for accepting an array of differences that yield a more expansive understanding of life" (Edwards, 33)

[11] The tension between these outlooks is neatly documented in Bennett's response essay 'Systems and Things' (2012)

anthropomorphism within material eco-criticism. Whilst theorists such as Iovino and Oppermann, advocate anthropomorphism as a critical "'dis-anthropocentric' stratagem meant to reveal the similarities and symmetries existing between humans and nonhumans" (2014, 8), others frame such strategies as "naïve and quaint, a sign of charming delusion" (Oerlemens, 68) "allied to anthropocentrism" (Daston & Mitman, 4) or even liken them to "racist slurs and homophobic phrases" (Estok 2014, 133).[12] Whilst these broad theoretical discussions regarding the epistemic accessibility of the material world are by no means the main topic of this thesis, its analysis of the intellectual and symbolic significance of the literary corpse is certainly implicated in and advantageous to such debates. As we shall see, the corpse's strategic utility for new materialist analysis lies precisely in its capacity to *simultaneously* induce a contemplation of material vitality and signify the epistemic limits of anthropic thought, a quality that it might be seen to share with the literary medium.

Bearing these concerns in mind, the spirit with which I am engaging the new materialisms, here, might be construed as one of genuine interest mingled with cautious observation. That is, while I endorse the need to re-approach the material world and 'realism' in general and advocate the ethical advantages of considering non-human agency, I am also cautious about the dangers of inadvertently reverting to positivist assumptions about the material world.

This particular orientation might be referred to as a 'cautious materialism', which draws on the scepticism towards the acquisition of noumenal knowledge demonstrated in the object-oriented-ontology of Graham Harman (2011, 171), the critical posthumanism of Neil

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[12] For more on eco-critical debates surrounding the efficacy of anthropomorphism see Estok (2014, 139n5), and (2007, 68).

Badmington (15), the materialist media analysis of Margaret Schwartz (3) and the eco-narratology of Astrid Bracke (2018b, 226). It is this cautious 'double position' which keeps one eye on the need for material rapproachment and the other on the necessary limitations of doing so that underpins the current project's approach to materiality. As we shall see, this mode of cautious materialism is precisely what is encouraged by the corpse's paradoxical ontology as both material "becoming-earth" (Edwards, 48) and human remains.

Whilst an overview of such debates enables us to theoretically situate this thesis, it is worth noting that the current work avoids staging an in-depth evaluation or intervention into the new materialist theorists and philosophies it deploys. Maintaining a critical focus on the literary corpse, it instead explores how textual representations of the deceased body consolidate and reframe new materialist concerns within specific contexts. As we shall see, doing so enables us to utilise "practices of writing and reading…[to] push the imaginative limits of theory" by exploiting the fact that "literary worlding confronts us with the irreducible ambiguity of sharing the world with other beings, creatures, and characters, though without ipso facto sharing their worldviews" (Tischleder 2019, 134).

New Materialisms and Literature

Despite the hostility to the 'linguistic turn' demonstrated by several theorists of the new materialisms, it would be a mistake to presume that discourse and literary analysis have no place within the movement. It is important to recognise that postmodern literary and cultural analysis is not necessarily as linguistically deterministic as it is sometimes represented by new materialists such as Barad (2003, 801), Alaimo & Hekman (2), or Frow (271). Rather, as Vicki Kirby (viii–ix), Sarah Ahmed (33), Clayton Crockett (8–9), Iovino and Oppermann (2012, 463), and Clare Hemmings (556) have shown, postmodern thinkers like

Butler, Foucault and Derrida demonstrate how discourse *contributes* to the processes of materialisation rather than dictate its conditions. Likewise, the model of new materialism taken up here is not one which *rejects* the agential power of language itself in the construction of 'reality', but rather grants it "its proper place, that is, a more modest one" (Dolphijn & Tuin, 98).

The continued importance of literature within the new materialisms can be seen in its frequent inclusion within some of the discipline's most prominent theoretical works. From Jane Bennet's meditations on Kafka (2010, 7–8) and Thoreau (46), to Timothy Morton's reading of *A House is a House for Me* (2013), the role of the work of H.P. Lovecraft throughout various texts of speculative realism (Harman 2011, 171), or Actor-Network-Theory's reliance on narratological concepts and thought structures (Tischleder 2014, 29–30), literary texts regularly emerge as subjects of study within works exploring new materialist themes. Such literary texts are variously deployed to demonstrate common attitudes towards matter and the role of literature in the 'mattering' of certain life-worlds.

As indicated above, the role of literary analysis within the wider new materialist project is varied and, at times, contradictory. Within this context, language is often conceptualised as a 'material-discursive' phenomenon (Dolphijn & Tuin, 91–92), but the interpretation and implications of this figuration varies from theorist to theorist. To elucidate this multifaceted role, it is helpful to turn to the work of Tobias Skiveren, whose entry within the 'New Materialism Almanac'[13], identifies two orientations towards literature within new materialisms (Literature, 2018).[14] The first of these 'literary materialisms' figures an affinity

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[13] The New Materialist Almanac was constructed as part of the COST Action sponsored project 'New Materialism: Networking European Scholarship on How Matter Comes to Matter'

[14] The different approaches in question are in fact heavily reminiscent of the split between Object Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism laid out by Graham Harman in 'The Road to Objects' surrounding the

between the materiality of the signifier and the materiality of the object, conceptualising the sign's resistance to definitive disclosure as a discursive manifestation of the insurmountable 'otherness' of non-human matter. From this perspective, literature — like matter — "becomes an abstruse and recalcitrant non-human actor that can never be known" (2018). Indicative of this kind of literary materialism we might consider the work of Colebrook (7), Tischleder (2019, 129), Morton (2013, 4) and Harman (2012, 200). For example, Colebrook states that "it would not only be the case that we do not know matter as it is in itself because we are only given matter by way of some mediating system (of concepts, experiential stabilities or language) but because matter 'itself' is not in itself" (7). Drawing on Derrida's concept of 'differance' and its insistence that language is not self-identical, Colebrook contests that the estranging instability of language renders immediate the radical otherness of matter itself. As Colebrook's work demonstrates, this strand of literary materialism tends to invoke post-structuralist accounts of language's epistemological resistance to manifest and exemplify the insurmountable otherness of the material world.

The second strand of literary materialism identified by Skiveren provides a very different vision in which literature constitutes "a privileged technology for rendering the somewhat abstract notions of new materialism palpable, sensible, and felt" (2018). Such readings capitalise more intensely on the materiality of language to position it as a mode through which the epistemological limits of the human might be momentarily expanded as the reader is granted imaginative access to the extra-sensory dimensions of matter, thereby

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relative 'knowability' of the non-human (171). Nevertheless, I am not locating this division within the specific sub-discipline(s) of speculative realism since, as subsequent examples demonstrate, similar criticisms and orientations can be seen to recur throughout the new materialist landscape.

imaging new models of human-material relations. Within this camp we might locate

theorists such as Barad (2003, 806), Bennett (2012, ix; 227), Brown (2015, 40*)* Bulhman et al.

(53) or Iovino and Oppermann (2014, 8). For example, the latter critics' concept of 'storied

matter' — an approach which "heeds matter not solely as it appears in texts, but as a text

itself" (6) — deploys a "human lens as a heuristic strategy aimed at reducing the (linguistic,

perceptive, and ethical) distance between the human and non-human" (2014, 8). That is to

say, by narrativising the material world, Iovino and Oppermann's extension of literary

analysis aims to diminish the 'otherness' of matter and "reveal the similarities and

symmetries existing between humans and nonhumans" (8). Such 'sensible literary

materialisms' conceptualise language as a material 'medium' capable of tactically disclosing

non-human knowledge.

In the first instance, then, literature becomes a staging ground that displays matter's

otherness and in the second instance it becomes a consolatory medium through which such

otherness is temporarily tamed. Put simply, from the former perspective, literature

articulates the *unknowability* of matter, whereas from the latter, literature becomes an

epistemological tool through which matter *can be known*. Therefore, within the new

materialisms, literature is both representation and remedy, exemplar and antidote.

In line with the 'double position' to materialist thought indicated by the corpse, this thesis

declines to dismiss either perspective outright. Without wishing to appear irresolute, I

would like to proffer that one of the main benefits of literature to the new materialisms is

its pronounced ability to perform *both* these functions at the same time. After all, to

consider language as a frictionless, transparent medium is to obscure the materiality of

language and perception itself, thereby re-iterating the same kind of anthropocentric

violence that new materialisms aim to overthrow. On the other hand, to overplay the affinity between linguistic and material recalcitrance, to consider the materiality of the sign as *identical* to the materiality of the referent, simply exacerbates the disconnection between human and matter that traditionally serves as the basis of human exceptionalism. Indeed, at its best, literature provides a "dual perspective that simultaneously acknowledges and disavows the difference of the nonhuman" and "enacts the struggle of imagining the other" (Tischleder, 134). It is, therefore, germane to attend to ways that language indeed operates as a privileged technology that renders sensible that which is beyond direct perception, whilst at the same time recognising the materiality that prevents the absolute disclosure of noumenal knowledge.

Therefore, the conviction underpinning this project is that the role of a conscientious literary materialism is to consider how literature manages to influence and re-attune our understanding of the material world, whilst *at the same time* retaining a sensitivity to the un-thinkability, the insurmountable otherness of the non-human. Furthermore, as we have seen, the corpse's double position as a (non)human subject provides a particularly opportune subject with which to negotiate this tenuous balance.

 It is my claim that such a move is not just beneficial for emphasising the flexible utility of language and the corpse within the new materialist imagination, but also for our conceptualisation of the new materialisms themselves. Charting possible future directions for new materialist enquiry, Christopher Breu states

> The emphasis on the collapsing of binaries in new materialism and the emphasis on the way in which materiality exceeds human access in speculative realism need to be thought together. We need a theoretical model that can both attend to the intra-

activity of entities (human and nonhuman) as well as the resistance, excess, and

recalcitrance of entities or transformation. Only by attending to both of these

dynamics can we begin to theorize the complexity of the relations between different

entities, human and otherwise.

(21)

Although we may want to quibble with Breu's assignation of these theoretical positions to

particular schools of thought,[15] the need to reconcile alternative modes of new materialist

analysis is embraced by this project's investigation in literary materialism (though I by no

means presume to provide such a definitive 'model' or robust set of principles by which

such reconciliation might be conclusively achieved).

To summarise, this section has considered the general features of the new materialism and

located this study within internal debates surrounding the possibility of non-human thought

and the role of language. Painting in broad strokes, a general divide can be witnessed

between 'sensible materialisms' that aim to re-establish the possibility and authority of

human knowledge of noumena and 'recalcitrant materialisms' that emphasise the

strangeness and unknowability of that same noumena. Whereas in the former, language

becomes a privileged medium with which to induce a wider awareness of materiality

beyond the human, in the latter, language becomes an enigmatic, resistant entity that

parallels the super-human recalcitrance of matter. In response, this thesis advocates a

middle route that acknowledges both of these capacities of language.

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[15] For example, as we have seen, the speculative materialist branch of speculative realism is one that
prioritises the accessibility, rather than recalcitrance, of non-human knowledge.

<u>Corpses and Language</u>

As demonstrated above, the value of literary and aesthetic analysis to new materialist inquiry is its capacity to simultaneously model and problematise access to non-human modes of thought. As such, I would argue that the corpse's evocation of the limits of language based on its uncertain capacity to represent a subject that is quintessentially beyond human understanding — that is, death — is well suited to such a purpose. That is to say, if "the deconstruction of the line between the living and the dead reads like that of the distinction between materiality and discourse" (Perdigao and Pizzato, 3), then the corpse might be seen to focalise such a parallel.

Many theorists have argued that fictional accounts of death and dying function as attempts to represent, and therefore render to some degree 'knowable', the ultimately unknowable state that is death (Perdigao & Pizzato, 1; Mandelson, 188; Bauman, 1992; Sherman, 5). As demonstrated in figures such as the Grim Reaper, 'King Death' or the skeletal fiddlers of the danse macabre (Guthke, 11), one of death's primary signifiers is its anthropomorphic incarnation through the corpse itself (Hakola & Kivisto, ix). And yet, whilst this might encourage interpretations of the corpse as death's (comparatively) stable and knowable material counterpart (Close, 6), the deceased body is, in itself, an ontologically and epistemologically indeterminate subject (Zimmerman, 7; Uhall, 352; Kristeva, 109), "an extraordinary body that fails to be recorded through quotidian modes of perception" (Edwards, 13). Consequently, representations of the corpse might be considered just as contested and controversial as representations of death (Mandelson, 188; Sherman, 7; Perdigao, 5; Zimmerman, 1; Russell, 17; Stommell, 336).

Drawing on this representative ambiguity, Perdigao's *Dead Bodies in Twentieth-Century American Fiction* (2010) explores how literary depictions of the corpse disclose a crisis of signification that foregrounds twentieth-century debates surrounding the relationship between discourse and matter (8). Such a reading evokes the corpse's potential to elicit and dramatize new materialist accounts of the constitutive inter-connections between matter and discourse. Although Perdigao's text does not specifically cite or engage with the new materialisms, its appeals to the "body theory" (3) of ancestral new materialists such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz illustrates its connection to this critical mode. However, it has also been noted that the text's dependency on the structuralist methodologies of Peter Brooks and Roman Jacobson occasionally results in the reification of the boundaries between matter and discourse (Robbins, 2). Whereas formalised new materialist analysis prioritises the exploration of material-discursive entanglements in a manner that enables the examination of the corpse's matter as one that signifies and its signification as one that matters, Perdigao emphasises how "the tension between the materiality of the body and the discursivity of language…are always at odds in representations of the body and, most specifically, the corpse" (3).[16]

Contrary to this emphasis on tension between the corpse as a materially existent and discursively constructed entity, Kristeva's regularly recited consideration of the corpse as an abject figure can be evoked to demonstrate the material-discursive reciprocity by which the corpse's ontological liminality manifests as and corresponds with its representational liminality. Arguing that the corpse's fundamental ontological indeterminacy between living and dead, human and matter, translates into a representational indeterminacy, Kristeva

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[16] In this sense, this thesis might be said to extend Perdigao's work theoretically, as well as historically.

theorises the dead body as a figure in which "meaning collapses" and the symbolic order gives way to the semiotic (3). From this perspective, rather than being in tension, discourse and matter align in a mutually deconstructive destabilisation.

Furthermore, the ambivalence of Kristeva's orientation towards the corpse as a figure of abjection and semiotic intrusion provides insight into how the corpse's representational resistance might be seen to parallel the wider 'double position' through which this thesis attempts to balance recalcitrant and sensible literary materialisms. According to Kristeva, the corpse's abject disruption of the symbolic order simultaneously enacts a momentary liberation from the regulatory prohibitions of patriarchal discourse (10), rather than simply codifying the dissolution of the symbolic as a threat requiring correction — as proposed in the works of Elam and Pielak (xii) and Perdigao (199). That is to say, the representational resistance of the corpse simultaneously infects and liberates language from the dominant inscriptions of conventional grammar.

By exposing the limits of conventional representational structures, the corpse produces a discursive space — which Edwards refers to as "necroglossias" (49) — that both epitomises the potential for a-normative grammar to expand our epistemological horizons *and* indexes the limits of doing so. In some scenarios, the corpse's "semiotic volatility" (Sherman, 7) is encoded as an epistemological tool, a means of expanding and recalibrating the limitations of human knowledge in order to derive a new, more 'accurate', picture of the strangeness that is material reality (Sherman, 6). In other contexts, however, the corpse's discursive ambiguity functions as an epistemological limit, a linguistic expression that telegraphs the fundamental unknowability of the material world (Edwards, 15). In doing so, its discursive representation induces a 'double position' that parallels that of the literary materialisms

considered previously. Put simply, the natural difficulty of describing the corpse within a written text stages an intensification of the fundamental problematic of non-human representation, allowing the politics of such contested representation to surface within the text.

New Materialism and the Corpse

Having reviewed some of the foundational tenets of the new materialism, it becomes clear that much of the available scholarship on the literary corpse continues to configure the "inactive and unresponsive corpse" (Sobchack, 188) as a problematically "passive, inert" (Georgieva, 162) object, primarily symbolising human loss rather than non-human agency. Indeed, even texts which provide a more sustained analysis of the corpse outside of a primarily thanatotic prism continue to figure it as an anthropocentric absence of vitality.

This de-animation of the corpse is often abetted by appeals to civil rights and 'rehumanisation agendas' aimed at empowering marginalised social groups. Such criticisms generally feature a variation of the argument that "the bodies of black people, convicts, women, the insane and the poor have been differentially treated, reminding us of the need constantly to situate reflections on our shared humanity in contexts of conquest and dispossession – as much of the corpse as of the living subject" (Posel & Gupta, 303). For example, a notable trend in scholarly evaluation of the literary corpse is the especial emphasis placed on the female cadaver. Such an emphasis is clearly an appropriate response to the correlating prominence of the female corpse throughout the history of necrotic representation (Bronfen, 3), facilitating a critical interrogation of the "cultural association between femininity and death" (Norman, 8; Bronfen, 35) and providing a necessary means of challenging the misogynist politics of "necropornographic" (Close, 31)

representation through which the violent subjugation of women is both legitimated and aestheticised (Bronfen, 59). However, this particular focus on the female corpse regularly entails a particular re-humanising agenda in which the depiction of the female cadaver becomes indicative of the material biologisation of women as "lifeless and passive" (Hotz, 62). Whilst this ontological degradation of women is certainly worth interrogating, from a new materialist perspective such readings problematically continue to re-situate a hierarchical structure based on ontological difference. That is to say, the goal of such analyses appears to be to conceptually *promote* women from the category of matter to the category of 'human', rather than to call into question the notion of ontological stratification in and of itself. Similar arguments that figure the corpse as "the privileged symbolic locus where [the] dehumanizing process is enacted" (Iuliano, 111) and aim to restore the humanity of its subjects can be witnessed in regards to the raced body (Warren, 111–112), classed body (Hotz, 41) and the homosexual body (Iuliano, 111).

In other respects, many of the texts in question analyse the corpse within the linguistically constructivist paradigm resisted by the new materialists. For example, Klaver offers a framework through which "the dead body is viewed as a textual, semiotic, discursive entity" (2004, xvi). Such considerations of the corpse as a 'discursive entity' not only effaces its crucial materiality, but also how the representational crisis of necroglossia *exceeds* the limitations of traditional discourse, demanding constant linguistic re-negotiation.

Similarly, much scholarship on the literary corpse exclusively interpret its destabilising agency as a function of discursive performativity. Thinkers such as Close (4), Norman (5), Perdigao (199), Fuss (4) and Elam & Pielak (52) continue to conceptualise the corpse itself as an inert object, whilst simultaneously identifying how aesthetic representations of the

corpse disturb any clearly conceptualised boundaries between life and death. Here, it is

exclusively the literary act which 're-animates' the otherwise inert cadaver (Perdigao, 202).

Such readings tend to overlook the reciprocity between these representational

destabilisations of life-death boundaries; how the constant material becomings of the

corpse itself similarly enact such destabilisations and the corpse's "physicality is also the

reason for its cultural power" (Schwartz, 2). Put simply, within such analyses, the complexity

of the corpse's aesthetic depiction is emphasised at the *expense* of the complexity of the

corpse as a material subject and any agency the corpse might be seen to demonstrate is

swiftly ascribed to the performative powers of discourse.

Corpse as Threshold

In response to this consistent de-animation of the corpse, a new materialist reading of the

dead body's non-human agency is certainly necessary and desirable. And yet, new

materialist interpretations of the corpse (rare as they are [Uhall, 352]) are not without their

problems either. While the corpse's intermediary ontological position "located somewhere

between the status of (former) person and subject, on the one hand, and decomposing

organic matter, on the other" (Close, 14) is regularly cited, criticism that extends a new

materialist analysis to the literary corpse often overlooks the problematic limitations

indicated by this liminality. Consequently, such tokenistic gestures towards the corpse's

residual anthropic qualities are at times accompanied by an excessive faith in the figure's

capacity to non-problematically impart non-human knowledge, what Schwartz identifies as

a "kernel of the real" (109). In such readings, the corpse demonstrates the "inhuman reality

of the body" (Cohen 2017b, 390) and provides a window into "disanthropocentrism: a

sweep in which an environmental justice may flourish, with its attention to lived human

existence, as well as the vibrant matter, dark ecologies, and object orientations that are so much a part of the new materialism" (382–383, sic).

Whilst new materialist orientations to the corpse outside of literary studies recognise the ambivalence by which "we cannot simply celebrate the biological or ecological productivity of the corpse, and yet that very productivity overwhelms or surpasses our grief in its very elaboration" (Uhall, 351), the eagerness with which much contemporary theory embraces the deceased body as "an expression of our ultimate shared materiality with the non-human world" (Marland, 80) tends to obscure this duality. Whilst this tactical elision of the corpse's residual anthropic propensities is certainly understandable, laudable even, it might be seen to simplify the cultural, affective and interpretive responses that the deceased human body demands (and, indeed, mark it as such a strategic site of enquiry in the first place). More problematic still, such valorisation of the corpse as a site of nonproblematic communion between human and non-human worlds entails an overinvestment in its capacity to function as a threshold of epistemic access to the non-human that enables us to "overcome our imagined isolation from other species" (Miller 2017, 391) and the "imagining [of] what is impossible to think"(Bezan, 192). Although this overdetermination of the corpse as a non-human threshold is at times beneficial it nevertheless requires serious critical attention.

Whilst it is beyond the remit of this introduction to provide a definitive explanation of this tendency towards excessive affirmation within currently existing new materialist accounts of the literary corpse, it is possible to speculate several potential causes.

Firstly, as Rogowska-Stangret observes, new materialisms' corporeal cartographies tend to follow Grosz' approach to corporeality that "concentrates on the zones of proximity between the body and the world" (64) by embracing an "inclusive theory of the body" (62)

that emphasises somatic materiality to conceptualise the body as a 'threshold' connecting human and non-human subjects. Within such a perspective, the body becomes a "radically open" space that performs "the movement of turning outside in and inside out…the elsewhere [is] incorporated into corpo*reality* and the exclusions are immanent to it" (63). In privileging the body as a site of intimate contact disclosing material knowledge, it is not difficult to see how the ostensive materiality of the *dead* body might become interpreted as a similar bastion of non-human contact. Appropriating the rhetoric of speculative materialism, if the aim of philosophy is to escape into the "great outdoors" (Meillassoux 2008a, 7) of non-human knowledge, the new materialist privileging of corporeality conceivably situates the corpse as the threshold through which such an escape occurs.

Secondly, the few new materialist analyses of the literary corpse available tend to conspire around the concerns of material ecocriticism and zombie studies. As such, the enthusiastic embrace of the corpse as non-human — rather than (non)human — subject might also be considered the product of spatial limitations and topical interest. After all, there are currently no book-length studies on material eco-criticism and the corpse, nor on the intersection of new materialism and zombie studies. Consequently, the demands of the journal article format necessarily impose certain limitations on the degree to which corpses might be explored or nuanced within such articles (sophisticated and illuminating as they are).[17]

In addition, zombie studies' primary subject of analysis is specifically the 'reanimated corpse', a particularly complex figuration which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter

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[17] It is worth noting that there is a book-length collection on zombies and the posthuman (Christie and Lauro, 2011). However, as a collection rather than a unified work, similar limitations apply in regards to chapter length.

3. In such instances, the supernatural quality of the reanimated corpse makes it less recognisably human, despite its formal resemblance, potentially encouraging the minimisation of its anthropic connotations. Likewise, material eco-criticism's topical interest might be seen to discourage recognitions of the corpse's anthropic qualities since its ethical imperative encourages the valorisation of the human subject's ecological connectivity. At least according to Iovino and Oppermann's definitive account, material ecocriticism "shows how deeply human agency depends on and is interlaced with the nonhuman. The political ecology regulating this landscape of blurred boundaries and hybridized agencies, where the human is always defined in relation to the nonhuman and the relationships between humans and nonhumans have political implications, is therefore necessarily and concretely a posthuman ecology" (2012, 456–7). Although giving the movement a desirable efficacy and urgency, this political interest in promoting awareness of the human subject's ecological entanglement potentially discourages the exploration of features that complicate or limit human connectivity with the non-human environment.

This perspective that whole-heartedly embraces the corpse as a symbol of human-nonhuman communion certainly has my sympathy, especially taking into account the political and theoretical valency of embracing the corpse as a counter-balance to its inert figuration within the literary imagination and the wider cultural logic of death-denial. However, in correspondence with this thesis' wider 'cautious materialism', I also feel a certain trepidation towards the extent to which an overly affirmative response to the corpse might be seen to close, and thereby occlude, the unavoidable fissures that inevitably complicate human understanding of the non-human world. As such, this thesis looks to carve out a middle path that navigates the line between unabashed negativity and overly enthused positivity. Whilst I do not claim to always navigate this boundary entirely

successfully or without occasionally lapsing into moments of necro-corporeal affirmation, it is always with one eye to retaining an appreciation of the corpse's 'double position' that this thesis is pursued.

Indeed, there is something especially uncomfortable about denoting the *human* corpse as an entirely material medium through which the non-human world might be encountered. To once more borrow Edwards' term, the image of 'corpse power' formulated in such accounts appears to be one of unbridled material activity, a dis-anthropic agency that discloses the workings of the material world in its de-centralised animation. Whilst this provides a refreshing contrast to the corpse's conceptual inertia, it does seem to overlook the enduring 'human' dimension of corpse power; the residual anthropic sensibilities and prioritisations that continues to be expressed in its affective charge, cultural significance and material form. Such a perspective seems problematically dismissive of the very different cultural and affective resonance invoked by the corpse's residual 'humanness'.

Corpse as Remains

In contrast to this excessive materialisation of 'corpse power', I turn to Margaret Schwartz' observation in *Dead Matter* that "as 'remains,' the corpse is a referential thing – it is the remains *of someone*" (4). Doing so embraces a more fluid and multifaceted concept of corpse power that remains open to its indivisible entanglement with human agency.

As Schwartz observes, in many situations much of the corpse's power is derived from its continued resemblance to a pre-existing human subject. For example, the embalmed bodies of heads of state such as Abraham Lincoln, Vladimir Lenin and Eva Peron continue to wield power as national symbols by indexing particular deceased individuals (Schwartz, 27). In

such cases, it is through explicit reference to the human subjects these bodies once were that nationalised corpses exert their power.

Similarly, as a site of mourning, much of the affective power of the corpse upon the bereaved is based upon its ability to evoke memories of the deceased subject. Indeed, the work of mourning and its attendant affects of grief, disgust, attraction and repulsion induced by the corpse orbits around prior memories and encounters with the deceased human subject it references (Schwartz, 106; Radcliffe-Brown, 154). For the bereaved, the corpse "is endowed with vestigial personality" (Gore, 2005), that often determines postmortem treatment of the body, which is regularly handled by loved ones as if "the corpse is still capable of physical and emotional feeling…Somehow, the still living are reluctant to yield the subjecthood of the other-dead to object status" (Klaver 2005, 18). Conversely, the corpse's recognisability as distinctly *human* remains can trigger "the anterior trauma of one's own death" (Elam & Pielak, 5) in the viewer, constituting a further manifestation of 'corpse power' (32–33). In such instances, it is "by projecting onto a dead body our own fears or uses [that] we animate it with a kind of being" (Lauro 2016, 151).

Therefore, contrary to the new materialist interpretations outlined above in which the corpse provides a viscerally intimate encounter with materiality and facilitates human contemplation and understanding of the non-human world, a recognition of the corpse-as-human-remains acknowledges the recursive nature of such material encounters. In this regard the corpse as subject cannot be completely dissociated from the human subject that it has recently been, since it is through their formal and compositional similarities — that is, the corpse as remains — that much of its 'corpse power' is produced.

Pluralising Corpse Power

And yet, of course, this same dynamic in which 'corpse power' involves anthropic agencies also operates in reverse, colouring apparently human activities with an unexpectedly non-human dimension. Returning to the previous consideration of critical works that primarily identified the corpse's agency as discursive, it can be observed that such texts nevertheless provide an opportunity to theorise the corpse's agency. That is to say, the attempt to recalibrate the corpse's disruptive potential as entirely discursive is not always successful and at various moments such texts (intentionally or otherwise) continue to ascribe the corpse with a certain degree of (compromised) agency. For example, although Elam and Pielak prioritise the corpse's conceptual stabilisation through its re-appropriation into the symbolic order via burial rites (x), at other times they nevertheless acknowledge the unburied corpse's generativity as "radical metamorphosis" (53) and a "process of *becoming*" (149, original emphasis). Likewise, Norman's talking dead women "insist upon the materiality of their bodies and their roles as active citizens" (16), even as such insistence is primarily expressed through discursive acts. A further example can be found in Sherman's *In a Strange Room*, in which "the dead are inert" (123) in one sense and at the same time are granted a "peculiar mode of power, an ability to transform the silence around it into an open, absolute demand, and to transform those around it" (22).

In such moments the artificial distinction between the corpse's material passivity and its performative agency seems unable to sustain itself, subtly registering the material-discursive entanglements that constitute the corpse's new materialist potential. Therefore, although traditional criticism of the literary corpse might not be said to fully *embrace* new materialist ontologies, the lingering possibility of the corpse's material agency nevertheless

emerges. These ambivalent examples of corpse power not only disrupt the ontological purity of 'human' endeavours, but also testify to the compromised nature of the corpse's agency that necessarily infuses it with a residual anthropocentrism.

The position towards the corpse as a liminal (non)human subject adopted in this thesis is one that acknowledges the above ambiguities to theorise the corpse as an entity that productively gestures towards the non-human whilst constantly indexing the limitations of such attempts at knowledge. Therefore, this thesis frames the dead body's 'corpse power' as one that is never purely extractable or divisible from that of the human. Instead, it conceptualises the corpse's postmortem agency as one inflected with, though by no means subordinate to, a host of anthropic attachments, anxieties and significations.

To clarify this position, it is helpful to briefly return to a consideration of Edwards' *The Modernist Corpse* in dialogue with David Sherman's *In a Strange Room* (2014). As kindred discussions of the modernist corpse, Sherman and Edwards' texts contain elucidating divergences and unexpected affinities through which I might map the contours of the conceptual space occupied by this particular study.

Indeed, Edwards specifically contrasts her work with that of Sherman, stating

> my project's posthumanist approach to the corpse also poses a counterpoint to David Sherman's recent *In a Strange Room*, which argues that tending to the dead is foundational both to ethical practices and the category of the human….How might we reconceptualise the vitality of nonhuman actants, objects, and environments by adopting a necrocentric perspective rather than an anthropocentric one?

> (Edwards, 14).

This reading of Sherman is certainly valid as, throughout the text, he advocates the importance of burial practices for the constitution of the human subject (11) and continuously refers to dead bodies as objects that "have no agency" (15). However, both Edwards and Sherman overlook the moments in which the concept of 'mortal obligation' appears to bestow a begrudging agency to the corpse. After all, by revealing how the ethical compulsion to perform burial rites is instilled by a host of outside forces such as social demands, public institutions and the corpse itself — that is, the impersonal forces that compel burial acts (18) — the concept of 'mortal obligation' unsettles the 'intentionality' of the act of intentional burial through which the human subject is regularly defined. In doing so, mortal obligation in fact indexes the corpse's irrevocable entanglement of human and non-human agency. The deceased body as conceptualised by Sherman certainly retains a degree of 'corpse power' but one that is also dependent on the corpse's role as ex-human remains. That is, the dead body as an agent of ethical obligation is bound to its position as a *human* corpse, since the corpses of animals, vegetables or 'inorganic' matter certainly lack the ability to exert the same degree of power in most societies (Edwards, 192; Posel & Gupta, 301).

To clarify, Edwards' criticism is certainly valid, the new materialist pedigree of Sherman's work being partial and problematic at best. *In A Strange Room* might subtly gesture towards the new materialist potency of the corpse, but it clearly retains an ethical, if not ontological, loyalty to essentialised notions of a coherently delineated human subject: "humans tend to each other's corpses; humans signify…we, in some essential sense, tend to our dead" (11). Where we might take issue with Edwards' statement, however, is the way it obscures certain uncomfortable similarities between the two works that disturb the possibility of delineating the corpse's anthropocentric and necro-centric agencies. Edwards' critique of

Sherman's 'anthropocentric' approach implies that her own 'necrocentric' account of the corpse's non-human agency is one in which this residual anthropocentrism is firmly displaced. However, as previously argued, I would seriously question the possibility of such a dissociation between the corpse's anthropocentric and necro-centric agencies, or indeed the extent to which Edward's own readings succeed in such a separation.

This is neither a criticism of Edward's work, nor the conceptual usefulness of the corpse for a new materialist study, but rather an acknowledgement of the multi-dimensional agencies that constitute 'corpse power'. To a certain extent the agency of the corpse is clearly material, the expression of non-human organisms blossoming into life. However, this agency is rendered so viscerally immediate within the corpse, precisely because it functions as *human* remains, thereby evoking an affectively laden comparative schema. A recognition that 'corpse power' simultaneously operates through both necro-centric and anthropocentric agencies is to embrace the new materialist implications of its 'double orientation' and precisely what makes it such a useful subject for the purposes of this thesis.

In this sense, 'corpse power' might be understood as a complex and indivisible entanglement of the potent material agency of the corpse-as-decomposing-matter and the affective cultural agency of the corpse-as-remains. I would argue that this undeniable entanglement between human and non-human modes of agency is precisely what makes the corpse a theoretically powerful (non)human subject. It gestures towards that which is beyond the human and our continuous inclusion within it, yet the power of this gesture is derived from its status as human remains. The power of the corpse as an ontological interface reaches beyond the human but is inextricably bound up in its humanness. It is for

this reason that I argue the corpse constitutes a particularly valuable and instructive subject for the new materialisms.

I am aware that the critique offered in which regular theorisations of the corpse are figured as excessively anthropocentric whilst the new materialist corpse is figured as not anthropocentric enough may appear unreasonably demanding or specialised. It is one, however, that I feel is worth pursuing. In order to avoid the extremes of adulation or denigration, it is useful to deal with the productive ambivalence, the complexity of the corpse as a figure that negotiates the entangled intersections and interstices of human and non-human sensibilities. To view the corpse in a manner sensitive to the human grief and loss it symbolises without falling into abject paroxysms of revulsion and despair; to view the corpse as testimony to the materiality of the human without presupposing a frictionless communion that utterly conflates the human and the non-human; these ambitions require a sensitivity to the corpse's polyvalent energies that gesture towards the material other without ever claiming fundamental identity.

 As such, my thesis contends that it is precisely this *threat* of the corpse, its liminal status as neither human nor entirely non-human — that is, its status as (non)human — that renders it such an opportune subject through which to explore literary approaches to the new materialisms. The corpse's paradoxical ontology as (non)human subject induces a confrontation with the 'double position' that characterises literary materialism's commitment to enervating the non-human whilst at the same time acknowledging the limitations of thinking the non-human through human cerebral and sensory apparatuses. Put simply, for our purposes, the symbolic power of the corpse is that its materiality is

always compromised by a certain residual 'humanness', just as all non-human thought is compromised by a human thinker.

Throughout this introduction, I hope that a certain correspondence has emerged between the corpse's 'double position' as a (non)human subject and the thesis' advocacy of a 'double position' within the new materialisms that navigates between recalcitrant and sensible materialisms. Furthermore, this double position manifests in both instances through the deployment of language and literature to represent matter. In the same way as language operates as both a privileged technology and aporetic manifestation in the new materialisms, so too does the corpse's representational resistance both gesture towards non-human materiality and index the impossibility of its epistemological attainment. It is through the corpse's tenuous translation into language via necroglossias that its double position as a (non)human subject aligns with the double position of the new materialisms. Put simply, the impossible imperative to definitively represent the corpse linguistically registers the impossible imperative of non-human thought. It is this linguistic and figurative correspondence that will be charted and explored over the course of the thesis.

Chapter Summaries

As mentioned previously, the broad aim of this thesis is to conceptualise the theoretical utility of the corpse for the new materialisms by staging a dialogue that reads the contemporary literary corpse through new materialist theory and, conversely, reads the new materialisms through the corpse. To guide such enquiry, this project explores three questions: How is the corpse's complex ontological status represented in contemporary literature? To what extent can these necro-corporeal representations facilitate a greater understanding of material vitality? And, what is the role of literature in this communicative

process? Correspondingly, the thesis has been divided into three parts, each responding to a

particular question. Simultaneously, each chapter explores a different necro-corporeal

configuration including dissection, mutilation, reanimation, preservation and

decomposition. As such, the following chapters provide a series of case studies detailing the

diverse applicability of the corpse to new materialist modes of thought and formalising its

intermediary position as an ambivalent (non)human subject that indexes the necessity, but

also the difficulty, of attaining epistemic access to the material world.

'Part One: Objectification Narratives' interrogates contemporary representations of necro-

corporeal ontology by examining two ways in which the crime genre's production of the

corpse-as-object attempts to domesticate its unruly metaphysical properties. Analysing

representative texts of forensic fiction (Patricia Cornwell's *Postmortem*) and serial killer

fiction (Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*), Part One explores the 'objectification narratives'

embedded within their representational strategies and interpretive schemas. Whilst

Postmortem utilises the process of dissection to produce the corpse as an object of forensic

knowledge, *American Psycho* utilises mutilation to produce the corpse as a commodity

object. However, in both these texts the ontological and representational liminality of the

corpse subtly subverts these objectification narratives. By following the corpse's unexpected

vitality, these initial chapters aim to read against popular objectification narratives and

consider how the corpse manifests surprising models of agency.

Chapter 1 explores the representation of forensic information and non-visual

epistemologies in Patricia Cornwell's *Postmortem* (1990) to resist the common

objectification narrative that frames forensic fiction as a subgenre that reduces the corpse

to a forensic tool. To similar ends, Chapter 2 evokes Bill Brown's concept of 'Thing Theory'

to explore how the mutilation of corpses in *American Psycho* (1991) not only reifies bodies, but conversely, provides animacy to the commodity-saturated world inhabited by Patrick Bateman.

'Part 2: Spectres of Flesh' examines and complicates the extent to which necro-corporeal representations facilitate an enhanced understanding of and engagement with the material world by exploring the corpse's dual depiction as a site of epistemic access and excess. To do so, it turns to the popular figure of the reanimated corpse, both as it appears in zombie fiction (Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*) and narratives less readily associated with the genre (Toni Morrison's *Beloved*). It considers how the figure of the zombie embodies the threat of socio-material indeterminacy, a tension exacerbated in the contemporary zombie's newly emphasised 'spectrality' that fuses the immateriality of the ghost and the corporeality of the zombie-ghoul. In doing so, the chapters in this section argue that the contemporary popularity of the reanimated corpse testifies to a desire to embrace non-human models of agency whilst simultaneously indexing such models' resistance to human comprehension.

Chapter 3 provides a broad analysis of the zombie genre, combining hauntology and new materialism to trace a particular genealogy of the zombie as a figure that conflates social and biological determinisms within a fantastic register of epistemic excess. This conflation is then grounded within a specific analysis of Colson Whitehead's novel *Zone One* (2010). Extending this figuration of the reanimated corpse as an icon of sociomaterial indeterminacy, the fourth chapter explores how the eponymous character of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*'s (1987) 'zombie-like' qualities frames the novel's, heretofore overlooked, new materialist themes.

'Part 3: Aesthetic (De)Compositions' interrogates how the politics of necro-corporeal representation focalises the tenuous role of literature in staging non-human encounters. This is achieved by exploring the literary treatment of necro-corporeal decomposition and how encounters with non-human agency are negotiated through its symbolic management. Whereas DeLillo's latest novel, *Zero K* (2016)*,* satirises attempts to efface non-human agency and transcend matter through both physical and aesthetic preservation, Crace's *Being Dead* (1999) embraces the transience of decomposition as a means of performing (non)human and romantic entanglements.

Chapter 5 explores how *Zero K*'s depiction of cryonic preservation provides a technoscientific update of the corpse's beautification, channelling a critical posthumanist critique of the transhuman desire to obtain technological immortality as well as traditional notions of aesthetic immortality. In counterpoint, Chapter 6 incorporates Stacey Alaimo's notion of 'transcorporeality' to argue that Crace's 'necromantic' figurations of the decomposing corpse articulates the ecological entanglement of material and immaterial phenomena, whilst simultaneously resisting realist claims of human-nonhuman connectivity through a 'necropoetic' discourse that entangles scientific and mythic epistemologies.

Over the course of this thesis, then, I will examine the different techniques by which the literary corpse is manifested and managed in contemporary fiction, the role of such representations in facilitating encounters with the non-human and the insights they disclose about literature's capacity to induce such encounters. Approaching a range of different necro-corporeal figurations through a variety of new materialist lenses, such an examination aims to illuminate the benefits of reading the literary corpse through the new materialisms and of reading new materialisms through the literary corpse.

PART ONE: OBJECTIFICATION NARRATIVES

Chapter 1 - Bodies of Knowledge: Dissection, Autoptical Knowledge and Necrometrics in Patricia Cornwell's *Postmortem*

"There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better"

(S.S. Van Dine, 'Twenty Rules for Detective Stories', 129)

Introduction

Part One of this thesis explores how the corpse's complex ontological status manifests in contemporary literature. Of course, the range of literary treatments of the corpse available are as varied and numerous as the texts in which they are represented, rendering attempts to definitively establish such strategies beyond the remit of any single study. As such, this thesis will focus on a particularly common mode of necro-corporeal representation that provides a distinct conceptual obstacle for the new materialisms; that is, the domestication and delimitation of the corpse's disturbingly liminal ontology through its objectification. In particular, this first part of the thesis investigates the aesthetic and narrative strategies by which the corpse's ontological destabilisation might be constrained and how such constraints are necessarily exceeded and subverted by the deceased body's ultimately irrepressible (non)human agency.

This first chapter tackles a subgenre that constitutes one of the most popular contemporary depictions of the corpse, that of forensic fiction.[18] "Explicitly focus[ing] upon the ability of the forensic detective or pathologist to read and interpret the material traces of the body", forensic fiction is a mode of detective fiction "characterized by [the] foregrounding not only

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[18] Whilst the term 'forensic' refers to any practice "pertaining to, connected with, or used in courts of law" (OED, 2019) and is used to describe a range of disciplines such as 'forensic linguistics', 'forensic archaeology' and 'digital forensics', within this chapter the term is specifically used to signify the practices and procedures of forensic pathology.

of the anatomical and medicalized body, but also the technologies of forensic detection"

(Palmer 2001, 54). This explicit foregrounding and medicalised framing of the corpse

situates forensic fiction as a particularly potent narrative space for the imaginative

construction of the dead body. It is the nature, production and interpretation of this

'forensic corpse' that will be explored in this first chapter.

Reading a subgenre widely accused of harbouring a "positivist" (Tait, 46) biologism in which

"the victim is reduced to being nothing more than a body" (Anusauskaite, 137)[19] through a

new materialist lens that emphasises scientific, social and discursive imbrication, the

present chapter aims to re-evaluate the relationship between forensic fiction and necro-

corporeal materiality. It will explore and challenge the common 'objectification narrative'

that figures the dissected corpse as an object of forensic knowledge by considering how

Patricia Cornwell's seminal novel *Postmortem* (1990) undermines popular notions of what I

will refer to as 'faux-rensic fanatacism' and 'autoptical[20] objectification'.

Mapping the 'Forensic Turn'

Since the publication of *Postmortem,* the narrative landscape of the late-twentieth and

early-twenty-first century has witnessed an explosion of forensic narratives, leading Lindsay

Steenburg to proclaim that "contemporary popular culture is experiencing a forensic turn"

(1).[21] The contours of such a turn are not difficult to delineate. Consider, for example, the

rampant serialisation of literary properties such as Jeffrey Deaver's *Lincoln Rhymes* series

(1997–2018), Kathy Reichs' *Temperance Brennan* (1997–2018), Jefferson Bass' *Body Farm*

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[19] See also: Pierson (85) and Deutsch & Cavander (45)
[20] This term, borrowed from Sue Tait (2006), has been evoked to draw attention to the visual primacy indicated in the etymology of the term 'autopsy'. Derived from the Greek 'autos' meaning 'self' and 'opsis' meaning 'sight', the term autopsy literally translates as 'to see with one's own eyes' (Klaver 2005, 19)
[21] See also: Braidotti (113)

(2006–2016), Tess Gerritsen's *Rizzoli & Isles* (2001–2017) and Karin Slaughter's *Grant County* novels (2001–2007). The subgenre has also been incorporated into the realms of literary and historical fiction with texts such as Michael Ondaatje's critically acclaimed novel *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and Bernard Knight's *Crowner John Mysteries* (1998–2012). This forensic ardour has even translated to the small screen with a slew of long–running dramas, most recognisably *CSI* (2000–2015) and its various offshoots including *CSI: Miami* (2002–2012) and *CSI: NY* (2004–2013), as well as comparable programming such as *Crossing Jordan* (2001–2007), *Silent Witness* (1996–present), *Bones* (2005–2017) and *Body of Proof* (2011– 2013).

Cornwell's work has been instrumental in the rise of this popular subgenre, with her 1990 novel *Postmortem* "signif[ying] a new branch of detective fiction, as since then 'forensic fiction' has become ubiquitous in contemporary culture" (Head, 36). Accordingly, Cornwell's first work is generally recognised as providing "the archetype of [the] genre" (Palmer 2001, 55), laying the groundwork for the distinguishing tropes, plot devices and conventions that would come to define the investigative forensic drama (Gregoriou, 144). The novel itself centres on the investigative procedures of Chief Medical Examiner Kay Scarpetta and her detective counterpart Pete Marino, as they hunt down the rapist and murderer, 'Mr Nobody', utilising a range of emergent forensic technologies such as DNA analysis, serology and spectroscopy. Whilst drawing on the broader traditions of detective fiction, it is Cornwell's emphasis on the inspection and interpretation of the dead body as a privileged site of knowledge alongside her conflation of the forensic pathologist and the detective into a singular figure (which I will hereafter refer to as the 'forensic detective') that spawns the forensic fiction genre as we know it.

While literary detectives have always deployed forensic technologies as part of their deductive apparatus (Thomas, 3), Cornwell places critical emphasis on these technologies and techniques. In doing so, the drama of postmortem investigation through inspection of the dead body and autopsy, which had previously only constituted a small part of the wider detective narrative (Whitney, 103; Plain, 13), takes centre stage within her work. It is this centralisation of the corpse as "the pivotal point of investigation" (Head, 44) and its subsequent treatment under the clinical gaze of 'autoptical' investigation that forms the recognisable kernel of forensic fiction and makes the genre of particular interest for the purposes of this thesis.

Forensic Fiction and the Corpse

The relationship between forensic fiction and current perspectives towards the corpse should not be underestimated. Critics such as Penfold-Mounce (22) and Foltyn (2008, 154–155) have gone so far as to speculate that the widespread popularity of forensic fiction and its centralisation of the deceased body has been the primary determinant in our current fascination with material death. However, as indicated in the introduction to this thesis, there are a variety of interrelated technological, political and philosophical factors that have contributed to contemporary culture's renewed interest in the deceased body. As such, it becomes necessary to situate an analysis of forensic drama within this particular context if we are to fully appreciate the outlooks and anxieties to which it both contributes and responds. That is to say, rather than a determinate cause, forensic fiction might be considered a particularly visible actant within a vast network of concerns regarding materiality, embodiment and the status of the human subject.

Nevertheless, the undeniable popularity of forensic fiction is indicative that the genre has played a key role in transmitting these concerns into the public consciousness. Permeating throughout cultural discourse, the narrative and stylistic inclinations of forensic fiction have established a framework through which dead bodies are often perceived and interpreted, constructing "a particular kind of image of the corpse….the grisly cadaver of scientific and forensic investigation" (Foltyn 2008, 154).

In this chapter, I will challenge the prevalent critical interpretation of this 'scientific cadaver' (hereafter referred to as the 'forensic corpse') as an objectified "forensic tool" (Foltyn 2008, 156; Penfold Mounce, 22–23) that places excessive faith in the truth-telling possibilities of forensic pathology and perpetuates a biologically reductive worldview (Pierson, 185). Resisting the prominent objectification narrative that forensic fiction and the aesthetic depiction of autopsy imaginatively construct the corpse as an "object of knowledge" (Foucault, 136; Angel, 16; Pierson, 187), this chapter explores the various ways in which the forensic corpse's ontology is far less stable than it first appears. Firstly, it attempts to reconstruct a loosely formalised theory of forensic fiction as a site of necro-corporeal objectification. Secondly, it investigates the extent to which forensic fiction's generic incorporation of procedural elements, unreliable narration and serial repetition of narrative formulas across multiple novels ambivalently challenge this popular objectification narrative. Afterwards, the chapter explores how *Postmortem's* narrative transition towards multi-sensory epistemologies undermine the autoptical objectification of the corpse by collapsing the boundaries between the subject and object of forensic investigation. Finally, it considers how Cornwell's text destabilises the ontological identity of the very knowledge produced by the technical transformation of the corpse into 'necrometrics'. By revealing the ontological precarity located in the very origins of forensic fiction, this chapter gestures

towards an alternative reading of the forensic corpse that resists its popular interpretation as a site of scientific objectification.

Scientific Objectification Narratives

Before deconstructing such critical narratives it is germane to explore the *form* of knowledge to which the corpse is (supposedly) subjugated. Put otherwise, if "the cadaver has become a forensic tool" (Foltyn 2008, 156; Penfold-Mounce, 22–23) then what is it a tool in service of? In the course of answering this question, I will examine popular critiques of forensic fiction's biological reductivism, the conceptual elision of corpse and/as data and its attendant demands of necro-corporeal separation. As we shall see, such interpretive constructs are crucial to understanding *Postmortem's* critical reception and interrogating how Cornwell's novel subtly exceeds these generic ascriptions.

Faux-rensic fanaticism

Conventional critiques of forensic fiction proclaim that its structural dependency on forensic methodologies, technologies and evidence "as a miraculous crime-solving substance" (Foltyn 2008, 162) that provides narrative closure and discloses 'the truth' of the crime enacts a biological reductivism. According to such criticisms, forensic fiction's enthusiasm to legitimate forensic practices as an unprecedentedly reliable means of obtaining criminal knowledge produces "an almost fanatical belief in the powers of forensic science to solve crime" (Penfold-Mounce, 21), necessarily distorting the contentious reliability of such methods and the limited horizons of the worldview they produce.

The impact of such fictions on 'real-world' interactions with death and the deceased are demonstrable. Penfold-Mounce (20) and Steenburg (104) indicate that the popularity of

such dramas has led to greater interest in the discipline and higher enrolment figures within university courses on the subject. Additionally, critics such as Goodman-Delhunty and Tait warn of the 'CSI effect' in which jurors have been known to "overestimate the value of scientific evidence" (102–4), resulting in unwarranted convictions. Such 'faux-rensic fanaticism' is based on a media culture in which forensic evidence is rendered absolute and indisputable, despite the accuracy of such technologies being regularly debated within the field.[22]

Whilst such popular misunderstandings need to be redressed, I should note that it is not only the general public that fails to distinguish between the reality of forensics and its fictive depiction (Kirby, 1). Many literary critics also elide this distinction by using their reading of forensic fiction to launch a wider assault on (what they perceive as) the monolithic "authority and positivism of forensic pathology, in which bodies yield truths because they can be measured [and] tested" (Mizejewski, 11).[23] Such readings tend to obscure the more nuanced subject positions produced by the postclassical sciences and the disciplinary practices of modern forensic pathology. In contrast, I would like to follow Steenburg's example by emphasising that forensic fiction depicts a "mediated version of forensic science" that extols "a nostalgic simulation of the unrealised promises of Enlightenment rationalism using a dynamic postmodern aesthetic" (9). That is to say, forensic fiction not only has the propensity to exaggerate the efficacy of forensic technologies, but also the claims to epistemological authority advanced by forensic practitioners. Whilst literary

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[22] For example, since 2011, the verity of fingerprint identification - long thought to be the "infallible" (Cole, 528) gold standard of forensic technology - has been reappraised in light of evidence disputing the supposed "uniqueness of human friction ridge skin" and recognition of "the notion that fingerprint examiners can be influenced by factors other than the data" (530).

[23] See also: Munt (202) and Palmer (2001, 61)

criticism is well versed in exposing the inaccuracies of the former, it is less accustomed to signalling those of the latter.

Therefore, in order to redress this reductive conflation of classical and postclassical scientific practices that exacerbates the perceived divide between the humanities and sciences, it becomes necessary to re-evaluate how scientific procedure, as well as outcome, is represented within such fictions through a new materialist lens that embraces, rather than dismisses, the 'intra-active'[24] socio-material and techno-discursive entanglements that punctuate technoscientific practice (Barad 2007, 87). By exposing the way in which uncertainty is both indexed and managed within forensic fiction, we can gain a better understanding of how — contrary to narratives of faux-rensic fanaticism — the limits of forensic knowledge are subtly articulated within these texts.

As I will argue, Patricia Cornwell's *Postmortem* provides a strategic point of inquiry into the authoritative operations of forensic fiction, simultaneously constituting the subgenre's origin and depicting the apotheosis of forensic anxiety. Produced during the infancy of new forensic technologies that radically alter the investigative method (most notably DNA analysis), *Postmortem* neatly registers the anxieties that arise alongside the judiciary application of emergent forensic technologies and the legitimation strategies through which they are fortified and naturalised. Furthermore, I would argue that this technological anxiety indicates how the procedural mechanics that permeate the forensic fiction subgenre ends up ultimately undermining the narrative operations that attempt to secure the ontological veracity of forensic knowledge.

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[24] 'Intra-action' refers to a non-essentialist theory of relations which "recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (Barad 2007, 33).

Necrometrics

Such issues surrounding the relative ontological status of forensic knowledge and its narrative representation are not peripheral, but central to our understanding of the forensic corpse. After all, despite claims that "the body is certainly objectified as a source from which different types of knowledge may be extracted" (Thacker 2004, 181) the relationship between dead bodies and forensic knowledge is not so much that of extraction and derivation as reconstruction. As Horsely and Horsely state, "by applying medical science to the description of the body, the forensic pathologist in a sense *produces* the body — both as a specific human being and as an embodiment of larger cultural anxieties" (18–19, my emphasis). In this sense, within the context of forensic fiction, forensic knowledge *is* the corpse, as "the medical cadaver must be 'manufactured' from the garden variety corpse" (Edwards, 83) and "forensic pathologists transfor[m] bodies into expert knowledge about death" (Timmermans, 24). That is to say, rather than thinking of forensic information as an ontologically distinct component that is harboured within and extracted from the corpse, we might also consider how ontologically verifiable forensic knowledge is produced through the transformation of the corpse from a material entity into abstract bio-genetic information (which I will hereafter refer to as 'necrometrics'). Shifting from the logics of 'instrumentalisation' to 'transformation', such a sensibility challenges the inherent object status of the corpse and emphasises how forensic procedures convert the corpse from an ontologically heterogeneous subject to a discretely delineated object.

Policing the Body

In order to cultivate a greater appreciation of this transformative relationship between necrometric data and the corpse, it is worth attending to some of the practices by which the

former is produced out of the latter. Within forensic fiction the production of the corpse as ontologically discrete necrometrics is predicated upon the technological separation of multiple corporeal subjects. Anusauskaite notes how forensic fiction involves an overlap of two modes of corporeal investigation, as the dead body of the victim is analysed by the pathologist in search of "traces of the body of the criminal" (136). To this we might add the body of the detective, who risks contaminating the evidence through contact over the course of their investigation. This illuminates how, in its 'original' state, the forensic corpse operates as a site of corporeal entanglement, a superposition of bodily subjectivities, which the forensic pathologist is tasked with neatly separating out into discrete entities. It is this "need to 'individuate' the absent criminal by tracing fragments of evidence, often organic bodily remnants such as blood, hair fibers, or even DNA, back to their essential and accountable origins" (Palmer 2001, 54) that structures the investigative activity of the forensic pathologist. Policing the boundaries between the bodies of the investigator, the killer and the corpse, Scarpetta's investigative authority hinges on her ability to separate life from death, killer from victim and, ultimately, subject from object through the processes of identification, reconstruction and interpretation of the dead body as necrometrics.

Most notably, the pathologist's apportioning agenda manifests in the divisionary cuts of autopsy, which speaks "to the desire to partition (the things of) the world" (Klaver 2005, 14) by partitioning the organs of the body into "discretely separated…objects" (27). However, within forensic fiction, this process is also extended and distributed amongst other emergent technologies that perform — less viscerally invasive, but nevertheless ontologically cleansing — corporeal divisions. After all, forensic fiction's social role is not constrained to a depiction of the classical forensic technology of autopsy but also involves the showcasing of emergent forensic methods. For example, within *Postmortem*, the desire

to ontologically separate the corpse's entangled corporeality is textually actualised through the processes of serology, in which the scientist literally attempts to separate the bodily fluids of the killer from those of the victim. In one scene, after Betty, the chief serologist, applies a naphthyl acid phosphate solution to a swab taken from the corpse, the colour purple "com[es] up" (118) to the surface of the paper, signifying the presence of the killer's semen. Here, forensic serology's acquisition of information about the murderer is conceptualised through the literal separation of bodies across an imagined vertical topography. By contrast, corporeal entanglement operates as a barrier to the production of forensic knowledge, as the presence of semen becomes harder to detect in the victims anal and vaginal cavities, since "her own body fluids would interfere with the tests" (119).

In a similar vein, decomposition is negatively framed as a hindrance to the reconstruction of events. One of the killer's previous victims is described as being "so decomposed there wasn't a hope in hell of finding seminal fluid" (176) and Henna Yarborough is "so bloated by decomposition, I could not tell what she looked like in life" (249). Regularly erasing crucial evidence, in *Postmortem* decomposition primarily functions as a prohibitive barrier to the successful identification of individuals and acquisition of evidence. As such, Scarpetta's role as forensic detective involves both drawing attention to the original ontological indeterminacy of the corpse as a layered palimpsest of corporeal components and resolving this indeterminacy by transforming the biologically super-positioned corpse into discretely delineated packages of necrometric data. As Horsley and Horsley note, within forensic fiction "the confrontation with decomposition must be followed by an act of composition: the pathologist is charged with bringing the narrative back from the horror of non-being and non-meaning to stability and reasonable form" (20–21). Therefore, contrary to the new materialist validation of corporeal and ontological indeterminacy, forensic fiction's necro-

corporeal translations and transformations revolve around the momentary revelation of inter-corporeal entanglements as a threat to be resolved, a barrier to be overcome and an anomaly to be corrected.

The Indeterminacy of Forensic Pathology

It is, at this point, worth re-iterating that I am in no way claiming that forensic pathology is itself an innately reductive practice, nor that it perpetuates a biologically deterministic epistemology. Rather, I would argue that Foltyn and Penfold-Mounce's claim that within forensic investigation the corpse becomes nothing more than a tool simplifies the more contextually complex manner in which forensic technologies construct the relationship between corpse and examiner (Klaver 2005, 81). Indeed, as a practice, forensic pathology demands a far more complex engagement with the entanglement of social and material factors in order to "sort out how pathology and life may have come together to constitute a lethal chain of events" (Timmermans, 262; Klaver 2005, 28) as well as an awareness of scientific contingency that signals the limits of such forms of knowledge (Timmermans, 21).

By being attentive to the literary representation of forensic fiction, the target of my critique is not so much the objectifying practices of forensic pathology or its absolute faith in the veracity of forensic science (which, as I have indicated, is a reductive reading of the discipline). Nor does it, however, necessarily abide by the orthodoxy that such fictions provide an assuredly objectifying perspective of the forensic corpse. Rather, I intend to interrogate the way in which critical appraisals of forensic fiction regularly condemn the subgenre as one in which forensic pathology operates as an objectifying practice in which necrometric data functions as an omnipotent 'silver bullet'. Although such an attitude is, doubtlessly, encouraged by the sub-genre's narrative and aesthetic conventions, I would like

to argue that such texts also provide an imaginative space in which these perspectives are undermined. That is to say, by carefully reading those moments in which the epistemological authority of the forensic sciences is exaggerated as a reassuringly stabilising foundation, we might better expose and resist the logics such a worldview perpetuates.

Postmortem's Forensic Anxiety

Having considered the claim that forensic fiction fanatically transforms the corpse into omnipotent and irrefutable biological information, I will now consider how several of its generic conventions might actually be seen to undermine such narratives. By examining *Postmortem*, the genre's literary origin, we can see how forensic fiction continues to disclose a certain anxiety surrounding the legibility of the corpse as a privileged site of decipherable knowledge.

Forensic fiction's propensity to provide narrative assurances is partly derived from its generic origins within detective fiction, a genre that often provides "popular and reassuring narratives [that] become safe spaces where cultural anxieties may be confronted, negotiated, and ultimately resolved" (Palmer 2001, 59). It is often argued that, within detective fiction "problems are resolved, ambiguities are clarified" (Mizejewski, 10) and the reader is provided with narrative assurance that justice will be restored and (more abstractly) that absolute knowledge can be derived through a series of logical processes.

On the one hand, forensic fiction might be seen to deploy forensic technologies to bolster this reassuring capacity by "diffus[ing]…the sense that science and the police are virtually infallible" (Deutsch and Cavender, 34). From such a perspective, "the work of the forensic pathologist….can be presented as a 'reinscription of order', a stay against the chaos and misrule that brought the body to the autopsy table" (Horsley & Horsely, 20) as forensic

science provides a secure point of knowledge that extends to the wider narrative structure within which it is depicted: "as a metaphorical system, forensics suggests comfort. Firmly situated within the paradigm of science, rationality, and ontology-revealing excavation" (Lucas, 219).

On the other hand, however, forensic fiction equally deploys the reassuring juridical authority of the police force to validate the practical applicability and ontological authority of the forensic sciences. Exploiting "the danger of a suspicious death [which] resides in the possibility that more such victims will be claimed" (Timmermans, 3), the subgenre tends to frame the benefits of forensic pathology as a mortal imperative. This is often achieved by conscripting the figure of the serial killer to provide an imminent time frame that both injects the narrative with a compelling sense of urgency (Gregoriou, 142) and allows forensic interpretation to become a matter of life and death (even after death has nominally occurred). As such, forensic fiction not only attempts to legitimate the judicial state apparatus through the provision of 'irrefutable' knowledge, but also draws on the social necessity of such an apparatus to validate its own importance. In just this way, the same elements that construct forensic fiction in general, and *Postmortem* in particular, as narratives of reassurance which glorify forensic knowledge also undermine this very motive. This same duality can also be seen operating through forensic fiction's distinctive incorporation of procedural elements, serial repetition and narrative voice.

For example, drawing on the subgenre's prolonged depictions of technical procedures, John Scaggs identifies forensic fiction as "a popular variant of the police procedural" (100), which is, itself, a narrative mode that offers "the reassurance that…organised and cooperative procedure will always contain the threat" (98) by placing particular emphasis on due process

and the authoritative legitimation of "the police detective as part of the state apparatus of the police force who safeguards society" (89). *Postmortem* certainly indulges this sense of comfort through procedure, repeatedly laying out forensic techniques such as fingerprint matching (54–55), the detection of seminal fluid (117–118), phase microscopy (221) and DNA analysis (318–319) in rigorous, step-by-step detail. This particular emphasis on the context in which forensic knowledge is produced is indicative that "the forensic pathologist procedural" (Scaggs, 100), is a subgenre that does not simply deploy forensic science to legitimate the judicial process, but also performs the reverse operation, reassuring its audience of forensic legitimacy by embedding the practice within authoritative structures of disciplinary governance.

Forensic fiction's use of repetition as an ambivalent gesture towards reassurance not only operates at the level of content but also in its textual and serial structure. After all, forensic fiction is markedly formulaic and predominantly circulates through serialised publication (Lucas, 210). This serialisation strategy constructs a wider reassurance that, towards the end of the novel, (almost) everything will go back to how it was, in order to secure the foundation for subsequent instalments. Indeed, in *Postmortem*'s concluding pages, Abby Turnbull informs Scarpetta "don't be surprised when you come back to find [Amburgey's] no longer in Richmond" (402), simultaneously reassuring the reader that Scarpetta will return and that her status as forensic detective has been preserved (Amburgey having previously attempted to curtail Scarpetta's legal authority). As such, not only does the "final and violent expulsion of the threat to social order" provide the audience with "a salve for the insidious nature of the threat that the killer poses in the novel" (Scaggs, 98–99), but the reader is also reassured of subsequent iterations of the same narrative dance between order and disorder.

At the same time, however, the sheer *quantity* of repetitions within the subgenre, both in terms of narrative formula and serialisation, might alternatively be seen to undermine the reassuring function of such narratives. Lucas pleasingly turns forensic fiction's comforting role on its head by framing "the formulaic crime novels of Patricia Cornwell, specifically her Scarpetta series, as a particular site of textualized trauma and repetition" (209, sic), a repetition that undermines "the apparent antidotes of textual predictability or…the science of forensics with its ontological trajectory towards wholeness, explication, and release" (Lucas, 210). Despite the forensic certainty supposedly articulated within each narrative, further reassurance is always required in a continuous play of repetitions that ultimately resist closure. Therefore, although the formulaic nature of forensic fiction might be understood as an attempt to provide a reassuringly repetitive narrative structure that cements the ontological validity of the forensic sciences, the compulsive nature of this *need* for reassurance ultimately discloses an ongoing anxiety surrounding the legitimacy of such modes of production.

A third motor of ambivalent reassurance within *Postmortem* is its dispassionate mode of narrative delivery, as Cornwell's "flinty affect strives to *manage* the horror of sexualised violence, much as does the stoic Scarpetta figure herself" (Whitney, 113, original emphasis). Head further advances this reading, claiming that "using Scarpetta as narrator enables a discursive hygiene, as the autopsies and violence are played out *through* her and her commentary, effectively purifying the narrative" (Head, 37, original emphasis). By deploying Scarpetta as an intermediary, *Postmortem* manages to circumvent the discursive horror that might puncture the comforting veil of scientific detachment that the novel constructs.

However, due to "the simultaneously official and taboo nature of forensic pathology itself" (Horsley & Horsley, 13), this relationship between discursive authority and unsettling content is not unidirectional but dialogic and Scarpetta's role as a mediator does not simply function to figure the corpse in a reassuring light, but also destabilises the integrity of her role as a narrator. Scarpetta's occupation regularly leads her to be viewed with apprehension as other characters question her motives due to the grisly nature of forensic investigation (Cornwell, 301). Within this text "the corpse itself, those who work with it and the procedures they employ…are all treated with suspicion" (Howell, 2011). Just as the forensic pathologist is deployed "to explain violent, suspicious, or unexpected deaths….the same cultural demands…tend to cause medical examiners and their work to be treated with distrust, even disgust" (Timmermans, 13).

This distrust is passed on to the reader as Scarpetta's first person perspective raises the possibility of subjective distortion in a manner that undermines the "*illusion* of reality" (Gregoriou, 53, original emphasis) that structures the text, as well as the wider genre. Although initially established as reliable — Scarpetta precisely recounts the time (3) and dates (97) of events, location (3) and even ambient temperature (15) with numerical exactitude — over the course of the novel a breach between Scarpetta and the reader starts to emerge as she becomes "no longer…sure of my judgement, my acumen, reason" (197). This breach gradually widens as the text indicates the presence of unknown factors that the first-person narrative's (supposedly) direct access to the mind of its narrator fails to disclose, such as Scarpetta's previous acquaintance with Lori Peterson (295) and her potential desire to kill Mr Nobody (332).

This uncertainty crescendos with the closing insinuation that Scarpetta may, in fact, be an unreliable narrator as her account of the final confrontation with Mr Nobody differs dramatically from Marino's official recollection: "we'd been over it at least five times. Marino wanted to argue. He didn't think it happened the way it did" (387). Despite Scarpetta's insistence on her correct perception, this conflict leaves the reader in an interpretive limbo, since, after Scarpetta herself, Marino is the novel's primary source of credible information. The clash of accounts, therefore, contests mutually exclusive concepts of reality that necessarily destabilises the credibility of previously recounted information. Therefore, whilst the first-person structure positions Scarpetta as a cleansing agent that allows the text to heighten narrative reassurance by 'purifying' unpleasant events, this same structure also destabilises the efficacy of such reassurances by subtly injecting uncertainty into the credibility of Scarpetta's narration.

Put simply, forensic fiction's dependency on procedural and formulaic features constructs an ambivalent dynamic. On the one hand, it appeals to the regulatory power of juridical authority in order to secure the legitimacy of forensic pathology. On the other hand, however, the very nature of this appeal exposes forensic pathology to the ambiguities of inspection and interpretation that formulate around the investigative process. Similarly, the compulsive need to continuously re-iterate forensic legitimacy through structural familiarity testifies to an underlying anxiety regarding such practices as models of establishing 'truth'.

This anxious ambivalence is perhaps best epitomised in Cornwell's particular invention of the 'forensic detective', which conflates the figure of the forensic pathologist with the criminal investigator. Whereas, in reality, "forensic science effectively represents a composite of interrelated, and often distinct, opportunities to support criminal

investigations" (Houk, 362) involving vast numbers of specialists including, but not limited

to, "the investigating officer, the CSI, the forensic advisor/budget holder/decision maker,

and the prosecutor" (363), Scarpetta's jurisdiction appears to cover all of these categories.

Rather than operating within her field of expertise, Cornwell's protagonist adopts a much

more hands-on role within the investigative process (Scaggs, 101; Horsley & Horsley, 2).

Scarpetta regularly attends crime scenes (4; 248), interviews next of kin (262–265), attempts

to deduce mode of entry (17; 188), motive (179; 299) and background (97) and even has a

showdown with the killer himself (381–386). Operating within a narrative scenario in which

"success depends on both science and the procedures of police investigation" (Scaggs, 101),

Scarpetta represents the intersection of the pathologist, who trades in the establishment of

biological facts, and the detective, who trades in speculation, interpretation and deduction.

Such a conflation of figures is certainly desirable from a narrative perspective, as it enables

Cornwell to focalise her depiction of forensic investigation through a single entity that

neatly unifies what might otherwise be a fractured, ensemble affair. Nevertheless, this unity

comes at a price, that of exposing the tenuous models of interpretation that potentially

undermine the practical validity of the forensic sciences.

Producing the Corpse

Having considered some of the general ways in which the generic conventions of forensic

fiction might be seen to undermine as much as it substantiates the reassuring ontological

integrity of forensic knowledge, I will now examine the technological and procedural

strategies through which such knowledge is produced within *Postmortem*. The technological

transformation of the corpse into forensic knowledge is particularly significant given the

historical context in which *Postmortem* emerges as a literary artefact. Appearing in the early days of DNA analysis, *Postmortem* registers uncertainty surrounding the legitimacy, efficacy and application of emergent forensic technologies. This uncertainty is reflected back upon established forensic technologies such as serology, microscopy and polygraphic analysis as the novel continuously draws attention to the contingency with which they are utilised and interpreted at both a surface and structural level. For example, Scarpetta actively discusses the accuracy and legal admissibility of forensic technologies such as lie detectors (173) and DNA analysis (164), registering the scepticism with which these devices were viewed within the novel's social and historical context.

These concerns over accuracy and admissibility are clearly raised in order to educate the reader and signify a political agenda advocating the advancement of forensic sciences. In one exchange, Betty states that "DNA's not worth a tinker's damn unless they catch *somebody*" (original emphasis), to which Scarpetta responds "not until we reach the enlightened age where genetic prints are stored in a central data base like fingerprint records" (117). Such dialogue (none too subtly) denotes a wish to promote the application of genetic analysis, but at the same time registers a certain doubt over the legitimacy of these technologies, as Betty's comment echoes the continued need for traditional policework. As such, Cornwell's novel "both reflect[s] and compensate[s] for contemporary cultural anxieties concerning the relation of new technologies of forensic detection to larger questions of social order, identity, gender and materiality" (Palmer 2001, 60).

Although technological advances have obviously increased the effectivity of the forensic sciences since Cornwell's first novel, *Postmortem* reminds us of the fundamental questions surrounding the procurement, interpretation and veracity of forensic evidence that the

contemporary zeal for postmortem investigation potentially obscures. Punctuated by concerns over forensic contamination, the misappropriation of evidence and its scientific verifiability, *Postmortem* reveals the uncertainty that underpins scientific practices of which we have become all too certain in recent years.

Likewise, forensic fiction's structural dependency on procedural progression demands the regular exposure of technological inefficacy. Since the subgenre's plot development is generally dictated by the succession of procedural elements, a *disruption* to said procedure becomes necessary for the production of narrative suspense and intrigue. As Mizejewski notes, "the discourse of medical forensics operates in crucial ways in these novels: it shapes plotlines by providing clues and leads" (6), and yet, for the sake of narrative tension, these same medical forensics also need to provide red herrings, delays and the breakdown of procedural operation. This kind of disruption to routine can undermine the credibility of forensic pathology as a legitimate means of knowledge production (Timmermans, 23). For example, within *Postmortem*, the status of the killer as a "nonsecreter" — that is, an individual whose "blood-type antigens could not be found in his other body fluids, such as saliva or semen or sweat" (Cornwell, 16) — seemingly offers up several potential lines of inquiry. This forensic information, however, ends up primarily operating as the facilitator of red herrings and investigative dead-ends that causes Scarpetta to falsely suspect Matt Peterson (92) and Bill Boltz (281). With linguistic playfulness, Cornwell delightfully utilises the killer's status as a nonsecreter as a nonsequitur.

This disruption of forensic procedure and exposure of technological inefficacy features multiple times throughout *Postmortem* as Scarpetta doubts the ability of serology to distinguish the origin of particular residue (231), and bemoans scanning electron

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microscopy's inability to differentiate between particular chemical compounds (244), the

laser's inability to distinguish between 'Borax' and 'Sunblush' leads to the false incrimination

of Matt Peterson (367) and, likewise, one of the novel's major subplots involves a

mislabelled PERK (Physical Evidence Recovery Kit) that threatens to undermine the

credibility of the evidence procured during autopsy (217–225). This latter mishap not only

challenges the credibility of such processes, but also the ontological fidelity of the collected

necrometric data itself. In these moments, Cornwell undermines the technologies and

processes through which, supposedly, concrete data is acquired, undermining the

ontological purity of the 'body-as-data' in order to craft a more suspenseful and engaging

narrative. As such, the utilisation of the novel's procedural elements to produce narrative

tension draws attention to the contingent conditions under which such evidence is

produced and interpreted. At a structural level, then, it is the tenuous (rather than absolute)

legitimacy of the acquired forensic evidence that provides narrative impetus.[25]

Autopsy in *Postmortem*

Crucially, *Postmortem*'s centralisation of emergent forensic technologies not only reveals

their tenuous legitimacy, but also brings into question existent technologies, particularly

autopsy and its accompanying 'autoptical' gaze. As we shall see, within *Postmortem* this

instability does not emerge through an outright critique of autopsy itself, but the visual

primacy that functions as its logical core. Before exploring how Cornwell's novel challenges

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[25] The narrative necessity of procedural obstruction leads this destabilisation of forensic evidence's ontological validity to recur throughout Cornwell's work. For example, in *Cruel and Unusual* (1993) and *The Body Farm* (1994), it is the villain Temple Gault's "ability to produce conflicting or irrelevant forensic evidence [that] enables him to evade the police" (Mizejewski, 13).

this visual logic, it is worthwhile considering the dynamics of autoptical objectification in more detail.

Autoptical Objectification

Autopsy's prominent figuration as a process of necro-corporeal objectification within the contemporary imagination is inextricable from its formative role in the establishment of Enlightenment models of knowledge and vision (Klaver 2004, xvi; Angel, 16). Drawing on the treatment of autopsy in the works of Foucault and Descartes, Edwards argues that the dissected cadaver not only "occupies a privileged position in Enlightenment epistemology" but also "provides a generalizable model of viewing and knowing the body whereby knowledge is best obtained through visual invasion of a passively inert other" (11–12). Solidifying the 'clinical gaze' in which the act of seeing naturalises the distinction between viewing subject and viewed object (Foucault, 136–7), autopsy equips the examiner with a disembodied transcendental perspective that allows them to explore the passively objectified corpse. Indeed, the performance of autopsy is one that seems to both demand "radically distinguishing subject from object…in order to 'violate' it" (Klaver 2005, 71) and enacts this very distinction through the administration of surgical "cuts, which sever the subject from the object" (Angel, 24). That is to say, autopsy is classically conceived as a visual technology that actualises the clinical gaze's epistemological correlation between vision and knowledge and "delineates a distinct separation of the looking subject from the looked-at object" (Klaver 2005, 84).[26]

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[26] It is worth noting that this particular interpretation of autopsy is by no means uncontested. Indeed, Klaver goes on to contest "the notion of a purely masterful, even mutilating, gaze, and the relations it would seem to beget with the object" (2005, 84)

The figuration of autopsy as a distinctly *visual* mode of objectification is compounded, particularly in forensic fiction, by a frequently noted aesthetic eroticisation. It is regularly argued that, within forensic fiction "the corpse is consistently arranged in a stylised position that is reminiscent of pornography" (Penfold-Mounce, 27–8) and, in so doing, "support[s] the normalisation and objectification processes of the gaze upon death and dead people" (27). For critics such as Foltyn (2008, 166), Penfold-Mounce (25), Tait (46), Close (86), Pierson (192) and Palmer (2001, 155) the eroticised visual grammar of forensic fiction contributes to the objectification of the corpse as a figure from which the viewer-as-voyeur is encouraged to derive sexual excitation through sensual stylisation and invasive optical penetration.[27]

Penfold-Mounce's emphasis on 'the gaze' is indicative of how the dissected corpse's visual objectification draws on both clinical and patriarchal epistemological practices. That is to say, within such objectification narratives, Foucault's clinical gaze is conflated with the 'male gaze' of feminist theory.[28] Indeed, Penfold-Mounce's concept of the 'autoptical gaze' is defined as a combination of these gazes: "the autoptical gaze is abject, voyeuristic and forensically inclined focusing on the eroticising process of the cadaver as a visual spectacle" (27). Therefore, the process of autopsy is seen to simultaneously transform the corpse into a "sexual object" (Head, 42) and an "object of knowledge" (Foucault, 136) through a combination of sexual and clinical models of visual penetration. However, within

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[27] Of course, forensic fiction's exploitation of a pornographic visual grammar does not necessarily suggest a non-problematic agreement with such sensibilities. Indeed, its status as a female dominated sub-genre often involves an ironic utilisation of such imagery in order to foreground a pervasive social misogyny. *Postmortem* itself frequently reflects on the (potentially complicitous) politics of narrative representations of sexual violence (Whitney, 96).

[28] For example, see Lucas (217-218), Munt (202), Palmer (2001, 55) etc

Postmortem the dominance of autoptical models of knowledge production are undermined as the novel gradually shifts from visual to sonic and olfactory epistemological models.

Restorative Autopsy

The aforementioned predisposition to frame autopsy as a mode of objectification both produces and is produced by an imaginative figuration of autopsy as a mode of violence, since the criminal mutilation of the corpse regularly operates within a symbolic economy of objectification (Horsley & Horsley, 8)(which the next chapter shall explore in greater detail). Such fears of autoptic violence are not without precedent, as the historical use of human dissection as a form of post-mortem punishment punctuates the practice with associations of "public humiliation, criminality, execution, morbid infection [and] body mutilation" (Klaver 2005, 9). Drawing parallels between the dismemberments of the killer and the pathologist, the autopsied body is frequently read as a victim of "the surgical strikes of rational exploration and explanation [that] leave their own interpretive trails upon the body" (Lucas, 220). Furthermore, Plain notes that, within forensic fiction "the corpse is reduced to a series of component parts, its bodily integrity more radically violated by the detective than by the criminal" (16) and such comparisons are regularly rehearsed within the critical literature on forensic fiction (Pierson, 193; Jermyn, 155; Horsley & Horsley, 16; Kundu, 108).

Although Lucas (210) and Whitney (99) identify the frequent evocation of such parallels throughout Cornwell's Scarpetta series, these comparisons between the violence of murder and the violence of autopsy are managed and minimalised by *Postmortem* as, despite being central to the plot, dissection's penetrative violence is hidden and relayed through alternative apparatuses. Lori Peterson's physical autopsy is only obliquely articulated

through a passing reference to the "small incisions" (27) made by Scarpetta. Instead, the fragmentation of Peterson's bodily form only occurs figuratively through Scarpetta and Vander's inspection of the body using laser technology through which it is *visually* "disconnected. The laser's bombardment illuminated a corner of a lip, a rash of pinpoint haemorrhages on the cheekbone, or a wing of the nose, isolating each feature" (27–28).

Similarly, Henna Yarborough's autopsy occurs between chapter transitions and the reader is only shown Scarpetta reconstructing the body post-autopsy, "suturing the last few inches of the Y incision" (274). Presenting only its final stages in which the body is placed back together, *Postmortem* frames autopsy as a reconstructive and remedial process rather than one that registers deconstructive violence (Horsely & Horsely, 19).

Indeed, the only prolonged depiction of autopsy takes place on a Jane Doe who is purely ancillary to the plot. A victim of a hit-and-run collision rather than Mr Nobody, the corpse's autopsy manages to avoid uncomfortable parallels between the penetrative operations of the detectives and the serial murderer. Furthermore, this scene is heavily framed in victim empathy as Wingo — Scarpetta's assistant — defends the woman's honour and chastises Marino for his crude jokes. The scene climaxes with Marino's deprecating comments "drowned out by the Stryker saw, which sounded like a loud dentist's drill as Wingo began cutting through the dead woman's skull. A bony dust unpleasantly drifted on the air and Marino and the trooper retreated" (214). Silencing Marino and forcing him into a temporary retreat, here, autopsy functions as a process that spares the victim's dignity, rather than compromises it. Cornwell's particular depiction of autopsy, therefore, is one which minimises the violence of such a process and hence backgrounds associations or parallels

that might be derived between the methods of investigation and those of the crime as comparable modes of objectification.

Autopsy as Visual Violence

However, this is not to insinuate that *Postmortem*'s depiction of autopsy is entirely positive. At the start of the novel, before the reader is even confronted with their first corpse, Scarpetta recounts:

> The dead are defenceless, and the violation of this woman, like the others, had only begun. I knew it would not end until Lori Peterson was turned inside out, every inch of her photographed, and all of it on display for experts, the police, attorneys, judges, and members of a jury to see. There would be thoughts, remarks about her physical attributes or lack of them. There would be sophomoric jokes and cynical asides as the victim, not the killer, went on trial, every aspect of her person and the way she lived, scrutinized, judged and, in some instances, degraded.

(10)

This opening statement appears at odds with the obscuration of autoptic violence that would minimise such comparisons between the victim's pre and post-mortem 'violation'. However, the emphasis on terms like 'photographed', 'display', 'scrutinized' and 'judged' indicates that the violation which Scarpetta fears is less to do with the physical penetrations of autopsy, than the visual penetration associated with the autoptical gaze and the body's display within a misogynistic environment. The phrase 'turned inside out' appropriates the imagery of autopsy within the context of public spectacle, thereby shifting the anxiety of dissection onto the anxiety of exhibition. That is to say, while *Postmortem* stages the traditional correspondence between the violence of murder and the violence of autopsy,

the nature of its articulation places emphasis on the autoptical gaze's visual violence, rather than dissection's physical violence. As Scarpetta states, "a violent death is a public event, and it was this facet of my profession that so rudely grated against my sensibilities" (11).

Within such a context it is autopsy and investigation, rather than autopsy and murder, that are imaginatively collapsed. The corporeal and visual violence of autopsy is backgrounded, only to re-emerge within the visual violence of the entire investigative process from detection of the body through to conviction of the killer. The 'objectifying' practices of autopsy are relocated away from acts of bodily penetration towards acts of superficial inspection, data analysis and interpretation. By extending the autoptical gaze above and beyond the process itself, Cornwell places critical emphasis upon the "external, postmortem examination of the cadaver" in which "autopsy…can be practiced without ever opening the body" (Klaver 2005, 10). Therefore, although autopsy itself enjoys a restorative role within the novel, its visual logic becomes the object of ethical and (as we shall see) epistemological critique.

Postmortem's Visual Sensibility

Despite her stated awareness of and discomfort towards visual violence, Scarpetta nevertheless regularly deploys the autoptical gaze's visual epistemology in a manner that rehearses the objectification of the corpse and the procurement of knowledge via a detached human subject. Scarpetta's thought process is primarily relayed through a visual rhetoric in which she sees a scene play out before her eyes as she comes to an understanding of events, discursively conflating visual immediacy with the procurement of knowledge.[29]

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[29] See pages (36; 42; 81; 103; 122; 139; 166; 183; 200 etc.)

This metaphorical prioritisation of vision as a model of cognition regularly operates at the *expense* of other sensory perceptions, particularly that of smell, as Cornwell manufactures an exclusionary relationship between olfaction and sight. For example, Scarpetta claims that "the morgue ha[s] a distinctive odor, the stale stench of death no amount of air deodorizer could mask. Had I been led here blindfolded, I would have known exactly where I was" (24–5). Here, it is through the *absence* of sight that smell is evoked. Likewise, the overwhelming presence of smell results in the exclusion of sight: "the odor lingered on the stairs, and when I stepped into the dazzling sunshine on the street, for a moment I was blind" (273). In these passages, Cornwell appears to depict olfaction and vision as asynchronous rather than simultaneous. As such, *Postmortem* initially appears to instil a "sense atomism" in which visual sensation is prioritised over and above other modes of sensory interaction, instilling an "absolute separation of the viewing subject and object of its conquering gaze" (Kazimierczak, 6).

During *Postmortem's* necro-corporeal encounters, the differentiation between visual and olfactory sensation becomes one of epistemological access operating along Cartesian co-ordinates as the smell of dead bodies overwhelms and disorients Scarpetta, particularly at the scene of Henna Yarborough's murder. In doing so, sight is identified with the rational processes of mind, whilst smell is associated with bodily affect: "It's almost as if I sensed it before I saw it. Like an animal senses things. And I thought I was smelling something but I wasn't sure and it only added to my confusion" (74–5).

Of course, the use of forensic technologies is heavily implicated in *Postmortem*'s visual sensibility. Scarpetta's epistemological 'visualisations', not only correspond with, but are in fact structured by, the forensic technologies that she implements. Whilst analysing Lori

Peterson's corpse under a laser, Scarpetta is depicted "channel[ling] my concentration into one thought at a time, as if I, like the laser beam, was in phase, too — all of me in sync with what I was doing, the sum of my mental energy coalesced into a single wavelength" (28). In this way, we can see how Scarpetta's epistemological operations are 'channelled' and directed into a linear direction through visual technologies.

At a deeper level, though, the use of visual technology as a mode of directing thought has profound consequences on *Postmortem*'s composition as Cornwell herself appears to have inherited an optical prioritisation from the aesthetic strategies of cinema. Discussing her decision to shift from first to third person in the novel *Blowfly*, she says "I thought these books would look better if I told them in 3rd person, more like a movie…I want the readers to feel…I want to put them in that world. And I have to feel things very intensely and see them very graphically in order to do that" (Cornwell, 2016). Whilst working within the semi-visual medium of the literary text, Cornwell's prioritisation of the cinematic as an aesthetic standard and conflation of affective response with graphical stimuli reveals the visual sensibility that underlies her writing. In this way, *Postmortem*'s initial prioritisation of visual epistemologies re-enforces an autoptical distinction between subjects and objects of knowledge that extends beyond the strict administrations of the corpse.

However, such a graphical prioritisation is nevertheless resisted by the literary medium since, in contrast to cinema or television, the 'image' produced by the literary text is mental rather than immediately sensible. At the same time, the literary text's typographic dimension literally renders sound and speech visible (a quality, which *Postmortem* exploits

to great effect).[30] As such, the sensory operations of the literary text are far more entangled

than within these other modes of visual media, undermining the 'sense atomism' that the

novel elsewhere attempts to instil. In fact, as will be explored below, it is based on the

intertwining of these responses that Scarpetta effectively operates as a detective through

the evocation of inter-corporeal empathy with her victims. Therefore, although the physical

reality of autopsy is obscured within Cornwell's text, it nevertheless addresses and exposes

the autoptical logic of visual primacy by providing a narrative space that enables the

coalescence of multi-sensory experiences.

Beyond Sensory Atomism

Comparative to the epistemological linearity instilled by vision, olfactory sensation operates

within *Postmortem* as a signifier of disorientation that destabilises Scarpetta's cognitive

faculties. Capable of overlapping in space and time, smell resists and complicates the clinical

gaze's processes of discrete separation and interpretation (Miller 1998, 66), allowing

olfactory sensation to frustrate the detectives' attempt to construct a linear timeline of

cause and effect. For example, when attending the scene of Henna Yarborough's murder,

Scarpetta's composure is repeatedly challenged by a variety of plot revelations and

gruesome details. Throughout the chapter she is depicted as being "knocked off balance"

(269) by a combination of disorientating sensations that makes "my heart see[m] to stop"

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[30] For example, one of *Postmortem*'s (deeply problematic) plot twists is dependent upon the revelation that one of the victims doesn't "sound black" (340). The reader is encouraged to be surprised by this revelation based on Cornwell's prior insistence on visually registering dialect in a manner that can only be described as cartoonish. Scarpetta's housekeeper, Bertha, displays particularly stereotypical linguistic tics, exclaiming "I tell you! I as much as step foot in there to bring her a sandwich and ask how she be and she start hollerin' and carryin' on…Lord have mercy" (39, sic). Cornwell's caricatured rendering of an individual's economic and racial characteristics through patois is somewhat jarring but also establishes an expectation which is later to be overturned. That is to say, the ability to ontologically delineate black from white is repeatedly upheld through the novel's visual sensibility, but ultimately undermined with the unexpected intrusion of aural indeterminacy.

(251). Tellingly, this chapter in which Scarpetta's professional equanimity is most radically challenged is framed by two depictions of overwhelming olfactory sensation. On entering the apartment, she is struck by "the pungent stench of decomposing human flesh that is unlike any other odor on earth" (249, sic) and upon exiting she is greeted by "the odor linger[ing] on the stairs" (273). This sensorial frame is a stark departure from her visually saturated arrival at the scene of Lori Peterson's death, on which the novel opens. Here, Scarpetta's arrival at the crime scene is announced by the fact that she "could see the blue and red flashing lights" (6) and her departure is signalled by the "front yard…lit up with television lights floating against the background of hypnotically flashing red and blue" (21). Framed by the colours of sirens, whose visual stimuli denote authority, Scarpetta's investigation is far more controlled and composed, coolly surveying the scene's contents and corpse alike. The contrasting sensoria that saturate these scenes suggests that, within *Postmortem*, the corpse's olfactory omissions "violate and disrupt the bodily boundaries of the living" (Trotter qtd in Plain, 16) and disturb the clinical gaze's objectivity, facilitating a viscerally reactive inter-bodily responsivity rather than the cool detachment to which Scarpetta aspires: "my thoughts undistracted, my hands perfectly still, my senses undisturbed" (27).

The introduction of smell also inhibits Scarpetta's ability to produce a linear timeline of cause and effect as the detectives' attempt to identify Mr Nobody via the distinctive smell produced by his MSUD is disrupted by the intertwining scents of the dead victim and the live killer. Blurring the distinctions between life and death, the smell omitted by the killer due to his disease is described as "sweet but putrid" (75), adopting a necrotic register that links it to the scents of death and decomposition. Towards the novel's end, this confusion between pre-mortem and post-mortem sensation is actualised when the remembered smell of

Scarpetta's dead father, described as a "sick, stale sweatiness" (380), transforms into the "putrid smell" (380) of the killer. In this moment, the scents of life and death become intermingled and, ultimately, interchangeable. Operating as a 'transcorporeal'[31] phenomenon, smell disturbs the temporal and bodily boundaries that distinguish past from present, life from death and killer from corpse.

Postmortem's visual sensibility is not only resisted by the destabilising inclusion of olfactory sensation, but also that of aural sensation. Upon the revelation that the killer's first contact happens with his victims over the phone, that is through sonic rather than visual sensation, Scarpetta is confronted with the limitations of her own epistemological processes. This sudden revelation registers as a moment of epistemic crisis as the text emphasises vision's relative fixity in time and space:

> when we think of stalkers, we think of psychopaths who *see* the victim at some
>
> point. In a shopping mall, out jogging, or through a window...We might be able to
>
> determine who a victim saw on any given day. But it was unlikely we could find every
>
> person she talked to on the phone

(217–8)

Radically compromising Scarpetta's investigative efficacy, the transition from the visual to the aural induces a crisis of knowledge, as her presumptions, and even her thought processes, are revealed to be inadequately linear and confined.

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[31] Transcorporeality might be understood as a means of "explor[ing] the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures" to imagine ways "in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (Alaimo 2010, 2). For a fuller discussion of transcorporeality, see Chapter 6.

Almost in direct response to this revelation, the conceptual metaphors through which

Postmortem articulates Scarpetta's thought processes shifts from the visual to the aural:

"You're making it too complicated, *my inner voice was telling me.* You're getting farther and

farther removed from what you actually know" (362–3, my emphasis). Instead of visualising

events Scarpetta starts to talk to herself (220), leading her to conclude that "all along I'd

been harbouring the fear that the killer might be a cop" (220). Trusting her instinct,

Scarpetta relies on intuitive models of knowledge rather than following a linear course of

logical deduction.

While visual cognition allows Scarpetta to maintain authoritative control of her

psychological processes, her 'inner voice' disrupts the previous linearity of her deductive

processes. The intrusive nature of aural thought is most starkly demonstrated in a scene

towards the end of the novel in which Scarpetta's semi-conscious psyche is penetrated by

audial hallucinations (378–9). Mixing previously encountered dialogue with unwitnessed

scenes, these audial hallucinations are *visually* delineated on the page through the use of

italics. Deploying typographic distinctions to demarcate intrusive audial content, here the

literary text's audio-visual superposition is explicitly foregrounded, challenging the

predominantly visual sensibility that otherwise constitutes the novel's organising principle.

Furthermore, this scene also presents as a challenge to the cool detachment associated with

Scarpetta's visual epistemology, as her uninhibited cry of "*daddddyyyyyy*!" (378, sic) both

functions as a strained attempt to visually delineate an oral/aural sensation and signals a

distinct break from the detached emotional restraint she previously exercises upon contact

with a corpse. Here, *Postmortem*'s protagonist is stripped of the forensic discourses which

hide death behind complex anatomical terminology. Without the comforting filtration of the

forensic pathologist's anatomical rhetoric, the readers, along with Scarpetta herself, are finally exposed to the blunt and raw truth of human mortality: "he was dead" (379). In such instances the corpse, rather than an object of visual epistemologies, operates as a subject that induces a more responsive, multi-sensory epistemology. In doing so, the autoptical logic that Scarpetta is initially so eager to exert is ultimately revealed to be insufficient for the task of effective necro-corporeal investigation.

Ultimately, it is Scarpetta's ability to interact with the dead bodies *beyond* the detached, rationalist schema of the clinical gaze that distinguishes her as a new type of detective that "exposes the masculine reliance on rational detachment as illusory" (Horsely & Horsely, 21) and eventually allows her to solve the crime at hand. Cornwell's depiction of Scarpetta "reject[s] the concept of the detective who remains unaffected by her work" (Gregoriou, 145) and "it is through [her] ability to perform the procedures of her job *while identifying with the corpse* that clues are located, the narrative of events reconstructed, and the criminal identified and apprehended" (Howell, my emphasis). For example, it is due to Scarpetta's responsive empathy for Henna Yarborough that she is able to convince Henna's previously hostile sister, Abby Turnbull that she "understand[s her] rage" (Cornwell, 315) and to aid the investigation, ultimately luring out the killer.

Scarpetta's identification with her victims enacts a thematic shift from detective fiction's common trope of eliding the distinction between investigator and criminal (Mizejewski, 11). This shift in which it is the blurring identities of detective and victim that are emphasised, rather than detective and killer, testifies to forensic fiction's fascination with corporeal instability. While the traditional "detective narrative thrives on its contradictions and subversions of identities, including clear-cut boundaries of good, evil, crime and justice"

(Mizejewski, 11), Scarpetta largely operates within the confines of the law and harbours a simplistic, binary view of good and evil in which "there are some people who are evil….there's something wrong with them. They're bad and will always be bad" (Cornwell, 49), a position that the novel attempts to legitimate via the quaint naiveté of Lucy, Scarpetta's niece. By sustaining a "politically reactionary" (Lucas, 215) ethos and constructing the criminal as "a pure 'other' that is uncomplicatedly monstrous and inhuman" (Scaggs, 99) *Postmortem* sidesteps ethical complexity, enabling Scarpetta to retain a certain moral purity. Instead, Cornwell's novel registers a *corporeal* instability that resists the objectification of the corpse of which forensic fiction is so often accused.

Necrometric Malleability

Having considered how *Postmortem* problematises the strategies by which the corpse is supposedly transformed into forensic knowledge, I will now briefly explore how this investigative indeterminacy destabilises the possibilities of forensic knowledge as such. As mentioned previously, this transformation might be meaningfully conceptualised as an attempt to separate out the different 'bodies' associated with the corpse in an effort to produce ontologically integral knowledge. After all, within *Postmortem* forensic technologies such as autopsy, serology, bloodwork typing and DNA profiling essentially operate as means of disassembling and reassembling the corpse as ontologically stable data "listing the sex, race, date of birth and other information revealing the candidate's identity" (Cornwell, 57). However, within Cornwell's novel the 'necrometric data' produced by the technological processing of the corpse is itself ontologically entangled with a variety of social and discursive determinants.

To a certain extent, the social interpenetration of necrometric data is consequentially linked to the forensic-detective's aforementioned interpretive ambiguity. For example, Marino dismisses the psychological profiler's rejection of Matt Peterson as a suspect "Cause he ain't blue collar enough. He ain't trashy enough" (100, sic). Here, the dialectical markers of Marino's speech are exaggerated to emphasise the conflict of interest that influences his investigation. Similarly, Scarpetta's empathy for the victims and her construction of an extra-judicial female network is fermented by the misogynistic sexual politics of her work environment. Perhaps most strikingly, Cecile Tyler's murder is the result of racial misidentification and an investigative turning point comes when Scarpetta reconstructs (and also problematically perpetuates) the cultural prejudice through which such a misidentification is enacted. In such cases, "the narrative quests for clear, forensic identification are constantly contradicted by more cultural concepts of the body as perceived, lived and represented" (Mizejewski, 12) and the generation of neutral biological 'fact' becomes irrevocably entangled with the social context in which it is situated. As such, Scarpetta's position as a 'forensic detective' results in the continuous display of interpretive acts that are influenced and implicated by the wider social context in which they are situated. In doing so, the necrometric forensic knowledge produced during the investigation becomes saturated with sexual, racial and social determinants.

Digital Violation

As we saw previously, through the application of forensic technologies such as autopsy, DNA analysis and blood typing, "the victim is reduced to evidence" (Horsley & Horsley, 18) of an abstract nature (Timmermans, 11). Referring to the forensic fiction of Kathy Reichs, Jun-nam Chou evocatively uses the term "digitalized" (153, sic) to refer to how the corpse is transformed into data through forensic technologies and the same transformations in which

"material evidence [is] converted to digitized code" (Palmer 2001, 69) can certainly be seen taking place in Cornwell's novel. Furthermore, Whitney states that Cornwell's frequent divergences into descriptions of digital technology make it "difficult to remember….that Cornwell works in a genre about *bodies* and what happens to them on the gurneys. Readers are a long way from the morgue, where boiled bones and sliced faces revealed intimate secrets" (111, original emphasis). *Contra* Whitney, I would argue that *Postmortem* effectively collapses this 'distance' and that the distinction between digitization and the autopsy is precisely what is elided through the text's continuous production of the corpse *as* necrometrics. For example, the OCME database, which acts as the repository of data gleamed during the investigation, is metaphorically figured as digitalised versions of the victims' bodies. Data breaches are repeatedly referred to as "violations" (94; 135; 146; 159; 268), figuratively associating it with the raped and murdered bodies of the victims and this violated and "leaking" (163; 267; 354) database is imaginatively constructed as a penetrated and permeable body from which information is gleamed.

As it transpires, however, the OCME data breach does not simply signify investigation, but also manipulation, as it belatedly emerges that the hacker has not only *obtained* but also *changed* information within the database (353–355). Placing the digitised body within a context in which Lucy's computational expertise is "powerful enough for her to do anything she wishe[s]. It [is] powerful enough to alter data" (351), the transformation of the corpse into necrometric data renders it newly malleable rather than determinately stable. Furthermore, it is eventually revealed that Amburgey, Richmond's commissioner, orchestrates these violations due to his prejudice against Scarpetta's female authority. Here, necrometric data is not only *interpreted* according to socio-political prejudices but also *reconstructed* accordingly.

This concept of necrometric malleability is particularly emphasised in *Postmortem*'s irregular plot resolution. Surprisingly for the mother of all forensic fiction, it is not forensic evidence that leads to the killer's apprehension but rather the dissemination of forensic *misinformation*. Faced with an investigative dead-end, Scarpetta resorts to teaming up with journalist Abby Turnbull who prints a news story that fabricates a fatuous link between DNA evidence, the killer's speculated metabolic disorder and his cognitive faculties (328). It is this circulation of misinformation, designed to "make [the killer] think my office has found evidence" (317), despite the fact that "the technology isn't sophisticated enough yet to read the specifics" (319) that lures out Mr Nobody, resulting in his being shot by Marino and allowing the novel to achieve narrative closure. Far from providing authoritative evidence that leads to a conviction — as is the genre's more prevalent mode of resolution (Goodman-Delahunty & Tait, 99) — the forensic evidence of *Postmortem* is emphatically incomplete, requiring a discursive supplementation in order to materialise the killer, to call forth the body of Mr Nobody, and provide resolution.

Postmortem's utilisation of discursively supplemented forensic misinformation exploits necrometric malleability and articulates the material productivity of discourse. Not only do the investigators deploy discursive technologies to make the killer perform particular actions, the novel emphatically lingers over its potential "physiological" (330) ramifications. Benton, Scarpetta and Turnbull discuss the possible physical effects of the article on the killer at length (327–332) and, as Scarpetta descends into increasingly technical language deploying terms such as "ataxic" (330), "hyperglycemia" (331) and "severe organic deficit" (331), the biological potency of discourse is revealed with increasing intensity. Pushing this

material-discursive reciprocity to its extreme, the detectives even insinuate that the article has the potential to result in the killer's death (331).

In this sense the information gleamed from the dead body alone becomes insufficient for the apprehension of the killer. Rather, the narrative representation of such information becomes an essential factor for the ultimate materialisation of forensic knowledge. Although the novel rather cynically appears to advocate and exploit a widespread *over*investment in the investigative powers of forensic technology, in representing the deception, the text equally testifies to the epistemological ambiguity that continues to lie at the heart of the forensic sciences. In this sense, *Postmortem*'s representation of the corpse is not limited to that of a reduction into absolutised forensic knowledge, but one in which the explicit manipulation of that knowledge for authoritative and judiciary ends is carefully indexed. As such, *Postmortem*'s irregular conclusion can be seen to resist the faux-rensic fanaticism that the text ultimately spawns.

Conclusion

Whilst objectification narratives emphasise forensic fiction's tendency to depict the corpse as a passive object of knowledge whose secrets are exhumed and exhibited by the penetrating interpretive inspection of the forensic pathologist, this chapter hopes to have offered a different story. It hopes to have revealed how, rather than passive objects that simply yield conclusive information to the forensic pathologist's omnipotent gaze, *Postmortem*'s corpses are subjects that reveal their own array of interpretively complex modes of information that are resistant to clean biological readings. Instead it is through a more fulsome, empathic and multi-sensory engagement with the corpse as a subject that Cornwell's forensic detective is able to outwit the killer and restore retributive justice.

Such a diversified approach to the production of the corpse as a 'body of knowledge' necessarily involves a re-evaluation of necrometric data's ontological integrity that acknowledges its malleability and how the acquisition and interpretation of forensic knowledge necessarily *distorts*, but also *reconstructs*, the corpse-as-data. That is to say, rather than abstracting the corpse into the realms of pure knowledge, necrometric transformation initiates it into the realms of discourse and sociality. After all, the transformation of the corpse into necrometics allows it to be recomposed as alphabetical and numerical sequences, as blood types, gene counts and DNA combinations. For example, Henna Yarborough's necrometric data is recounted as follows: "blood type is B…Her PGM's one-plus, one-minus. Her PEP is A-one, EAP is CB, ADA-one and AK-one" (335). Furthermore, it is through such discursive translations and transformations that the ontological compositions of victims' corpses become a pliable resource for further socially motivated manipulations, alterations and erasures. Simultaneously abstracting and materialising the corpse, the transformation of the dead body into necrometric data, counterintuitively, does not make it more stable and knowable, but rather more mobile and susceptible to manipulation. It is by embracing such an orientation towards necrometric malleability that it becomes possible to redress the problematic manner in which forensic narratives circulate and are received as vessels of faux-rensic fanaticism.

Although the critical approaches offered by objectification narratives are compelling, my analysis of *Postmortem* hopes to have demonstrated that a close reading of forensic fiction allows alternative perspectives to emerge. This is not to suggest that all forensic fiction provides a non-problematically positive representation of the dead body within crime fiction. On the contrary, much forensic fiction sets out to instrumentalise the dead body in a manner that is clearly diminutive of its agential possibilities. Rather, I am arguing that it is

precisely the determination with which forensic fiction goes about this business that marks it as a strategic site of inquiry. Implicit within the same processes that attempt to legitimate forensic knowledge and the technologies through which it is produced, lurks a counter-narrative that registers the tenuous levels of procedural, interpretive and ontological indeterminacy that must be constantly managed. It has been the aim of this chapter to bring these implicit counter-narratives to the surface. In doing so, we might be able to cultivate a fuller appreciation of the corpse as the subject, rather than the object, of forensic fiction.

Having considered the role of dissection in forensic fiction, the following chapter takes on another prominent figuration of the dead body, the mutilated corpse. Just as this chapter resists the scientific objectification narrative that frames the dissected corpse as an object of knowledge within forensic fiction, the following chapter turns to the — deeply implicated — subgenre of serial killer fiction (Priestman, 68) to similarly resist the economic objectification narrative that frames the mutilated corpse as a commodity object. In doing so, this first section of the thesis aims to expose how the corpse's ontological instability often exceeds the representational and interpretive schemas that figure it as an inert object.

Chapter 2 - 'A Cummerbund, a Magazine and a Severed Hand': Corpses, Commodities and Mutilation in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*

"The corpse smelling now of excrement and rot, pushes ever nearer, smearing with its messy touch the lines that make of me a someone and not a something"

(Strauss, *Human Remains*, 273)

"Psycho Killer
Qu'est-ce que c'est"

(Talking Heads, *Psycho Killer*, 1977)

Introduction

Having considered various ways in which the dissected corpse resists objectification and displays surprising forms of agency, this second chapter extends such enquiry to the related figure of the mutilated corpse. Operating as the dissected corpse's dark double, the mutilated corpse stages a similar confrontation with images of necro-corporeal and ontological fragmentation outside of forensic investigation's broadly legitimating lens. As we shall explore, this alternative context initiates a shift in objectification narratives through which the dead body's agency is domesticated and contained as the mutilated corpse becomes figured as an economic, rather than scientific, object.

Advancing Part One's investigation of the corpse in contemporary crime narrative, this second chapter explores the relationship between serial killer fiction, necro-corporeal mutilation and economic objectification narratives. Citing the popular interpretation of mutilation as an objective correlative for reification within serial killer fiction, the chapter considers how Bret Easton Ellis' controversial classic *American Psycho* (1991) depicts the

limits of such conceptual associations by displaying the corpse's physical, aesthetic and linguistic resistance. Specifically, it focuses on how the novel's deployment of an exaggerative splatterpunk aesthetic, (non)human compositions and linguistic disarticulation frames the mutilated corpse as an active subject that vivifies the consumer 'objects' amongst which it is positioned. Subsequently, the chapter pulls back to consider how *American Psycho*'s wider narrative frame depicts the mutilated corpse as *both* the apotheosis and antithesis of consumer capitalism, thereby complicating readings that might situate its 'corpse power' as a necessarily subversive or non-human agency. In doing so, this chapter reconsiders *American Psycho* through a new materialist lens that embraces, rather than rejects, the ontological confusions necessarily entailed by consumer capitalism, whilst respecting the polyvalent agencies that situate the mutilated corpse as a (non)human subject.

As considered in the previous chapter, critics such as Steenburg (1) and Braidotti (131) have noted a 'forensic turn' in contemporary culture. This particular focus on the dissected corpse might be considered a particular manifestation of a wider trend towards increasingly graphic depictions of necro-corporeal destruction since the 1980s, evidenced in the rising prominence of slasher (Donnelly, 19–20), splatterpunk (Aldana-Reyes 2014a, 28–31), serial killer (Priestman, 65), and torture-porn (Lockwood, 41) subgenres. Whether the iconic massacres of the *Friday 13th* franchise (1980–2009), the culinary and sartorial mutilations of Harris' *Silence of the Lambs* (1988) or the sympathetic slaughter of Lindsay's *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004), both visual and literary culture prominently feature disfigured corpses that undergo deliberate acts of mutilation and dismemberment as either a contributing factor to, or post-mortem extension of, the symbolic and material death of a human subject.

The mutilated corpse plays a particularly prominent role in serial-killer fiction, a 90s

subgenre that "often involve[s] gross injury, mutilation, and dismemberment" (Simpson,

11). Capitalising on the anxieties and idealisations surrounding the popular trope of the

serial killer as "mythic hero" (Caputi, 101), the subgenre regularly incorporates mutilation as

a signifier of dominance (Jarvis, 333; Giles, 168) that performs the de-humanisation of one

human subject by another in a ritualistic "strip[ping] away of humanity and individuality —

the very subjectivity — of their victims with the utmost violence" (Lefebvre, 51). This

interpretive schema of dominance and subjugation has led critics such as Caputi (103),

Schwegler-Castañer (618) and Jarvis (330–1) to conclude that "serial killers [enact] the

objectification of the victim" (Horsely & Horsely, 8).

Perpetuating anthropocentric presumptions of necro-corporeal inertia, such an interpretive

paradigm once more subjects the corpse to an 'objectification narrative' that frames it as

the debased object of manipulation. However, as we shall see, rather than the 'scientific

objectification narrative' found in critical responses to forensic fiction, readings of the

corpse in serial killer fiction tends to revolve around an 'economic objectification narrative.'

As we shall see, it is precisely this economic objectification narrative that dominates critical

interpretation of *American Psycho's* murdered and mutilated corpses, forestalling a more

nuanced appreciation of the corpse's postmortem vitality and its particular aesthetic and

symbolic operations within Ellis' novel.

This generic specialisation of necro-corporeal objectification is partially induced by the

intimate connection between consumer capitalism and the serial killer within the

contemporary imagination, which critics such as Jarvis, Zaller and Lefebvre have attributed

to a range of "psychodynamic similarities" (Jarvis, 338) surrounding themes of compulsive

behaviour (339), the fetishization of corporeal transformation (334), the imaginative

fragmentation of the body (336) and the shared connotative associations with cannibalism

(Lefebvre, 44–45).[32] Numerous and convincing as these arguments are, the object of this

chapter is not to explore the imaginative relationship between serial killing and

consumerism but its consequences for thinking the serial killed and mutilated corpse as

"objects of *serial consumption*" (Lefebvre, 51). Indeed, as Lefebvre argues "in the context of

capitalism, cannibalism and serial killing become themselves images of reification…images

of human flesh as meat to be consumed" (51). It is this particular interpretive narrative of

mutilation as reification, as economic objectification, that this chapter explores and

problematises by emphasising reification's tendency to confuse, as well as consolidate, the

boundaries between subject and object, consumer and consumed.

Reification and the Serial Killer

If we are to consider the conceptual pairing of mutilation and reification, it is necessary to

briefly consider the paradoxical role of reification in both unsettling and affirming the

ontological relations induced by consumer capitalism in the late-twentieth century

(hereafter referred to as the 'consumer ontology'). Indeed, capitalism operates as a social

order that implicitly blurs ontological distinctions since "subject and object are rendered

ineffectual categories under capitalism, as the commodity fetish animates objects and

reification objectifies workers" (Lauro & Embry, 399).[33] According to the historical

materialist philosophy of Marx (Chapter 1, Section 4) and Lukács (86–7), it is precisely

through this externally imposed transgression of presumed ontological distinctions that

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[32] See also Zaller (320), Simpson (xiv) and Lee (110)
[33] See also Brown (2006, 180) and Jarvis (338)

capitalism alienates workers from their labour (Brown 2015, 234). However, as Campbell notes, within the context of late-stage consumer-capitalism this dynamic shifts as the agential mastery associated with consumer control offers various modes of reassurance to the "ontological insecurity and existential angst" (35) induced by a capitalist social order. This "ontological reassurance" (37) manifests in the idolisation of "consumer sovereignty" (Schwarzkopf, 10) which promises agential mastery over the commodity goods they purchase, deploy and manipulate.

Within this context then, the threat of reification lays in its ability to *efface* rather than *induce* the confusion of subject and object that its operations necessitate. That is to say, transforming subjects into objects that can be non-problematically manipulated and controlled, reification guarantees the mastery of the consumer subject and bolsters the ontological reassurances of consumer sovereignty. Yet, of course, this very act of transformation, the transition between discrete categories of subject and object, discloses the instability of the very ontological distinctions it works to produce (Brown 2006, 179–181). It is, I argue, precisely this ontologically estranging transformation that is indexed in the processes of necro-corporeal mutilation.

As we shall see, traditional readings of *American Psycho* tend to disclose a historical materialist bias by identifying this elision of the conceptual boundaries between human and object — somatically articulated in Bateman's mutilation of corpses — as the very nature of consumer-capitalism's ethical and existential threat. In contrast, this thesis adopts a new materialist outlook which views such entanglement as a bracing opportunity to rethink traditional ontological hierarchies. Contrary to economic objectification narratives that figure mutilation-as-objectification, this chapter's analysis of *American Psycho* interrogates

the potential for the mutilated corpse to exacerbate the dead body's paradoxical (non)human status and perform a critical re-conceptualisation of corporeal materiality that emphasises the 'thingness' of the body and, moreover, the agency of things. Therefore, rather than considering *American Psycho*'s scenes of necro-corporeal mutilation as indicative of the 'inappropriate' treatment of human subjects like commodity objects, this chapter examines how such moments unsettle the initial distinctions by which these differential categories might be meaningfully established and upheld.

American Psycho's Economic Objectification Narrative

Since its publication in 1991, and even before, [34] *American Psycho* has proven to be one of the most controversial novels of the late-twentieth century. Following the exploits of Patrick Bateman, a materialistic and disturbed Wall Street banker with a predilection for homicidal violence, the novel's explicit portrayal of racism, homophobia and misogyny coupled with its graphic depiction of torture, mutilation and bodily evisceration has prompted a deeply divisive critical reception. One of the most reviled and revered works in the contemporary Western canon, *American Psycho*'s visceral depiction of "torn, dismantled, scattered human bodies" (Caracciolo, 103) has secured its infamous position as "one of the most scandalously gory American novels ever to be published" (Abel, 29).

Critical attempts to make sense of such brutal violence commonly adopt an interpretive schema in which the text's extended scenes of mutilation and torture operate as a material analogue for the worst excesses of predatory consumerism that diminish and debase human beings into interchangeable objects. As such, Bateman's sadistic acts of torture, mutilation

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[34] Famously, the critical backlash directed at pre-publication extracts of the novel in *Time and Spy* magazine was so intense that Simon and Schuster withdrew their offer of publication, without asking for a return on their $300,000 advance (Freccero, 48)

and dismemberment are seen to graphically materialise the exploitation, oppression and regulatory regimes that consumer capitalism enacts upon the human subject. Thomas Heise's 'American Psycho: Neoliberal Fantasies and The Death of Downtown' (2011) provides what is perhaps the clearest illustration of such a reading, claiming that "*American Psycho* translates for readers the massive social costs of neoliberal economics into a terrifyingly intimate experience of violence by a psychotic subject who embodies neoliberal theory and performs it through his repeated acts of disembowelment" (135).[35] Drawing parallels between Bateman's rampant desire to dominate and 'possess' his victims and his frenzied, fanatical consumption of material goods, the conclusion of such satirically oriented readings is the figuration of Bateman's murders and mutilations as objective correlatives of late-capitalism's systemic, dehumanising violence: "Bateman's mutilations can be seen as an extension of his desubjectivisation" (Colby, 86). By directing, defiling and disarticulating his victims as if they were simply consumer goods, Bateman graphically literalises the processes of reification, the "transformation of human beings into thing-like beings which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world" (Bottomore, 463).

However, as I shall explore, *American Psycho's* representation of corpses is far more ambiguous than this dominant interpretive paradigm allows. This chapter considers some of the ways in which the corpses of *American Psycho* exhibit a certain resistive, nonhuman agency that defy and complicate the processes of human reification that forms the explanatory centre of such a reading. By focusing on the corpse's subversive agency, it will supplement such objectification narratives with a consideration of the ways in which *American Psycho* depicts the mutilated corpse, and Bateman's 'production' of such corpses,

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[35] For similar examples of this objectification narrative in action, see Zaller (320), Simpson (148), Hume (124), Colby (62-3), Lee (110), Juchartz & Hunter (67), Caracciolo (101) etc.

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as entities and activities that *resist*, rather than wholeheartedly express, the logic of consumer capitalism and the particular 'consumer ontology' that subtends it.

<u>Thing Theory</u>

Rather than viewing the literary depiction of 'human objectification' as the aesthetic expression of a horrific mis-categorisation of distinct types of being, this chapter draws on Bill Brown's notion of 'Thing Theory' to reconsider such moments as artistic depictions of "a social relation neither between men, nor between things, but something like a social relation between human subject and inanimate object, wherein modernity's ontological distinction between human being and nonhumans makes no sense" (Brown 2004, 29). That is to say, it eschews an exclusive differentiation of human and object relations to consider reification as the particular expression of (non)human entanglements.

Proposing a distinction between 'objects' and 'things', in which 'object' denotes physical entities inscribed with "codes by which our interpretive attention makes it meaningful" (2001, 4) and 'thing' denotes "what is excessive in objects…what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects" (5), Thing Theory demands recognition of the strange recalcitrance of non-human subjects as entities that exist on the boundaries of epistemological accessibility (5). Although this distinction between 'object' and 'thing' is conceptual rather than ontological, Brown maintains that when objects stop working the way in which they 'should' — according to the logic of their design — their 'thingness' is illuminated, transforming it from a product that exists to be utilised and manipulated by a human subject to an ontologically indeterminate entity that straddles the liminal region between subject and object. As he famously states, "we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car

stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily" (4).

Pursuing the symbolic synchronicity between broken objects and broken bodies, this chapter approaches the mutilated corpse as a figure that illuminates the strange 'thingness' that subtends embodied existence. Indeed, *American Psycho's* epigraph "As things fell apart/nobody paid much attention" attributed to the *Talking Heads* evokes precisely this correspondence by linguistically counterposing disintegrating objects and disintegrating bodies, both of which are subsumed under the umbrella term 'things'. Following Brown's logic, then, it can be argued that Bateman's 'reification' of his victims through pre and post-mortem mutilation, is an imperfect reification that does not so much turn them into 'objects', but into 'things'. Even more emphatically implicating the human within their ontological estrangements, Bateman's imperfect reification of his victims deconstructs the boundaries of traditional object relations and construct an "indeterminate ontology where things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like" (Brown 2001, 13), thereby radically unsettling the illusory metaphysical distinctions upon which a 'consumer ontology' is predicated.

Resisting Reification

The 'thingly' quality of *American Psycho*'s corpses manifests in their surprising acts of physical and symbolic resistance that thwart Bateman's attempts to transform them into consumer objects. Such moments disrupt "the codes by which our interpretive attention makes [objects] meaningful", allowing these corpses to "asser[t] themselves as things" and — more to the point — as "thing[s] among things" (Brown 2001, 3–4) that 'de-objectify' the

commodities and products amongst which they are consistently positioned, both materially and conceptually.

On the one hand, if we consider the repeated comparisons between corpses and objects, we can certainly find ample evidence to support the common reading that Ellis' novel depicts necro-corporeal articulations of reification. On multiple occasions Bateman's appalling acts of graphic violence seem to provide a harrowingly visceral manifestation of the excesses and exploitation of predatory capitalism and its tendency to treat human subjects as reified objects. Resplendent with images including a "hollow and eyeless" head used as "a jack-o'-lantern on Halloween" (160), a dismembered arm "wielded like a pipe" (135) and "a necklace [made] from the bones of some girl's vertebrae" (210), it seems feasible that Bateman's production of corpses and their subsequent dismemberment reifies the dead bodies of his victims. Bateman's transformation of disarticulated bodies into material objects for his own manipulation and mastery is rendered to the extent that "the gadgets and décor that fill up Bateman's apartment are of a piece with the boiled heads in his pots and the severed vaginas in his health club locker; they are his trophies" (Zaller, 324).

Physical Resistance

On the other hand, however, such transformations are (by necessity) not absolute or seamless but jarring and stunted, both in terms of their shocking depiction and the clumsy enactment of Bateman's post-mortem manipulations. In fact, the bodies of Bateman's latter victims often put up more resistance than their acquiescent human counterparts. For instance, Christie, a prostitute that Bateman frequently employs and eventually murders, is given little dialogue, characterisation or agency, primarily operating as a physically manipulatable prop to be 'pushed', 'pulled' and 'positioned' for the economic (169) and

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sexual (174) gratification of men. Yet following her murder, "Christie's battered hands are swollen to the size of footballs, the fingers are indistinguishable from the rest of her hand and the smell coming from her burnt corpse is jolting and I have to open the venetian blinds, which are spattered with burnt fat from when Christie's breasts burst apart" (155). The surprising activities of Christie's corpse contaminates the integrity of material commodities both imaginatively (the hands like footballs) and physically (the fat on the blinds), assailing Bateman with its post-mortem odours and dictating his activities. Ironically, then, the unexpected and unruly necro-corporeal processes that attend Christie's mutilation express a 'thingness' that inverts the original subject-object power dynamic, as her corpse poses and positions Bateman.

This resistive capacity crescendos in 'Tries to Cook and Eat Girl', in which, as the chapter title indicates, Bateman *tries* but ultimately fails to exert his own masterful agency as his attempt to manipulate the corpse "becomes too frustrating a task and instead I spend the afternoon smearing her meat all over the walls" (184). In this scene, the unruly corpse's resistance to Bateman's manipulations puncture his delusions of consumer sovereignty, causing him to melodramatically "curs[e] the earth and everything I have been taught" (185).

The extent to which this act of necro-corporeal resistance destabilises Bateman's 'consumer sovereignty', and hence a consumer ontology, can be witnessed if we take a moment to consider its re-orientation of cannibalism as a consumerist metaphor. Within this same chapter, the context in which Bateman's cannibalistic practices are depicted encourage the reader to pursue a vitalist consideration of human meat as recalcitrant, not only by depicting the explicit frustration of his anthropophagic desires, but also through its network of symbolic associations. It is, I think, significant that Bateman is attempting to turn his

victims "into *patties*" (185, my emphasis) thereby linguistically resonating with the chapter's brief mention of the "*The Patty Winters Show*, whose topic today is Human Dairies" (184). Imaginatively conjoining the chat show with Bateman's cannibalistic intentions, the programme's surreal topic draws attention to the difference between inanimate and animate orientations towards food through a contrast between 'human patties' as processed and manipulated food *products* and 'human dairies', as bio-industrial *producers* of food. Furthermore, the ease with which the word 'dairies' might be misread as 'diaries' foregrounds the distinctions between passively and actively orientated perspectives of the corpse. Whilst 'human diaries' symbolically reimagine the body as a blank and passive surface upon which the thoughts and desires of the writer are inscribed, the more bizarre imagery of 'human dairies' reframes the deceased body as a generative entity. This tricking elision between 'human dairy' and 'human diary' shifts the corpse's 'meat' from a passively defined object, akin to the 'product' of the human patty, to an agential producer. The insinuation, here, is that it is not so much Bateman that produces corpses, but corpses that produce Bateman; an inversion that is signposted by the discursive correspondence between the cadaverous "patties" (185) and Patrick "Pat" (8) Bateman, himself.

By indexing moments of physical resistance, these scenes of necro-corporeal mutilation start to denote recalcitrance rather than control. In refusing to act as they 'should', such corpses resist the social impositions that would otherwise designate them an objective correlative of consumer reification (Brown 2001, 10). As such, Bateman's mutilated corpses are not simply broken bodies, but also broken objects that refuse to conform to the expectations of either category. That is to say, rather than consumer objects, corpses become 'things' that (literally) refuse to be consumed and inversely threaten Bateman's illusions of agential mastery.

It is, perhaps, for the sake of this resonance between broken bodies and broken objects that the corpse as represented in *American Psycho* is not the 'natural corpse', but the disarticulated corpse. After all, Bateman does not simply murder his victims, "he obliterates them, cuts them open, carves them up, eats their brains, makes nipples into necklaces, ties ribbons around vaginas" (Storey, 66). The eviscerated, manipulated and emphatically mutilated corpse provides an indeterminate 'thingly' middle zone by which the nonhuman subject (the corpse) and the non-human object (the commodity) express and arrange their limits. Even after their murder, Bateman continues to refer to corpses by name (156) whereas it is alongside his acts of dismemberment that commodity parallels are evoked. For example, Bateman states:

> I have also shaved all the skin and most of the muscle off her face so that it resembles a skull with a long, flowing mane of blond hair falling from it, which is connected to a full, cold corpse; its eyes are open, the actual eyeballs hanging out of their sockets by their stalks. (184)

As we can see from this sentence, the slippage between personal and impersonal pronouns, from human 'she' to animalised and vegetated 'it' complete with 'mane' and 'stalks', occurs at the moment of mutilation. Within the logic of the text, then, it is Bateman's *mutilation* of the dead body which functions as the irreconcilable erasure of human subjectivity that heralds its entry into thing-status. Therefore, in *American Psycho*, mutilation becomes the means by which the corpse's paradoxical (non)human status is expressed and intensified.

To be sure, this distinction between nonhuman subjects and things, corpses and their commodities is tenuous and fluctuating. After all, the flayed skull of the above quotation is described as being "connected to a *full*, cold corpse" (my emphasis), indicating how

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Bateman has dissociated the skull from its body, but nevertheless continues to view the headless corpse as a complete entity. Here, the corpse and its mutilations are irrevocably distinct yet entirely connected as the disfigured skull is imaginatively abstracted from the wholeness it materially constitutes. The fact that many critics read *American Psycho's* deceased as simply corpses, rather than emphatically *mutilated corpses*, is by no means surprising considering the conceptual slippage of its depiction as both one and multiple, whole and divided. Yet this tenuous distinction is of the utmost significance, as it is through such a transition that Ellis' text allows us to renegotiate the frameworks by which the commodity is commonly conceptualised in correspondence with the possibilities of nonhuman subjectivity.

Aesthetic Resistance

Even when corpses do not physically or symbolically resist Bateman's manipulations, the splatterpunk aesthetic through which his postmortem eviscerations are depicted testify to the uneasiness with which they might be rendered objects. That is to say, at the level of representation, as well as operation, the corpses that Bateman produces are less 'objects' than they are 'things' that demonstrate a power and potency of their own which "threatens the coherence of the object" (Brown 2015, 23).

Indeed, most readings of *American Psycho* neglect the extent to which its necro-corporeal depictions draw on the aesthetic conventions of 'splatterpunk' (Eldridge, 21); a heavily interrelated[36] yet symbolically divergent subgenre that curiously unsettles the interpretive

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[36] Xavier Aldana-Reyes notes "the prevalence of serial killers in subgenres related to splatter, such as, for example, the slasher cycle" (2014a, 30), whilst Philip L. Simpson conversely states "the horror story where 'anything can happen' exists within a larger generic territory comprised of what Linda Williams calls 'body genres'" (13). Clearly it is not always so simple to dissociate the genres or determine the dominance of one mode over another.

paradigm that reads mutilation-as-objectification. Constituting a visual and literary mode which prioritises "a representational moment in which the human body is violently torn asunder, shredded, sliced, hacked, dismembered, melted and transformed" (Milburn, 289), splatterpunk essentially intensifies the corporeal evisceration associated with the serial killer genre and lingers upon such moments with lyrical intensity. And yet, in doing so, this lingering gaze appears to enact a conceptual inversion of serial killer fiction's objectification of the mutilated corpse, revelling in its leaking porosity (rather than discrete dissociations) to antithetically locate such bodies as active subjects inciting powerful affects in the reader and deconstructing ideals of bodily integrity (Abel, 43; Mandel, 11; Hume, 124; Colby, 61–62). *American Psycho*'s relentless body-horror and gleefully indexed litany of abuses certainly positions it within the narrative tradition of splatterpunk, whilst at the same time drawing on the popular motifs of the serial killer subgenre. Containing "passages that …are likely the most graphic in the subgenre of serial killer fiction" (148), *American Psycho* might meaningfully be regarded as a text that strategically collapses these two literary modes into a singular 'serial splatter' novel,[37] thereby complicating the objectification narrative associated with the former but eschewed by the latter. Therefore, the graphic excess of *American Psycho*'s necro-corporeal mutilations ensure that its corpses are not simply registered as objects akin to the products and commodities that otherwise saturate the novel, but rather 'things' that "elicit your attention, interrupt your concentration, assault your sensorium" (Brown 2015, 22–23).

Ripping through victims with chainsaws (329), boring through mouths with power drills and manually extracting organs via the throat (305), the ridiculous hyperbole and "impossible"

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[37] Other notable examples of serial splatter include H.G. Lewis' *Blood Feast* (1963), Poppy Z. Brite's *Exquisite Corpse* (1996) and Jack Ketchum's *The Lost* (2001)

physiology of Bateman's actions channels the excesses of splatterpunk and "betrays the mind not of a leering sensualist or a cynical pornographer but rather of a cartoonist" (Haupt-Lehmann, 1991), baffling the reader with their laughable overkill and puncturing the credibility of its depiction "with murders that are so grotesque as to be absurd" (Eldridge, 23). Therefore, although the mutilated or dismembered corpse may constitute an object within the text, it nevertheless a very specific *type* of object, one which unsettles and even undermines the distinctions between humans and the commodities they manipulate. If, as Mandel argues, the purpose of *American Psycho's* continuous commodity descriptions "is not to represent objects but to reproduce their identity as (an excess of) material *products*" (14), then the slapstick splatterpunk depiction of Bateman's mutilated corpses render them conspicuously *imperfect* reproductions. By making the reader painfully aware of the impropriety of treating corpses like objects, it becomes impossible to circumvent their fundamental *difference* from objects, at least as traditionally conceptualised within a consumer ontology.

However, rather than solidifying the boundaries between corpses as residual human subjects and commodities as consumer objects, the conceptual precarity of the mutilated corpse estranges and undermines the consumer ontology that figures the distinction between consumer subject and commodity object. For example, Bateman's manipulations of the corpse not only extend the logic of reification to the human body, but equally extends the logic of embodiment to material commodities.

For example, returning to 'Tries to Cook and Eat Girl', not only is the corpse described as a material object, with its "bluish *rope* of intestine" (184, my emphasis) and "patches of skin…the colour of *tin-foil*" (184, my emphasis), but also conversely material objects are

imbued with profoundly human qualities: "the walls were *breathing*" (184, my emphasis).

The rhetorical exchange between material and somatic descriptions makes the display of

the body as a commodity both stylistically re-figure the body as a reified object and also

alter our orientation towards the very objects amongst which it is positioned. With seeming

indifference, Bateman states "things are lying in the corner of my bedroom: a pair of girl's

shoes from Edward Susan Bennis Allen, a hand with the thumb and forefinger missing, the

new issue of Vanity Fair splashed with someone's blood, a cummerbund drenched with

gore" (184). This particular arrangement evokes an alarming parallelism in which a severed

hand is afforded no greater attention than the various consumer goods that constitute its

immediate environment, all of which are equally rendered as 'things'. And yet despite the

equivalence suggested by the contents and arrangement of this imaginative composition, at

the level of description bodily matter overtakes the expected product descriptions with

increasing intensity. Moving from a merely 'splashed' issue of Vanity Fair to a positively

'drenched' cummerbund, the presence of blood interrupts the normal mode of recitation

which the reader has come to associate with commodities, as Bateman (uncharacteristically)

omits any detailed elaboration on the cummerbund's design or material properties. Just as

the blood taints Bateman's icons of elitism, so too is the ontological category of 'object' and

its representation tainted by the severed hand's inclusion. Therefore, whilst the initial

composition indicates an alarming objectification of the body, the infectious presence of the

disarticulated corpse within a material survey starts to subtly shift the means by which such

commodities come to be described, as both corpses and commodities drift towards the

status of 'thing'.

A similar effect is produced later in the same chapter, when this dissonance between

compositional harmony and descriptive contamination is inverted. Whilst Bateman's

apartment is previously depicted as an orderly landscape of neatly compartmentalised descriptions — for example, 'Morning' depicts his piano, jukebox, stereo-system and speakers in a single classificatory passage that depicts the chronological development of musical equipment (15) — 'Tries to Cook and Eat Girl'[38] provides a disordered scene of (seemingly) random combination.

> Her breasts have been chopped off and they look blue and deflated, the nipples a
> disconcerting shade of brown. Surrounded by dried black blood, they lie, rather
> delicately, on a china plate I bought at the Pottery Barn on top of the Wurlitzer
> jukebox in the corner, though I don't remember doing this (184)

Whilst the presentation of sex organs upon a china plate provides a salient image of bodily fragmentation and cannibalistic intention, we might also want to consider the precarious placement of the china plate upon a Wurlitzer juke box.[39] This incongruous mise en scene demonstrates the corpse's displacement of previous material arrangements as the bric-a-brac totem of musical equipment, crockery and human remains constructs a precarious collage which evokes continuity between humans and (previously distinct) material subjects, rather than a harmonious landscape of differentiation and consumer control.

By disconnecting body parts from their original embodied contexts and allowing them to be repositioned in different networks of material relations, the fragmentary disarticulation of the corpse is the process by which *American Psycho's* reification is expressed. And yet, the insistent *messiness* of such disarticulation, the fact that it refuses neat delineation, paradoxically challenges the clarity of distinctions that structure Bateman's practices of

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[38] As we shall see, shortly, a specific comparison of these two chapters is invited by the novel.
[39] Bateman specifically mentions the model as a Wurlitzer 1015 which is only produced with a rounded top, as opposed to – for example – the flat-topped Wurlitzer 1900

material categorisation, consumer sovereignty and sense of agential mastery. For instance, Bateman remarks that the extent of his post-mortem eviscerations have rendered the corpse's head and neck "indistinguishable" (184) and despite his desire to maintain conceptual distinctions by "keep[ing] the men's bodies separate from the women's" (133) he ultimately becomes unable to tell the bodies of his victims apart (163). Simpson notes this paradox as a generic quality of the serial killer, stating "modernist serial killers…commit to a dualist project that is at once systematic and messy. They perpetrate a violent penetration of boundaries that upsets epistemological, ontological, and teleological conceptions" (12). Whilst this paradox may well be present to some degree within the serial killer novel, it is exaggerated tenfold in *American Psycho*'s serial-splatter narrative through its aesthetic intensification of the corporeal desecration that unsettles ontological boundaries. Within *American* Psycho, therefore, we can see that whilst the compositional re-arrangements of mutilated corpses as and among consumer objects places it in imaginative equivalence with commodities, its material ambiguity also unsettles the ontological distinctions that constitute the foundations of consumer sovereignty, incorporating them into the generalised category of 'thing'.

These various (non)human compositions that interposition mutilated corpses and commodity products constitute one of *American Psycho*'s most salient and shocking features (Quindlen, 1990; Lee, 115; Giles, 165). And yet, by adopting a new materialist perspective that embraces rather than rejects ontological indeterminacy such moments might be re-read as refreshing manifestations of human-nonhuman entanglements. Indeed, such compositions disclose a notable similarity to Schwartz's concept of the 'corpus' as "a nonhierarchical assemblage of physical, cultural and discursive objects with dynamic and emergent effects" (16). Just as Schwartz's corpuses synecdochally index the ontological

diversity of the corpse caught up in such networks, so too do *American Psycho*'s

(non)human compositions index, extend and intensify the corpse's (non)human ontology.

American Psycho's placement of the reified corpse within disharmonious compositions

therefore operates as the primary means by which the conceptual boundaries between

human subjects and commodity objects are continuously collapsed and reaffirmed within

the unstable category of 'thing'. By positioning the corpse-as-residual-subject in uneasy

conjunction with the commodity-as-consumer-object, the novel's mutilated corpses

intensify the (non)human indeterminacy of the deceased body.

Linguistic Resistance

American Psycho's necro-corporeal deconstruction not only facilitates the deconstruction of

ontological boundaries, but also the linguistic fabric of the text itself. In this way, the

corpse's general representational resistance is extended to the text's entire narrative

structure. Both disarticulated and *disarticulating*, the mutilated corpse exemplifies and

enacts the novel's aesthetic fragmentation. This tendency can be demonstrated by once

more returning to *American Psycho*'s disharmonious (non)human compositions. In 'Girls',

Bateman recounts that "a head has been nailed to the wall, fingers lie scattered or arranged

in some kind of circle around the CD player….with the blood from one of the corpses'

stomachs that I dip my hand into, I scrawl…a scary drawing which looks like this" (163).

Followed by a blank space rather than Bateman's aforementioned drawing, the

representational fabric of the text is here compromised by the interruption of a body that is

(literally) too graphic to be textually depicted.[40]

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[40] Bateman's previous cadaverous doodles (167; 266) leads the reader to imagine only too well what kind of artwork he might produce.

The prominence of Bateman's CD player in this particular tableaux holds especial

significance if we recall his previous statement that its "laser lens is very sensitive, and

subject to interference from dust or dirt or smoke or pollutants or moisture, and a dirty one

can inaccurately read CDs, making for false starts, inaudible passages, digital skipping, speed

changes and general distortion" (16). This description of a malfunctioning CD accurately

depicts the gradual breakdown of narrative coherence throughout the text, as we

experience changes of pace, distorted recollections, indecipherable passages, and

incomplete sentences. As the text becomes more and more 'polluted' by the increasing

presence of dead bodies — which are regularly referred to as "trash" (249), "garbage" (298)

or "shit" (345) — these representational interferences become increasingly prolific.

Culminating in the ultimate breakdown of language itself, the centrality of Bateman's

necrotically polluted CD player within 'Girls''s (non)human composition thematically binds

the disintegration of aesthetic unity with that of the boundaries between human and

nonhuman entities as text, technology and bodies are all rendered 'thingly' broken objects.

This mutually constitutive disarticulation is explicitly dramatised in the novel's final chapter,

'At Harry's'. In this closing scene, language itself descends into a superficial, non-referential

medium which contains "no real structure or topic or internal logic or feeling…..just words,

and like in a movie, but one that has been transcribed improperly, most of it overlaps"

(210). Cut through with the continuous reiteration of glib, non-topical disclosures such as

"just say no" (211) and "life sucks and then you die" (211), this scene produces and

reproduces a mystifying disjuncture between signifiers and referents as the discursive

arrangement is permeated by "random fragments of linguistic connection that break apart

as quickly as they form" (Simpson, 153).

Bateman's response to the breakdown of discourse, "disintegration – I'm taking it in stride" (210–211) explicitly evokes his bodily deconstructions, his experimentations in "how long it would take a corpse to *disintegrate*" (147, my emphasis). Here, the simultaneous application of the word 'disintegrate' across discursive and corporeal registers implicates the destructive practices by which Bateman dissolves the boundaries of the human body with the collapse of language that is staged over the course of the novel.

The breakdown of narrative structure is not just signposted by the increasing presence of mutilated bodies within the text but is also induced by the representational ambiguity of the corpse itself. Just as the "specific unspecificity" (Brown 2001, 3, sic) denoted by the term 'thing' foregrounds the reciprocity of ontological and representational indeterminacy, so too is the disarticulated corpse's representational ambiguity implicated in the collapse of previously coveted ontological and conceptual boundaries. For example, whilst mutilating an unnamed victim, Bateman remarks that "her stomach resembles the eggplant and goat cheese lasagna at Il Marlibro or some other kind of dog food" (184). Here, the physical and representational indiscernibility of his victim's body leads Bateman to construct a simile that not only blurs the boundaries between human subjects and food, but between food for human and animal consumption. Obfuscating the difference between gourmet and garbage, Bateman's attempt to navigate the mutilated corpse's representational ambiguity subtly undermines the value system he otherwise valorises which puts a premium on upper-class dining.

A further comparison between 'Morning' and 'Tries to Cook and Eat Girl', provides a particularly salient demonstration of the manner in which the presence of the corpse in *American Psycho*'s (non)human compositions disrupts the linguistic (as well as

compositional and ontological) harmony of the text. Such a comparison is implicitly

suggested by the fact that these chapters are the only two incidents in which Bateman

himself is depicted preparing 'food' and the resonance between the latter scene's

disharmonious, alien landscape and the "Martian landscape" of Bateman's Onica, which

depicts a "desert scattered with dead, gutted fish [and] broken plates rising like a sunburst"

(15). The latter chapter's ambiguous topography populated by dead bodies and estranged

objects externalises the Onica haunting the background of Bateman's fastidiously organised

apartment. As such, the reader is prompted to consider how 'Tries to Cook and Eat Girl'

parallels and reorganises the previous material compositions through which Bateman's

apartment is described. Whilst both scenes construct a tableaux of material objects, the

inclusion of disarticulated human remains in the latter chapter creates an abrupt shift in

both the impact of these configurations and the manner of their delivery, as specificity gives

way to ambiguity, exemplifying the ontological destabilisations initiated by the corpse.

The indexical precision with which 'Morning' recounts the items within Bateman's

apartment provides a mental slow-pan, a meticulously structured imaginative survey that

logically and tediously catalogues its contents. This precision is dramatically renounced in

'Tries to Cook and Eat Girl' as definite adjectives give way to vague descriptors. The exact

numerical account of "eight floor-to-ceiling windows" and "four chests of immense

bleached mahogany drawers" (15) is replaced by indefinite adjectives indicating "a few of

her intestines" (184) and "whatever is left of her" (185). Similarly, his victim's intestines are

described as "blue*ish* in colour" (184, my emphasis) in contrast to the intimately detailed

"black-dotted beige and white Maude Sienna carpet" (15). In the latter chapter, the material

co-ordinates with which Bateman has previously constructed space as a navigable surface is

replaced with a haphazard accumulation of displaced debris. Rather than seamlessly

blending in as another object-amongst-objects, the intrusion of the corpse brings ambiguity to the precisely delineated compositional harmony of Bateman's living environment. In doing so, the material delineations that have previously quantified, circumscribed and isolated such commodities as distinctly *knowable* entities is unsettled by the epistemological recalcitrance on the corpse as non-human subject. Consequently, in the latter chapter corpses and objects alike "hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable" (Brown 2001, 4–5, sic).

Condemnation and Consent

Having explored how the 'thingly' nature of *American Psycho's* mutilated corpses undermines capitalism's consumer ontology through acts of ontological and discursive resistance, it is germane to consider how the narrative context in which these corpses manifest necessarily problematise their subversive potential. After all, it is through the most appalling acts of violence that such corpses are produced in the first place. Within such a context, attempts to envisage the conceptual utility of the mutilated corpse as a medium of ontological defamiliarization potentially risk advocating the ethically indefensible means by which they are produced (Caracciolo, 100).

In fact, I would argue that this constant slippage between expression and subversion constitutes the narrative core of the text's engagement with consumer-capitalist culture and is precisely the quality that makes *American Psycho* such an enduring, challenging and, at

times, remarkable text.[41] The fundamental representational dilemma enacted by the text

and argued by its critics is the tension generated between its capacity to expose and reflect

upon the reprehensible zeitgeist of 1980s yuppie culture and the *form* that expression takes

(Iannone, 52; Sheppard, 100; Haupt-Lehman, 1991). It is, I would argue, *American Psycho*'s

core narrative strategy to court just such an ambiguity in which critical reflection constantly

threatens to tip over into enactment and, perhaps, even advocacy as Ellis' satirical send up

of the Wall Street elite's banal preoccupation with appearance, status and commodities

continuously threatens to transform into a perverse adoration of the commercial system it

appears to undermine. Rather than *purely condoning* the images and mentality it represents

or *purely condemning* such representations, Ellis' novel explicitly dramatizes the possibilities

and limitations of expression-as-critique and the necessary complicity of dissent (Brauner,

48; Caraciollo, 112; Colby, 20). Accordingly, rather than unproblematically resisting a

consumer ontology, the conceptual defiance of these mutilated corpses is always

precarious, constantly threatening to slip into a reassertion of the very values they appear

to battle against. As such, within *American Psycho* the mutilated corpse potentially operates

as *both* an expression of consumer capitalism *and* its subversion. I will now briefly consider

how the text generates a peculiar double-orientation towards its own satirical intentions

and how this dynamic enfolding of expression and subversion inflects the corpse's agency

with a profound ambivalence.

Hyperbolic Recitation

One strategy by which the text conflates complicity and critique is its deployment of the

"notoriously dispassionate narrative voice" (Mandel 2008, 14) characteristic of 'blank

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[41] For a fuller discussion of this aspect of Ellis' novel see: Gardiner 'Textual Evil and Performative Precarity in Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*' (Publication forthcoming)

fiction' (a subgenre that fuses "an emphasis on the extreme, the marginal and the violent" [Annesley 1998, 1] and a "blank, atonal perspective" [2]). This non-affective and indifferent narrative mode refuses any overt condemnation or approval of the evil acts it depicts, exacerbating the ambiguity surrounding the stance that the reader is being encouraged to take (Eldridge, 24). Consequently, within *American Psycho*'s blank fiction, the relative lack of overt textual clues "puts all obligation for interpretation on the reader" (Hume, 121) and forces them to divine parodic intention based more on faith than concrete textual evidence. Although there are occasional episodes of buffoonery or farce that more clearly advocate a satirical orientation — for example, the comic misrecognitions of 'Another Night' (309–315) — the most prominent strategy that Ellis deploys is one which renders this orientation most precarious; that is, the strategy of 'hyperbolic cataloguing', the extended recitation of items and activities that structure the novel's representation of murder and consumerism alike.

Take, for example, the instances of excessive cataloguing in which Bateman describes the contents of his lavish apartment (15–17), his wardrobe (35–36) or his musical preferences (72–74) in excruciating detail. In these moments, Bateman's excessive referential pedantry raises the possibility of a parodic authorial intention, but in a manner that resists explicit confirmation. Mimicking the breathless superlatives of infomercials and promotional brochures, the novel's depiction of Bateman's commodities evokes a register in which exaggeration is second nature, making it increasingly difficult to identify whether its hyperbolic tone signifies realistic recitation or parodic amplification. Furthermore, this dependency on hyperbolic recitation renders *American Psycho's* satirical strategy virtually indistinguishable from product placement. The repeated deployment of excessive cataloguing as a narrative trope therefore complicates the reader's easy identification of a

satirical orientation and constantly threatens the possibility of promoting, rather than critiquing, Bateman's lifestyle.

This tension between expression and subversion is important for our consideration of the corpse in *American Psycho* since the text's relentless descriptions of murder, torture and post-mortem mutilation, that is the production of corpses and its subsequent treatment, regularly draws upon the same representational method of hyperbolic catalogue (Annesley, 14; Simpson, 148). Depicting Bateman's murderous activities and the corporeal viscera of his desecrated corpses with the same encyclopaedic intensity as its material catalogues, the text's gleeful gaze similarly threatens to collapse satire into advocacy by covertly endorsing the proceedings it documents. That is to say, so outrageous and lingering are the novel's torturous depictions, that their representation in and of itself potentially run the risk of advocacy. Here, *American Psycho*'s relentless corporeal gaze threatens to undermine the critical distance by which the reader might safely localise and contain the perverse acts to Bateman and the social logic he supposedly represents.

The complicity of the text's representational vigour is exacerbated by the fact that Bateman's violent episodes often incorporate scopophilic practices — such as the videotaping of victims (Ellis, 162) — that threaten to collapse the distance between the text and the actions it depicts. At the same time, the emphasis placed on Bateman's role as both spectator and perpetrator of his horrifying deeds implicates the reader as complicit in the act of violence. The extremity of the text's depiction resituates the reader as voyeur rather than detached witness, assaulting but also potentially thrilling the reader. They are, after all, encouraged to derive a reluctant pleasure from such scenes through contrast between "its boringly slow passages of endlessly repeated details of Bateman's life and the speeded-up

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interruptions of violent outbursts" (Abel, 45). And yet, of course, the relief and release of these intensely charged scenes inevitably give way to the same predictable ennui and "clinical flatness of tone" (49) that characterises Bateman's material cataloguing. As such, the prolonged spectacles of torture and mutilation that mark the reader as both accomplice and victim (Mandel, 11) to Bateman's evil deeds, seemingly perpetuate the violence they depict in a manner that both alleviates and reiterates the evils of consumer capitalism. In doing so, the novel's scenes of torture and abuse are permeated by an ambivalent double logic that creates an uncertain distance between the reader and the image as one of ambiguous condemnation and consent.

Shopping Sprees and Killing Sprees

Within such a context it becomes difficult to ascertain whether *American Psycho*'s mutilated corpses function as the absolute expression of consumer capitalism, as generally argued within economic objectification narratives, or as an attempt to break free from such a system.[42] Conflating banality and psychosis, the reader is presented with an ambiguous interpretive choice as to whether these depictions of mutilation provide a much-needed *escape* from the stifling mundanity of consumer capitalism or the absolute *manifestation* of its underlying lunacy. Does the compromised reification of Bateman's victims articulate or undermine a consumer ontology? Does its discursive disarticulation manifest or alleviate the psychotic banality of its worldview? The answer — maddeningly and exhilaratingly — is yes, to both.

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[42] For examples of readings that attempt to glorify the subversive potential of *American Psycho*, see Rogers (240) and Cariaccolo (100)

One example of this simultaneity at play can be found in the chapter 'Chase, Manhattan', in which Bateman's relentless production of corpses is accompanied by a waning of formal narrative structure. The frequent deployment of ellipses, run-on lines and implausibly cinematic activity (Cariacollo, 104; Giles, 169–170), bestows the sequence with a surreal, detached tone. Crucially, this linguistic ambiguity encapsulates the text's ambivalent representation of the mutilated corpse as a figure that simultaneously expresses and critiques consumer capitalism. That is to say, throughout the chapter it remains ambiguous whether Bateman's rampant production of corpses protest or actualise the logic of consumer capitalism as its non-linear structure parallels two previous, diametrically opposed, chapters.

The first of these chapters, 'A Glimpse of Thursday Afternoon' makes similar use of frenetic run-on sentences and incongruous activity to depict Bateman's temporary relinquishment of the stultifying social vigilance that otherwise characterises his public interactions. Instead, Bateman vents his internal desires in bizarre acts of public humiliation that conspicuously deviate from his established social norms. These include the performance of degrading bodily acts in front of esteemed colleagues (81), the disposal of functioning commodities (80), the conspicuous consumption of cheap meats and romantic communion with a poster of Eponine from *Les Miserables* (81), a notably queer, impoverished and revolutionary character. The rampant incongruous activity and surreal tone of this chapter provides stark relief from the itemised recitation and self-conscious neurosis that characterises Bateman's regular social encounters.

However, despite the emancipatory madness of 'A Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon' the same tone which seems to designate deviancy is repeated just a few chapters later in

'Shopping' to depict the very act that epitomises consumer behaviour, the compulsive purchase of material goods (Jarvis, 339). Just as 'A Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon' provides extensive run-on sentences which evade completion to depict delirium and frenzied activity, 'Shopping' contains paragraph-long sentences listing products with ellipses to signify disruption and discontinuity (177–179). Here, the maddening release of consumerism's injunctions becomes virtually indistinguishable from its maddening embrace.

This 'double echo' in which the narrative style of 'Chase, Manhattan' simultaneously parallels 'A Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon' and 'Shopping' induces an interpretive uncertainty in which Bateman's murders might either signify an attempt to escape the mundane restrictions of consumer-capitalism or the absolute manifestation of its particular logic. This uncertainty is expressed through 'Chase Manhattan's indeterminate use of ellipsis, as Bateman's production of corpses at once unsettles the narrative integrity of the text *and also solidifies* it. For example:

> the bullet splatters his head open, cracks it in half like a dark red watermelon against the windshield, and I reach over him, open the door, push the corpse out, slam the door, start driving…

> …in an adrenaline rush causing panting, I can only get a few blocks, partly because of panic, mostly because of the blood, brains, chunks of head covering the windshield (186).

Whereas previous use of ellipsis disarmingly jumps between radically different contexts (95), in 'Chase, Manhattan' a certain degree of continuity is maintained. Whilst the ellipsis presumably signifies a narratorial absence or chronological leap, the impact of such absence is minimised by the grammatical consistency, the repetition of 'windshield' and the

assurance that Bateman has only driven 'a few blocks'. Pairing the production of corpses

with an indeterminate use of ellipsis, *American Psycho* tantalises the reader with the

uncertain *possibility* that events have been omitted whilst seemingly preserving a wider

narrative coherence. As such the scene's escalating acts of murder structure a discursive

undecidability in which the corpse's disintegration of narrative structure becomes

inseparable from the formal representational strategies which normally structure the novel.

Killing sprees become indistinguishable from shopping sprees in an uneasy equivalence

which condemns a consumerist mind-set whilst equally undermining its cathartic mode of

release or relief. Therefore, just as the ontological indeterminacy of the corpse both

expresses and undermines consumerist object relations and models of subjectivity, so too

does its aesthetic ambiguity play into the text's wider expression and subversion of the

consumer psyche.

Cleaning up the Streets

This interpretive indeterminacy is not only introduced by the corpse's discursive

disintegration of the text's narrative structure but also extends to the symbolic function of

the corpse itself, complicating the possibility of definitively locating the corpse as the

product of a consumer capitalist society or the reaction against it. Consider, for example,

the alternative roles ascribed to corpses and their production during Bateman's two

encounters with Al, one of his many homeless victims, in 'Tuesday' and 'Bum on Fifth'. The

first confrontation with Al follows a description which plays out a conservative rhetoric in

which fears of urban moral degeneration are entangled with cosmopolitan deviance from

white heteronormativity:

Black guys pass by offering crack and hustling tickets....A couple of skinny faggots

walk by while I'm at a phone booth checking my messages, staring at my reflection in

an antique store's window. One of them whistles at me, the other laughs: a high, fey,

horrible sound. A torn playbill from *Les Misérables* tumbles down the cracked, urine-

stained sidewalk. A streetlamp burns out....Bags of frozen garbage line the curbs.

(70)

This stagnant cityscape is subsequently projected onto Al, who is himself "surrounded by

garbage" (70), referred to as a "faggot" (71) and a "crazy fucking nigger" (72) and accused of

alcoholism. Figuratively transforming his victim of mutilation into the physical embodiment

of a 'corrupt' Manhattan, Bateman's first documented mutilation reads as a perversion of

social uplift as his uncomprehending attempt to "help" (71) Al quickly descends from

mocking condemnation to a Giuliani-esque, zero-tolerence attempt to 'clean up the streets'

of both physical and cultural corruption. Tellingly, Bateman follows up this initial assault by

"go[ing] somewhere Al would go" (71) and "sit[ting] where Al would sit" (72), encoding his

attack as a means of displacing marginalised communities and reasserting his authority over

their space. Therefore, the narrative context of Bateman's first assault frames mutilation

and murder as an extension of neoliberal gentrification, a necessary process in the

actualisation of an urbane, upper-middle class consumer society.

In contrast, Bateman's second encounter with Al is preceded by the following passage:

"walking down Fifth Avenue around four o'clock in the afternoon, everyone on the street

looks sad, the air is full of decay, bodies lie on the cold pavement, miles of it, some are

moving, most are not" (205). By evoking the registers of death and decomposition to

describe similar scenes of urban decay that Bateman previously relies on violence to

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resolve, the impoverishment and desolation that Bateman previously cites as a *motive* (and,

perhaps, perverse justification) for murder is recast as a consequence of these very actions.

Indeed, it is insinuated that Bateman's mutilation of Al has in fact exacerbated and

multiplied his existence. Not only does Bateman's initial assault fail to 'remove' Al through

murder, but it also aggravates Al's discursive intrusion into Bateman's narrative space as his

altered signage reads "VIETNAM VET BLINDED IN VIETNAM. PLEASE HELP ME. WE ARE

HUNGRY AND HOMELESS" (205, sic) rather than "I AM HUNGRY AND HOMELESS PLEASE

HELP ME" (70). Not only does this extended signage exacerbate Al's linguistic incursion into

the text, but the grammatical transition from first person singular to plural insinuates that

Bateman's violent acts have multiplied rather than diminished the presence that he intends

to eradicate. Bateman's second encounter with Al therefore inverts the novel's previous

signification of mutilation and necro-corporeal production as his murderous activities are

reconstituted as a potential producer, rather than a product, of metropolitan degeneration

and social decay. As such, the 'corpse power' through which Bateman's victims subvert

consumer-capitalism's object relations is not untempered, but rather simultaneously

conscripted into Ellis' depiction of economic violence. Consequently, the mutilated corpse is

left to fluctuate as an ambiguous signifier of liberation and oppression that undermines the

consumer ontology it is deployed to express and vice versa.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how, within the context of serial killer fiction, objectification

narratives involving the corpse take on a profoundly economic dimension that figures necro-

corporeal mutilation as a symbol of reification. However, a new materialist reading of

American Psycho exposes the limits of such interpretive models by unveiling moments of

physical, aesthetic and linguistic resistance that frame the mutilated corpse as less of a consumer object, than an ontologically indeterminate 'thing'. Extending this 'thingly' indeterminacy to the material goods that comprise the novel's memorable (non)human compositions, the mutilated corpse's 'reification' might be understood as a "redemptive reification" (Brown 2015, 374) that activates its latent capacity to obscure (rather than police) the boundaries between humans and objects.

Whilst I have been eager to show in this chapter how the mutilated corpse's representational and material resistance subverts the object relations of consumer capitalism, I also hope to have given a sense of how it simultaneously expresses these same relations, becoming the vehicles by which they are perpetuated in Ellis' work. Positioning physically and representationally resistive corpses within material catalogues, the novel's (non)human compositions frames the disarticulated deceased as imperfect iterations of the commodity object. As such, *American Psycho*'s mutilated corpses unsettle the preconditions of capitalist object relations whilst being incorporated into its actualisation. In this way, the ambivalent 'double position' of the corpse as (non)human subject emerges at three distinct levels: materially, in the act of necro-corporeal mutilation; aesthetically, in the production of (non)human compositions; and symbolically, through the corpse's status as both expression and subversion of consumer capitalism.

More broadly, Part One of this thesis has interrogated different means by which the fragmented corpse becomes initiated into the symbolic networks of objectification. Whilst the sanitised divisions of dissection draw on the clinical gaze's segregation of the subject and object of investigation to transform the corpse into an object of knowledge, the brutal renderings of necro-corporeal mutilation draw on the serialised violence of late-capitalism

to transform the corpse into an object of consumption. However, in both such instances the same acts of necro-corporeal fragmentation that aim to domesticate the corpse's unruly ontology opens up novel avenues of epistemological and ontological destabilisation. The corpse's diversely affecting sensorium inverts attempts at its scientific objectification and undermines detached notions of objectivity itself. Likewise, the corpse's unruly defiance of physical, linguistic and aesthetic manipulation short-circuits attempts at economic objectification and inversely imbues consumer goods with a recalcitrant vitality. Exploiting the same circular syllogisms that claim the corpse to be as 'dead as a doornail', this re-routing of objectification narratives reveals the conceptual utility of exploring the corpse's vitality for wider new materialist enquiry.

Mounting resistance to such literary critical narratives that presume and perpetuate a figuration of the 'corpse-as-object' is crucial to rehabilitating the vital materiality of the corpse-as-subject. After all, literary critique is not an impartially reflective process that dispassionately illuminates a text outside of ideological restraints, but rather a process of continuous management and choice in which certain elements within its subject of analysis are foregrounded whilst others are diminished. In this regard, objectification narratives that situate the corpse as an inert object are not confined to acts of representation but also popular interpretations that perpetuate this sensibility. Resisting the objectification of the corpse, therefore, is not simply a process of identifying the literary conceits by which their agency is reduced within the context of narrative fiction, but also exposing and resisting the strands of thought that derive readings from the presumption and/or construction of the corpse's inertia.

However, throughout this section I have also acknowledged the limits of the corpse's defiant (non)human agency and the continued influence of generic and narrative contexts in which they appear. Just as the corpse power of *Postmortem*'s disorientatingly affecting bodies finds itself in constant tension with forensic fiction's generic predisposition to provide ontological reassurance by resolving corporeal entanglements into discretely delineated necrometric units, so too is the unruly agency of *American Psycho's* corpses tempered by its thematic exploration of complicit resistance.

In the following section I will consider how this problematisation of corpse power is incorporated in figurations of the dead body through an in-depth analysis of contemporary culture's most ubiquitous narrative corpse, the re-animated zombie. As we will explore, the explosive popularity of the zombie in contemporary culture indexes a desire to think through sociomaterial entanglement as both a source of desire and fear. However, the emphatically fantastical nature of the reanimated corpse testifies to the limits of such thought, complicating the extent to which the deceased body operates as a figure capable of disclosing non-human knowledge.

PART 2: SPECTRES OF FLESH

Chapter 3 - 'Impenetrable Abstractions': Hauntology, Socio-Material Indeterminacy and the Reanimated Corpse in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*

"Let us call it hauntology. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger than an ontology of a thinking of Being…it would comprehend [effects] but incomprehensibly."

<div align="right">(Derrida, Spectres of Marx, 10).</div>

Introduction

Part One of this thesis explored how narrative attempts to curtail and contain the corpse's ontological liminality are subverted by the deceased body's propensity to stage material encounters that unsettle the ontological preconditions of the material and conceptual structures in which they are initiated. Subsequently, Part Two turns to a more thorough examination of the literary corpse's ability to stage such material encounters and provide epistemological access to the material world. As we saw previously, the dead body's 'corpse power' is by no means unconstrained by external influence, but rather inextricably bound up in the epistemological constraints of the human subject that it formally indexes. In order to think through this residual anthropism, Part Two interrogates the contemporary popularity of the reanimated corpse, or 'zombie'. Resisting current readings of the zombie as a new materialist icon, it explores how the reanimated corpse's peculiar ontological characteristics articulate the ethical and epistemic barriers to positively conceptualising new materialist ontologies.

In 2002, Danny Boyle's multi-award-winning film *28 Days Later* inaugurated a postmillennial zombie-cycle that, almost two decades later, has shown only modest signs of abating. From the explosive popularity of Robert Kirkman's graphic novel *The Walking Dead* (2003–2019) and its subsequent TV adaptation by AMC (2010–present) to Zombie runs (Sattar, 248),

'philosophical zombies' (Kirk, 2005) and 'Plants vs Zombies' (2009), the reanimated corpse remains a fixture of contemporary entertainment regardless of media format. This abundant fascination with the undead in all its rotting permutations has similarly infiltrated the realms of contemporary fiction with texts such as *World War Z* (Brooks, 2006), *Warm Bodies* (Marion, 2010), *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Austen & Grahame-Smith, 2009) and Brian Keene's slew of zombie thrillers (2003–present) enjoying commercial success and multimedia adaptations of their own. No longer confined to genre fiction, the zombie has more recently started to feature in 'more serious' literary fiction with novels such as *The Girl with all the Gifts* (Carey, 2014), *Raising Stony Mayhall* (Gregory, 2011) and, this chapter's main exemplum, *Zone One* (Whitehead, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, then, this thesis' analysis of the corpse as (non)human subject now turns its attention to the figure that appears to evoke the deceased body's continued animation most prolifically and conspicuously within the contemporary cultural landscape — the zombie. Following the zombie's explicit revelation of the 'liveliness' of dead matter, this chapter examines its supernatural postmortem animation as an emphatically fantastic manifestation of 'corpse power'. Developing Lauro and Embry's conceptualisation of the zombie as an "ontic-hauntic" (395) being, this chapter approaches the reanimated corpse as a hauntological subject that possess a strangely spectral, rather than purely somatic, necro-corporeality that draws attention to the undecidable intersection of material and 'extra-material' components that constitute the (post)human subject. In doing so, it extends the corpse's unruly disruption of the boundaries differentiating *types* of matter — investigating and investigative bodies, humans and nonhumans, objects and things — to a wider consideration of the boundaries between the material and the immaterial. That is to say, the zombie's spectrality elevates the corpse's ontological confusion to a cosmic level that

renegotiates the distinctions between presence and absence. As such, I shall explore how the zombie's ghostly, immaterial quality is often associated with the imperceptible, but no less 'real', influences of social ideology, problematically abstracting 'the social' in a manner that neglects the material bodies by and through which such ideologies operate. In the final section of this chapter, the intersection between the zombie's hauntological corporeality and socio-material indeterminacy will be further explored through an examination of how Colson Whitehead's 2011 novel *Zone One* provides a dualistic treatment of the zombie that reflects on its (im)material ontology and narrative genealogy. In doing so, this chapter contends that the recent abundance of zombies within the narrative landscape is indicative of an attempt to think through the cultural implications of the entangled nature of matter and society; to understand the materiality of the social and the sociality of matter. As we shall see, this fleshly spectrality imbues the reanimated corpse with the potential to expand and diversify our traditional understanding of the material world but at the same time continuously threatens to descend into an abstract mysticism that figuratively 'de-materialises' corporeal phenomena.

Theorising the New Materialist Zombie

Understandably, the zombie's cultural ubiquity has already garnered a great degree of academic attention as demonstrated by the release of several anthologies on the topic since 2008.[43] In many such evaluations, the zombie is associated with a fundamental *loss* of

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[43] See Christe and Lauro: *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (2011), Lauro: *Zombie Theory: A Reader* (2017) Carrington et al: *Generation Z: Zombies Culture and Educating Youth* (2015), Boluk and Lenz: *Generation Zombies: Essays on the Living Dead* (2011), Hubner et al: *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture* (2015), McIntosh and Leverette: *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead* (2008), Balaji: *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means* (2013) and Keetley '*We're All Infected': Essays on AMC's* The Walking Dead *and the Fate of the Human* (2014) etc.

agency and its attendant notions of selfhood. Scholars typically adopt a reading in which "zombies represent a plague of suspended agency" (McGurl, 2010), which situates the fundamental 'meaning' of the zombie and the source of its terror as an "image of the disfigured body dispossessed of its soul, will, agency, and hence its interiority and its very humanity" (McAllister, 73).[44] Such readings cultivate an inherent anthropocentrism by framing non-human influences as apocalyptic contagions that pollute the psychological, moral and ontological integrity of an idealised human subject, which must be protected by force. Consequently, these critical narratives perpetuate exclusionary notions of agency in which the recognition of non-human agential forces — for example, Boon classifies the zombie as "death given agency" (34) — is equated with its fundamental loss. Such readings betray an implicit predisposition to associate the democratisation of agency between human and non-human subjects with its essential cessation. Re-emerging as a site of cultural fascination at the same moment in which social, scientific and economic factors increasingly problematise exclusionary concepts of the human, it is not unreasonable to assume that the zombie as a figure of terror is, at least in part, a response to shifting notions of agency and a re-evaluation of nonhuman determinants that might be seen to constitute the human subject.

The task of this chapter, then, is to reconsider the zombie from a new materialist perspective as a figure in which identity and agency is not *lost*, per se, but renegotiated as an intersection of various biological, institutional and technological actants. A new materialist acknowledgement of the zombie's agential entanglement might therefore

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[44] For similar readings see: Knickerbocker (68), Lauro & Embry (397), McNally (124), Bishop (90) etc.

provide a means of appreciating how contemporary zombie narratives evoke a reconfigured continuation of agency from a non-anthropocentric perspective.

Movements towards such a sensibility might be observed in current attempts to rethink the zombie as a new materialist or posthuman subject. For example, critics such as Thacker (2017, 363), Muntean (83), Commentale (201) and Penfold-Mounce & Reed have argued that the zombie represents a "decentering of agency" (127). And yet, such readings also present a tendency to glorify the utility of the zombie as a figure through which the human subject might be able to attain epistemological access to non-human agency. For example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen mobilises a "zombie-oriented ontology…which makes evident the objectal status of the body as a heterogeneous concatenation of parts" (2017b, 388–389, sic) and functions as "a kind of contact zone between the human and the nonhuman" (383) through which "we [might] recognize the suffering, the possibilities, the potency, and the dignity of humans and nonhumans alike" (392). By insisting on the similarities between humans and zombies Cohen advocates an ecological ethics that prioritises the interiority of nature within the human subject (383). However, in doing so Cohen problematically neglects the zombie's supernatural dimension, instead stating that "zombies seem wholly natural. They are 'just' dead human bodies, after all" (385). Effacing the distinction between zombie and corpse, Cohen's emphasis on the zombie's "insistent human connection" (391) to foster a reciprocal ecological ethics provides a skewed reading of the reanimated dead that fails to attend to their epistemological resistance.

In light of such readings, it becomes necessary to develop a more nuanced response that acknowledges the reanimated corpse's capacity to express non-human agencies whilst accounting for the fantastical framework in which it operates. After all, whilst the

decomposing corpse articulates material agency within a naturalistic register, the zombie's

supernatural *re*animation locates the origins of such agency outside of the recognisable

material realm. Often originating from quasi-supernatural catalysts such as voodoo magic

and religious reckoning,[45] the reanimated corpse is a quintessentially paranormal entity that

insistently gestures *beyond* the physical limits that usually constrain biology. Even when the

zombie is given 'scientific' origins, such as within those narratives that construct the zombie

as a product of pseudoscientific experimentation,[46] epidemiological disease[47] or radioactive

mutation,[48] the creature "remains fantastic, as three of its defining traits defy the known

laws of physics: the return from the dead of those long deceased, the fact that they do not

need to eat to survive, and their immortality unless acted upon by external force. The pure

Romerian zombie is thus paradoxical: it is a fantastic figure explained scientifically"

(Knickerbocker, 64).[49] That is to say, in all its materiality, the zombie's supernatural

animation nevertheless gestures towards that which lies beyond matter, or at least beyond

traditional conceptualisations that "render matter a fundamentally quantitative

phenomenon, amenable to precise measurement" (Coole, 94).

This supernatural component necessarily complicates the zombie's particular brand of 'non-

human agency' or 'corpse power'. On the one hand, the reanimated corpse's supernatural

element might be seen to diminish its corpse power by ascribing its animation to an external

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[45] This is particularly true of the early cinematic zombie. See: *White Zombie* (1932), *King of the Zombies* (1941), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966) etc

[46] See: *28 Days Later* (2002), *Resident Evil* (2002), *The Crazies* (1973), *Re-animator* (1985), *Hell of the Living Dead* (1980) etc.

[47] See: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Quarantine* (2008), *Dead Alive* (1992) and *I Am Legend* (1954). Although the creatures appearing in the latter novel and subsequent cinematic adaptations are referred to as 'vampires', Lauro and Embry persuasively categorise them as biological zombies (409).

[48] See: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Fido* (2006), *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), *I Was a Teenage Zombie* (1987), *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (1974) etc.

[49] Although Knickerbocker specifies the Romerian zombie, the biological impossibility of initial resurrection applies this contradictory fantastical scientism to all forms of re-animated corpse.

determinant (Lauro 2016, 154) as an abstract, immaterial force — be it religious, ideological or psychological — that manipulates a passively receptive material corpse. Edwards refers to this as "a kind of 'bad' posthumanism' [in which] the corpse is merely the dead body reanimated by ideological forces…rather than the site of vitalism and human reconfiguration" (21). From this perspective, the reanimated corpse produces a dissonance in which nonhuman agency is both expressed and deferred, acknowledged and explained away. Such a dynamic finds lexical expression in the fact that zombies are often referred to as reanimat*ed*, rather than reanimat*e* corpses. That is to say, the corpse is here rendered *active* but not an *agent* and continues to occupy a passive position, both grammatically and conceptually, whilst an external actant is perceived as the source of its animation.

On the other hand, however, the zombie's supernatural qualities might be embraced as a signifier of epistemological excess rather than diffused through explanatory narratives that de-localise its agency. Pursuing this second interpretation, the next section situates the reanimated corpse as a hauntological subject whose impossible ontology signifies and perpetuates its fundamental resistance to definitive epistemological comprehension or interpretation. As such, rather than dismissing the reanimated corpse as a site of terror that allegorises the *loss* of human agency or idolising it as a non-problematic exemplar of non-human agency, this chapter considers the zombie as a figure of agential disturbance and epistemological recalcitrance. Indeed, as we shall see, it is precisely in order to induce sensations of epistemic crises that *Zone One* provides an emphatically hauntological representation of zombies and worlds.

<u>Hauntology</u>

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the reanimated corpse's hauntological pedigree, it is worthwhile considering (and complicating) the extent to which the zombie's materiality is often defined in contradistinction to the ghost's immateriality. For example, Cohen claims that "the undead with the most enduring history of haunting are no doubt ghosts….yet these intangible spirits have yielded over the last decade to a relentlessly corporeal zombie onslaught" (2017b, 383). Such sentiments are echoed by a variety of critics such as Boon (37), Smith (2007, 147), Dendle (177), Venables (220) Commentale (189) and Bishop (21). This conceptual dichotomy is dependent upon a classical reading of the ghost as an "immaterial" (Leigton, 2) being that "undermin[es] the apparent predictability of the material world" (Briggs, 24) and "indulges the wish to believe in another, more fearful world, beyond the material order of things" (Leighton, 10). Potentially signifying spiritual (Hildebrant, 15), psychological (Freud, 13–14) or social (Gordon 2008, 8) actants — that is, any traditionally 'immaterial' yet determinate entities — the abstract, ephemeral ghost functions as the constitutive other against which the zombie's carnal, material nature is often defined and circumscribed. In this regard, the constitutive disidentification of the material zombie and the immaterial ghost might be read as an imaginative extension of Cartesian substance dualism that problematically separates body from mind, soul and spirit.

However, with the advent of Derridean 'hauntology', such clean and clear delineations between ghostly immateriality and zombie-like carnality become increasingly difficult to maintain. Originating in *Spectres of Marx* (Derrida, 1993), hauntology draws attention to the materiality through which the ghost's immaterial activities are necessarily expressed, stating that "the spectre is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of spirit" (5) and that "there is never any becoming spectre of the spirit

without at least an appearance of flesh" (126).[50] Put simply, Derrida reconceptualises

spectres (*gespenst*) or ghosts as materialisations of more abstract concepts or spirits (*geist*)

within particular moments of physical realisation. As a result, the Derridean spectre's

paradoxical (im)materiality manifests as an 'absent presence', a contradictory ability to

positively express its absence in a manner that is perceptually sensible (48; 63; 204).

Emphasising the ephemeral materiality inherent in the spectre, Derrida draws attention to

the crucial ontological implications of the ghost as a figure which "dislocates the *self*

presence of the subject" (Davis 2007, 19, original emphasis) and "describes [an] instable or

indefinable ontology" (Loevlie, 337). As such, the Derridean spectre enacts an ontological

defamiliarisation that renders matter newly strange, haunting it with that which is outside

of presence.

Despite its emphatic propensity towards ontological estrangement, the theoretical potential

of hauntology for new materialist analysis has remained comparatively untapped. However,

as Maoilearca observes "the notions of spirit, spectrality, ghosts and animate matter

(vitalism) are closely connected to many ideas operating within the new materialism" (16).

This reluctance to embrace hauntology's new materialist utility is potentially a product of its

recognition of epistemological finitude and conspicuously poststructuralist origins (Loevlie,

337). After all, the spectre's 'paradoxical phenomenality' is adopted as a moment of

epistemological withdrawal, Derrida primarily theorising the spectre as an entity that is

beyond comprehension "not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present

presence, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge"

(5). Such sentiments conflict with those subsets of new materialism that aspire to epistemic

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[50] See also pages: 6; 101; 126

contact with the non-human. Of course, it is precisely the centrality of epistemological

finitude that renders hauntology a strategic addition for this thesis' own brand of 'cautious

materialism'. As such, Derrida's call to recognise and acknowledge the 'otherness' of the

spectre without presupposing definitive comprehension provides a productive alternative to

new materialisms that prioritise non-human access, such as Cohen's theorisation of the

zombie as a contact zone connecting human and non-human forces. Gesturing towards that

which lies outside of thought and is therefore epistemologically unattainable, the Derridean

spectre becomes an apt metaphor for the mind-blowing strangeness of postclassical

approaches to matter, which appears to constantly retreat from human attempts at

epistemological comprehension.[51]

Zombie Hauntologies

Returning once more to the figure of the reanimated corpse, such an acknowledgement of

hauntology's ontological implications enables an appreciation of how the figure of the

zombie, as material revenant, expresses a comparable 'spectrality'. That is to say, just as

Derrida's analysis reveals classical readings of the ghost as a purely immaterial being to be

woefully insufficient, so too does it suggest that an entirely materialist reading of the

zombie is reductive to the figure's complex aesthetic, theoretical and political signification.

After all, "zombies can, like ghosts, represent the ongoing presence of traumatic racial

histories" (Hurley, 314). Furthermore, with its conspicuous display of decomposition and

constantly re-enacted disarticulation "the zombie is a creature that is *always* missing

something" (Lauro 2017, 353) rendering it "an incarnation of present-absence" (Lauro &

Embry, 400) that is "identifiable not by its presence,…but by an act of subtraction" (Lauro

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[51] For example, Karen Barad evocatively deploys the rhetoric of hauntology to discuss the "ghostly sense of dis/continuity" (2010, 244) expressed by quantum matter

2016, 165). Indeed, this spectral resonance is encoded in the zombie's etymological origins. Drawing on the work of Wade Davis' controversial *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985), Ackermann and Gauthier observe that the Haitian term *zombi* might actually refer to one of "two types of zombis: soul-less bodies and bodyless souls" (473), with both figures subsumed under a single noun. With these features in mind, rather than viewing the zombie as an entirely material being or an interchangeable counterpart to the ghost, I will proceed in the manner of Lauro and Embry, who "following Derrida, tak[e] up the paradoxical nature of the zombie as neither being nor nonbeing" whilst acknowledging that "the zombie is more substantial than the ghost….resid[ing] somewhere between the ontic and the hauntic" (409n6). Therefore, a hauntological approach positions the relationship between the zombie and the ghost as one of nonidentical contiguity, rather than constitutive disidentification that figures both subjects as (im)material entities.

Having explored the reanimated corpse's (im)materiality, this chapter now considers how this spectral aspect manifests in the zombie's impossible animation. Both constrained by its corporeality and exceeding material limitations, the indeterminate locus of the zombie's agency frustrates attempts to identify whether the source of its animation lies in material, biological compulsions or extra-material social imperatives. The following section briefly traces the zombie narrative's historical trajectory, arguing that its shifting representation from 'zombie-drone' to 'zombie-ghoul' alternately identifies its corpse power as the product of immaterial social forces and material biological forces. Consequently, the spectral (im)materiality of the reanimated corpse emerges as a sociomaterial indeterminacy that conflates and confuses these animating principles. Such considerations not only provide a wider framework for understanding the zombie's general narrative significance but also provide crucial insight into how *Zone One's* explicitly hauntological depiction of the zombie

enables it to interrogate the diverse web of sociomaterial entanglements that constitute the contemporary subject.

Drones & Ghouls: Zombie as SocioMaterial Being

The zombie's success as a cultural icon has often been accredited to its "semiotic fecundity" (Lauro 2017, xi) or "blankness" (Hubner, 7) that allows it to be interpreted in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, one consistent line of interpretation frames zombie narratives as allegories of either social or biological determinism, as cautionary tales illuminating the dangerous potential for invasive cultural ideologies and biotechnological interference to compromise and ultimately overcome the human subject's rational autonomy (Collins & Bond, 190). Intertwined as such readings are, the zombie narrative's genealogical evolution within the Western tradition somewhat disentangles these interpretations by lending emphasis to either social or biological determinism. Adopting Kevin Boon's historical typology of the figure,[52] this section observes how the 'zombie-drone' (37) of the early-twentieth century is succeeded by the mid-century 'zombie-ghoul' (35) and precipitates a shift in modes of representation and reception that encourage socially determinist and biologically determinist readings respectively. The history of the zombie genre has been dominated by this dichotomy, which is precisely what *Zone One* sets out to disrupt.

Emerging from the American occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934 (McAlister, 74), the first depictions of the zombie to penetrate the Anglo-American consciousness are those of the zombie-drone that emphatically externalises the reanimated corpse's agency. These initial zombie narratives of the early-twentieth century such as *The Magic Island* (Seabrook,

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[52] Whilst the terminology deployed here is Boon's, this transition from first to second generation zombiedom is regularly rehearsed in the critical literature. For example, see also: Zani and Meaux (98), Knickerbocker (63), Muntean (83), Aldana-Reyes (2014b, 142)

1929), *White Zombi* (Halperin, 1932) and *Black Baghdad* (Craige, 1933) reimagined Haitian folk tales and depicted their central figure as an undead slave reanimated to work the plantations of its master. Functioning as an allegory of alienated labour that simultaneously condemns and legitimises the colonial project (Kee, 17), the zombie-drone depicts the human subject reduced to a mechanised instrument. "A soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life" (Seabrook, 93), the zombie-drone narrative is more about possession, both psychic and material, than biological animation.[53]

Attributing the re-animated corpses' apparent display of material agency to the magical prowess of the slave master (or *bokor*), the zombie-drone conspicuously equates spiritual manipulations of the material body with the social forces of colonial exploitation, casting the mindless, depersonalised creature as a nightmarish representation of social and spiritual control. For example, Seabrook's account registers his surprise at learning that "close even to the cities there are sometimes zombies" (95) and that there have been reports that zombies are employed by the American company Hasco "perhaps the last name anybody would think of connecting with either sorcery or superstition" (95). Seabrook states that Hasco "pays low wages, twenty or thirty cents a day, and gives steady work. It is modern big business" (95) and describes the zombie drones "lined…up for registration….vacant-eyed like cattle" (95), bringing the concept of industrial labour's zombifying drudgery closer to home with descriptions of modern economic servitude perhaps all too familiar to his readership. Here, the mind-numbing effects of labour are not limited to the exoticised rural-

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[53] Similar to the classical ghost, the zombie-drone expresses material reality, specifically the body, as the manipulated and exploitable vessel of abstract agents. In this sense, the spiritual logic that animates the zombie-drone might reasonably lead us to interpret the figure as a haunted body.

agricultural practices of the Haitian plantation, but infiltrate the privileged space of American industrial commerce. As such, the superposition of these contexts establishes 'the social' as an extra-material animating force alongside and entangled with the mystical.

The zombie-drone's ghostly, extra-material quality is exacerbated by the fact that these early depictions of zombies do not feature the decomposing, putrescent corpses analogous with their contemporary iterations, but essentially fresh and functioning bodies, albeit lacking sentience or free will. Seabrook notes that within the folklore, zombie slavers were required to "dig up the body before it had time to rot" (93) and the act of decomposition actually denotes the end of the zombie-drone's post-mortem enslavement (99). Here, the reaffirmation of material agency is evoked as a potential cure to the spiritual agency by which they are manipulated. This preservation of corporeal integrity is likewise maintained in early cinematic depictions of the zombie-drone as an entity possessing a well-defined, unruptured body. As such, critical scrutiny evoked by the zombie-drone is less directed at materiality, than the abstracted psycho-social forces by which matter is subdued, manipulated and set to work.

However, this depiction of the intact, socially animated zombie-drone undergoes a dramatic reversal in the mid-twentieth century with its more familiar incarnation as the zombie-ghoul (Boon, 38). First popularised in Romero's seminal *Living Dead* series, the cadaverous, flesh-eating zombie-ghoul bestows the creature with an emphatically corporeal dimension and sets the blueprint for most of the qualities that continue to be associated with the figure. Foul, rotting and fragmented, the zombie-ghoul presents decomposition as a source of fear rather than salvation. Furthermore, unlike its possessed 'drone' counterpart, the zombie-ghoul is no longer governed by a master but rather by its own innate desire to feed on the

flesh of its victims. It is during this transition that the zombie appears to break away from the socio-spiritual logic that had previously functioned as its source of animation (McAllister, 74–75), as Romero's re-conceptualisation enacts a transition from "the classic mindless corpse [to] the relentless instinct-driven newly dead" (Lauro & Christie, 2) providing "new zombies [which] may be read as material vessels devoid of social meaning" (Aldana-Reyes 2014b, 143).

This transition from zombie-drone to zombie-ghoul, from matter-as-vessel to matter-as-master, inundates a second common reading of the zombie; as a creature that expresses the horror of biologised man, a too fleshly embodiment that derives terror from the possibility of an existence limited to anatomical functioning. In such a reading, zombie-ghouls confront their audience with the fear of an excessively material human subject reduced to "a relentless will to consume and not much more. Ungraced even by the intentions of the evil witchdoctor whose bidding they used to do, they wander aimlessly and apolitically in search of food" (McGurl, 2010).

However, the contemporary zombie's refusal to neatly align with either of these interpretive frameworks confuses the relative (im)materiality of its corpse power. After all, a biologically deterministic reading of the zombie as an "embod[iment of] physical corruption" (Boon, 34) or "the inanimate end to which we are all destined" (Lauro & Embry, 90) is conspicuously undermined by its continued animation and transgression of the biological boundaries between life and death. This 'impossible animation' is a trait continuously exhibited by the bodies' incredible feats of movement (after all, the zombie continues to stagger, limp or crawl towards its victims despite often lacking the necessary ligaments, muscles or tendons with which to do so). The threat of the zombie, then, does

not so much stem from a purely *biological* terror, as from its ability to *overcome* biological

deficiency. Similarly, the zombie's willingness to place itself in danger in order to acquire a

sustenance unnecessary to its subsistence (Knickerbocker, 68), demonstrates the antithesis,

rather than the apotheosis, of purely biologised human survivalism.

Conversely, it appears equally reductive to consider the zombie as a figure of social or extra-

material terror, since such an argument overlooks the emphatically somatic, embodied

manner through which these social desires are performed. For example, although the

zombie's primary compulsion to kill and feed is regularly interpreted as an expression of

consumer capitalism's predatory excess (Lauro & Embry, 92), it is necessary to acknowledge

how *imperfectly* such actions are reproduced. Put simply, zombies don't *actually* go

shopping, perform menial labour or re-establish hierarchical regimes, but present a

corporeal parody of such practices. Therefore, the zombie's conspicuous corporeality

indicates that its interpretation as a vessel of social agency is just as unfeasible as its

interpretation as a vessel of material agency.

Neither material nor immaterial, neither biological nor social, the zombie 's conspicuous

display of impossible animation announces an indeterminate agency that both constitutes

and transcends matter.[54] The zombie, therefore, simultaneously collapses the boundaries

between the material and the immaterial, flesh and spirit, the biological and the social. As

we shall see, few zombie narratives do so as explicitly or emphatically as *Zone One.*

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[54] As Zani and Meaux observe, this interpretive undecidability itself often becomes an invaluable source of anxiety within zombie narratives (108).

Zone One and Spectral Zombies

Having explored the relationship between the zombie's sociomaterial indeterminacy and its decidedly spectral ontology, I will now consider how Colson Whitehead's novel articulates this dynamic by externalising and collapsing the zombie's ghostly and fleshly qualities. In doing so, it provides a compelling reflection on both the zombie's spectrality and its narrative genealogy.

Zone One's Hauntological Context

Set in an unspecified near future some years after a zombie apocalypse, Whitehead's novel imagines a world in which survivors have managed to retake Manhattan from Canal Street down, temporarily securing an area referred to as 'Zone One'. The story centres on a trio of 'sweepers', Mark Spitz, Gary and Kaitlyn as they make their way through Zone One killing any residual zombies as part of a larger, loosely organised, attempt to rebuild society known as 'The American Phoenix'. This primary narrative is interspersed with flashbacks detailing Spitz's pre-apocalyptic past and post-apocalyptic adventures. Forgoing documentation of the initial outbreak and its immediate consequences that typically forms the focus of regular zombie narratives, the framing narrative's chronological distance positions the text at a vantage point that prompts a meditation on the themes of nostalgia, haunting, trauma and loss. As such, the novel's setting counterpoints the material concerns and activities of its protagonists and undead antagonists with the (traditionally) more abstract sensations and experiences associated with memory (Bergson, 23).

By counterpointing the materiality of the diegetic present (that is, the present as presence) with the immateriality of a past which has been destroyed and primarily exists within the abstract realms of memory, the novel resonates with a hauntological tendency to note

present absences. This tendency is primarily realised through the novel's depiction of Manhattan's postapocalyptic cityscape, which — as we shall see — is consistently imaged as a zombie-like entity. Such present absences are refracted through the novel's main character, Mark Spitz, who regularly comes across incomplete tableaus including the abandoned wreckage of a hideout (133), Manhattan's decimated horizon (89) and the cryptic code written in vehicles by a character known as The Quiet Storm (232). Reading "the flaws in the skyline, the gaps" (89) and "the meaning encoded in the spaces between the vehicular syllables" (232), Spitz hauntologically deciphers the ghostly landscape by acknowledging an interplay between the material and the immaterial, how meaning is structured by its lack: "he knew them all from their absences" (133).

At the same time, by presenting its spectral landscape as a text to be deciphered, *Zone One* encourages the reader to seek out present absences within the texture of the novel. Notably, despite the novel's primary setting of South Manhattan, *Zone One* adamantly refuses to mention 9/11. This omission appears especially conspicuous and purposeful since the two principal locations in which the text's action take place — Fulton x Gold and Church x Duane — intersect *precisely* at ground zero. As such, the establishment of 'Zone One' might be read as an ultimately doomed attempt to reconstruct a lost New York out of the ashes of Ground Zero, positioning the novel as a circuitous attempt to deal with the fundamental absence at its narrative and geographic core.

Furthermore, the extent to which New York itself is repeatedly described as an undead entity encourages the reader to extend the city's paradoxical (im)materiality to that of the corpse. Described alternately as a "phantasmagorical" (78) "ghost ship" (4) and a "monstrous" (58) "cadaver" (65), "dying" and "deathless" (223), possessing "extruded guts"

(5), butchered "insides" (6) and cannibalistic inclinations (244), Zone One is framed as a

paradoxically (im)material zombie in its own right. It is within this decidedly spectral context

that Whitehead sets his zombie novel and, as we shall see, this thematic overlay of

materiality and immateriality, presence and absence, proceeds to imbue *Zone One*'s

zombies with a decidedly ghostly, extra-material dimension.

<u>Stragglers and Skels</u>

The spectrality of *Zone One's* reanimated corpses operates in tandem with a wider

meditation on the figure's aforementioned narrative history. Indeed, the stance adopted by

Zone One as a literary artefact suggests that Whitehead's spectral zombies can be read as

symptomatic rather than singular. Positioning itself at the intersection between 'genre

fiction' and 'literary fiction', *Zone One* represents Whitehead's self-consciously literary take

on the zombie, signified by the hardback edition's tongue-in-cheek tagline: "A zombie novel

with brains". The novel's serious treatment of its subject matter and critical self-awareness

frames it as an interrogation of the zombie as a wider cultural figure, rather than an exercise

in re-iterating the tropes and characteristics with which the zombie is popularly associated.

In doing so, the text invites the reader to reflect on the zombie's narrative history from the

outset and contemplate its cultural work as a site of horror within the wider context of

"monster movies" (5). Accordingly, *Zone One*'s particular reimagining of the zombie mythos

provides an incredibly apt reflection of its historical trajectory that foregrounds and

combines its different interpretations.

Whitehead's most dramatic contribution to the genre is the introduction of a sub-species of

zombie known as 'stragglers'. Although sharing many of the physical characteristics of the

conventional zombie, stragglers do not demonstrate physical aggression towards humans,

instead performing indefinite repetitions of a singular action. Manifesting in various guises, such as a plant store owner repotting shrubbery, a salesman suspended mid-pitch, an office worker lifting the hood of a copy machine and a fast-food server operating a fry station (Whitehead, 49), the activities repeated are conspicuously related to the stragglers' prior acts of labour. Despite Whitehead's protestations that *Zone One* draws on the Romerian zombie, rather than its roots in colonial narratives of the early-twentieth century (Whitehead, 2012), this sub-species of zombie remains eerily reminiscent of early depictions of the 'zombie -drone'. After all, *Zone One's* stragglers are devoid of personal sentience yet compelled through an abstract injunction, here the habituating effects of routine employment that explicitly transforms its workforce into "bedraggled drones" (148), to indefinitely continue the labour performed in life. Furthermore, the mundane activities in which they appear to be engaged conjure a sense of drudgery, denoting updated parallels of the "dull heavy tasks" (Seabrook, 93) assigned to the original zombie-drone. Just as the zombie-drone's abstract, social obligation to autonomically perform plantation labour outstrips their mental faculties and ultimately death itself, the "interminable loop of repeated gestures" (50) that previously comprise the stragglers' urban labour transcends the deleterious effects of material decomposition and suspends the straggler in a "discrete and eternal moment" (50). Like the zombie-drone, then, Whitehead's stragglers provide a nightmarish representation of habituated social control that expresses the possibility that, rather than autonomous agents, humans are nothing more than dumb vessels destined to repeat the actions dictated by the "invisible fist" (17) of impersonal external forces: "an army of mannequins, limbs adjusted by an inscrutable hand" (48–9).

 Crucially, Whitehead repeatedly describes the stragglers through a phantasmagorical discourse, referring to their various workstations as "the places they chose to *haunt*" (48;

33; 159; 225, my emphasis). Reminiscent of the spiritual logic that both conceptually and narratively animates the zombie-drone, Whitehead's depiction of the straggler is emphatically ghostly, a resonance that is literalised when Mark Spitz reflects "he was a ghost. A straggler" (155). By drawing on the ghostly qualities of the Haitian zombie-drone as a figure that emphasises the body's extra-material manipulation, *Zone One*'s depiction of the straggler aligns it with fears of social habituation and ideological control that manifest through the text in the form of involuntary bodily responses to set stimuli (8; 10; 24–25; 77; 164). As such, the straggler's reanimated corpse realises the text's perpetual anxiety over the material effects of social control and symbolically counterpoints the pre-apocalyptic citizenry's predisposition to be "conditioned" (8), "imprinted" (25) and "programmed by the vista-less city to utter [specific phrases] at the correct triggers" (57).

In contrast to the drone-like straggler, the figure of the skel corresponds more faithfully with the recognisable Romerian 'zombie-ghoul' of the mid-twentieth century, with the brachylogy of its very name (an abbreviation of skeleton) indicating a physical reductionism. From the outset, skels are defined by their physical aggression and materiality, described in their first appearance as "thin membranes of meat stretched over bone…sensible dress suits made darker still, and stiffed, by jagged arterial splashes and kernals of gore" (14). Foregrounding their violent corporeality, the skels' description is limited to their external qualities, whereas the more ethereal stragglers are given a projected level of interiority through the ascription of pronouns (82) and the regular rumination on their past-lives in a morbid caption-contest-style game referred to as 'Solve the Straggler' (80–81).

Therefore, Whitehead's distinction between the ghostly, drone-like straggler and the physicalised, ghoulish skel establishes a figurative dialectic that parallels the Western

zombie's historical trajectory, as its initial configuration as drone is evoked alongside its mid-century re-imagining as ghoul. As *Zone One* progresses however, the distinction between these two entities is gradually elided, reformulating the contemporary zombie as an emphatically spectral figure.

The Spectral Zombie

This climactic breakdown comes in the form of a straggler, a gypsy "fortune-teller" (229), who unexpectedly breaks out of her post-mortem stupor and bites Gary on the hand, signalling a profound shift in the book's narrative universe that elides the distinction between the non-violent straggler and the physically aggressive skel.[55] Significantly, the straggler-skel's occupation as a spirit *medium* encodes this typological disruption as a transgression of the boundaries between spirit and matter. The role of the medium as a fulcrum between these two domains dramatises the intersection of the skel's corporeal realm and the straggler's spiritual realm just as her action denotes the simultaneous adherence to social and biological imperatives. After all, in biting Gary, the medium secures his demise providing an 'answer' to Spitz's question "will *we* make it through?" (228, my emphasis) by dissolving the unit to which Spitz's pronoun refers. The medium's bite is therefore at once a performance of labour and impulse, satisfying social and biological imperatives in a single moment that confuses the tentative distinction between duty and desire.

Following this climactic conflation of skel and straggler, Whitehead's zombies are depicted as truly spectral figures rather than physicalized ghouls or possessed drones. Shortly after

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[55] This elision is subtly foreshadowed throughout the scene which inconspicuously refers to the fortune-teller as both a straggler (224) and a skel (226).

this incident, Spitz observes "the dead strea[m] past the building like characters on an electronic ticker in Times Square, abstractions as impenetrable as the Quiet Storm's vehicles" (246). Evoking the novel's prior representations of technology (4) and language as hauntological entities that are simultaneously present and absent, the paradoxical (im)materiality of the zombies' 'impenetrable abstractions' represents a conflation of the straggler's ghostly absence and the skel's ghoulish presence, as the two figures are conflated under the collective term, 'the dead'. Like the gypsy straggler-skel, the zombie is revealed as a spectral conflation of the spiritual and the carnal: "these were not the Lieutenant's stragglers, transfixed by their perfect moments...that existed only as its ghost. These were the angry dead, the ruthless existence of chaos made flesh" (258). As such, *Zone One*'s narrative progression stages a figurative dialectic which devolves into a paradoxical mesh of social and material models of agency resulting in a decidedly spectral zombiedom.

It is this 'spectral materiality' that irreconcilably entwines abstract social imperatives and material biological imperatives that composes *Zone One's* final assessment of the zombie and its significance to contemporary culture. In this sense, Whitehead's novel resurrects the original duality of the zombi(e), suggesting that its contemporary manifestation is one in which a certain spectrality functions as a surface upon which the irresolvable contradictions of its sociomaterial indeterminacy is played out.

Whilst it would be excessive to extrapolate a general theory of the contemporary zombie as an increasingly spectral entity from Whitehead's text, his novel does provide a valid meditation on its post-millennial instantiations. After all, Lauro has identified that "the immaterial zombie is making a comeback" (2017, 353) and Pifer notes that the contemporary zombie comedy's (zom-com) lampooning of the banal drudgery of consumer

capitalism conjures the "image of the enslaved worker [which], while new to the Romero zombie audience, is actually a return to the image that captured the public's imagination in the early twentieth century" (168). At the same time, however, the contemporary zombie has been characterised as "considerably more gruesome in appearance and behaviour than the earlier Voudou zombie" (Muntean, 83, sic). Whilst such observations may seem contradictory, a hauntological reading of the reanimated corpse accounts for this divergent proliferation of excesses that allows the contemporary zombie to be at once more and less material than previous iterations.

Zone One's Epistemological Limits

Returning to Whitehead's novel, it is important to recognise that the dramatic significance of *Zone One*'s conflation of skels and stragglers exceeds the reinterpretation of the zombie as a spectral figure. As discussed previously, the spectral representation of the zombie as an (im)material being foregrounds its epistemological inaccessibility. Accordingly, within Whitehead's narrative the disruption of the zombie's typological boundaries primarily functions as a disruption to the tenuous sense of knowledge and reassurance that has been established throughout Zone One's restoration project: "Solve the Straggler, and you took a nibble out of the pure chaos the world had become" (81). After all, the conflation of straggler and skel defamiliarizes the zombie as a once more unpredictable entity that cannot be neatly categorised or typified into discrete recognisable entities. This reframing of pre-established knowledge is indicated in Spitz's contemplation that "if one skel broke the rules, there were more" (242). Reframing 'knowledge' as 'rules', this statement evokes a childlike register that dramatizes the ill-advised artifice of the Restoration's presumed models of knowledge, here exposed as nothing more than man-made rules no more binding than those of a child's game.

In keeping with the novel's general depiction of Zone One as a zombie-like space, this epistemological disorientation is geographically realised as Spitz reflects that "with Gary's attack, he was one foot in the Wasteland again, and nothing could be taken for granted" (231) and the surroundings with which he has been gradually familiarised become "alien and unnerving" (235). Indeed, the revelation that Zone One is nothing more than a PR stunt designed to instil "the only metaphor left in this mess…Keep chaos out, order in" (97) that re-enforces the distinctions between human and non-human entities, exposes the American Phoenix's attempt to regain control of New York as nothing more (or less) than an attempt to salvage significatory and epistemic control of the landscape.

Ultimately, then, the operations of the Phoenix witnessed in the novel primarily consist of forcing the postapocalyptic landscape to cohere with "that sensible, age-old grid layout" (76) of a pre-apocalyptic Manhattan through which its "geographical circumstance…could be subdued and understood" (34) by mapping the environment and clearing it of undead aberrations that diverge from official schematics. Significantly, the sweepers' mission is not simply to eliminate stragglers, but also "to record demographic data: the ages of the targets, the density at the specific location, structure type, number of floors" (34), thus enabling The Phoenix "to extrapolate the whole city from Zone One, speculate about how long it will take *X* amount of three-man sweeper units to clear the island zone by zone, north to south and river to river" (34). Pairing zombie-reduction with knowledge-acquisition, the role of Zone One's sweepers is to provide the knowledge through which a restoration of the city might be actualised. And yet, the terms 'speculate' and 'extrapolate' belies the tenuous nature of such knowledge.

As such, the late revelation of Zone One's ultimate uninhabitability indicates that team Omega's mission is less to make New York once more habitable than to resurrect "the truth of the grid's rectilinear logic, its consequences, of how people moved and lived inside boundaries" (34) that delineates space into a territorialised and compartmentalised regularity that structures the sweepers' and readers' understanding of the physical environment. By re-establishing control over Manhattan's co-ordinates, the reconstruction aims to resurrect the possibility of positive knowledge: "in reconstruction, you knew where you stood" (89), a spatial knowledge that is threatened and undermined by Zone One's constitutive outside, the homogenous "great out there" (39) of the 'Wasteland' infinitely lacking in cartographic or ordinal reference points.

Given the symbolic construction of Zone One as an effort to regain epistemological control of a violently emergent nonhuman environment, it is unsurprising that the collapsing distinctions between straggler and skel is diegetically synchronous with the collapse of Zone One's walls. That is to say, the breakdown of the zombie's 'ontology' narratively precedes and thematically foreshadows the collapse of the physical and conceptual barriers that separate Zone One from the Wasteland, the 'known' from the unknown and the reconstructed city's inhabitants from the zombie horde. In this sense, the zombie's newfound spectrality precipitates an epistemic crisis that undermines attempts to arrive at definitive understanding of the non-human world through a continuation of pre-existing models of knowledge.

Significantly, although Whitehead's climactic breakdown of the distinctions between humans and zombies rehearses the "prevailing trope of the millennial zombie: the idea that humans and zombies have little to distinguish them" (Collins & Bond, 202), in *Zone One* this

encounter is enacted in pursuit of interjecting mystery, rather than extending empathy.

Rather than bestowing his undead creatures with the "zombie subjectivities" (Ni Fhlainn,

152) that are increasingly prevalent in contemporary undead narratives,[56] *Zone One*

deconstructs the subjectivities of its human protagonists to the extent that it becomes

uncertain whether they possess any such subjectivity at all, or simply "detritus that passed

for identity" (50). For example, all of *Zone One's* survivors exhibit a form of Post-Apocalyptic

Stress Disorder (PASD) that transforms them into "trauma zombies…that are unable to

maintain a coherent identity and thus enter a muted, dazed state of being not unlike that of

the traditional zombie" (Muntean, 82). Moreover, the inventory of possible manifestations

of PASD is so comprehensive that it becomes "not so much a criteria for diagnosis but an

abstract of existence itself" (55). Pathologising the entirety of human emotions, PASD

reconfigures the markers of human subjectivity as the means by which it is deconstructed

(92).

Likewise, the novel's mechanistic depictions of bodily action as the depersonalised

operations of "protocols" (111), "bloodless processes" (144) and "agitated electrons" (164)

unsettle the survivors' agency. Directly before being bitten, Gary performs an indefinite

parody of mediumship in which his "body convulse[s], a ferocious psychic current entering

at that intersection of his skin and that of the fortune-teller. The mechanic c[an't]keep a

straight face as he combat[s] the forces of the spirit world, frail conduit" (228). The phrase

'frail conduit' might ambiguously apply to either Gary or the straggler, drawing attention to

how the gypsy's conflation of straggler and skel into a singularly indeterminate figure is

actually mirrored in the indeterminacy of Gary's actions. The ambiguity of this passage

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[56] See: *Land of the Dead* (2005)*, Warm Bodies* (2010)*, The Rising* (2003)*, Dead Snow* (2009)*, Fido* (2006) etc.

leaves it uncertain whether Gary's 'convulsions' are a feigned mockery or an authentic moment of spasm, an ambiguity that is exacerbated by the uncertain signification of Gary's inability 'to keep a straight face.' The uncertainty as to whether this phrase is referencing a fit of laughter, thereby denoting a lack of bodily restraint, or a fit of pain denoting the corporeal manipulations of an immaterial 'psychic current' obscures the extent to which Gary's convulsions are animated by an external spirit or internal bodily compulsion. In this moment, authorial distance is compromised and it becomes unclear whether the third person omniscient narrator's reference to a 'psychic current' is a dialogic adoption of Gary's mock mysticism or a genuine recounting of events that corresponds with Spitz's perception of "something in his skin....the faintest of vibrations" (227). At this level, the medium's conflation of social and material models of agency registers as an interpretive inability to determine whether Gary is the actor (both in terms of agent and performer) or the acted upon. As such, the novel's climactic collapse of straggler and skel explicitly emphasises the spectrality of the zombie in a manner that invites the reader to reconsider prior depictions of social and material agency as it manifests through human and zombie alike.

Indeed, whilst Spitz is initially tempted to divine recognisable qualities in both stragglers (82) and skels (16), his extension of personality or subjectivity to zombies is ultimately exposed as nothing more than a fantastic projection: "Mark Spitz's impulse to leave Ned the Copy Boy at his post in the empty office was no mercy. These things were not kin to their perished resemblances" (225). Therefore, in closing the gap between humans and zombies, *Zone One* refuses to entertain the possibility of arriving at knowledge of the zombie, but rather instead introjects unknowability into its human subjects, framing them as beings that are alien to each-other and even to themselves (183). As such, *Zone One* does not demystify

or otherwise 'humanise' its zombies, but conversely re-mystifies the human subject as being always already (non)human.

It is worth noting, however, that although Whitehead's entanglement of zombies and humans is one in which knowledge is displaced rather than extended, this epistemological disintegration is framed as exhilarating rather than catastrophic. This orientation is reflected in Spitz's response to Zone One's collapse. Over the course of the novel, the fear and despair experienced by Spitz is tinted with an incredulous ennui derived from the Restoration's doomed attempt at reconstruction: "if they could bring back paperwork, Mark Spitz thought, they could certainly reanimate prejudice, parking tickets and reruns" (231). For Spitz, it is the attempt to impose old models of order and knowledge upon a radically alien and alienating environment that evokes equal dread as "a contagion in its own right" (13). Accordingly, after the collapse of the ontological, conceptual and physical boundaries through which Zone One attempts to exert its epistemological dominance, Spitz radically embraces his restored habitation of an unknown and unknowable world whilst maintaining hope in the possibility of future connection: "We don't know how to read it yet. All we can do right now is pay witness" (233).

Conclusion

It is on this note of cautious optimism that Whitehead's text concludes. After Zone One's barricades collapse under a renewed onslaught of zombies, the novel closes with Spitz preparing to move "on to the next human settlement, and the one after that, where the barrier holds until you don't need it any more" (258). Evoking the conceptual barriers that separates man from zombie, human from nonhuman, straggler from skel, and the social

from the material, Spitz fleetingly envisions a moment in which such divisions are rendered unnecessary. In the end, *Zone One* suggests that survival is not so much a case of securing such conceptual barriers, but of no longer needing them. Therefore, the epistemic excess of the reanimated corpse becomes a feature that ironically re-vitalises Spitz himself, heralding an exhilarating world in which "nothing could be taken for granted" (231). Respecting the insurmountable otherness of the non-human, Spitz's renewed encounter with the zombie as a defamiliarized (non)being that pushes the boundaries of matter into a newfound unknowability functions as a source of celebration rather than dread.

However, although *Zone One's* conclusion tentatively embraces the "utopian side to the zombie story…that sees the breakdown of our categories of the individual and even the human not as a tragedy but as a form of release" (Lauro & Embry, 412), the next chapter will explore how such 'utopianism' is inherently compromised by the existential threat the zombie poses to survival. In doing so, it considers how the zombie's figurative connotations require attempts to embrace the zombie as both a narrative and theoretical figure to be pursued with extreme caution and a critical awareness of its conceptual limitations. Extending this chapter's hauntological reading of the zombie to another text that navigates the affinities and distinctions between embodied and disembodied manifestations of undead necro-corporeality, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, I will examine how the reanimated corpse's epistemic and interpretive excess necessarily operates as a site of profound ambivalence. In doing so, it further complicates new materialist readings of the zombie as an emancipatory figure in a manner that provides a more reflective account of the corpse's 'double position' as a (non)human subject.

Chapter 4 -Talking about Flesh: Socio-Material Indeterminacy and the Reanimated Corpse in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

"Anything dead coming back to life hurts"

(Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987)

Intro

As explored in the prior chapter, the reanimated corpse's sociomaterially entangled form of agency de-centres the sovereign agency of the human subject, instead recalibrating it as an indeterminate and indivisible amalgamation of the biological and the social. Whilst this theoretically positions the zombie as a figure to be celebrated by the new materialisms, the particularity of its narrative expression complicates its adoption as a figure of nonhuman entanglement. As previously discussed, the zombie's status as a quintessentially supernatural being encodes sociomaterial agency as a phenomenon that exceeds epistemological comprehension. This chapter further complicates the zombie's new materialist credentials by examining how the indeterminate ontology of the walking dead is supplemented by a definitive violence that is endemic to (at least the majority of) its contemporary figurations.[57]

Having assessed the role of hauntology and sociomaterial indeterminacy in a widely recognised and recognisable zombie novel, the present chapter extends these observations to offer an informative re-reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Emphasising the

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[57] It is ultimately the zombie's violent violation of the traditional restrictions of a humanist society that marks it as a figure of potential liberation in the first place (Lauro & Embry, 398). Therefore, any amount of zombie-sympathy still comes into conflict with the fundamental ambivalence that its violence entails.

'zombie-like' — rather than ghostly — qualities of Beloved's uncanny material return, this chapter approaches *Beloved* through the lens of the spectral zombie narrative established in chapter 3. In doing so it aims to uncover the sociomaterial indeterminacy that subtly permeates Morrisons' exploration of racial oppression. Furthermore, this chapter considers how *Beloved*'s political context frames this sociomaterial indeterminacy as a site of profound ambivalence. As such, this chapter's reading of *Beloved* aims to reveal how the reanimated corpse's new materialist credentials are not only complicated by its epistemological excess, but also by the profound ambivalence with which it operates as both an emancipatory and threatening figure.

Before focusing on Beloved's particular necro-corporeality, the chapter starts by establishing the appropriacy and advantages of examining *Beloved* as a distinct form of 'zombie novel' and considers how the conspicuous 'absent presence' of the corpse throughout its literary landscape encourages the subsequent projection of necrotic features upon its living cast of characters. The next section provides a thorough exploration of Beloved's reanimated body, arguing that its ontological collapse of adult and infant corporeality simultaneously exposes, condemns and perpetuates the self-legitimating logics of racial oppression. Finally, I consider how this interpretive excess operates as a site of ambivalence within the novel's wider exploration of black identity and communal relations. In doing so, this chapter suggests that Beloved's indeterminate ontology informs a wider preoccupation with sociomaterial indeterminacy that frames the materiality of the subject as both a source of liberation and oppression. It is this fundamental ambivalence that demarcates *Beloved* as a particularly illuminating 'zombie' narrative. A harbinger of horrifying emancipation, the novel's indecisive and undecidable depiction of Beloved and the material decomposition she both enacts and induces as a danger or a blessing

establishes a double-orientation that defies coherent resolution. As the text memorably states "anything dead coming back to life hurts" (108), and it is this pain of acknowledging the vitality of 'dead' matter that both Morrison's novel and the zombie as a wider cultural trope viscerally articulate.

Hauntology in *Beloved*

Revolving around the revenential visitation of Sethe, an ex-slave, by the daughter she murdered in a tragically pyrrhic bid for freedom, *Beloved* is regularly interpreted as a racialised reformulation of the "ghost story" (Schmudde, 404) that "positions the consequences of black invisibility in both the records of slavery and the record-keeping as a situation of primary spiritual significance" (Holloway, 516–517).[58] As such, *Beloved* may seem a surprising text for an analysis of necro-corporeal reanimation. However, I hope to demonstrate that, just as *Zone One* is a zombie novel obliquely about ghosts, so too is *Beloved* a ghost novel obliquely about zombies. In both cases then, the corpse's supernatural reanimation is articulated in emphatically spectral terms that foreground the reanimated cadaver's disruption of the boundaries between the material and the immaterial. After all, the zombie's colonial roots position it as a particularly appropriate figure with which to consider the lasting effects of slavery and the problematic conditions of resistance that the novel dramatises. As Lauro and Embry note "the slave could not lay claim to family relations because all persons involved were possessions of their masters; likewise, the zombie has no kin and has lost ownership even of itself" (402). This theme of familial dispossession radiates throughout the novel as the impersonal conditions of slavery

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[58] For similar analyses that predominantly categorise *Beloved* as a ghost story, see: Martinez (2009), Spargo (2002) and Toth (2015)

repeatedly desecrate Sethe's kinship ties, systematically separating husbands from wives, sisters from brothers and mothers from daughters. As such, I will argue that the supernatural return of Beloved's reanimated corpse acts as the narrative epicentre that focalises the zombie-like qualities of the novel's wider cast of characters. Like Beloved, "both Sethe and Paul D display prominent signs of an identity and autonomy lost through slavery" (Yeates, 527) in a manner that draws metaphorical associations with the Living Dead. Such associations manifest discursively when Paul D and his fellow slaves escape the coffin-like "wooden boxes" (106) in which they have been imprisoned, only to rise from the earth as depersonalised "zombies on the loose" (110). Similarly, evoking the "staring, unfocused, unseeing" (101) gaze that Seabrook originally ascribes to the zombie, Halle loses his mind becoming "flat eyed as a fish" (224) and Sethe has "the glittering iron [punched] from her eyes" (9).

On the one hand, identifying that Beloved's primary actors demonstrate qualities that associate them with the undead might be seen to re-tread familiar ground. Critics such as Panajotovic (5) and Spargo have already argued that many of the novels' characters act and are treated "as if [they] were already one of the many ghosts populating black grief" (Spargo, 123). However, such generalised observations neglect to account for the *different ways* in which Morrison's array of characters parallel the living dead. After all, Beloved contains a range of complex and nuanced characters, each with their own unique response to the traumas of slavery (Morrison 1988, 6) and to homogenise such a wealth of depicted reactions under a singular undead rubric seems needlessly reductive.

Furthermore, such an interpretive move appears especially insufficient in a text which specifically transitions from *one kind* of haunting to *another*. For example, towards the end

of the novel, Ella reflects "as long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place — shaking

stuff, crying, smashing and such — Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her

world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't mind a little communication

between the two worlds, but this was an invasion" (257). This foregrounded differentiation

between communication and invasion clearly denotes the novel's progression from

immaterial ghost to emphatically embodied reanimation as a matter of interpretive

significance. By moving 'the shoe' from one foot to the other, the reader is forced to

confront the fact that Beloved possesses a "very real, physical presence in the storyworld"

(Yeates, 521) and represents "the baby ghost in a different form – more material, more

enduring, more demanding" (Loevlie, 346), actively encouraging a contemplation of the

qualitative distinction between these alternative forms of reanimation. Therefore, by being

attentive to such distinctions and placing interpretive pressure on the material

estrangements induced by Beloved's return as a *reanimated corpse* rather than immaterial

ghost, it becomes possible to identify that *Beloved*'s transition towards a more fleshly

dynamic insists upon trauma as an embodied, material experience, rather than an abstract

psycho-social phenomenon. That is to say, Beloved is not simply a tale talking about the

spiritual and psychological consequences of slavery as abstract phenomena, but rather

always also "talking about flesh" (255)

Beloved as Zombie Novel

A brief survey of the relevant literature reveals that Beloved's precise ontological status has

been the subject of much critical debate, alternately interpreted as a ghost (Krumholz, 400),

psychological projection (Heinze qtd. in Marks, 67), vampire (Lawrence, 195), literal

personification of 124 (Hock Soon Ng, 238) or succubus (Barnett, 418). Even if one rejects

the potential indications that Beloved may simply be a coincidentally named run-away slave

(House, 17), just what kind of "miraculous resurrection" (Morrison, 105) she constitutes is highly ambiguous and open to interpretation. However, it is important to note that Morrison's novel is one in which "meaning is multiple [and] contradictions stand intact" (Krumholz, 398). Appearing within a literary space that conspicuously courts paradox, the fact that Beloved's ontological status is constructed "in such a way that renders final categorization impossible" (Powell, 109) obtains a purposive significance. Therefore, any attempts to definitively delineate Beloved as either one kind of being or another is arguably more harmful than illuminating (it is, after all, not for us to make claims on Beloved, but rather Beloved who "has claim" [Morrison, 274] over us). As such, Beloved's ontological status and symbolic significance cannot be reduced to a singular reading but rather resides in her confluence of multiple identities, particularly her paradoxical manifestation as a "fleshly ghost" (Lawrence, 196) which "thwarts the reader's desire for interpretive mastery" (Marks, 72).

Despite the multiple and overlapping readings of Beloved's ontological status, there nevertheless appears a conspicuous interpretive gap in which Beloved is rarely, if ever, considered as a zombie. However, as Robert Yeates deftly notes "African religious concepts of the living-dead, the Caribbean concept of the zombi, and the American adaptation of the zombi as zombie all bear profound influence on the composite identity of the character of Beloved" (516). With this in mind, it is not my aim to insist or prove that Beloved is a *de facto* zombie, but rather identify how her 'zombie-like' characteristics informs the text's general construction of Beloved's reanimated corpse as a figure of sociomaterial indeterminacy that foregrounds the embodied consequences of institutional slavery. That is to say, the following reading based on this section's previous observations regarding the signification of the re-animated corpse is in no way intended as definitive. Rather it is

offered as a contribution towards a deeper understanding of the multiple levels at which Morrison's novel resonates and the heterogeneous traditions it draws upon.

Providing the most thorough scholarly account of *Beloved*'s evocation of the figure of the zombie, Yeates' article convincingly outlines how Beloved's physical characteristics such as her vacant expression, rasping voice and limited mental capacity resonates with the voodoo zombie of Haitian folklore discussed in the previous chapter (525–526). Primarily focusing on those qualities that link Beloved to the traditional Haitian zombie and concepts of the living-dead found in African religious beliefs, Yeates reads these similarities as indicative of Morrison's attempt to introduce distinctly non-European forms of horror into the Western imaginary. Whilst this is certainly a valid and worthwhile argument, Yeates' emphasis on earlier manifestations of the zombie has the unfortunate consequence of overlooking the extent to which Beloved also corresponds with its more contemporary reiterations in a manner that, at times, produces a strained reading. For example, noting how Beloved's excessive hunger becomes figuratively cannibalistic as "Sethe plays host to a parasitic Beloved who feeds on her strength and vitality" (524), Yeates evokes traditional African libation rituals to argue that Beloved's increasing gastronomic demands articulate her vengeful displeasure at Sethe's "failure to remember her adequately" (524). Such a reading seems at odds with how Sethe's "suffering from insatiable memory" (Matus, 104) results in an excessive mourning and inability to move forward that informs the novel's cyclical form.

More importantly, Yeates' accentuation of the Haitian zombie discernibly omits Beloved's more direct associations with the mid-century zombie-ghoul's cannibalistic inclinations. In emphasising connections between Morrison's text and older African and Haitian myths of the re-animated corpse, Yeates unfortunately neglects how *Beloved* equally channels the

ravenous re-inscription of the zombie in more recent Anglo-American culture. That is to say, although Yeates' initial observation that Beloved displays properties coinciding with both "the Caribbean concept of the zombi, and the American adaptation of the zombi as zombie" (516) appears indicative of her (im)material indeterminacy as zombie-spectre, in practice the article places excessive emphasis upon the characteristics of the former. Therefore, in contrast to Yeates, this chapter will consider how Beloved's decidedly spectral necro-corporeality incorporates the logics of both drone and ghoul to induce an ambivalent sociomaterial indeterminacy. In doing so, we will see how, just as *Zone One*'s spectral narrative de-fleshes the zombie, *Beloved*'s deployment of the re-animated corpse provides a curiously embodied tale of haunting that en-fleshes the ghost.

'A Hill of Black People': Absenting the Corpse

Before exploring Beloved's necro-corporeality in detail, it is important to recognise that many of the novel's living protagonists — such as Sethe, Paul D and Denver — possess notably zombie-like qualities. Similar to *Zone One*, *Beloved* provides a hauntological literary space which bestows the reanimated corpse with an emphatic spectrality. One means by which this is achieved is through the concept of 'rememory', in which remembered spaces *physically* manifest in the 'real' world. As Sethe explains to Denver, "if a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world" (36). Blending the abstract and the concrete,[59] *Beloved's* discourse constructs rememories as physical territories that the characters can "bump into" (36). This spectral topography is textually realised in moments that effortlessly slide from present description to past recitation, confusing the boundaries between past and present.

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[59] This elision is indicated in the neologism 'rememory' itself, in which the abstract noun 'memory' displaces the concrete noun 'member'.

Physically and textually intertwining memories and reality, 'rememory' operates as a phenomenon in which recollections of the past are made present, both spatially and temporally.

Conversely, this fluidity dematerialises the 'real' spaces that occupy the text's diegetic present. For example, the architecture of 124 is relayed in notably abstract terms. Upon entering the house Paul D notes that "the air above the stairwell was charmed and very thin" (11), a 'thinness' that is conveyed to the reader through the predominantly colour-based description of the "ghost-white stairs" (235) that is notably lacking in material referents (11).

Beloved is also constructed as a spectral textual space through the conspicuous omission of elements from familiar numerical and alphabetical sequences. For example, Sethe's house is consistently referred to by number as 124, typographically signifying the absence of the number 3, and hence Sethe's 3rd child. Similarly, the novel features a group of brothers named Paul A, Paul D and Paul F, leading the reader to feel the absence of the missing brothers — Pauls B, C and E — without ever articulating their fates or even acknowledging their existence. Through such strategies, Morrison constructs a spectral textual environment haunted by the elements it emphatically omits.

For our purposes, however, the most significant absent present is that of the corpse itself. It is notable that, despite the vast number of dead bodies alluded to in *Beloved*, corpses are not contemplated or described in any particular detail. Instead the text enacts a threefold obscuration of the corpse by absenting, revitalising and referring to it euphemistically. For

example, Sixo's significant and repeatedly referenced[60] demise is recounted in a single, solitary line which abruptly shifts to an image of Paul D walking through flowers that dramatically absents the climactic moment of Sixo's death (226). Likewise, recounting her experiences at Sweet Home, Sethe refers to the hanging corpses of her fellow slaves as 'boys', and expresses Paul A's death through physical absence, stating she "passed right by those boys hanging in the trees. One had Paul A's shirt on but not his feet or his head. I walked right on by" (198). Alternatively, upon her death, Baby Suggs' corpse is revitalised and beatified to the extent that it no longer resembles a corpse at all but rather looks "like a girl" (171). Perhaps most disturbing of all, vast heaps of dead bodies are euphemistically referred to as "pile"s (62; 211; 262) and "hill"s (211) transforming an uncounted and uncountable number of dead (60 million and more) into an ambiguous homogenised, mass. Therefore, the physical corpse — like so many of the novel's crucial elements — becomes an absent presence, spectrally evoked through a refusal to engage in its direct expression.

Even during the novel's climactic scene of infanticide, Beloved's dead body is educed through a similar combination of absence ("there was nothing there to claim" [149]), re-vitalisation ("neither Stamp Paid nor Baby Suggs could make [Sethe] put her crawling already? girl down" [151–2, sic]) and euphemism (an "armload" [151]). This may simply be a matter of taste, an indicator of Morrison's intention to avoid vulgarising the immense emotional and psychological turmoil of Sethe's traumatic experiences with crass visceral descriptions. However, we should keep in mind that the novel's euphemistic, indirect articulation of events not only represents Morrison's narrative preferences, but more importantly parallels Sethe's psychological state. After all, *Beloved's* oblique and circuitous

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[60] This event is referenced in some capacity at least 6 times over the course of the novel. See: 22; 41; 72; 188; 197; 219

mode of narrative delivery replicates Sethe's inability to directly confront her own experiences (Matus, 108). As such, the conspicuous absence of Beloved's corpse from this scene might be understood as a manifestation of Sethe's emotional failure to engage with the materiality of death.[61]

This inability to engage with the corpse as a material being — and hence, the materiality of the human as a corporeal entity — is depicted as both a consequence of slavery's institutional effacement of bodily rights and an internalised defence mechanism adopted by Morrison's characters to avoid the harsh realities of their existence. In an originary act of necro-corporeal denial, Nan prevents a young Sethe from interacting with, and hence identifying, the corpse of her own mother, which is heaped in a "pile" (62) of black bodies. As this episode demonstrates, whilst slavery's disregard for black lives leads to the homogenous anonymisation of the corpse, the slaves themselves unwittingly internalise this same material effacement to avoid the pain of such material confrontations. This dematerialisation is carried forward by Sethe in her avoidance and her continued insistence on 'walking right on by' the corpses hanging in the trees of SweetHome. Just as Sethe implores that "if I hadn't killed [Beloved] she would have died" (200) and Paul D "drove him[self] crazy so he would not lose his mind" (41), the inhabitants of Bluestone deny their own corporeality in a self-defeating attempt to prevent their bodies from being taken from them. As we shall see, it is precisely this denial of corporeality that *Beloved* diagnoses as the primary problematic of slavery's legacy and which it redresses through Baby Suggs' exhortations to the Bluestone community to "love your flesh" (88).

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[61] Sethe's adamant refusal to engage with the physical presence of the corpse as a coping mechanism is insinuated by the previous quote's repetition of walking "right on by" the dead bodies hanging from trees (198).

Despite, or perhaps because of, Sethe and the novel's reluctance to directly confront the presence of corpses in all their materiality, the figure's symbolic resonance is metaphorically reasserted through its displacement onto the living. Indeed, whilst Sethe's refusal to acknowledge the corpses of her kin defies "the visibility and spectacle that had characterized lynching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Schwartz, 57), her body retains their trace in the form of the Cherrychoke tree scarred across her back recalling the totemic apparatus of lynching. Similarly, upon witnessing Sethe's actions, Schoolteacher states that the "pickaninnies they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky…were not" (149). The phrase 'alive and well' entwines Beloved's physical death with its emotional consequences for the living. Crucially, however, such a death is not simply abstracted to the realm of social or psychological necrosis, but physically re-enacted through a materialistic register evocative of decomposition and the bodily fragmentation it entails (Powell, 107). This displacement is suggested in the final line of the chapter depicting Sethe's infanticide, which describes how "the hot sun dried Sethe's dress, stiff, like rigor mortis" (153). Here, the deathly materiality that is omitted in the text's indirect depiction of the corpse surfaces upon the bodies of the living. As such, the consequences of Beloved's death as a social and psychological trauma are corporealized and embodied in the text's surviving characters. Sethe is paralysed in a living rigor mortis, Baby Suggs is overcome by grief as "her big old heart beg[ins] to collapse" (89) and the family unit decays in Beloved's absence when Howard and Buglar flee from 124, re-enacting a familial division which is previously described as "fe[eling] like I'd been split in two" (202).

The absence of overt material descriptions of the corpse, therefore displaces the burden of decomposition onto the text's living characters as Beloved, Denver, Paul D and Sethe's emotional and physical fragmentation becomes analogous with the deferred acts of decay

attributable to the bodies that litter Morrison's text allusively, but not discursively.[62] Like

Beloved herself, such bodies become lost objects that defy traditional mourning practices by

frustrating the desire to "ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by

identifying the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead" (Derrida, 9, original emphasis).

Instead, what remains are the survivors, newly necrotised by the corpse's ontological

absence.

Drones and Ghouls

Having seen how the corpse's absent presence bestows *Beloved's* protagonists with a

certain undead spectrality, it becomes necessary to distinguish the different zombie-like

characteristics they demonstrate. Indeed, as in *Zone One, Beloved's* divergent

manifestations of living death can also be seen to map onto the zombie's historical

genealogy. Sethe's general acquiescence to the demands of the baby ghost and the social

institution of slavery she represents[63] casts her in a particularly 'drone-like' light. Indeed,

her fundamental act of infanticidal resistance perversely "mirror[s] the power over life being

assumed by her enslavers" (Martinez, 6) and "the slave-owners in the[ir] claim to possess

another" (12). In "trying to outhurt the hurter" (Morrison, 234), Sethe ends up replicating

the social constructs that she looks to defy as "the cultural ghost of infanticide" is

perpetuated through Sethe's actions and "the oppression enforced by slaveowners is now

perpetuated by the oppressed themselves" (Lawrence, 193). Unwittingly conditioned to

replicate slavery's oppressive regimes by the horrors of her enslaved experience, Sethe

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[62] This deferral of decomposition will be more thoroughly explored in the chapter's third section.
[63] As Askeland states "124 Bluestone is haunted as much by the patriarchal institution of slavery as by the ghost" (166) and Gordon notes that, within *Beloved*, "the ghost that is haunting [Sethe] is haunted herself" (2008, 141). Both haunted and haunting, Morrison's ghost expresses a metonymic function in which it represents not just vengeful victim but also the victimising institution that creates it (140), a parallel that is foregrounded by Beloved's evocative reference to white colonisers as "ghosts without skin" (Morrison, 241).

becomes the reluctant envoy of a social system that violently corrupts the biological compulsions of her maternal instincts as "societal and psychological causality interconnect, corrupting the experience of maternal love" (Martinez, 10–11). In this regard, Sethe's body and biology become the tools of colonial exploitation in a manner reminiscent of the Haitian zombie-drone.

In contrast, Paul D's response to the traumas of slavery is to "shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing" (41). Whilst Paul D survives the horrific degradation of his experiences, he loses touch with all but his most biological compulsions, exhibiting a zombie-like "brainless urge to stay alive" (264) that reduces life to a set of physical movements in which he must "Move. Walk. Run. Hide. Steal and move on" (66). Here, Morrison represents Paul D as a re-animated corpse in its zombie-ghoul manifestation, as an entity compelled to operate almost entirely on physical compulsion.

Such a reading suggests that, rather than a homogenised set of Undead characters, *Beloved's* cast provides a variety of responses to the trauma of enslaved existence in a manner responsive to the reanimated corpse's varied resonances. As Sethe reflects, Paul D "had beat the spirit[64] the very day he entered the house….a blessing, but in its place *he brought another kind of haunting*: Halle's face smeared with butter and the clabber too; his own mouth jammed full of iron" (96, my emphasis). Filling "the empty place of no definite news with a brand-new sorrow" (95) Paul D's haunting provides a direct confrontation with the physical reality of her enslaved past, as memories of lost milk decay, thicken and

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[64] This same phrase is regularly repeated throughout the novel (20; 66; 96; 98), staging Paul D's exorcism of the baby ghost as an explicit confrontation of material and immaterial animating principles.

ferment into images of clabber. Therefore, whilst Morrison's characters might be meaningfully considered undead descriptively and metaphorically, their respective reanimations can be seen to have very different symbolic connotations. Placing Paul D's story next to Sethe's – as the novel suggests (273) – exposes how Paul D's physicalism casts him as an approximation of the conventional mid-century zombie-ghoul, whereas Sethe's social determinism is more reminiscent of the zombie-drone of the early-twentieth century. Through their interactions, Paul D and Sethe attempt to negotiate the socially and materially deterministic models of agency instilled by their own de-humanising experiences. As we shall see, this negotiation between social and material models of nonhuman agency provides the thematic backdrop which is crystallised with the arrival of Beloved and the ontological estrangements incurred by her spectral zombie-body.

'The Jungle Whitefolks Planted': Beloved's Socialised Biology

It is important to acknowledge that although Beloved's re-animated corpse shares some clear affinities with the conventional zombie, she also displays some marked dissimilarities. Whilst her body is certainly corpse-like, Beloved does not appear to overtly display the processes of material decomposition (at least at first). However, she nevertheless manifests a paradoxical ontology; in this case, an ontology that challenges the boundaries between childhood and adulthood (which is then further complicated by her continuous fantasies of material fragmentation). New flesh on adult bones, Beloved constitutes a particularly nuanced and unusual articulation of the reanimated corpse that, to a certain extent,

localises and domesticates the zombie's more radical necro-corporeal conflation of life and death and repositions it within an (arguably) more realist setting.[65]

In seeming opposition to the rotting and putrescent materiality commonly associated with the zombie-ghoul, Beloved is initially described as having "new skin, lineless and smooth" (51). However, although Beloved doesn't initially display physical signs of decomposition, this is not to say that she lacks an equally uncanny ontology. After all, whilst her flesh is described as "flawless", "soft and new" (51) she simultaneously possesses adult proportions and stature. Possessing the flesh of a new-born baby, "the body of a young woman, about nineteen or twenty" (56) and the movements "of an older one" (56), Beloved's paradoxical ontology deconstructs the boundaries between infant and adult.[66]

Of course, Beloved's ontological conflation of infant and adult operates alongside — rather than in lieu of — the deconstruction of the boundaries between life and death heralded by the 'traditional' zombie. She is, after all, a reanimated corpse. Furthermore, the simultaneity of birth and death, of birth as death and vice versa, is suggested in the description of Sethe's "knees wide open as any grave" (5) and in Beloved's fragmented recollections of her origins as a "dark", "small" place in which she "lay down on her side and curled up" (75), a statement which might be equally understood to describe a foetus in a womb or a body in a grave. Similarly, this description is framed within a recollection of the Middle Passage, itself a liminal voyage that denotes both the end of one life and the beginning of another (a

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[65] After all, *Beloved's* socio-cultural context stages a confrontation between the supernatural and the everyday as hauntings are rendered commonplace: "Not a house in the country ain't packed to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby" (5)

[66] Kristen Lillvis (2013) notes that Morrison's novel frequently elides the distinctions between mothers and daughters, particularly through its depiction of the relationship between Sethe and Beloved, thereby adding re-enforced importance to this particular ontological collapse.

simultaneity that is compounded by the fact that many of *Beloved*'s characters similarly gain

their freedom from a passage over the Ohio by boat [233]).

The tensions exhibited by this uncanny conflation imbue Beloved with an (im)material

spectrality that both expresses and exceeds biological limitations. Such corporeal

contradictions are regularly demonstrated through descriptions of her feet as "soft new feet

which, barely capable of the job, slowly b[ear] her to the keeping room" (53). These feet are

so frail that she "can't walk. But I seen her pick up a rocker with one hand" (56, sic).

Mirroring the zombie's imperfect ambulation, Beloved's continuation of the baby ghost's

poltergeist antics is articulated in parallel with a conspicuous display of biological

prohibitions, thereby simultaneously adhering to and surpassing material determinants.

Towards the end of the novel this ontological indeterminacy is reaffirmed as Beloved's

"footprints come and go…should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit" (275).

Equally accommodating an infant or an adult, Beloved's footprints signify the material

fluidity of her spectral embodiment.[67] Therefore, similar to *Zone One's* spectral zombies,

Beloved's contradictory embodiment occupies a liminal space between materiality and

immateriality as her conspicuously corporealized movements are offset by her ethereal

form.

Morrison's re-envisioning of the reanimated corpse that refutes a conspicuous display of

decomposition in favour of a too fresh embodiment might itself constitute a political

comment on the strange reversibility of life and death that permeates the black experience.

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[67] This focus on Beloved's feet is especially significant, since imagery of feet and legs notably recurs throughout the novel, functioning as the site at which the text challenges the ontological distinctions between humans ("she walked, on two feet meant, in this sixth month of pregnancy, for standing still" [29]), animals ("You got two feet, Sethe, not four" [64]), and objects ("holding the table by two legs, he bashed it about" [18]). As such, Beloved's impossible animation both expresses and exceeds biological limitations in a manner that impels a disorientation of ontological boundaries.

Beloved is, after all, on first introduction presumed to be a runaway slave, and yet the absence of physical blemishes would seem to contradict such an explanation, causing Paul D to grow suspicious of her origins (65). Within the perverse context of slavery, it is the *absence,* rather than the *presence* of wounds that signals her potentially undead status. Similarly, it is the presence of new flesh, rather than old and rotting flesh, that signifies Beloved as the reanimated corpse of Sethe's deceased baby. Therefore, Beloved comes to articulate a very specific type of reanimated corpse, in which material decomposition is not initially forthcoming, but nevertheless displays a paradoxical ontology that breaks down the distinction between the living and the dead, material and immaterial and adult and child.

However, there is a further significance to Beloved's strange ontology. In eroding the limits between adult and child, Beloved signifies an interpretive impasse in which she might feasibly represent a stereotype of the child-like black subject, or a manifestation of unadulterated, material desire. Displaying the volatile temperaments, wants, needs and dependencies of a child, a reading of Beloved that attaches interpretive significance to her new-formed flesh figures her as an expression of uninhibited human desire, a distillation of material impulse refracted through the infant's biological compulsion to seek food, shelter and self-preservation. From such a perspective, Beloved is simply doing what comes "natural" (195) to her, like "a baby sucks its thumb" (195). On the other hand, a reading that prioritises Beloved's mature stature and designates her an adult, casts her as a figure that plays into the common myth of black primitivism which ascribes certain behaviours to black subjects as a means of legitimating imperial rule. From this perspective, Beloved appears as a socialised caricature, replicating the trope of the primitive and infantile black subject.

This second reading is prefigured directly before Beloved's arrival when, upon visiting a

carnival, Sethe, Paul D and Denver encounter a theatrical performance of white colonial

fantasies in the form of "Wild African Savage [who] sh[akes] his bars and sa[ys] wa wa" (48–

49). The capitalisation of 'Wild African Savage' firmly categorises him as a fictional

archetype, a spectacular demarcation of white fantasies of the black subject, which, as his

cry of 'wa wa' testifies, revolves around the conspicuously non-linguistic expression of

atavistic desire and subsequent processes of infantilisation.[68] Significantly, as Beloved

becomes ever more demanding and physically aggressive, she increasingly embodies this

same stereotype, eventually being described in a similar register as "wild game" (244) whilst

her own language descends into the 'irrational' rhythms of pre-linguistic semiosis. That is to

say, Beloved literalises the strategies of colonial dominance that "broke [its subjects] into

children" (220), but in a manner that obfuscates whether she is the victim of a social logic

that has conditioned such behaviour or whether she constitutes its material instantiation.

By ontologically unsettling the distinctions between adult and infant, Beloved's ambiguously

reanimated corpse emerges as a focal manifestation of the novel's pervasive concerns over

sociomaterial indeterminacy within the context of slavery. Moreover, in Morrison's novel,

sociomaterial entanglement is precisely the mechanism by which slavery's deepest

oppressions are instilled, allowing it to thrive as such a pernicious system of control. From

the image of Sethe's mother who "had the bit so many times she smiled… [even] when she

didn't want to" (203), to the ambiguity of whether Garner's attribution of his slaves as 'men'

"was….naming what he saw or creating what he did not" (220) to the description of racial

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[68] This link between wildness and the non-linguistic is exemplified by Sixo, who abandons language when he
learns that "definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (190) and is referred to as "the wild man"
(11)

resentment as "the jungle whitefolks planted in them" (198), *Beloved* is replete with subtle expressions of sociomaterial indeterminacy, as slavery and biology become entangled in the construction of the black subject. In fact, *Beloved*'s core ethical dilemma revolves around the extent to which Sethe's infanticide signifies the heart-breaking consequence of an institution that defiles the biological sanctity of familial relations, or an indictment against the monstrous maternalism by which she "almost steps over into that she was terrified of being regarded as, which is an animal" (Morrison 1994, 6). Such moments testify to the sociomaterial operations of colonial oppression with slavery emerging as a 'natureculture'[69] that elides the distinction between biological predisposition and acculturation. Therefore, Beloved's indeterminately re-animated body operates as the symbolic epicentre from which such concerns radiate.

However, within the context of Morrison's exploration of trauma and black identity in post-bellum America, Beloved's sociomaterial indeterminacy is not simply indicative of epistemological excess but simultaneously becomes the site of profound ethical ambivalence. Taking into account the dehumanising bestialisation of black subjects by which racial oppression has been historically legitimated, the extent to which materiality might be embraced takes on a particularly charged resonance. After all, a new materialist ethos that aims to undermine the privileges and presumptions that subtend the human subject is perhaps premature for subjects who have never been historically defined as 'human' in the first place (Braidotti, 15; Weinstock, 233). As such, to embrace materiality in a manner that undermines human subjectivity might be seen to uncomfortably echo the warped logic of

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[69] First introduced into critical parlance in Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), 'naturecultures' can be defined as "a symbiotic concept of entanglement [that] speaks to the non-discreteness of ecologies that are *both* materially and socially formed" (Rosenhan, 276)

slavery that equates black subjects with property, things and animals and devalue the calls

to a recognisable humanity that many emancipatory discourses evoke as their fundamental

rallying cry (Grusin, xv; Brown 2006, 179). Therefore, it is not only the zombie's fantastical

dimension but also the ethical considerations evoked by its colonial heritage that enables

"tales of the reanimated corpse [to] offer an important qualification to the *joie de vivre* of

contemporary new materialism" (Weinstock, 233). Consequently, *Beloved* indexes a

profound ambivalence towards the acknowledgement of human materiality as a

prerequisite to black emancipation. This chapter will now consider how such ambivalence

manifests in *Beloved*'s conflicted meditation on the limitations and liberations of corporeal

embodiment. Crucially, it is through the metaphoric application of decomposition as a

universal principle (rather than an exclusively necro-corporeal process) impacting

individuals, psyches and communities alike, that such ambivalence is articulated within

Morrison's novel.

Ambivalence in Beloved

'Herself in Pieces': Explosion and Digestion

As mentioned earlier, *Beloved's* disinclination to directly depict the corpse leads to its

systematic projection throughout the novel. This is also true of the processes of decay, since

the strange absence of physical decomposition within the text's depiction of death places

greater interpretive significance upon those displaced forms of bodily fragmentation literally

and figuratively demonstrated by Beloved, Sethe, Paul D and Denver. This section explores

how Beloved's deferred depictions of bodily decomposition textually manifests in two

modes: as dismemberment, which emphasises isolation, and as incorporation, which

emphasises integration. As we shall see, this dualistic approach to decomposition features

throughout *Beloved* as a structural metaphor with which to explore the vexed relations between community and identity, inflecting the process with a profound ambivalence.

Whilst Beloved's original appearance retains a regularly delineated (if ontologically complex) material form, as the novel progresses her corporeal integrity is undermined at both a physical and psychological level. Incapable of distinguishing where her body ends and those of others begin, Beloved repeatedly displays an inability to conceptualise her bodily boundaries, stating "I am not separate from her   there is no place where I stop   her face is my own" (210, sic). Beloved's overwhelming desire for interpersonal communion disintegrates the corporeal limits that her body physically maintains, a disintegration which, due to her undead status, becomes reminiscent of decomposition. This interpersonal indeterminacy progresses from the conceptual to the physical when the novel claims that Beloved uncannily "ate up [Sethe's] life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it" (250) and her body displays increasingly transcorporeal characteristics as her hair is replaced with vines (261) and fish (267).

The text provides an interpretive schema to such moments in a scene towards the end of Part One in which Beloved painlessly extracts a tooth from the back of her mouth. Looking at the tooth she thinks

> This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed (133)

The consistent and gradual disarticulation of this paragraph relays an entropic bodily sensibility that discloses a constant struggle to maintain corporeal integrity. Incapable of being 'by herself', Beloved's somatic integrity is dependent upon the maintenance of social relations. At the same time, however, Beloved's excessive investment in these same social relations also threatens the stability of her body as she becomes unable to distinguish between her own form and those of Sethe and Denver. Therefore, the decomposition of Beloved's reanimated body manifests a corporeal contradiction in which it is only through communion with others that her body is maintained, whilst this same communion is precisely what threatens to tear it apart. Returning to the previous quote in which Beloved declares her bodily entanglement with Sethe, we can see how this contradiction emerges upon the novel's textual surface. The typographic omissions in the line "I am not separate from her   there is no place where I stop   her face is my own" (210) might equally signify the erasure of full stops between a series of discrete sentences, or the erasure of conjunctions – such as 'and' – within a single, continuous sentence. Here, the idiosyncratic representation of Beloved's discourse renders it ambiguous whether the blank space erases the grammatical boundaries or connectors that structure her syntax, allowing it to simultaneously represent communion and isolation. Society and community, here, is both that which endangers and maintains somatic stability

This ambivalence is reflected in Beloved's two dreams of exploding and being swallowed, which provides two possible orientations towards material agency by respectively depicting decomposition as a process of expulsion and incorporation. Symbolically conjuring dissolution and a movement from being to nothingness, the rhetoric of explosion prefigures material agency as a fundamental loss of self, of driving out and away from the communal (as indicated by its prefix 'ex') as the body is separated from both others and itself.

Alternatively, the rhetoric of digestion conjures a very different symbolic economy in which decomposition is figured within a Bakhtinian process of ingestion, assimilation and regeneration as part of a wider communal whole composed of human and nonhuman actants alike (Bakhtin, 26–27). At a symbolic level, therefore, digestion frames material animation as a means by which selfhood and agency is *reconstructed*, rather than irrevocably lost. These opposing fantasies of bodily decomposition indexes an ambivalent orientation to human materiality as one that may threaten or empower the black subject.

Whilst Beloved provides the most literal manifestation of 'living decomposition', many of the novel's other characters also display fragmentary tendencies. In fact, the novel is rife with imagery of corporeal disarticulation. Powell notes that many of *Beloved*'s characters are imaginatively associated with de-contextualised body parts (107), Denver's fear of Sethe manifest in dreams of decapitation (Morrison, 206) and Paul D warns that "a big love….would split you wide open" (162). Such fantasies and fractures circulate amongst the novel's central characters like a contagion, as Beloved's indeterminate ontology extends outwards, infecting those around her. Across these various scenes of bodily fragmentation, Beloved's two imaginative figurations of decomposition as dissolution and incorporation operate as a repeated trope that subtly structures its contemplation of identity and community.

For example, evoking a digestive register, Denver's experience of being looked at by Beloved is described as being

> beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn't discovered…Denver's skin dissolved under the gaze…she floated near but outside her

own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what

there was (118)

However, this pleasurable sensation of interpersonal resonance quickly turns into

something far more sinister: "if she stumbles she is not aware of it because she does not

know where her body stops…Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped

meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing" (123). At

this point, the same decomposition of bodily boundaries is experienced and described very

differently, shifting from a movement *beyond* oneself as a presence, 'being what was there'

to a movement into absence, 'into nothing'. Similar to Beloved's explosive rhetoric, the

decomposition of bodily boundaries is here linked to a *loss* of self rather than a

transcendence beyond self. Eventually, however, Denver reunites with this initial form of

transcendent decomposition as she escapes 124 "to be *swallowed up* in the world beyond

the edge of the porch" (243, my emphasis).

Meanwhile, Sethe experiences animate decomposition in explosive terms similar to

Beloved, forced by the power of her rememories to "gri[p] her elbows as though to keep

them from flying away" (68) before accepting Beloved as a re-embodiment of her daughter

and experiencing "the click – the settling of pieces into places designed and made for them"

(175). Paul D's violent experiences in Georgia likewise result in his "breaking into pieces"

(106) which are finally reconstructed through his affection for Sethe: "she gather me, man.

The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right places" (272, sic).

In this way, *Beloved* is permeated by the ebb and flow of its characters' disintegration and

reconstruction (Powell, 105), figuring decomposition as a destructive, yet necessary, process

that ultimately reconstructs and strengthens communal bonds.

This dynamic is perhaps most compellingly demonstrated during Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing, in which she performs a discursive vivisection, naming each individual body part and imploring her fellow citizens to embrace and care for their bodies (88). Figuratively fragmenting her congregation from "eyes" to "skin" to "hands" even down to "the dark, dark liver" (88), Baby Suggs decomposes the black body piece by piece. Crucially, however, it is from these pieces that the community is able to construct a reciprocal public body in which "Baby Suggs, holy offered up to them her great big heart" (88), "while the others opened their mouths and gave her music" (89). In this scene, the social body is reconstructed from the decomposition and fragmentation of individual corporeality, generating a new, materially responsive form of community.

It is worth acknowledging that this re-integration into a wider communal body is structurally positioned by the text as a means by which the problems induced by Beloved's arrival might be redressed. After all, it is only through incorporation into a previously lost community that the narrative achieves resolution, as the novel's climax depicts the citizens of Bluestone finally rallying around Sethe to exorcise Beloved through song.[70] Setting aside Sethe's social exile based on her "self sufficiency" (171), the Bluestone community re-integrates Sethe's waning body.

Described as "rapt" (261), "mumbling" (258) in a manner reminiscent of the text's previous description of "the black and angry dead" (198), and as "a pile of people…a hill" (262), Morrison's depiction of the reconstructed Bluestone community courts comparison with the text's previous depictions of the disgruntled, anonymised dead. However, this resonating

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[70] Referring back to the song and dance of Sethe's childhood in which "when they sang….they shifted shapes and became something other" (31), song here becomes a "potent material force" (Lawrence, 197) pointedly displacing models of language as an abstract network of signification: "in the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound" (Morrison, 259).

and responsive community, collectively composed of "necks", "breasts" (257), "teeth", "hips", "hands", "shoulders" and "knees" (259) that "build voice upon voice until they found….a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees" (261) provides a stark counterpoint to the inertly de-individualised 'piles' of dead slaves evoked earlier. Here, the elision of bodily boundaries is not framed as a de-agentifying phenomenon that reduces the community to an inert mass, "some great lump called slaves" (Morrison 1988, 6), but rather forms the basis of a newly embodied and materially responsive community.

Ambivalence

However, although *Beloved*'s narrative resolution figures decomposition as an ultimately regenerative phenomenon, it is equally important not to lose sight of the wider ambivalence it acquires throughout the novel. In fact, *Beloved* explicitly warns against such overly consolatory readings in the ambiguity of its closing sentiment: "this is not a story to pass on" (275). Although critics often note the duality of 'pass on' to mean either 'impart' or 'ignore', the third meaning of the term 'pass on' as a euphemism for death is also resonant, here. The implicit warning in this final phrase indicates that Morrison's tale is not one that is 'laid to rest' by Sethe's re-incorporation in the Bluestone community but rather one that indexes a perpetual cycle of pain, loss and reformation. After all, Sethe and Denver's final reconciliation within an embodied community is forged at the expense of individual identity, causing the text to bristle against the slave narrative's generic predisposition to revalidate personal identity in the wake of its institutional effacement (Brown 2006, 180). Pulled in two directions simultaneously, *Beloved* is impossibly tasked with balancing the recovery of personal identity with a resistance to the social atomisation that attends individualism.

This tension between the individual and communal is, perhaps, most compellingly realised by returning to the only passage in *Beloved* in which the term 'zombie' is used, the moment of Paul D's escape from captivity in Georgia. Working together as a single unit, Paul D and his fellow slaves use the shared chain by which they are all imprisoned to communicate with one another and ultimately escape incarceration. Stating that "the chain that held them would save all or none" (110), this scene demonstrates how the de-individualising dehumanisation of the Georgia slaves' experiences consequently allows them to forge an emancipatory collective. And yet, the ambivalence of this scene emerges once freedom has been obtained and the slaves naturally seek to remove the chain that binds. Morrison irresolutely depicts this moment as that of Paul D's liberation but also his abandonment by his newly formed social unit. Describing Paul D as "the only Buffalo man left – without a plan….Alone, the last man with buffalo hair among the ailing Cherokee" (112), the passage repeats his solitary status in quick succession and counterpoints it with the Cherokee community (disclosed through a noun that is both collective and personal) and emphasises that in gaining his freedom, Paul D has lost his kinship. Left to roam the wilderness alone, Paul D trades one kind of enslavement for another.

This dual orientation towards individual human identity as both desirable and damaging is, appropriately, played out through Beloved's ontological status which ultimately intermingles the registers of incorporation and dissolution that had previously been deployed to establish alternate perspectives on the act of material decomposition. In the text's penultimate page, Beloved "erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her away" (274). As the causal relationship between these two clauses indicates, decomposition cannot be easily distinguished into discrete forms of digestion and explosion, the 'good' decomposition of incorporation and the 'bad'

decomposition of dissolution, just as it becomes impossible to dissociate the "'bad' zombie…as a slave of others" and the "'good' zombie…which resists being a tool" (Lauro & Embry, 407). Rather, the two processes are mutually dependent as loss of subjectivity becomes a necessary step in the process of establishing non-individualist communal relations.

Conclusion

It is this quintessential ambivalence towards revenential visitation and material decomposition as a simultaneously emancipatory and threatening process that marks *Beloved* as an informative text for new materialist readings of the contemporary zombie. Such ambivalence testifies to the threat, as well as the promise, posed by such a figure. Indeed, *Beloved's* ambivalence towards decomposition might be seen as a politicised expression of the broader dynamic in which our contemporary affection towards the zombie[71] is necessarily tempered with a wary acknowledgement of the violence central to its imaginative configuration. To embrace the zombie, physically or otherwise, is always to risk a form of contamination. As such, to embrace the zombie is not just to gain an appreciation and acceptance of distributed agencies and new materialist ontologies, but also to risk losing something: the individualist benefits and affirmation of universal rights that have traditionally been grounded in liberal humanist values (Braidotti, 29). Consequently, the zombie is a figure that can always only be embraced from a distance.

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[71] As part of the millennial 'zombie renaissance', a host of texts have emerged in which survival becomes dependent, not upon the zombie's *annihilation*, but upon co-operation with, toleration of or otherwise *becoming* zombie. Such texts include *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *iZombie* (2010-2012), *Warm Bodies* (2010), *28 Days Later* (2002)*, Fido* (2006)

This fundamental characteristic precludes attempts to read the zombie as a figure of new materialist celebration, instead demarcating it as a deeply ambivalent figure that indexes the potential difficulties inherent in the abandonment of anthropocentric thought in favour of a new materialist ethics. If the zombie narrative tells us anything, it is that one cannot move beyond the ideological confines of the human without great pain or sacrifice. It testifies to the reality that "loyalty to one's species has some deeper and more complex affective roots that cannot be shaken off at will. Disidentification at this level involves the pain of disengagement from anthropos" (Braidotti, 16). It is this tension, therefore, that constructs the ambivalent distance at which the contemporary zombie is held, as the site at which the desire to transcend the human comes into conflict with a reluctance to relinquish that very humanity. Moreover, it is precisely this tension that is illuminated in *Beloved's* fraught narrative representation of the pleasures but also the pain induced by the necessary revitalisation of the dead.

To summarise, Part Two of this thesis has explored the potential and limitations of the zombie as a new materialist icon of distributed agency. It has considered how the spectrality of the reanimated corpse's impossible animation collapses the distinctions between the material and the immaterial, as well as those between the social and the biological. However, at the same time it has also recognised how this new materialist potential is augmented by the fundamentally supernatural framework in which the reanimated corpse operates. Depicting postmortem vitality through a thoroughly fantastical figure, the zombie is a being that formulates nonhuman agency as a phenomenon that exceeds human comprehension. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how its fundamental violence provokes a certain ambivalence that precludes its non-problematic acceptance. As such, the zombie cannot be considered an imaginative glorification of new materialist thought. Rather, the

zombie is a figure that testifies to the desire and utility, but also the difficulty of attaining uncompromised epistemological access to the material world.

The third and final part of this thesis will interrogate how these observations regarding the corpse's ambivalence as a figure of uncertain epistemic contact are extended and reflected in the literary medium. Examining how two texts — Don DeLillo's *Zero K* and Jim Crace's *Being Dead* — utilise the corpse to explore how art both enables and inhibits aesthetic encounters with the material world, Part Three investigates the tenuous and conflicted role of literature in facilitating non-human contact.

Part 3: AESTHETIC (DE)COMPOSITIONS

Chapter 5 - Dying to Live: Preservative Paradox, Posthumanism and the Cryopreserved Corpse in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*

"Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires."

<div align="right">(Stevens, 'Sunday Morning', ll. 46-50)</div>

Introduction

'Part Two: Spectres of Flesh' investigated how the fantastic ontology of the reanimated corpse necro-corporeally manifests the limitations of the dead body as a means of deriving epistemic access to the material world. However, as explored in the introduction to this thesis, the corpse's compromised, intermediary position might be seen to reflect that of literature itself. Indeed, the role of literature within the new materialisms is hotly contested, ranging from recalcitrant models in which linguistic undecidability reflects the material world's constant withdrawal from human sensory and epistemic contact to sensible models that frame literature as a privileged technology disclosing unprecedented access to the non-human world. Part Three of this thesis takes up such debates by exploring how textual representations of the corpse induce aesthetic reflections on the role of the literary medium in facilitating encounters with the non-human world. Specifically, this will be approached through a more focused investigation of decomposition and how its challenging counter-aesthetic is managed and framed by literary narratives. Analysing two texts that explicitly offer the corpse as an artistic model, Don DeLillo's *Zero K* and Jim Crace's *Being Dead,* this concluding part to the thesis examines the symmetries and divergences that arise between the corpse as a (non)human subject and the literary medium as a vessel for disclosing specifically compromised access to non-human noumena.

"All plots tend to move deathward….we edge nearer death every time we plot. It is like a contract that all must sign, the plotters as well as those who are the targets of the plot" (DeLillo, 1985, 18). These words uttered by Jack Gladney, the mortally paranoid hero of Don DeLillo's early masterwork *White Noise* (1985), might be seen to articulate the core concern of DeLillo's latest literary offering *Zero K* (2016), a novel that explores the complex intersection of delusion and desire that underlie both technological and artistic attempts to forestall death's terminal inevitability.

Taking on the contemporary phenomenon of 'cryonics', a scientifically dubious and primarily speculative branch of biotechnological research that investigates "the freezing, immediately upon death, of people who have suffered from rare or incurable diseases….to store the body and prevent decomposition until a cure for the cause of death can be found" (Gordon 1975, 132)[72], *Zero K* evokes an abstract lyricism that is conspicuously 'plotless' in both its geographic and narrative trajectory. Loosely based on the Alcor cryonics facility in Scottsdale, Arizona, the majority of *Zero K* takes place in 'the Convergence', an isolated and spatially indeterminate complex, "part laboratory, part futurist art project" (Brown, 2016) that aims "to preserv[e] the bodies of the dead until such a time as….technology delivers the means to reassemble bodies and brains, indeed, even reinvigorate individual identities after suspension" (Vala, 239). The novel's plot ostensibly follows Jeffrey Lockhart's strained reconciliation with Ross, his estranged father, as the latter conspires to cryonically preserve his second wife and eventually undergoes the same procedure himself. However, this

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[72] Whilst the source of this definition is notably dated (1975), it nevertheless remains one of the more appropriate and articulate designation of cryonics located to date. This is especially true when compared to the vague and self-congratulatory humanitarianism permeating the definitions provided by the leading institutes of cryonics, KriosRus – "[cryonics is] the last resort for the dead and dying to save their lives, albeit in the hope of returning to life sometime in the future" (KriosRus) - and Alcor – "cryonics is an effort to save lives by using temperatures so cold that a person beyond help by today's medicine can be preserved for decades or centuries until a future technology can restore that person to full health" (Alcor).

surface narrative primarily functions as a structuring mechanism by which the reader is brought into contact with the cryonic and aesthetic contradictions inherent in the Convergence's immortalist project.

Stylistically aligned with the sub-zero temperatures of its subject matter, *Zero K* is a novel glacial in tone; cold and detached in its slow drift between decontextualized observations and ideas. Deploying the "slender plotting, elusive meanings and dense, elliptical prose" symptomatic of "'late period' DeLillo" (Jordison, 2016), *Zero K* coolly and crisply eulogises the forgotten moments of minor epiphany that occasionally grace lived experience and, somewhat paradoxically, attempts to preserve these briefly illuminated instants within an artistically induced immortality. In doing so, the text evokes a semi-hallucinogenic, free-floating sensation that both stylistically and thematically grapples with the relationship between the transient and the eternal, the ephemeral and the immortal.

Fact or Fiction?: The Cryonics Debate

Not to be confused with 'cryogenics', which is a recognised area of credible scientific research into phenomena that occur at very low temperatures,[73] the optimistically theoretical and empirically dubious nature of 'cryonics' has led to its frequent dismissal and derision amongst the scientific community, marking it as one of "the world's most deliciously ridiculed quasiscientific enterprises" (Kumar and Singh, 182). Researchers such as Hendricks, Kumar & Singh and Shermer (2001) have already catalogued the numerous barriers that undermine the possibility of cryonic reanimation, citing the complexity of connectomics and neural mapping, the problematic maintenance of cell-membrane integrity

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[73] For a fuller consideration of this distinction and the repercussions of its unfortunate popular confusion see Parry (2004)

and the non-replicability of neuronal pathways. Perhaps the most devastating indictment of cryonics, however, is Hendricks' assertion that life extension institutes such as Alcor and KrioRus pursue a "purposeful conflation of what is *theoretically conceivable* with what is *ever practically possible*" (Hendricks 2015, original emphasis).

Obviously, this chapter does not intend to replicate such empirically oriented critiques of cryonics as a scientific practice. Rather it examines how the particular network of preconceptions that underpin cryonics' philosophical outlook adopts and adapts popular perceptions of the corpse, decomposition and preservative practices as they appear in the twenty-first century. It argues that the cryonic project ultimately disrupts the physical and conceptual integrity of the very subjects it aims to conserve, a dynamic that will be referred to as the 'preservative paradox'. Furthermore, it contends that it is precisely this preservative paradox that animates DeLillo's depiction of the cryopreserved corpse as a materially, experientially and aesthetically contradictory figure that is simultaneously posthuman *and* transhuman.

This chapter starts by identifying the cryonic project's preservative paradox and its wider relationship with transhumanism. Afterwards, it explores how *Zero K* constructs cryopreservation as a reactionary response to contemporary society's erasure of 'the human' as a discrete ontological category by producing and isolating a disembodied 'self' akin to the ideals of liberal humanism. It then goes on to observe how this idealised human is, in fact, undermined by the very technological, subjective and experiential recalibrations enacted by cryopreservation. Finally, this chapter examines how *Zero K* extends this preservative paradox to aesthetic considerations by thematically aligning it with the stultifying self-referentiality that accompanies artistic immortalisation. In doing so, this

chapter aims to demonstrate how DeLillo exploits the paradoxes inherent in the cryopreserved corpse to reflect on the role of literature's epistemological insights into the material world as necessarily partial, conflicted and ephemeral.

The Preservative Paradox

Despite remaining a discredited and marginalised topic of scientific investigation, the cryonic enterprise has gripped the cultural imagination since its inception by Robert Ettinger (1962) in the latter half of the twentieth century (Smith 1983, 126–7; Kumar & Singh, 183). Indeed, cryonic preservation figures prevalently across a variety of popular discourses, such as animation (*Futurama*, 1999–2013), science fiction cinema (*Realive,* 2016), podcasts ('Mistakes Were Made', 2008), genre fiction (*Extra Innings*, 2012) and urban legend (e.g. Walt Disney's cryonically preserved head).[74] In addition, the practice itself has proved controversial and often garnered public attention due to its legal and ethical implications, such as the lawsuit following the cryopreservation of baseball star Ted Williams[75] or the infamous 'Chatsworth Scandal' in which malfunctioning equipment led to several decomposing bodies being discovered seemingly abandoned in a preservation chamber.[76] Such public debates are only likely to multiply with the continued expansion of cryonic storage facilities such as Alcor and KriosRus and the emergence of smaller groups such as Cryonics UK (Goddard & Brown, 2016). As such, the realms of cryonics provide a culturally relevant permutation through which to read contemporary approaches to decomposition and necro-corporeal preservation as they circulate throughout the public sphere within both

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[74] This cultural visibility is maintained in spite of, or possibly *because* of, public confidence in the practice being notably low (Stodolsky, 2016)

[75] For more on the Ted Williams case see Johnson and Baldyga (2009) and McCormack (2014)

[76] Robert Nelson, the facility's proprietor, adamantly denies the presence of bodies on site and decries the claim as the fabrication of a controversy-hungry media and publicity seeking prosecution lawyers (Nelson, 150). Regardless, the Chatsworth Incident remains "the most disastrous and damaging event in the history of the practice" (Shoftstall, 2013)

fictional and nonfictional discourses.[77] Furthermore, as we shall see, the particular

orientation towards deceased bodies and the processes of decomposition that arise within

the cryonic imagination provide an intensely anthropocentric, 'transhuman' approach to

death and the corpse that is elevated to the level of a "metaphysical crime that needs to be

analysed by philosophers" (114) within *Zero K*.

Although its speculative, techno-utopianism potentially marks cryonics as a bizarre anomaly

in the history of the corpse's treatment, it can also be understood as the latest permutation

of more conventional preservative practices such as mummification (Quigley, 247),

postmortem photography (Schwartz, 17) and embalming (Edwards, 3) that attempt to stage

technological interventions into decomposition. As explored in this thesis' introduction,

decomposition's rampant display of the corpse's (non)human agency violently articulates

the materiality of the human subject, thereby destabilising the integrity of the ontological

distinctions that have traditionally distinguished human from matter. As such, attempts to

reject, arrest or conceal decomposition manifest both a personalised desire to safeguard the

identity of the deceased individual and a broader metaphysical desire to protect the

integrity of the 'human subject' as a discretely contained ontological unit. Likewise, the

fantasy of cryopreservation not only indexes the desire to attain personal immortality but

also to reaffirm the 'human' as an ontological category through the physical and symbolic

denial of decomposition.

Of course, such acts of decomposition denial are a feature of aesthetic, as well as

technological, practices. Notions of artistic preservation can be observed in "the traditional

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[77] The powerful interrelationship between these two modes of discourse might be demonstrated by the fact that Ettinger's project was originally inspired by Neil R. Jones' science-fiction short story 'The Jameson Satellite' (1931)

topos of poetic immortality" (Hakola & Kivisto, xiii), in which the permanence of artistic representation is a figured as a compensation for the transience of lived existence.[78] Indeed, this notion of aesthetic immortality is deeply entwined with the prevalence of decomposition denial, since the desire to construct literary texts as enduring artefacts manifests in its depictions of "the dead body [as] intact, whole, unblemished, indeed beautiful, rather than ugly, decayed, corrupt" (Gilman, 151). In this context, the beautification of the corpse as an aesthetic object aligns with a preservative vision of the literary medium that neglects the significance of social, historical or material context in the production of meaning. As such, the aesthetically preserved corpse has traditionally operated as a metonym for the immortalising power of art. It is this particular association between necro-corporeal preservation and aesthetic permanence that will be interrogated in the final part of this thesis. Providing a more refined focus on the literary treatment of decomposition, it explores how the aesthetic management of the corpse either prohibits or enables its ability to stage encounters with material agency.

One of the features that makes cryonics an especially interesting, even unique, mode of technological preservation is the extent to which its extreme ambitions literalise the latent symbolic logic of conventional preservative practices, in which the "appeal [is] not so much [their] power of preservation as such, but [their] power to preserve the *appearance of life*" (Schwartz, 13). Within such a context, the momentary arrest of decomposition imaginatively signifies remembrance and the continuation of the human subject beyond death. In contrast, the cryonic imagination is one in which decomposition not only *signifies* death but *becomes* death. For example, consider the following passage from Robert Nelson's

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[78] This sentiment is, perhaps, most famously articulated in Shakespeare's Sonnet XVIII: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, /So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (ll. 13-14)

autobiography *Freezing People Is (Not) Easy: My Adventures in Cryonics* (2014) in which the author recounts his response to the aforementioned Chatsworth Incident:

> The thought of her decaying deep inside the fifteen-hundred-pound pressure cooker
> drove me to my knees, and I cried….I was solely responsible for the death of these
> three lost friends…The damage was done. They were dead – not just clinically dead
> but irreversibly gone – killed by my mistakes and the California sun (136)

Nelson's melodramatic account moves beyond the traditional binary of life and death to construct a secondary distinction between theoretically reversible clinical death and 'real death', in which the presence of late-stage decomposition both signifies and constitutes the latter. That is to say, within the cryonic imagination, the prevention of decomposition is understood to *literally*, rather than purely symbolically, keep its subject alive.

However, although necro-corporeal preservation maintains the superficial likeness of their subject, such practices ironically transform the corpse at a material level by subjecting them to technological procedures that alter their physical, chemical and corporeal composition (Schwartz, 12). Conflating symbolic and material forms of preservation, cryopreservation brings this contradiction to the surface by fundamentally altering the human subjects it attempts to maintain both physically and conceptually. As we shall see, *Zero K* stages this 'preservative paradox' through its depiction of the "cryogenic dead" (74) as figures that are thoroughly dehumanised by the self-same aesthetic and technological procedures that aim to preserve them, ultimately resulting in their premature demise rather than immortality (111). Figuring the cryopreserved corpse as a symbol of aesthetic and material contradiction, DeLillo's novel exposes the cryonic project as one which threatens the human life it attempts to preserve both physically and metaphysically.

<u>Cryonic Transhumanism</u>

Although the extreme anthropocentrism and technological utopianism of cryonics is certainly noteworthy, it is by no means unique. Rather, cryonics might be understood as a subset of the more encompassing, and academically visible project of 'transhumanism'. Often considered a form of "hyper-humanism" (Roden, 25), transhumanism embraces technological and cybernetic developments as tools with which to augment and enhance the biological and neurological possibilities of the human subject, demonstrating an "emphasis on progress…reason, technology [and] scientific method" in a manner consistent with the values and principles of "Enlightenment humanism" (More & More, 4). This ethos is commonly counterposed to that of 'critical posthumanism', which utilises bio-technological integration as an opportunity to rethink the validity of liberal humanism and reformulate a new ontological category which transcends the boundaries between nature and culture, biology and technology, provisionally referred to as 'the posthuman'.

This alliance between cryonics and transhumanism is by no means universally acknowledged with many transhumanists rejecting the possibility of cryopreservation (O'Connell, 2017). Likewise, cryonicists such as Aschwin de Wolf (2009) and Stephen Bridge (2014) are reluctant to identify with transhumanism, deeming the movement to be potentially damaging to cryonicists' desire to acquire scientific credibility. Nevertheless, their philosophical foundations and ethos remain remarkably similar. For example, cryonics and transhumanism share a "psychological reductionism" (More, 25) that perceives selfhood as a primarily mental, informational phenomenon capable of being 'frictionlessly' transferred between bodies (Hayles, 2). Similarly, both practices demonstrate a faith, if not a dependency, in the ability of future technological advances "not only to renovate, but also to augment the existing faculties of the subject" (Kumar & Singh, 181–182).

Such affinities are formalised in mutual displays of support, with Ettinger's later text — the

alarmingly named, *Man into Superman* (1972) — "emphasiz[ing] the role of cryonics for

transhumanity" (Ranisch & Sorgner, 11) and the inclusion of a clause in the 2009

Transhuman Declaration announcing its support for the cryonic project. Furthermore, as of

2011, Max More, founder of the Extropy Institute and editor of the *The Transhumanist*

Reader[79] became acting CEO of Alcor, further facilitating dialogue between the disciplines.

As these fundamental similarities demonstrate, both the conceptual frameworks and

objectives of cryonics and transhumanism are closely aligned.

An affinity of particular relevance to this chapter can be found in cryonics' and

transhumanism's mutual dependency on a paradoxical conception of 'the natural' as both

an aspirational ideal and a barrier to be technologically transcended. Cryonic discourses

often deploy naturalistic notions of evolution and the fulfilment of human potential,

referred to by Ettinger as the "doctrine of future evolution" (86). This is the presumption

"implicit" in the cryonic project that modern man "represents only a rung on the

evolutionary ladder; that we not only evolved from lower forms of life, but will continue to

ascend, through manifold biological and bioengineering techniques" (77). In this sense, the

cryonic imagination retains a biological essentialism even as it collapses traditional

distinctions between the natural and the technological by attempting to undo the essential

property of organic life that is death. This same paradoxical dependency on the 'de-

naturing' of the human as a means of enshrining its 'natural' dominance can be identified

within transhumanism's self-promotion as "a class of philosophies that seeks the continued

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[79] Unsurprisingly, *The Transhumanist Reader* includes a section dedicated to life extension and a separate chapter featuring a discussion on cryonics between Ray Kurzweill and Eric Drexler first staged at 'The Alcor Conference of Extreme Life Extension' (2002)

evolution of human life beyond its current human form as a result of science and technology guided by life-promoting principles" (More, 1). Therefore, both cryonics and transhumanism configure the human subject as one that fulfils his predestined role *within* nature, by uplifting himself *out of* nature.

As we shall see, DeLillo's conflicted depiction of the cryopreserved corpse exposes this paradox in a variety of ways. In the process, *Zero K* not only deconstructs 'Life Extension' procedures but also the wider "transhumanist ethos" (Cofer, 2) that punctuates the Convergence's technological augmentation and preservation of its human subjects. This chapter argues that the particular configuration of 'cryonic transhumanism' depicted in *Zero K* is one that both explicitly and implicitly unravels itself as a paradoxical project, ultimately furnishing the text with a critical posthumanist sensibility. This contradiction takes the form of a 'preservative paradox' in which the cryonic operations depicted in the novel both physically and conceptually threaten the 'human life' they intend to preserve, ultimately manifesting the representation of the cryopreserved corpse as an entity so entirely 'human' that it evacuates the term of all meaning.

Preservative Paradox in *Zero K*

In a 2016 interview with the *LA Times*, DeLillo states that "the key to the cryonic aspect of the novel is that here in this facility, there is an area called 'Zero K' in which people volunteer to undergo the cryonic process even though they are nowhere near dying. This is the essence of the novel in a way" (DeLillo, 2016). Although it would be ill-advised to rely too heavily on the perspective of the author as the sole locus of meaning, the dynamic that DeLillo describes neatly encapsulate cryonic transhumanism's preservative paradox — its

methodological contradictions that attempt to arrive at a technologically mediated ontological exceptionalism, individuated subjectivity and immortal transience. Explicitly indexing the inevitable renegotiations and sacrifices that accompany attempts to materially and conceptually preserve the human subject, the volunteers' agreement "to be a frozen specimen in a capsule twenty years before [their] time" (111) in the ironic pursuit of a longer lifespan mortally manifests the preservative paradox that denigrates conventional lived experience in the pursuit of its elongation. This narrative event anthropomorphically accentuates the violence inherent in cryonics' limited definition of what constitutes 'life'. Insisting that "death is due to the disturbance of vital mechanisms with irreversible changes in living matter, which disintegrates and decomposes" (Nelson, 124), the cryonic imagination negatively defines death and obscures the life inherent in the microbial processes of putrefaction and decay. Reflecting this violence in narratively immediate terms through its human characters, DeLillo problematically but productively anthropomorphises and renders visible the nonhuman violence that necessarily accompanies cryopreservation.

Therefore, the bodies inside of 'Zero K' — the 'essence of the novel' according to DeLillo — constitute an extreme manifestation of cryonic transhumanisms' paradoxical deconstruction of 'the human' in pursuit of its affirmation. However, as we shall see, the volunteers' literal cessation of life in search of its continuation provides only the most obvious manifestation of the text's subtler explorations of cryopreservative paradox, including the cessation of subjectivity in pursuit of subject status, the experiential cessation of transience as embodied experience and the ontological cessation of nonhuman animation.

Cryonics as Metaphysical Remedy

As we shall see, the technological interpenetrations of the cryonic corpse constitute a metaphysical, as well as physical, threat to the 'human subjects' it intends to preserve. This threat is codified as an extension of the preservative paradox through DeLillo's depiction of cryonics as an attempt to preserve 'the human' as a discrete ontological category. Aimed at nullifying perceived threats to the sovereign agency of the human subject, cryopreservation is framed as an implausible palliative to the ills of the modern world. During Ross' ritualistic induction into suspended animation, a representative of the Convergence delivers a sermon stating

> that world, the one above…is being lost to the systems. To the transparent networks
> that slowly occlude the flow of all those aspects of nature and character that
> distinguish humans from elevator buttons and doorbells…haven't you felt it? The
> loss of autonomy
>
> (239)

Justifying the technological arrest of decomposition through appeals to the 'naturalness' of ontological distinctions and human exceptionalism, this sermon indicates that the Convergence's practices of cryopreservation are as reactionary as they are future-oriented. Suspended animation is, here, encoded as an escape from the depersonalisation of networked ontologies, from the definitional erasures of new media, globalisation, environmentalism and postclassical systems theory. By cryonically forestalling the processes of decomposition that similarly occlude the distinction between humans and things, subjects and objects, *Zero K* frames cryopreservation as an act of symbolic defiance against the ontological challenges to human subject-status of the early-twenty-first century. As

such, the Convergence's cryonic project is also framed as a retreat from technological, social and environmental practices and perspectives that challenge traditional ontological hierarchies subtending notions of the sovereign humanist subject.

Of course, the greatest ontological threat that the Convergence attempts to neutralise is that of death itself. This message is not just projected by the Convergence's experimental cryonic procedures, but also by the facility's incorporation of wall-to-wall, drop-down screens that continuously project images of conflict, disaster and desolation. Constantly bombarding its subjects with catastrophic visions of demise that it both displays and anticipates, the Convergence frames death as a disaster to be outlasted in its "subterrane" (244, sic) "safehold" (78) rather than a natural process interrupted by technological intervention.

Moreover, the visual grammar of such footage indicates that the Convergence is not simply a bunker against 'death' in the abstract, but rather against the particularly depersonalising processes of death, the reduction of a subject to a statistical number, to a crushed body in a crowd, to matter amongst matter. Significantly, it is not private or personal death depicted on the Convergence's screens, but mass death in which individual identities and figures become indiscernible. Catastrophe reduces human subjects to "*people* everywhere running" (11, my emphasis), "people wearing facemasks, hundreds moving at camera level….long ranks of slow moving men and women…in the thousands now" (120) and "masses of people carrying whatever possessions they can manage" (260). These huddled and harried multitudes are ultimately depersonalised in a manner equivalent to its images of the "dead arrayed on ravaged floorboards" (36) and "bodies: slaughtered men in a jungle clearing, vultures stepping among the corpses" (260). Reduced to fleeing masses and piled bodies,

death is here rendered in the form of depersonalised extinction as "an escape from our personal mortality. Catastrophe. It overwhelms what is weak and fearful in our bodies and minds. We face the end but not alone" (66).

Despite the comforting tone of Miklos Szabo's above comment, it is precisely this mode of depersonalising death that the Convergence aims to conquer. Cofer claims that "death, a classic DeLillo fascination, stands as an unavoidably private experience, at odds with the networked logic of crowds" (1), yet in *Zero K* the reverse is true. In *Zero K* death is represented *en masse*, as a unifying (and damagingly de-individualising) experience, and it is the project of the Convergence to *make* death — or rather its deferral through preservation — a private experience, to restore the 'personal mortality' that is lost in the mass death of public catastrophe.[80] As such, *Zero K* depicts a defensive retreat into both a conceptual and physical bunker that attempts to weather the assaults on human exceptionalism heralded by new media, globalisation and, crucially, the very scientific and cultural developments that make the Convergence's immortalist project possible.

Technological Paradox

This internal contradiction is also materially expressed in how the Convergence's attempts to preserve the ontological integrity of the human subject paradoxically remain dependent on the self-same postclassical developments in biotechnology by which such integrity is compromised. Reliant on techniques such as vitrification, perfusion and nanotechnological reconstruction, cryonic preservation deploys emergent and speculative technologies that seriously challenge "even what it means to be human" (Milburn, 263) by transforming "the

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[80] I would argue that this is more in keeping with DeLillo's literary representations of death than Cofer might suggest. For example, in his analysis of *White Noise*, Cowart claims that the white noise itself is a symbol that conflates death and dis-individuation, symbolising "the great tide of multiplicity" (83), "a kind of chaos, an absence of meaningful differentiation, the sonic equivalent of entropy and heat death" (85).

possible parameters of human subjectivities and human bodies, the limits of somatic existence" (270) in a contradictory defence of that original human subject.

Furthermore, it is not just the procedures of cryopreservation that destabilise the ontological integrity of the human subject, but also their ethical consequences. As Nelson's prior quote testifies, although legal stipulations insist that the cryopreserved subject is a corpse,[81] within the cryonic imagination they are classified as 'patients' (O'Connell, 28). Confusing the boundaries between human and corpse, the cryopreserved subject ontologically estranges the human it attempts to preserve, transforming them into a "cadaver-patient" (Gordon 1975, 134) conceptually, as well as technically. Indeed, the ethical uncertainty arising from cryonics leads *Zero K* to directly emphasise the ambiguity of death as a matter of interpretation rather than biological fact (139–140). Therefore, despite the cryonic project's best attempts to nullify ontological confusion through the indefinite extension of human existence, such practices implicitly rehearse the destabilising functions of the decomposing corpse that its preservative procedures are designed to arrest.

Within the novel, then, the cryopreserved corpse becomes a site of intense contradiction. A transhuman ambition with posthuman results, a flight from ontological disintegration that results in its radical exacerbation. *Zero K*'s preserved corpses do not escape the ontological erasures of decomposition and their threat to human exceptionalism, but rather migrate and transpose them. Whilst cryonic suspension may well defer decomposition's

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[81] The violence of contemporary cryonic procedure necessitates that the cryopreserved subject be legally deceased, as it is only following the pronouncement of clinical death that "the rules pertaining to procedures that can be performed change radically because the individual is no longer a living patient but a corpse" (Hendrey and Crippen, 6).

materialisation of the human, in this same process the ontological destabilisation of the human subject is re-enacted along a technological axis.

However, this preservative paradox is not only technologically enacted, but also reflected in the Convergence's ambition to revive essentialist notions of human subjectivity liberated from external contact or influence. Indeed, the Convergence's "controlled environment" (247) that encourages its subjects to 'plane down' the landscape and "*make it* abstract" (79, my emphasis) appears deliberately designed to induce a sense of heightened subjectivity by providing "solitude in extremis….[in which] the mask drops away and the person becomes *you* in its truest meaning. All one. The self" (67). As such the solitude and seclusion of the Convergence is strategically manufactured as an individualising respite from the dehumanising commotion of contemporary urban life (and death). As Ross reports, the Convergence is designed as a space in which one can "tight[en] my idea of myself" (99), and people can "find out eventually who they are. Not through consultation with others but through self-examination, self-revelation" (124).

Subjective Paradox

The natural conclusion of such rampant subjectification through geographic abstraction is, of course, transhumanism's aforementioned 'psychological reductionism', as the body becomes the final horizon that must be dematerialised to arrive at a pure liberal humanist self. As Hayles famously argues, such fantasies of disembodiment re-instil Cartesian substance dualism by problematically conceptualising subjectivity as an informational pattern that can be transferred between material vessels without undergoing change in form. In doing so, Hayles claims that, whilst transhumanism "deconstructs the liberal

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humanist subject, it thus shares with its predecessor an emphasis on cognition rather than embodiment" (5).[82]

The "possibility of disembodiment" (Cofer, 7) promised by the Convergence's cryonically-induced "phantom life within the braincase. Floating thought" (DeLillo, 238), clearly aligns itself with transhumanist, rather than posthumanist sensibilities. Indeed, one might be forgiven for thinking that DeLillo's vision of a militantly "anti-posthumanist" (Cofer, 7) cryonics had been conceived in explicit defiance of Hayles' preferred vision of a posthuman future that

> embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity
>
> (5)

In contrast, the Convergence adamantly pursues a disembodied immortality, neglecting the embodied finitude fundamental to the subject they wish to preserve (the human) and pursuing a distinctly un-embedded subject position "outside the narrative of what we refer to as history" (DeLillo, 237). This orientation is elegantly distilled in Artis' designation as a "cyberhuman" (67), a term which conspicuously reformulates the posthuman figure of the 'cyborg' (cybernetic *organism*) with an emphatically articulated continuation of the human, both discursively and conceptually.

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[82] Though we should note that Hayles' avoids using the term 'transhuman' in this particular text, instead referring to the problems of what she refers to as "cybernetic posthumanism" (4) which she differentiates from posthumanism proper.

Crucially, DeLillo's depiction of the Convergence's 'transhumanist ethos' should not be interpreted as approval, but rather as a means of exploring the limitations of transhumanist thought. Indeed, the novel's use of Jeff as a first person narrator encourages the reader to side with his sceptical assessment of cryonics as nothing more than ritualised death "chemically prompted, in a subzero vault, in a highly precise medical procedure guided by mass delusion, by superstition and arrogance and self-deception" (50). Such reservations are subtly echoed by Artis who, in a moment of Haylesian self-reflection asks, "What will it be like to come back? The same body, yes, or an enhanced body, but what about mind? Is consciousness unaltered? Are you the same person?" (48).

This question is ultimately answered in the negative and Jeff's scathing assessment of the Convergence's misguided faith is substantiated in the novel's discursively experimental midsection, 'Artis Martineau', which depicts disembodiment as a horrifying, rather than liberating, experience through (the now cryopreserved) Artis' maddeningly solipsistic stream of consciousness. The Convergence's quest for pure subjectivity cruelly manifests as a "*nightmare of self drawn so tight that she is trapped forever*" (161, original emphasis) in pure isolation where "*she can ask her questions to no one but herself*" (162). Rather than providing self-knowledge, DeLillo's depiction of the materially isolated cryopreserved corpse, the "pure self, suspended in ice" (68) is one of linguistic cyclicality, infinite regress and perennial uncertainty in which "the words want to tell me things but I don't know how to listen/ I listen to what I hear/ I only hear what is me. I am made of words" (158). In this section, a human subject that is materially and conceptually sealed from their environment is revealed to have no choice but to become its own object, a concept literalised in the repetitious paroxysms of its solipsistic syntax. As Cofer observes, "the section of *Zero K* titled

'Artis Martineau' suggests that realizing the transhumanist dream may instead prove the bleakest of nightmares" (19), and the realisation of the cryopreserved subject as "a single life in touch only with yourself" (DeLillo, 237) manifests as a threat rather than a promise.

However, I would argue that DeLillo's greatest critique of cryonic transhumanism stems not from its unflattering representation of disembodied existence, but its revelation of just how divorced from human experience transhumanism really is. That is to say, the radical *unfamiliarity* of Artis' disembodied internal monologue exposes the alien (and ultimately *inhuman*) nature of the conceptually isolated "idealized human…a human body as a model of creation…naked and absolute" (258) that her frozen form comes to represent. The irony here, is that in the preservation of the human body in its Platonic 'ideal' the specificity and individuality with which it is associated is ultimately eclipsed by abstract form. The preservation of the human *subject* is accomplished at the expense of human *subjectivity*. "Look long enough", Jeff says "and even the shaved heads of the women begin to seem consistent with the primal chill of nature. This was a function of the pods, I thought, the detailed rigour of scientific method, humans stripped of adornment, spliced back to fetushood" (144). Here, the cryopreserved corpse's maintenance of the human as a discrete ontological 'type' ultimately erases the integral feature of humanism — rational, autonomous subjectivity — as just another 'adornment'.

This fundamental contradiction between means and ends, the extent to which the cryonic process is one that produces new modes of subjectivity as it attempts to preserve them, is perhaps the ultimate paradox of the Convergence's goal of transhumanist subjectivity. By depicting ironically objectified 'human subjects' DeLillo exposes cryonic transhumanism as a self-defeating and paradoxical process, an ambition undermined by its realisation, in a set of

contradictory associations conjured by its representation of the cryopreserved corpse as a site of 'preservative paradox'.

This central irony is demonstrated in *Zero K*'s numerous depictions of how the Convergence paradoxically homogenises its subjects by turning them into interchangeable components within a wider scientific process. Despite their ambitions to preserve selfhood, the novel's cryonic 'patients' are described as "laboratory life-forms shaved naked in pods and drawn together as one unit whatever the means of canning and curing" (142), and "individuals in clear casings, in body pods, and they were naked, one man, two women, shaved heads, all three" (140). The 'individuals' ironically referenced in the latter quote are ultimately de-individualised as their singularity is numerically displaced as 'one' becomes 'three' and human beings are re-coded as abstract symbols, unified beyond sexual difference in a dis-individuated and sterile homogeneity. In such instances, the schematised stripping of the body to its Platonic ideal transforms living subjects into "naked icon[s]" (245).

This point is, perhaps, most forcefully made when, upon confrontation with Ross' cryopreserved corpse, Jeff contemplates his "father's body, stripped of everything that might mark it as an individual. It was a thing fallen into anonymity" (251). In this climactic moment, the Convergence's 'subjectifying' philosophy is starkly undermined by the process through which it seeks realisation as cryonic suspension is predicated upon techniques and technologies that fundamentally emphasise, rather than escape, the depersonalisation that its material stasis seeks to flee.

Experiential Paradox

The final means by which *Zero K* depicts the preservative paradox significant to this chapter is in its representation of lived experience. Whilst the cryonic pursuit of immortality is often

practiced out of an intense *appreciation* of lived experience — as Mike Darwin puts it "we are cryonicists because we love being alive and do not want our lives to ever end" (26) — *Zero K* foregrounds life's *transience* as the fundamental precondition of such experience. The celebration of transience is encouraged through Jeff's narrative filtration and character development. Throughout the novel Jeff displays a determination to "gather all the forgettable fragments" (200) that make up lived experience, demonstrating an obsessive inclination to recognise and recount the "things people do, ordinarily, forgettably, things that breathe just under the surface of what we acknowledge….[to allow] these gestures, these moments to have meaning" (209). Adopting his mother's teachings that "ordinary moments make the life" (109), Jeff attempts to acknowledge these passing moments and so forge an identity, not through the expansion or diffusion of time, but through a recognition of its fleetingness, that it is "the things we forget about that tell us who we are" (172).

Unsurprisingly, Jeff's appreciation of transience comes into tension with the Convergence's redefinition of life through its (supposedly) infinite extension. This tension is fittingly played out through the other maternal figure in Jeff's life, his stepmother Artis. Early in the novel, Artis recounts a vivid memory of herself standing transfixed in the shower "watching a drop of water skate down the wet curtain" (19) as it "begin[s] to lengthen, to ooze" (18), an experience she refers to as "a moment never to be thought of except when it's in the process of unfolding" (19). This appreciation of ephemerality is offset, however, by the fact that she is the primary character that the reader witnesses undergoing cryonic suspension. Demonstrating a profound appreciation of the unfolding fluidity of water as a symbol of transformative vitality, Artis is ironically destined to be "alone and frozen in the crypt" (67), "crusted in ice" (243). The material becoming that Artis seems to value so dearly is precisely what is denied in the cryonic process that turns ice into water, fluidity into stasis and decay

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into preservation. As such, the cryonic dream of infinite existence involves a re-evaluation of life that neglects the embodied transience and becoming that, in fact, constitutes *Zero K's* assessment of the joy and significance of being 'human'.

This irony reveals how the Convergence's desire for cryonic immortality as a means of preserving human existence is undermined by immortality's reformulation of the essential conditions and experiences that constitutes such an existence in the first place. As such, the 'life' which cryonics attempts to *extend* is essentially negated and renegotiated in its pursuit of the eternal. Consequently, DeLillo's novel suggests that life cannot be cryonically 'preserved' as such, as what is preserved might no longer be defined as 'life'.

Artistic Immortality as Preservative Paradox

Having considered how *Zero K* represents cryonic transhumanism's preservative paradox, technologically, metaphysically, subjectively and experientially, this chapter now proceeds to explore how this particular orientation frames its representation as a means of attaining epistemic contact with material reality. As mentioned earlier, *Zero K's* literary depiction of cryonics implicitly induces considerations of artistic preservation. However, although *Zero K's* subject matter certainly encourages reflection on artistic immortality, the novel's orientation towards such a possibility is harder to discern. Whilst some critics claim that DeLillo supports the notion of aesthetic immortality (Rich, 2016), others suggest that "the implication [of *Zero K* is] that striving for immortality in art is as absurd as paying a fortune to have someone freeze your dead body" (Jordison, 2016). As we shall see, the novel's extended and explicit contemplation of necro-corporeal aesthetics aligns with its critique of cryonic transhumanism's contradictions by framing artistic immortalisation as a process that evacuates the work of art of any vitality.

The imaginative association between cryopreservation and aesthetic immortalisation is overtly indexed by the dual signification of the Convergence as a meta-structural cryonic chamber and art gallery. The "shaved space" (250) of the Convergence's abstract architectural design stylistically entwines with the cryo-chambers populated with "shaved bodies" (152) through a play on the term 'suspension', a phrase which might either signify 'to defer in time' or 'to hang in space'. Whilst the cryopreserved corpse's 'suspended animation' nominally refers to the former, DeLillo extends it to the latter as the lack of spatial reference-points that make the Convergence "appea[r] to float up out of the earth" (230) parallels the "free-floating sensation" that accompanies its "temporal blur" (90).

At the same time, the Convergence's abstract, anonymous spaces which are de-contextualised to facilitate contemplation are heavily reminiscent of art galleries and museums. This similarity is foregrounded when Jeff visits an art gallery that houses a single "petrified" rock consisting of "long-dead remains" (216), in a scene that evokes conspicuous parallels with the Convergence's aesthetic display of cryopreserved corpses (Rich, 2016). As Jeff observes, the Convergence's architectural aesthetic equally renders it "an art gallery…Or an enormous marble tomb" (148).

Correspondingly, the cryopreserved corpses that occupy the Convergence's 'cryonic gallery' are figured as "form[s] of visionary art, body art with broad implications" (236). This link is supplemented by the facility's "post-mortem décor" (232), that features both stylistically posed "mannequins as preserved corpses" (133) and precisely arranged cryonic storage units reminiscent of "tableau vivant…except that the actors were dead" (140). Featuring art that looks like corpses and corpses that look like art the Convergence's visual narrative

intermingle representation and reality, ultimately collapsing the two in its 'statue' of "a human figure, male, nude...not a silicone-and-fiberglass replica. Real flesh, human tissue, human being. Body preserved for a limited time by cryoprotectants applied to the skin" (231). Jeff's repeated observation that the human statue was "headless – he had no head" (231) emphasises the cryonic transformation as one that eradicates the, cognitively-defined, liberal humanist subject. As such, the de-capitulated entity evacuates all pretensions towards cryonic and aesthetic immortalisation as one that preserves its subject. Instead, the artistically immortalised subjects become nothing more than "stunted monoliths of once living flesh" (23), operating as an aesthetic correlative to the preservative paradox in which the subject is eradicated by the preservation process.

A similar dynamic can be observed when Ross utters his final words "*Gesso on Linen*" (251, original emphasis) before undergoing cryonic suspension. Afterwards, Jeff observes that "the paintings in the room are oil on canvas but I tell myself that I will visit museums and galleries and search for paintings designated gesso on linen" (268). However, such an endeavour is doomed to failure, as Ross' phrase does not designate a mode of painting, but rather of artistic preparation in which a white primer is placed upon a canvas in order to preserve and protect the painting which is to be applied afterwards. Confusing primer for paint, Jeff's conflation of preservation and art, process and subject, is indicative of how preservation alters, obscures and ultimately eclipses its subject. As such, the subject immortalised in Ross's cryopreservation is not a human, but the technological ambition indexed by the preservative practice. In such moments, DeLillo extends his critique of cryopreservation as a process that kills its subject to issues of artistic immortalisation, depicting both as self-defeating practices.

This exploration of artistic immortality is also overtly indexed through the heavy-handed symbolism of Artis' namesake. Both art's symbol and its product, Artis *is* art, but also *of* art, if we are to take its Latinate grammatical form — genitive singular— into account. To take her name seriously and read Artis as an allegorical representation of the work of art, the preservation that she undergoes might meaningfully be equated to the aesthetic memorialisation of sepulchral sculpture or the elegiac form. Consequently, the nightmarish depiction of Artis' cryopreservation frames artistic immortalisation as a process that fatally divorces the work of art from its social, historical and material context. Devoid of referents, the immortalised artwork becomes purely self-signifying as Artis' maddeningly cyclical discursivity dramatises the meaninglessness of decontextualized art that "is all words but…doesn't know how to get out of words into being" (157) and in which "words themselves [are] all there is" (158).

Similar to Artis' cryonic nightmare, the 'immortalised' artwork suspended in the Convergence's asynchronous time and space become entirely self-referential when detached from cultural, historical or material referents. Likewise, the Convergence's cryonic isolation of its artworks transform them into decontextualized pieces that exclusively cite other works of art, past and future. Consider, for example the aforementioned 'human statue' that "reference[s] preclassical statuary" (232) rather than the human body and entails a prediction about "art markets of the future" (232). Preserved within the Convergence, the isolation of these signs from concrete referents traps them in a vortex of aesthetic self-signification.

Contrary to this aesthetic solipsism, however, DeLillo indicates that art's primary function is to facilitate more meaningful contact with the material world. Ironically, Artis' original motivation for undergoing cryopreservation is her hope that she will "be reborn into a deeper and truer reality. Lines of brilliant light, every material thing in its fullness" (47). Significantly, this access to "the radiance of things" (46) is encoded within an aesthetic register that depicts the beauty of 'the real' through the discourses of visual art. Following an eye operation, Artis recalls "seeing what is always there…the rich colour, the depths of color, something from within….there was something in the shapes and colors, the symmetry of the weave, the warmth, the blush" (45, sic). Insinuating that art primarily functions as a means of transcending the "intimations" (45) and "inklings of what is really there" (45) granted by human perception and obtaining direct contact with "the world as it really is" (45), Artis' cryonic ambition is essentially to attain a sublime aesthetic permanence capable of accessing the 'thing-in-itself'.

However, this newfound perceptual access to "the world as it truly looks" (46) is short-lived as Artis eventually acclimatises to her newfound clarity of vision. Insisting that "the experience hadn't drifted away and the radiance hadn't faded – it was simply re-supressed" (46), Artis' recollection is overshadowed by the fleetingness of her perception, indicating that such material access can (necessarily) only be grasped in the specific moment. As such, Artis' cryonic ambition directly contradicts her reminiscence's indication that epistemological and phenomenal access to noumena is only ever ephemeral and fleeting, as de-familiarisation quickly turns to re-familiarisation. Within the logic of the text, artistic appreciation of 'the real' beyond the confines of human experience, is depicted as something that cannot be simply 'obtained' in any permanence, but only momentarily realised in ephemeral snatches. In what is perhaps *Zero K*'s most direct enunciation of its

own artistic concerns, the Stenmark twins ask, "does literal immortality compress our enduring artforms and cultural wonders into nothingness?" (69), a question that Artis' recollection — and the novel as a whole — appears to answer in the affirmative. Rather, it is through a constant attentiveness to everyday evanescence that Jeff is able to come into irregular contact with the real: "this was the unseeable texture of life except that I was seeing it" (104).

Language

This paradoxical ambition is specifically extended from the visual to the literary arts through the Convergence's project to develop "a language that will not shrink from whatever forms of objective truth we have never before experienced…The universe, what it was, what it is, where it is going" and "will offer new meanings, entire new levels of perception" (130). Such a project indicates an infinite faith in the power of language to enable epistemological access to 'the real' alongside a valorisation of "the logic and beauty of pure mathematics" (130) reminiscent of Meillassoux's 'speculative materialism'. However, although Ben Ezra's comments indicate a desire to *reveal* the material world in a manner akin to Artis' desire to perceive 'the world as it truly looks', an entirely different logic is ultimately revealed when another envoy of the Convergence discloses that:

> We have a language to guide us out of dire times…Why not follow our words bodily into the future tense? If we tell ourselves forthrightly that consciousness will persist, that cryopreservatives will continue to nourish the body, it is the first awakening toward the blessed state.
>
> (253)

This admission indicates that the role of the Convergence's new language is, in fact, to *create* new levels of material reality through the ritualistic performance of acts and signs that 'follow our words bodily', just as the facility's video displays involve "simulacral scenes" (Schaberg, 87) of "images bod[ying] out, spill[ing] from the screen" (DeLillo, 153). Akin to Artis' contradictory desire to experience 'the radiance of things' by stultifying material vitality, the logic of the Convergence's new language collapses the distinction between revelation and production, as the 'new levels' of reality to which this novel language supposedly provides access does not pre-exist such language, but rather are produced by it. That is to say, within the rarefied realms of the Convergence, aesthetic immortalisation twists the purpose of art from *revealing* the 'radiance of things' to *remaking* it, as sign precedes referent.

This excessive faith in the productive power of signs irreducibly interpenetrates *Zero K*'s representation of the cryopreserved corpse. Midway through the novel, an escort of the facility discloses to Jeff that "the temperature employed in cryostorage does not actually approach zero k. The term, then, was pure drama" (143).[83] Sharing its title with this storage facility, DeLillo's novel indicates that it is not simply the name of this sub-unit that is 'pure drama' but the cryonic project in its entirety. Foregrounding cryonics' primarily symbolic logic in which the tokenistic denial of death through the cessation of decomposition is conflated with actual immortality, DeLillo deploys the cryopreserved corpse as a vehicle with which to explore the contradictions of aesthetic preservation as a process that fatally severs the link between sign and referent, art and world. As such, *Zero K* reveals both

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[83] According to Brian Wowk, cryopreservation takes place at around -196 degrees Celsius (7), whereas Zero K/absolute zero is measured at -273.15 degrees Celsius.

aesthetic and physical 'immortalisation' to be a paradoxical process that annihilates its subject by displacing it from the embedded context in which its 'life' is given meaning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, this penultimate chapter has investigated how *Zero K's* representations of the cryopreserved corpse express and manage its wider meditations on artistic permanence and the capacity of language to stage a communion with materiality. By using such entities to foreground the preservative paradox, DeLillo dramatizes the limits of the literary medium as one that is only capable of bestowing ephemeral snatches of 'the real' and satirises the hubris of seeking unmediated material encounters through the arts. Indeed, *Zero K* suggests that aesthetic immortalisation fatally detaches artworks from their subjects of depiction.

Ultimately, then, it is through a critique of physical and aesthetic immortalisation that DeLillo launches his counterclaim regarding the role of literature in disclosing the material world. As Artis observes, "the only thing that's not ephemeral is the art. It's not made for an audience. It's made simply to be here. It's here, it's fixed, it's part of the foundation, set in stone" (51). However, as *Zero K* reveals, this immortal, 'non-ephemeral' art is ultimately a dead art, just as surely as Ross' prematurely cryopreserved body is a dead body. Rather than providing an eternal sublime aesthetic experience or unmediated contact to the real, the only material access that the work of art discloses is glancing and transient. In this way, DeLillo chronologically indexes the limitations of the work of art as a means of attaining noumenal contact but refuses to deny its possibility. Moreover, by exposing the

preservative paradox that subtends the Convergence's cryonic transhumanism, DeLillo

reveals the importance of transience in both life and art.

In the final chapter I will demonstrate how DeLillo's sentiments are surprisingly echoed in a

seemingly antithetical novel, Jim Crace's *Being Dead.* As we shall see, Crace's depiction of

the naturally decomposing —rather than cryopreserved — corpse positively expresses the

aesthetic sentiments implied in DeLillo's satirical critique of cryonics. In doing so, *Being*

Dead utilises necro-corporeal decomposition as a means of exploring the scientifically

estranging possibilities of aesthetic representation.

Chapter 6 - Hopeless NecRomantics: Decomposition, Ecology and Transcorporeal Love in Jim Crace's *Being Dead*

> *"From love, for here*
> *Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,*
> *All truth and beauty—from pervading love—*
> *That gone, we are as dust"*

<div align="right">(Wordsworth, The Prelude, ll. 149–152)</div>

Introduction

Having considered DeLillo's narrative interrogation of necro-corporeal preservation and artistic immortality, this final chapter turns to a novel that provides a very different subject of analysis, the decomposing corpse. Indeed, Jim Crace's 1999 novel *Being Dead* is perhaps the text within this thesis that offers the most direct and prolonged consideration of necro-corporeal decomposition. Centring on the brutal murder of two married zoologists, Joseph and Celice, the novel attentively depicts the various stages of decomposition including autolysis, bloat, rigor mortis, livor mortis and putrefaction interspersed with analeptic scenes fleshing out their romantic history. Becoming one with the landscape that had been both the progenitor and subject of their life's work, Joseph and Celice's physical decomposition registers the text's environmentalist ethic by enacting an ecological entanglement between the human microbiome and the wider biosphere. As we shall see, Crace's idiosyncratic mode of representing such necro-corporeal entanglements positions the literary medium as one which both insists upon and warns against attempts to 'read' nature in any straightforward sense.

Whilst documenting the corporeal and chemical processes of human decomposition with an unapologetically scientific sensibility, Crace's novel by no means rehearses hackneyed

divisions between art and science. Rather, *Being Dead*'s unceasingly detailed depiction of anatomical decomposition is recounted through a distinct prose style that marries biological precision with rhapsodic lyricism to re-enchant the natural world; a style I have termed 'necropoetics'. This necropoetics both mimics and mocks the straight, documentary-style recitation of fact that characterises scientific discourse, loosely disguising the novel's emphatically *fictional* ecology.

Far from incidental, this chapter hopes to demonstrate that *Being Dead's* conflation of registers is symptomatic of a wider representational ambiguity in its depiction of the corpse. Whilst unwaveringly materialist in orientation, the text nevertheless seems to (quite literally) *romanticise* the corpse as a signifier of love on multiple occasions: "It was as if Syl's parents' lives, which had seemed hidden and pale… only needed death's bright torch to bring the passion and the colour out" (170). Moreover, this romanticisation of the decomposing corpse informs the novel's wider aesthetic in which the discourses of scientific realism are co-opted to provide a materially-instantiated re-enchantment of the natural world.[84]

Necromantics

Adopting a compensatory schema in which the death of the mortal body is recompensed by the survival of an immortal and immaterial love, *Being Dead* draws on the artistic tradition of the Liebestod, or 'love death', in which "the fantasy of dying with the beloved is…not an expression for the wish to end life but, rather, for life's perfect renewal" (Euchner, 188). [85]

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[84] Elements of this chapter are replicated in Gardiner 'Hopeless Necromantics: Transcorporeal Love, Decomposition and (Non)human Agency in Jim Crace's *Being Dead*' (Publication forthcoming)

[85] Derived from the closing aria of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), Liebestod is a term generally applied to music. Nevertheless, these same underlying sentiments are recognisable throughout literature. Such a tradition might be seen to date as far back as the Roman love elegies of Ovid and Catallus (Gold, 2012) and includes notable entries in the form of Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 116' (1609), Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'

Deploying the dead body as a narrative device inducing poetic contemplations of immortal love, the Liebestod tradition seems far removed, even antithetical, to the materialist sensibilities and "necro-ecological" (Bezan, 191) entanglement demonstrated elsewhere in Crace's text. Indeed, as Edwards notes, "love has traditionally been regarded as a humanizing force, or even the pinnacle of human sensibility….an experiential domain from which animals, plants, minerals, in short the whole of nonhuman life are excluded" (159). Expressing the desire to compensate for material death with an anthropocentric exultation of human virtue and experience, [86] the Liebestod conceptually situates the body within a "framework of finitude" (Bezan, 193) diametrically opposed to the "decompositional vitalism" (195) expressed in *Being Dead*'s clinical account of environmental entanglement. And yet, Crace repeatedly draws on such a tradition to structure his formal representation of the corpse, intermittently referring to death as a "conclusive" (Crace, 154), "tumbling nothingness" (13) and claiming that Joseph and Celice's "love had survived the death of cells" (12). The text even includes numerous references to the operatic mode that spawns the Liebestod, referring to the environmental setting — appropriately named 'Baritone Bay' — as an "operatic coast" (29) that resonates with "arias of grief" (202–3).

How then are we to account for such a discrepancy in which the text insistently attends to the corpse's materiality one moment, whilst equally indexing its signification of extra-material sentiments the next? What tensions emerge from *Being Dead*'s simultaneous identification of the decomposing corpse as a site of material vitality and vital finitude? And

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(1819), Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' (1849) and (as we shall consider in greater detail, later) Larkin's 'An Arundel Tomb' (1956).

[86] Critic and philosopher Dianne Enns refers to such a desire as the "love-preservation instinct", in which the assertion of an immortal love is deployed to fend off the "absolute limit of death" (49)

how does the novel's treatment of such tensions inform its wider environmental ethic and narrative aesthetic?

This chapter aims to unpack Crace's layered depiction of the 'romantic corpse' by suggesting that *Being Dead*'s unique 'ecology of passion' materialises love as a transcorporeal energy passing between human subjects and nonhuman environments. In doing so, *Being Dead*'s romantic corpses counter-intuitively *undermine* rather than substantiate the ontological delineations that subtend human exceptionalism, resulting in a particular figure that I refer to as the 'necromantic corpse'. Furthermore, *Being Dead's* necromantic representation of the decomposing corpse invokes a scientific estrangement that respects transcorporeal connectivity whilst maintaining the recalcitrant otherness of the (non)human.

Jim Crace

Although Crace has produced multiple critically recognised and award-winning works of fiction — including *Continent* (1986),[87] *The Gift of Stones* (1988),[88] *Quarantine* (1997)[89] and *Harvest* (2013)[90] — he remains surprisingly "marginal in academic criticism" (Tew, 25). Reflective of this, there are, at present, only a handful of academic articles dedicated to an analysis of *Being Dead*, despite the novel receiving critical acclaim (134).

Less surprisingly given *Being Dead*'s peculiarly visceral subject matter, what attention the text *has* received tends to narrowly focus on its arresting depictions of rotting corpses as the symbolic key that unlocks the novel's wider meaning. Furthermore, such analyses are regularly orchestrated in a manner that echoes the new materialist sentiments advocated

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[87] Winner of the David Higham Prize for Fiction, Guardian Fiction Prize and Whitbread Award for First Novel (1986)
[88] Winner of the GAP International Prize for Literature (1989)
[89] Winner of the Whitbread Award for Novels and shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction (1997)
[90] Winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (2013) and International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (2015) and shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction (2013)

within the thesis thus far. In particular, critics such as Bezan, Byatt, Bracke, Callus and Lanfranco have deployed the lens of material eco-criticism to identify how "Crace's narrative considers the corpse to be a dramatic site of activity for a natural burial undertaken by the earth and its agents" (Bezan, 196) in a manner that "shares affinities with broader moves towards nonanthropocentrism" (Callus & Lanfranco, 82). Whilst the outlook adopted by this thesis finds itself largely concurrent with such analyses, this chapter supplements and, at times, complicates these pre-existing readings by exploring how several of *Being Dead*'s formal and narrative strategies inform the textual construction of postmortem materiality.

In particular, this chapter deploys Stacey Alaimo's notion of 'transcorporeality' to investigate how Crace's novel represents the decomposing corpse as a symbol elucidating love as an inter-bodily phenomenon that simultaneously foregrounds the entanglement between humans and the environment, and between material and immaterial entities. In doing so, we will see how *Being Dead* not only provides a meditation on decomposition as a process of transcorporeal becoming, but also on the problematic politics of depicting the nonhuman environment through the markedly, although by no means exclusively, human apparatus of literary fiction.

Transcorporeality

First introduced by Stacey Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* (2010), transcorporeality refers to how "engagements with scientific understandings of materiality" (Alaimo, 155n3) figure the human subject as inseparable from the environment in which it is situated. Identifying the interpenetration of the human body as a super-organism made up of countless bacteria, micro-organisms, pollutants, waves and pharmaceutical compounds, Alaimo's notion of

transcorporeality emphasises that "the human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies" (13). To place some symbolic pressure on this final statement, Alaimo's notion of transcorporeality provides a scientifically-minded lens that illuminates the corpse's role as a *decomposing* entity, in both the active and passive sense of the term. As the dead body breaks down through the processes of decomposition, so too does it decompose and recompose the various *other* bodies in its environment through the diffusion of chemicals, nutrients, gasses and inorganic compounds. Alaimo's concept therefore demonstrates the material reciprocity that occurs between the corpse and the environment, challenging the tenuous limits of their ontological separability in favour of an intra-active model of mutual becoming that necessitates a heightened ecological responsivity.

At the same time, transcorporeality provides an effective basis for theorising the *similarity* between the living human subject and the decomposing human corpse. Within such a framework that views the living human body as "always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world" (11), the decomposing corpse simply functions as an *in extremis* articulation of human ontological instability, rendered with exaggerative perceptual immediacy (Stommell, 333). Therefore, a transcorporeal perspective frames the corpse as a medium that ostentatiously accentuates and exacerbates the reciprocal material connectivity that links humans and environments.

This notion of transcorporeality certainly informs Crace's novel. Not only does *Being Dead*'s necro-ecological focus foreground the chemic and microbial reciprocity that exists between humans and their environment, but its various depictions of sexual interaction and drug use similarly emphasise the organic and inorganic "chemistry" (Crace, 120) that is always

already swirling through the bodies of its cast. As such, decomposition is not simply framed as a particularly prominent expression of transcorporeality but also functions as a lens through which the latent transcorporeality of everyday life reveals itself.

Before proceeding further, it should be noted that a transcorporeal sensibility has already been identified in *Being Dead* to a limited degree. Callus and Lanfranco's article essentially describes the concept of transcorporeality and its destabilisation of traditional scientific definitions of death as "initially defined by absence of indicators rather than by their presence" (83). However, despite being published 4 years after *Bodily Natures*, this article fails to acknowledge Alaimo's work and its application to *Being Dead* is implied rather than articulated. More directly, Astrid Bracke's article states that "Stacey Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality — the way in which 'the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world' (Alaimo 2010, 2) — provides a particularly apt perspective on *Being Dead*" (2018a, 60). However, the broad scope of Bracke's piece that charts developments within the history of eco-criticism throughout the trajectory of Crace's work prevents a more thorough analysis of the novel from a transcorporeal perspective. As such, this chapter's transcorporeal reading of *Being Dead* might be seen to take up Bracke's theoretical challenge and attempt just such a response.

In doing so, I hope to identify and remedy two interrelated deficiencies within the material ecocritical readings of *Being Dead* currently available. Firstly, such analyses tend to narrowly focus on Crace's specific depictions of Joseph and Celice's rotting corpses, thereby overlooking how these bodies operate and resonate within the wider narrative. This is certainly understandable given the unusual emphasis placed on decomposition within the text. However, it is important to remember that *Being Dead* is also a love story, and to

dismiss this narrative strand as purely auxiliary fails to do justice to Crace's nuanced

depiction of dead bodies. In fact, I will argue that the novel's erotic and necrotic strands are

mutually informative and that it is through the fertile intertwining of these narratives, the

stories of Joseph and Celice's life and death, that the novel is able to provide such a

viscerally descriptive, yet unmistakably affectionate, depiction of decomposition.

In contrast to such a narrow focus, a transcorporeal analysis insists on recognising the

resonance between the body's environmental entanglement as rendered perceptually

immediate by the corpses' decomposition and the, less perceptible, transcorporeality that

constitutes the unseen substrate of everyday experience. This will be done through an

exploration of Crace's polyvalent use of waves as a metaphor to depict love as a material,

transcorporeal phenomenon. Indeed, *Being Dead's* metaphoric superposition of acoustic,

aquatic, erotic and necrotic 'waves' creates a textual landscape in which these diverse

phenomena are implicated and imbricated in an entangled becoming. Therefore, a

transcorporeal analysis necessitates a wider consideration of decomposition as an activity

that prompts a renegotiation of common perceptions of embodiment, both living and dead,

away from notions of rarified human exclusivity and towards a more intra-active ecological

entanglement.

A broadening of scope also enables us to fill another conceptual gap within critiques of

Being Dead by facilitating a consideration of how the zoologists' corpses evoke human-

nonhuman intra-action at a subatomic level; that is, at the level of subatomic disturbances,

forces and waves. Bezan's article primarily examines how "the decomposition of Joseph and

Celice challenges the organized structure of human and non-human animal difference"

(Bezan, 198) and Byatt's work extends this analysis, providing a more vegetal focus that

considers how "the regression from 'Zoo. to Bot.'....giv[es] rise to a state that is at once both zoological and botanical" (253). Just as these considerations of how Crace's corpses destabilise the boundaries between human and animal, and human and vegetable, this chapter hopes to provide a 'mineral' (and even 'sub-mineral') dimension by exploring those moments in which the cadavers can be seen to intra-act with the inorganic components that constitute the landscape and the confluence of acoustic and aquatic waves that give Baritone Bay its name. Therefore, the first half of this chapter interrogates how the novel's metaphoric use of waves extends transcorporeality's ontological destabilisations towards the less immediately perceptible realms of sub-atomic phenomena, emotional experiences and imaginative concepts, ultimately rendering love itself a transcorporeal phenomenon.

The second mode of reading *Being Dead* that this chapter will reappraise aligns with this thesis' wider interrogation of the corpse as an ambivalent (non)human subject that provides explicitly compromised epistemic contact to noumenal matter. It will argue that existent readings' tendency to frame the corpse as an idealised conduit of direct contact with the non-human other prove insufficient to capture the complexity of Crace's nuanced and sensitive postmortem depictions. the Such excessive positivity towards the human corpse is occasionally visible within the work of both Bezan and Byatt. For example, Bezan claims that *Being Dead*'s necro-ecology provides "a set of relations that is deeply embedded in the structure of the world composed of organisms both human and animal, living and dead. This is a vision of the world that does not expose us, but encloses us in a community of new, alternative relations" (205). Such a vision, whilst desirable, is perhaps too optimistic regarding the human corpse as a facilitator of non-human knowledge networks and mitigates the extent to which (non)human subjects resist human interpretive practices and legibility. Likewise, Byatt states that "in *Being Dead*, bodily deviancy finds its purest form,

stripping away the mythological narratives of human significance found in earlier cultures"

(261). In both cases, the problematic nature of the *human* corpse as a vessel of *nonhuman*

thought is backgrounded and obscured in favour of an excessive celebration of its capacity

to function as a threshold of material contact.

To counteract such approaches to the corpse within *Being Dead*, this chapter examines how

the novel's evocation of transcorporeality informs its wider engagement with eco-

narratological concerns regarding "the relationship between literature and the physical

environment…with sensitivity to the literary structures and devices we use to communicate

representations of the physical environment" (James, 23 qtd in Bracke 2018a, 51). In doing

so, it will consider a variety of formal and rhetorical strategies with which *Being Dead*

navigates the problematic issues of 'reading nature' as a textual surface by figuring the

corpse as an estranged and estranging (non)human subject, that is at once rendered

intimately familiar whilst retaining its fantastic 'otherness'.

Transcorporeality and 'Becoming Wave' in *Being Dead*

Throughout *Being Dead*, the transcorporeality between its protagonists' corpses and the

environment is emphasised by the open responsivity with which its geographical setting is

framed. For example, towards the end of the novel, it is reflected that "Joseph and Celice

would have turned to landscape, given time...Even stars must decompose" (29). This

environmental exchangeability defamiliarizes the 'landscape', a construct usually imaged as

"somehow stable or fixed" (Oerlemans, 6,) by omitting any concretising article. In doing so,

'landscape' is figured as a malleable, conceptual construct rather than a specific, distinctly

delineated space.

This geographic fluidity is exacerbated by Crace's emphatically liminal choice of setting (Palmer 2012, 52), the novel primarily taking place along the "shifting" (Crace, 79) shoreline of Baritone Bay, a fluid space in which "every day, the dunes are lifted, stacked and undermined. Their crests migrate and reassemble with the wind" (210). Locating its action within a "soft and passing" (87) geographic setting in which both space (89) and time (102) are rendered liminal, the novel topographically parallels the "liminal space" (Byatt, 250) induced by decomposition's "erosion of the being/dead (non being) distinction" (249) and exacerbates the transcorporeal reciprocity that entangles bodies and environments in a process of mutual becoming.

This transcorporeal reciprocity is compounded by the novel's frequent description of the decomposing corpse through extended ecological metaphors that literalise Alaimo's assertion that "the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2010, 2). Within the novel's descriptions of decomposition, corpses *become* an environment in themselves, possessing a "pine-brown surface of veins, which g[ives] an arborescent pattern to the skin. The blossoming of blisters, their flaring red corollas and yellow ovaries like rock roses" (108). This floral register situates the corpse within an ecological imaginary, and yet this same passage also disorients the reader's perception of geography as it goes on to re-focalise its spatial descriptions through the various organisms that partake in the decompositional process. As the narrative gaze resituates itself within the bodies' "gaping caverns – sub-rib, sub-flesh, sub-skull" (108), the text momentarily adopts the perspective of scavenging fauna: "the maggots gorged and tumbled in their carrion…their caverns and their dells" (109). By re-focalising the reader's perspective within the dead bodies which are reimagined through an environmental discourse, Joseph and

Celice's corpses are not just described *like* an environment, they actually *become* the narrative environment.

This function is, perhaps, most dramatically demonstrated in chapter 6, when the narrative point-of-view shrinks down and becomes focalised through the perspective of a beetle, *Claudatus Maximus*.[91] Once Celice has fallen on top of the beetle, the text recounts how

> the beetle flipped off his back and hurried towards the sunlight visible beyond the
> warm and wool-roofed cavern, which had enclosed him so suddenly. His legs caught
> in the folds of Celice's jacket…It snagged him, a heavy web. But he persevered
> against the cloth and against the unexpected darkness. Dune beetles choose to feed
> in light. Celice was an eclipse for him…He fled her weight and shadow

(36)

Here, the novel provides an intricate description of the beetle's movements in a way that shifts the corporeal reference points from human to insect body. In this passage, it is the *beetle's* back and legs which are awarded personal pronouns, whereas Celice's body becomes an engulfing mass that fills the novel's newly delimited horizon. Furthermore, the emphasis on negative visibility through terms like 'darkness', 'eclipse' and 'shadow', visually encloses the reader beneath Celice's jacket alongside the beetle, leading the reader to inhabit the creature's optical perspective. As darkness descends on the beetle, so too is the reader's visual access to the scene obscured as our own optical horizons become one with

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[91] Bracke convincingly argues that "although the narrator projects the absence of human concerns onto the beetle, the narrative is never focalised through the beetle…nor does the narrative ascribe an inner life to [it]" (2018a, 66). However, although the novel certainly foregoes a projective rendering of the beetle's interiority by primarily concentrating on an absence of human mental faculties, I would nevertheless contend that the beetle still functions as a focaliser, at least from a purely *technical* perspective since the narrative viewpoint is emphatically funnelled through the creature's perspective.

the beetle's. As Simons notes, (non)human focalisation transforms "not only characters…but also the very world of the text" (171), here, turning the corpse into a landscape in and of itself. This strategy attunes the reader to the decomposing body's transcorporeality as one that simultaneously re-figures the corpse-as-environment and the environment-as-corpse.

Being Dead's Metaphoric Ecosystem

Throughout the novel, this transcorporeal fluidity functions as an ontologically equalising phenomenon that distributes agency across a range of human and nonhuman actants. Such an effect is produced by the novel's fluid use of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism and reification to produce a mobile metaphoric eco-system which variously depicts humans like animals, animals like things, and things like humans. For example, Joseph and Celice's killer is described as a "noble beast…stalking like a cat" (30), and their study house is described as "skeletal" (152), with a "branded frame containing…bone ash" (160), whilst dead bodies' orifices are described as "doors and windows" (140). Furthermore, with each metaphoric displacement the ontological relations between subjects shift. Flies feasting on the corpses are "lined up like fishermen along the banks of the bodies' open wounds" (39), "tenant crabs" (65) occupy their remains and various creatures "flippantly *brows[e]* Joseph and Celice, *frisking* them for moisture and for food" (32, my emphasis). In the same moment that *Being Dead* personifies animals, it recalibrates the humans' ontological position to the status of objects and estuaries. In this way, the novel's fluid and everchanging metaphoric eco-system projects an unstable ontology in which the relations between subjects are constantly shifting depending on which perspective is adopted. Therefore, by articulating transcorporeal exchange through metaphoric and relational exchange, the novel embeds transcorporeality within its textual world, denaturalising traditional ontological distinctions

and promoting a sensitivity to the conditions upon which such delineations are realised and regulated.

Being Dead's mobile metaphoric eco-system is perhaps at its most versatile when depicting waves and vibrations, which resonate throughout the novel as a multimodal signifier entangling death, love, music and ecological activity within a complex agential web. The constant presence of the lapping sea literally surrounds the characters with the presence of waves that become both physically and conceptually entangled with their bodies.[92] Death itself is referred to as being "lost to the waves" (107), and the process of decomposition specifically breaks down the distinction between solid and liquid, as Joseph and Celice's corpses "had both dissolved and stiffened. They were becoming partly semi-fluid mass and partly salted drift; sea things" (108). Furthermore, the process of decay is itself recounted with the rhythms of a tidal ebb and flow as "coming and receding days of grace" (206). By novel's end, the subtle articulation of decomposition as 'becoming wave' is rhetorically and physically realised, as the narrator speculates that, had they been left to decay naturally, "Joseph and Celice's lives would have been *tossed and tumbled* in the dunes to nourish and renew themselves in different forms", eventually left to "weave and drift into the unremarking sea" (208, my emphasis).

And yet, *Being Dead* is not only permeated by the sea's physical waves but also by the "acoustic waves" (188) that reverberate across Baritone Bay, a geographic space that derives its name from this musical phenomenon realised through the intra-action of temperature, wind, sand dunes and the ocean (29). Decomposition's becoming wave also

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[92] Alaimo herself regularly performs her transcorporeal analysis with reference to the sea (see: 'Oceanic Origins, Plastic Activism and New Materialism at Sea [2014] and 'States of Suspension: Trans-corporeality at Sea' [2012]), leading Bracke to speculate that "water [is] one of the most pervasive agents of transcorporeality" (2018b, 223)

corresponds with this second connotation as corpses contribute to such acoustic reverberations. In one scene, a morgue clerk muses that "the dead don't talk – but bodies belch for hours after death….The morgue could sound, at times, as if a ghoulish choir was warming up, backed by a wind ensemble of tubas and bassoons" (135). The 'belching' sound emitted by the bodies is echoed by the landscape as Joseph and Celice's footprints are depicted "belching air and water in their wake" (182). Moreover, the clerk's orchestral depiction of the emission of bodily gasses resonates with a later description of "the sound that gave the bay its name….the humming fugue of men in churches, exercising their voices before a funeral ….This was the baritone of mourning and of saxhorns, sepulchral, pessimistic, deep" (183). This musical link extends the transcorporeal relationship between bodies and bays beyond the easily perceptible material reciprocity of organisms to the insensible sub-atomic level of waves and forces.

Moreover, by deploying waves as a multimodal signifier arousing both aquatic and acoustic connotations, Crace's metaphoric ecosystem does not simply break down the distinction between human and nonhuman, or between solid and liquid, but also between the material and the immaterial. For example, the narrator describes Joseph's singing voice as "that great sustaining *wave* on which [Celice's] love had surfed for almost thirty years" (151, my emphasis) and how Joseph "could sing….like a sea cave, turning ocean to sound" (15), constructing a simile that at once encourages a reciprocity between human and landscape and an exchangeability between matter and sensation. Throughout the novel, the "reverberations of the land" (188), meld into the characters' more abstract, emotional experiences through the "quivering" (2) of bereavement and the "shiver" (188) of sexual excitation. As such, whilst Crace's mobile metaphoric eco-system certainly breaks down traditional distinctions between humans, animals and vegetables, it actually goes much

further than that, as the polysemous use of waves and reverberation proceeds to break down the distinction between material and immaterial phenomena.

Environment as Romantic Collaborator

This (im)material reciprocity is also foregrounded throughout the novel's romantic plotline and its particular depiction of love as a transcorporeal, intra-bodily phenomenon that passes between humans and environments. This might be seen in how the natural environment plays a key role in the love story that unfolds between Joseph and Celice. Joseph's flirtations primarily revolve around a set of metonymic displacements in which he elicits intimacy by discussing the "lovable, adorable" (82) 'sprayhoppers' that are the subject of his research; insects that are elsewhere referred to as "his Valentine…his single rose…erotica" (94). Whilst Joseph's statement might be interpreted as an anthropocentric instrumentalisation of the non-human, sprayhoppers actually play a more active role within his courtship ritual than such a reading would suggest. Functioning as a key part of his wider "strategy" (94) to "lure [Celice] to the beach" (94) on which they first made love, Joseph tellingly refers to the sprayhoppers as his "collaborators" (94), re-signifying them as active subjects rather than passive objects. In fact, *Being Dead* regularly depicts a collaborative relationship in which the zoologists work together *with* the environment in the coproduction of their romance. For example, early in the novel "a fillet of [Celice's] hair f[alls] loose across her face, picked up and dropped by *a conspiring breeze*" (94, my emphasis). As the etymological origin of the term 'conspire' — 'breathing with' (OED, 2019) — indicates, it is by acting *with* the environment, by resonating with the acoustic and sexual waves of music and breath that the love between Joseph and Celice is co-produced, nurtured and (ultimately) renewed.

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Likewise, when Joseph and Celice consummate their relations to the melodies of Baritone Bay's "ululating orchestra of sand" (186), the environment does not merely function as a romantic backdrop serenading the human characters' tryst, but rather becomes an active agent, inducing and partaking in their passions as "the landscape [broke] out in song and was arousing them, and was embracing them" (186). Emphasising the transcorporeal reciprocity of humans and waves (both aquatic and acoustic) to figure Baritone Bay as collaborator, conspirator and co-producer of romantic love, *Being Dead* essentially reveals this quintessentially 'human' experience as an ontologically transverse phenomenon, passing back and forth through environmental, metaphysical and human bodies. In doing so, the novel's mobile metaphoric eco-system of waves and vibrations, of sexual shiverings and acoustic arousal, frames love itself as a transcorporeal phenomenon, inspired, induced and cultivated in reciprocal relation to the nonhuman environment.

Bodies, music, death, ecosystems, sex; all are "sorted by the waves" (210) that interpenetrate Baritone Bay in *Being Dead*'s entangled network of transcorporeal reciprocity. Caught up in this web of diverse ontological exchange, the decomposing corpse's 'becoming wave' becomes the central process through which these transcorporeal becomings are expressed, positioning Joseph and Celice's "putrifying bodies….[as] a burgeoning locus point for the convergence of nonhuman agents" (Bezan, 191). Furthermore, as we shall see, the corpse's central function in *Being Dead* is not simply to signify such transcorporeal entanglements, but rather to operate as the site through which these becomings are produced and performed.

Decomposition and/as Transcorporeal Love

Being attentive to *Being Dead's* transcorporeal depiction of love enables a re-evaluation of those passages in which the novel's depiction of the 'romantic corpse' seemingly rehearses traditional sentiments of death's material conquest by the immaterial. As previously suggested, *Being Dead* repeatedly draws on the Liebestod tradition by indicating that Joseph and Celice's love survives their death. Such moments seemingly advocate a conservative anthropocentrism by triumphing the transcendence of death's unruly materialities through the continued permanence of immaterial human sentiments: "while his hand was touching her, curved round her shin, the couple seemed to have achieved that peace the world denies, a period of grace, defying even murder" (12). However, as I have argued, Crace's depiction of transcorporeal (im)materiality figures love as an environmentally reciprocal phenomenon that is instantiated in and through nature. In this sense, the triumph of love depicted in the novel's romantic corpses is not one that *denies* materiality, but one that expands our definition of materiality itself to include the ephemeral and imperceptible permeations of subatomic forces and disturbances. Therefore, *Being Dead*'s depiction of love as a transcorporeal phenomenon allows its romantic corpses to exceed a framework of finitude in which death's materiality is transcended by immaterial human sentiments. Rather, Crace's 'necromantic' representations of post-mortem passion depict love expressing itself *through* (rather than in spite of) decomposition as a process that briefly illuminates the transcorporeal materialities on which such an experience is predicated. Depicting Celice's "*quivering* of lovers" (59, original emphasis) alongside orgasm's "absolute forgetfulness of death" (188), *Being Dead* deploys necrotic and erotic registers with a polyvalent reversibility in which they are both referred to as "transformations on the beach" (177). That is to say, in *Being Dead*, love

'survives' the process of decomposition because it is *through* the very transcorporeal

relations exacerbated by decomposition that Joseph and Celice's love is induced and, hence,

perpetuated. Death therefore becomes the moment in which love returns to the waves

from which it originates; the moment in which that love which is given *of* the land is

expressed, performed and reclaimed *by* the land.

Recomposing 'An Arundel Tomb'

The corpse's active role in *Being Dead*'s re-positioning of love as a materially instantiated,

rather than materially transcendent, phenomenon can be observed in the novel's

intertextual evocation of Philip Larkin's celebrated 1956 poem 'An Arundel Tomb.' As Istvan

Racz observes, *Being Dead's* insistence on love's continuation after death and its central

image of Joseph's hand resting on Celice's shin strongly resembles Larkin's subject of mortal

contemplation, a sepulchral effigy of the Earl of Arundel holding the hand of his wife (Racz,

178). Likewise, Crace's claim that his protagonists' "love had survived the death of cells" (12)

evokes the concluding line of Larkin's poem, "what will survive of us is love" (ll.42), that

figures love as a means of material transcendence.

And yet, as in Larkin's poem, *Being Dead's* subsequent embrace of materiality undermines

this sentiment and infuses the phrase with an intense irony. Just as 'An Arundel Tomb'

exposes the "sculptor's sweet commissioned grace" to import an "Untruth…[of] stone

fidelity", *Being Dead* rejects the "ornate fine lines from poets and scriptures, being brave at

the expense of death" (191) that arise in artistic and commemorative modes of

preservation. Accordingly, the novel's own depiction of death emphatically refutes such

modes of aesthetic beautification, claiming that

> there was no beauty for [Joseph and Celice] in the dunes, no painterly tranquillity in
>
> death framed by the sky, the ocean and the land, that pious trinity, in which their
>
> two bodies, supine, prone, were posed as lifeless waxworks of themselves...This was
>
> an ugly scene.

(11)

Rejecting affinities with visual and material art — framed here as quasi-religious modes of immortalisation — *Being Dead* self-identifies as a literary work that resists such preservative tendencies. Instead, it sides with the 'ugly' processes of decomposition, situated as a mode of becoming that counters the inert tranquillity of artistic depiction that drains the corpse of its teeming decompositional vitality. Figuring necrotic stabilisation as a process that, ironically, renders the dead body 'lifeless', rather than revitalised, Crace's text expresses an ecological affinity with nonhuman life and a sentimental affinity with both Larkin's 'An Arundel Tomb' and — as we saw in the previous chapter — Don DeLillo's *Zero K*.

However, despite their shared scepticism towards aesthetic immortalisation and romantic transcendence, Larkin and Crace offer significantly different subjects of mortal contemplation, the former selecting the "stiffened" (ll. 4) and "rigidly" (ll. 30) permanent medium of a sculpture and the latter selecting the transient "scaly sculptures" (108) of Joseph and Celice's rotting bodies. Reversing the coordinates of the Arundel tomb's composition, *Being Dead* specifically evokes and revises the poem's second verse as the Earl's 'empty gauntlet' is counterposed with a depiction of Joseph's hand as "a starched and empty glove" (109). Significantly, in Larkin's poem the Earl's 'empty gauntlet' functions as a preliminary icon that catches "the eye" (ll. 8), allowing the viewer to "se[e], with a sharp tender shock,/ His hand withdrawn, holding her hand" (ll. 11–12), signifying love through

deferral. In contrast, in *Being Dead* the 'empty glove' of Joseph's hand constitutes the *point of contact* between the deceased lovers. Likely referring to a common postmortem occurrence known to morticians as 'skin slippage', Crace's 'empty glove' does not so much signify a material absence testifying to the deferred immateriality of love, but instead constitutes a material presence, that of decomposition, through which romantic love is maintained. After all, in Crace's text the deconstruction of form, the emptying of the glove, becomes the site at which love is affirmed due to the transcorporeal entanglement of decomposition and passion via the metaphoric proliferation of waves and vibrations. Therefore, whilst the Earl and his wife's memorials become their bodies, Joseph and Celice's bodies become their memorials.

As such, Crace and Larkin critique models of romantic transcendence from alternate vantage points. Whereas the primary movement of 'An Arundel Tomb' is the sly exposure of romantic and aesthetic immortality, *Being Dead* bluntly and explicitly rejects such ideals by swiftly conjuring and denying the "comforting" illusion of material and artistic preservation in which "his hand and her lower leg remained unspoiled, enfolding and enclosed" (109), only to immediately state that "Joseph and Celice were sullied everywhere" (109). Therefore, whereas Larkin's text primarily *debunks* models of romantic transcendence and aesthetic immortalisation, *Being Dead* attempts to envision an alternative materially-instantiated paradigm of love.

‘Making Love’ with Dead Bodies

This general ambition can be identified by returning to, and extending, the previous quote: "their love had survived the death of cells. The corpses were surrendered to the weather and the earth, but here were still a man and a wife, quietly resting, flesh on flesh; dead, but

not departed yet" (12, my emphasis). As these final phrases indicate it is through the positioning of their bodies, emphatically materialised as 'flesh on flesh', that the love of Joseph and Celice is expressed. The tenuous immortalisation that Crace's text instils is not the conquest of inert matter by an immaterial vitality, but rather a renegotiation towards materiality itself that expands its horizons to include both extensively perceivable matter and super-sensible phenomena. Put differently, the lasting image of Joseph's hand on Celice's shin, does not function primarily as a sign of the love that existed during their life together, but rather its endurance *becomes* their love. Indeed, just as the recurrent image of Joseph's hand on Celice's shin imaginatively unifies their individual bodies, their simultaneous putrefaction decomposes their corporeal boundaries and reformulates them as a singular, entangled entity.

 Therefore, more than simply a *reflection* of a previously manifest love, Joseph and Celice's post-mortem intimacies *produce* and *enact* their love with re-vitalised affective immediacy: "they had the power, on their deaths, to flush [Syl's] heart – too late – with love. It was the light touch of his finger on her leg" (169). As such, Joseph and Celice's corpses are not simply *signs* of love, expressing a pre-existing and human sentiment, but rather they are agents of love, they *make* love through the processes of decomposition. In doing so, *Being Dead*'s transcorporeal materialisation of love rejects a naïve scientific realism that reduces love to biochemical processes, instead performing an act of mutual estrangement that simultaneously embraces romance's material dimensions and expands the limits of materiality to incorporate affective phenomena. As we shall see in the next section, the necromantic corpse's double estrangement informs *Being Dead's* wider necropoetic representation of non-human subjects.

Necropoetics and Scientific Estrangement

Whilst Crace's depiction of transcorporeal reciprocity insists on an interconnectivity that

binds the human and the (non)human environment, this is not to say that such an

interconnectivity remains unproblematic. After all, a recognition of human-nonhuman

entanglement does not *necessarily* lead to a less anthropocentric orientation. As Gabriel

Egan notes, collapsing the distinctions between human and non-human, nature and culture,

necessarily runs the risk of "drain[ing] all force from the distinctions that make the terms

intelligible in the first place" (130), potentially enacting cyclical justifications for the natural

world's anthropic exploitation. Whilst I am not suggesting that Alaimo's own theory

rehearses such justifications, Egan's argument does serve as a helpful reminder that a

recognition of ecological connectivity alone is by no means sufficient to guarantee a less

anthropocentric set of environmental relations. Rather the orientation of such relations

must be consciously and consistently managed to avoid the damaging imposition of human

oriented values within our contemplation of non-human contexts.[93] Certainly,

transcorporeal reciprocity (the insistence that humans are transformed by, as well as

transform, the environment) goes some way to modulating this dynamic. However, as we

shall see, *Being Dead*'s imaginative deployment of transcorporeality extends such

counterbalances to explicitly question the literary conventions by which human-

environmental connectivity has traditionally been represented. In doing so, Crace's novel

channels an eco-narratological ethic that "simultaneously clos[es] off any possibility for

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[93] Alaimo performs just such a management by supplementing her insistence on "the need to cultivate a tangible sense of connection to the material world in order to encourage an environmentalist ethos" (2010, 16) with the recognition that "even as we attempt to formulate new understandings that do not isolate the human from the flesh or from nonhuman nature, we need to mark the limits of our own ability to render the material world through language" (42).

human narrative ever fully doing justice to non-human experience, while opening up a space in which the non-human view may nonetheless be considered" (Bracke 2018a, 59).

Being Dead's evocation of an ambivalent transcorporeality that both validates and complicates the symbolic construction of nature as a readable surface is aesthetically managed through a necropoetic conflation of biologic and mythopoetic registers that frames the corpse as a scientifically estranged subject of indeterminate legibility. On the one hand, the visceral precision with which Crace equally details the dead body's surfaces and microbiota provides an intimate portrayal which re-familiarises the reader with the materiality of the corpse. On the other hand, however, the novel refuses to depict the corpse as an entirely 'knowable' subject, adamantly maintaining a certain conceptual distance by which its 'otherness' might be derived. That is to say, whilst Crace eagerly documents the corporeal processes of decomposition with a degree of intimate veracity, he also demonstrates a desire to retain an associated sense of mysterious fascination.

This commitment to maintaining the corpse's fantastic dimension is observable when Syl confronts the "the mystery" of her parents' bodies in a passage that quickly counterpoints a pathologist's reading of their "thousand signs of disassembly" (166) with Syl's reading of their "calmed" corpses in which the "wild sign[s]" of decomposition "had reduced" (167). Providing two competing visions of the corpse within a single passage, the biological and the poetic, the layering of this scene renders the corpse as a tenuously legible palimpsest, capable of interpretation but resistant to conclusive definition.

Furthermore, the fact that such an appreciation of the corpse's 'otherness' is potentially antithetical to the explanatory powers of biological systems of knowledge can be seen in the "Gothic anecdotes" (138) offered by the morgue clerk:

> the one occasion, for example, when mourners at a spinster's funeral had found an old man dead in the casket instead of the expected woman scarcely forty years of age; the time, ten years before, when a technician's resourceful use of a condom and some orange garden string had gone expensively wrong – the relatives had sued the morgue; the story of the body that had snored for seven nights.
>
> (138)

With each anecdote, the reader is provided with less information, thereby heightening the Gothic uncanniness that renders the corpse a fantastic figure. This reveals an awareness of the extent to which a certain mystery or unknowability remains crucial to the conservation of the corpse as a figure of the fantastic, one which obviously risks compromise within an anatomically oriented account of the cadaver as a strictly biological entity. As such, the biological legibility of the corpse is problematised by those moments in which it is rendered uncanny.

Although *Being Dead's* depiction of the corpse mimics the discursive characteristics of scientific discourse, the explanatory power of such epistemological systems is regularly diminished and undermined. For example, whilst the use of affirmative sentence structures conveys a didactic tone — "bodies decompose most quickly when they're dry and warm, and when insects are at work" (67) — the authoritative power of such statements is undercut by the aforementioned deployment of a fictional ecology in which such 'insects'

are conspicuously fabricated. Likewise, the limitations of scientific knowledge are also

evoked by the shifting levels of omniscience that *Being Dead* ascribes to the narrator.

Throughout the novel, the narrator's perspective demonstrates a fluctuating penetrative

capacity, sometimes able to home in like a biological x-ray that can perceive, interpret and

relay how Joseph's "grey matter could metabolize only half the glucose that it needed. But

he was functioning. His kidneys still processed and cleaned his cells. His stomach still

digested what was left of the mango and cheese brioche he'd eaten for his breakfast" (8). At

other times, however, such omniscience is drastically inhibited as the protagonists are

"gathered in by death cell by cell….[rendering them] too small to measure" (10) and the

narrator is reduced to the level of a spectator: "their bodies had expired, but anyone could

tell – just look at them – that Joseph and Celice were still devoted" (12), or even speculator:

"her skin was warm, so Joseph *might have* taken this as confirmation that his wife was still

alive" (10, my emphasis). The fluctuation between the authoritative certainty of a scientific

master-discourse and the subjective language of interpretation draws attention to the

'situatedness' of the scientific gaze, reminding the reader of the elements of narrative

interpretation that similarly imbue the scientific project. In doing so, scientific systems of

knowledge are entertained whilst drawing attention to their precarity as explanatory

frameworks that are both implicit and implicated within the constructs they intend to

impartially document.

The Biologist's Valediction

Perhaps the novel's most conspicuous challenge to the hegemony of scientific discourse can

be found in the unabashed lyricism which flows through the text alongside its scientific

realism. Although *Being Dead* documents the scientific processes of decomposition with an

attentiveness to biological accuracy, the novel retains the "percussive, rhythmic quality"

(23) that Tew identifies throughout Crace's body of work. As Callus and Lanfranco note, the novel "bears dispassionate and clinical prose about dying, death, and decomposition. Yet it seems compelled by vitality. The passages quoted are stark in content, yet the prose is lyrical. There is song in Crace's lines on death, on decomposition" (89). Although the morgue clerk might claim that dead "bodies ha[ve] no poetry" (134), Crace's mastery of language proves otherwise.

What is noteworthy here, however, is not so much the contrast between Crace's deployment of a 'dispassionate' scientific register and his prosaic lyricism, but those moments that allow these two forms to intertwine. To conceptualise Crace's deployment of both scientific and poetic registers in terms of contrast, rather than supplementation, risks re-establishing unhelpful divides between arts and sciences in a manner that runs contrary to the sentiments expressed within the novel (and indeed the new materialisms as a wider scholarly project). Instead, Crace's necropoetic depiction of decomposition and the corpse re-enchants the natural sciences without succumbing entirely to a scientific worldview.

For example, the (fictional) poem quoted at the start of the novel, 'The Biologist's Valediction to his Wife' reads as a cynical parody of scientific reductivism. The use of the definite article in the poem's title indicates that the poet is not the biologist himself, but rather assuming the role from an outside perspective. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the biologist in question is intended as an archetypical figure, priming the reader to expect a degree of generalisation and caricature.

The poem's primary movement is one of denial, a bathetic reduction that is unsatisfying either in its content or its form. Consider, for example, the following lines:

> Don't count on Heaven, or on Hell.
>
> You're dead. That's it. *Adieu*. Farewell.
>
> Eternity awaits? Oh sure!
>
> It's Putrefaction and Manure
>
> And unrelenting Rot, Rot, Rot.
>
> As you regress, from Zoo. to Bot.

The poem's dependency on regular metre, quaint rhyming couplets and overly emphatic use of punctuation belies ridicule and condemnation as The Biologist's purely scientific worldview in which any notion of an afterlife is displaced with 'putrefaction and manure' framed as, like the poem itself, unsophisticated, infantile and devoid of beauty. And yet, as the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that it is not the biological mindset *per se* that is inadequate, but rather the narrator's pessimistic orientation towards biology.

In contrast to this initial 'poetic' dismissal of the biological worldview, the necropoetics of Crace's wider text provides a far more refined, perceptive and nuanced appreciation of the biological imagination. Consider, for example, the following passage which describes the same processes as the introductory poem, but in a very different way:

> they'd been passed down, through classes, orders, species, to the last in line, the lumpen multitude, the grubs, the loopers and the millipedes, the button lice, the tubal worms and flets, the *bon viveur* or nectar bugs, which had either too many legs or none

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Here, the impartial listing of organisms in a manner reminiscent of a biological survey is interspersed with poetic asides and condensed repetition of spondee (classes, orders, species) that rhythmically organises the sentence in the form of an incantation. Contrary to the novel's initial presentation of a scientific orientation towards decomposition that is child-like and reductive, the more sophisticated prose poetry scattered throughout the novel's main body imbues the biological worldview with a lyrical enchantment. Crucially, this is not simply a poetic glorification of the sciences either. The melodic cadence of the sentence presents itself as a *horizontal* poem that offsets and renegotiates the problematic *hierarchy* of its original taxonomic subject, allowing Crace's forensic poetry to revitalise the reader's engagement with the scientific imagination whilst offering subtle revisions.

Therefore, contrary to The Biologist's Valediction in which a scientific perspective of decomposition is framed as being devoid of beauty, the novel's necropoetics infuses scientific discourse with an undeniable lyricism that skates the line between scientific and aesthetic representations of the corpse. Rather than contrasting a cold, dispassionate scientific discourse with prosaic lyricism, *Being Dead* gradually intertwines these two modes of representation. This deployment of scientific lyricism might be regarded as an effective strategy for simultaneously familiarising readers with the processes of decomposition from which they are traditionally alienated, whilst at the same time avoiding the numbing indifference that potentially arises from scientific realism. Rendering science newly 'strange' through its lyrical re-enchantment of taphomonic discourse, *Being Dead* navigates the poles of estrangement and indifference which structure contemporary perspectives of the corpse.

This curtailment of science as master-discourse is also enacted through the role of myth and folklore in the novel. However, just as *Being Dead*'s necropoetics provides a collaborative model of taphonomic poetry, so too are science and myth positioned as symbiotic, rather than oppositional, epistemological frameworks. For example, upon being struck by her assailant, Celice's "brain did what it could to make amends…the signals of distress it sent were stars. The myths were true, thanks to the ruptured chemistry of her cortex" (7). Here, the chemical explanation of experienced phenomena is not used to dispel myth, but rather to validate it. The reader is provided with a non-reductive form of 'explanation' that verifies, rather than undermines, the rhetorical cliché of 'seeing stars' thereby ceding a tenuous legitimacy to alternative epistemological engagements with the world.

This symbiotic relationship influences the textual depiction of decomposition via Crace's fabricated myth of Mondazy's Fish, a synonym for death itself. Within *Being Dead*'s folklore, "Fish would show itself only as silvering across the corpse, or by its smell" (62) and "wise people….might find in Joseph and Celice, on their fourth day of putrefaction in the dunes, much evidence of Fish" (107). Here, the mythopoetics of Fish is not discredited but tentatively legitimated through the scientific account of corpses that display "a jewelling….where life's soft pink and death's smudged grey conspired to find the silver in between….These would be the patterns, surely, that Mondazy had described" (108). Much like the folkloric explanation of ecological phenomena that Celice stumbles across in *The Goatherd's Ancient Wisdom*, such readings are depicted as "not *strictly* true. Not scientific *on the whole*. But…wisdom widely honest" (65, my emphasis). Similar to the scientific lyricism of its necropoetics, this entwining of epistemologies is part of the strategy by which *Being Dead* frames the corpse through a biologically rendered familiarity, whilst also

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maintaining its uncanny status through the simultaneous defamiliarization of scientific knowledge.

Reading Nature

Having considered how *Being Dead*'s formal aesthetic entails a mode of scientific estrangement, I will now explore how Crace's necropoetics informs both its environmentalist ethic and the role ascribed to literature in cultivating more ethical engagements with the material world. Indeed, *Being Dead's* scientific estrangement of the corpse is entirely typical of the text's wider depiction of the natural world as a tenuously legible surface that is simultaneously 'real' and fantastical.

 Most conspicuously, *Being Dead*'s scientific discourse is conscripted to relay an emphatically fantastic ecology that comprises of a variety of fictional flora and fauna that are given evocative and curiously fitting names. For example, Celice's subject of zoological study, "the bladder fly" (19), possesses a name that denotes a mixture of human organ and insect, perhaps *too* poetically foreshadowing the eventual consumption of Celice's insides by her object of study. Likewise, the common names of *lissom grass* (the grass on which Joseph and Celice make love for the both the first and the last time) are listed as "sweet thumbs, angel bed, pintongue, pillow grass, sand hair, repose" (66). The fact that the common name 'angel bed' *so* aptly corresponds with the lissom grass' symbolic meaning as a layered site of consummation and decomposition demonstrates an excessive anthropomorphic projection in which *Being Dead*'s entire ecosystem is fabricated in correspondence with its narrative development.

At the same time, however, Crace "takes delight" (Tew, 136) in providing clear indicators that his accounts are fictitious. For example, the novel's fantastic ecology is ostentatiously exhibited in the lengthy description of a sub-species of Cicada that survives exclusively within diesel engines (92–3). Similarly, by conspicuously cataloguing the provocatively precise symbolic significance of his fictive organisms within the folkloric explications of *The Goatherd's Ancient Wisdom* (another of Crace's narrative inventions), the novel pre-empts and undermines the reader's interpretive impulses, drawing attention to the artifice of deriving symbolic meaning from nature. By embellishing his invented organisms with a fictive folklore which is narratively foregrounded, Crace's fantastic ecology at once provokes the reader into interpreting significance within these organisms whilst equally drawing attention to the fatuousness of ascribing natural organisms with culturally specific meanings. In doing so, *Being Dead* parodies the ascription of symbolic significance to nature and seems to ridicule the notion of 'reading nature' as an anthropocentric practice of fabricated projection.

Finding the Future: Reading Nature's Warnings

Crucially, however, Crace's reluctance to frame nature as a legible surface does not necessarily entail an outright abandonment of the need *to attempt* to read nature or affirm an absolute disconnect between humans and their environment. After all, to do so would be to return to an absolute anthropocentrism that withdraws from the necessary challenges of ecological and transcorporeal awareness that the text has, elsewhere, been so careful to instil. Such a detached, objectivist position is itself ridiculed as excessively mechanistic and reductive to the ecological vitality that the text has previously been at pains to demonstrate. This alternative, yet equally extreme, sensibility is parodied by the narrator, who states

Our doctors of zoology...underst[ood] the mundane manners of the world, its rigid,

sequenced protocols…the dulling truth that dew, sapnuts, the faces of the moon, can

only show conditions that have passed…It is the past that shapes the world. The

future can't be found in it…And so it is with singing salt dunes. They do not predict

the fast-advancing misfortunes of the world. They merely say, 'Conditions are

correct for singing'.

(184)

Here, the denunciation of nature's signifying power is condemned as a "rigid…dulling truth"

that opposes the scientific re-enchantment and ecological vitalism that the novel prioritises

elsewhere. Therefore, whilst *Being Dead* overtly refuses to indulge a direct correspondence

between human and nonhuman activity, neither does it advocate an indifferent disconnect

between humans and their environment. It is, after all, Joseph and Celice's refusal to read

the signs of nature, to "regard the clearance as a metaphor" (89), that the novel portrays as

partially responsible for their demise: "Fine weather loves a funeral. Wise, non-scientific folk

would stay indoors on days like that, not walk along the coast, beyond the shelter even of a

tree. The doctors of zoology were illinformed" (96).

Therefore, although *Being Dead* reveals the anthropocentric artifice of 'reading nature', it

appears to nevertheless maintain an appreciation of nature's signifying power by figuring its

outright refutation as a denial of the human-nonhuman reciprocity that its transcorporeal

ethos insists upon. It is in order to reconcile these extremes of contact and detachment that

Crace's novel deploys a necropoetic articulation of the corpse that refuses to deny nature's

legibility, whilst simultaneously recognising its limitations.

Conclusion

As the first half of this chapter has demonstrated, Crace's 'necromantic' depiction of decomposition and the corpse as a signifier of enduring love does not so much disclose a longing for immaterial transcendence, as a recalibration of materiality itself that incorporates traditionally abstracted sentiments and phenomena. In doing so, the novel induces a transcorporeal awareness of, responsivity towards, and hence responsibility for, the (non)human environment through which even the most 'human' emotions are produced, expressed and transmitted. However, as we saw in the chapter's latter half, the transcorporeal reciprocity between human and environment does not presuppose a frictionless connectivity between human and non-human. Rather, *Being Dead*'s necropoetic mode of recitation and ambivalence towards environmental legibility persistently interrogates the epistemological limitations that structure knowledge of the non-human world.

Ultimately, then, *Being Dead*'s necromantic depictions of decomposition and the corpse signify a model of (non)human transcorporeal entanglement that thoroughly embraces environmental alterity. Rather than a transparent window onto the workings of materiality, Crace's corpses function as complex mediators that both disclose and distort (non)human materiality. In this way, the intertwining strands of love, death and the environment are brought together through the transcorporeal becomings of decomposition that balances an insistent ecological connectivity with an intense appreciation of the 'otherness' of non-human agency

As such, although Crace and DeLillo interrogate antithetical necro-corporeal figurations that embrace and deny decomposition respectively, they ultimately arrive at similar conclusions. Like Larkin, DeLillo interrogates and undermines traditional notions of aesthetic immortality, chronologically indexing the deficiencies of the literary medium as a mode of attaining definitive knowledge of 'the real'. In contrast, Crace's affectionate depiction of decomposition attempts to theorise the conditions upon which literature might facilitate limited contact with the material world beyond the anthropocentric horizons of the human subject. Refusing to entirely condone or condemn scientific or mythopoetic knowledge-systems, *Being Dead* performs a careful balancing act of epistemological supplementation. The mutually constitutive scientific and poetic discourses (and epistemologies) that construct Crace's necropoetics encourage a 'palimpsestuous' interpretation of (non)human nature that gestures towards its tenuous legibility as one that is always receding from the perceptive capabilities of the human mind. It is this cautious embrace of literature's capacity to enact encounters with the material world that constitutes the unlikely unity between DeLillo and Crace's opposing accounts of necro-corporeal decomposition.

Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the corpse has become a familiar and increasingly prevalent icon within the contemporary cultural and narrative landscape (Braidotti, 205). Although several academic works perform an analysis of the dead body in contemporary literature and culture,[94] to date none have done so in conversation with the 'new materialisms', a diverse body of scholarship aiming to reappraise traditional perceptions of matter in response to the radically changing conditions of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Such conditions include the rising visibility and acceptance of postclassical sciences such as quantum theory (Barad 2007, 6) the 'new biology' (Coole, 102) and complex systems theory (Coole and Frost, 15–16), unprecedented developments in biotechnological capabilities (Kirby, 7), alarming levels of ecological degradation (Breu, 15), the seemingly inexorable progress of global capitalism (Derrida, viii), increasingly invasive models of geo-political control (Connolly, 402; Pradhan & Singh, 100) and the conceptual recalibration of human subjects as streams of techno-digital and biogenetic information (Braidotti, 146; Brown 2001, 16). Given the far-reaching impact of the 'material turn' in contemporary scholarship, the widespread influence of the new materialisms and the necro-corporeal ramifications of the anxieties to which they respond, such an omission is particularly detrimental. Likewise, the corpse remains conspicuously absent in new materialist studies, especially as they recur within the humanities, further impeding such investigations. This lack of analysis of necro-corporeal materiality inhibits the academic

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[94] See: Perdigao (2010), Elam and Pielak (2018), Close (2018), Norman (2013) and Klaver (2004)

community's ability to identify and analyse the significance and signification of the corpse as an entangled intersection of human remains, material bio-organism and aesthetic symbol.

Graphically articulating the materiality of the human subject through the processes of decomposition and cessation of anthropically-defined 'activity' (Uhall, 357), the corpse regularly functions as a site at which the fears and anxieties surrounding human materiality are expressed and navigated materially (Schwartz 2015, 17; Edwards, 6), socially (Sherman, 18; Klaver 2004, xvi) and symbolically (Webb and Webb, 217). However, critical responses predominantly interpret the corpse as a symbol of death, negatively conceptualising materiality within an anthropocentric 'framework of finitude' that "maintains a sharp distinction of the living from the dead as it interprets death as the definitive end of being" (Bezan, 192). This thanatotic framework obscures and ignores the corpse's (non)human vitality, leaving us ill-equipped to provide nuanced and sensitive responses to the confrontations with human materiality enacted by necro-corporeal encounters. And yet, as the new materialisms identify, such nuanced responses are precisely what is required if we are to meet the imminent technological, political and ecological challenges of the twenty-first century. It is in the hope of contributing to such responses that this thesis performs its new materialist analysis of the literary corpse.

To assuage the conceptual deficit outlined above, this thesis stages an encounter between new materialisms and the contemporary literary corpse in a manner that facilitates new modes of reading the deceased body and new means of theorising the new materialisms. This is achieved by exploring literary representations of the corpse in a variety of texts ranging over three decades (1987–2016) in conversation with a selection of new materialist topics and theories including thing theory, material eco-criticism, critical posthumanism and

hauntology. In doing so, this thesis has demonstrated the diverse applicability of the corpse as a means of focalising a range of new materialist anxieties and its particular function as a (non)human subject that testifies to the necessity, but also the limitations of attaining epistemic access to non-human matter.

Summary

In the introduction to this thesis, I indicated that the project aimed to both read the corpse through the new materialisms and (conversely) to read the new materialisms through the corpse. Furthermore, I established a set of questions to guide this exploratory project: Firstly, how is the corpse's complex ontological status represented in contemporary literature? Secondly, to what extent can these necro-corporeal representations facilitate a greater understanding of material vitality? And finally, what is the role of literature in this communicative process? Although this thesis does not presume to have provided definitive answers to such questions, it has explored a range of responses offered by fictional representations of the corpse in the current literary and critical landscape. In response to these investigative prompts, the thesis has been divided into three parts, each addressing a particular question. In addition, each chapter focuses on a different necro-corporeal figuration in order to disrupt presumptions that 'the corpse' represents a homogenous universal entity and celebrate its diversity and versatility as a human, material and aesthetic subject.

'Part One: Objectification Narratives' tackles the first question by considering two prominent representational and interpretive strategies that aim to cultivate and contain the corpse's ontological liminality, alongside the extent to which they are subverted by the corpse's unruly material and aesthetic agency. It examines how two different modes of

necro-corporeal disarticulation, dissection and mutilation, provide mutually informative 'objectification narratives' through which the corpse is produced as a scientific and economic object, respectively. Shifting the preconditions of this presumed objectification, Chapters 1 and 2 investigate how the corpse's (non)human agency enacts surprising modes of resistance that destabilise the ontological preconditions of the material and conceptual structures into which they are initiated by challenging the distinctions between subjects and objects. In Patricia Cornwell's *Postmortem,* the corpse's multi-sensory epistemologies subvert the autoptical models of knowledge production that transform it as a scientific object, consequently undermining the detachment of observer from observed. In doing so, attempts to produce the deceased body as objects of forensic knowledge subtly subvert the ontological and epistemological bases of such knowledge. Alternatively, in Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, Bateman's reification of his victims as consumer objects conversely vitalises the commodities that inhabit his environment. In both texts, the processes by which the corpse is supposedly transformed into an object are disrupted by the dead body's unruly 'corpse power' in a manner that destabilises the original ontological framework in which they are to be initiated. As such these chapters reveal how textual or narrative attempts to domesticate the corpse's complex ontology are regularly undermined by the corpse's intractable symbolic agency.

'Part Two: Spectres of Flesh' explores how literary depictions of the corpse facilitate epistemological access to the material world, complicating the extent to which the corpse's previously considered acts of symbolic and ontological resistance might be embraced and utilised. Accordingly, the second part of the thesis investigates the popular figure of the reanimated corpse, reading its ambivalence as a strategic testimonial to the promises, but also the hardships that accompany new materialist ontologies. Starting with a broad analysis

of the zombie as an imaginative and narrative figure, Chapter 3 deploys a hauntological

reading to demonstrate that the zombie's fantastic (im)materiality frames its sociomaterial

indeterminacy as an epistemological excess that defies human comprehension. This reading

is then situated within an analysis of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* that demonstrates how

Whitehead's reinterpretation of the zombie mythos externalises and collapses the figure's

spectral (im)materiality in a manner that evokes epistemological finitude. Chapter 4 extends

this hauntological approach to the reanimated corpse to produce a provocative re-reading

of sociomaterial entanglements in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* Considering how the

idiosyncratic reanimation of its titular character both evokes and reformulates the zombie's

spectral ontology, it argues that Morrison's novel reveals the sociomaterial entanglements

that justify, produce and constitute racial oppression. The final part of the chapter explores

how the ambivalence of decomposition within *Beloved* reflects the duality of the

reanimated corpse as a figure that indexes both the desire for and fear of material vitality.

By presenting imaginative dialectics that contrast and collapse the conceptual

configurations of the ghost and the zombie, both Whitehead and Morrison's texts provide

informative case studies that illuminate the reanimated corpse's spectral (im)materiality. In

doing so, these texts demonstrate how the zombie operates as a figure that indexes the

ambivalence of the new materialisms' attempt to grasp an appreciation of noumena that

operate beyond the human's epistemological purview.

In 'Part Three: Aesthetic (De)Compositions', the thesis approaches the final question by

exploring how literary depictions of the corpse communicate specific attitudes towards the

possibilities of aesthetic representation as a means of attaining epistemic access to the

material world. This is achieved through a more sustained analysis of necro-corporeal

decomposition as an expression of (non)human agency and how its narrative treatment

reflects alternative modes of navigating particularly vital expressions of corpse power. In Don DeLillo's *Zero K*, decomposition is emphatically rejected in favour of cryopreservation, a boomeranging process that ultimately undermines the human subject it aims to physically and ontologically preserve. Extending such observations to notions of aesthetic immortality, *Zero K*'s conflation of corpses and art affirms the centrality of the transient material processes denied in both artistic and material preservation. In contrast, Jim Crace's *Being Dead* enthusiastically embraces decomposition as a transcorporeal manifestation of love. In doing so, Crace's lyrical and fictitious re-presentation of necro-corporeal processes deflates scientific attempts to attain definitive knowledge of the non-human and indexes an appreciation of the mythic imagination as a means of re-enchanting our material relations. Therefore, despite depicting contrasting processes in which decomposition is respectively denied and embraced, DeLillo and Crace's novels share a profound appreciation of putrefaction and decay as processes that both constitute and signify the (non)human entanglements that subtend lived experience. Crucially, however, in both cases this appreciation is aesthetically framed, extending the corpse's (non)human status to reflect on the imperfect, but nevertheless significant, role of art and language in attempts to facilitate a tenuous connection with the material, non-human world.

Synthesis

As revealed over the course of this study, the corpse is a versatile and mobile entity, capable of being used in a variety of contradictory ways to think through a range of issues regarding human materiality. Such topics include the technoscientific transformation of the body, the limits of scientific knowledge, ecological responsivity and responsibility, the psychosocial effects of commodity culture, and the mind-bending indivisibility of social injunctions and

biological compulsions. Whilst some authors such as Crace and DeLillo depict the corpse as a figure of affection and wonder, others such as Cornwell, Ellis and Whitehead situate it as a distressing entity that terrorises its readers and protagonists by documenting 'inhuman' situations, actions and ontologies. Predominantly, though, the corpse is an ambivalent amalgamation of the two, a site of affection and horror, of wonderful fear. Regardless of their orientation, all of these authors engage with the corpse as a site of material agency that poses serious challenges to the human subject.

By applying a new materialist lens to the literary corpse this thesis has been able to proffer an invigorating counterpoint to the prevalent thanatotic framework that interprets the deceased body as a passive signifier of death. In contrast, a new materialist perspective enables us to re-read the deceased body as an active subject that both expresses and enacts encounters with (non)human life. As such, this thesis shifts the trajectory of contemporary academic discourse surrounding the literary corpse in a direction more conducive to an acknowledgment of its material agency, cultivating the epistemological space to envisage the corpse as an entangled intersection of human remains, material organism and aesthetic symbol. It also better positions us to identify the opportunities afforded by necrotic encounters as moments that graphically focalise the materiality of the human subject and explore the representative techniques through which such confrontations are envisaged, cultivated and negotiated within the contemporary imagination. From the splatterpunk aesthetic of Ellis' *American Psycho* to the necropoetics of Crace's *Being Dead*, we have seen how corpses are depicted as subjects through which matter is both estranged and rendered viscerally intimate.

By providing such a framework this thesis has been able to illuminate how the structural, narrative and thematic preoccupations of several renowned contemporary texts respond to the particular social developments and conceptual crises that populate the material turn. This has yielded unexpected re-readings of several contemporary classics such as *Beloved* (1987)*, Postmortem* (1990) and *American Psycho* (1991) that challenge critical orthodoxy and provide new means of approaching these texts that expose the necro-corporeal vitality and ontological ambiguity that permeate their narratives. Part 1's critical explorations of the corpse's resistance to objectification reveals how forensic fiction counter-intuitively destabilises forensic knowledge at the same time it valorises it. Likewise, it offers an alternative to typical satirical interpretations of *American Psycho* by considering how Bateman's production of corpses shifts and unsettles, rather than merely reproduces, the logic of reification. Finally, a new materialist analysis of *Beloved* facilitates a recognition of Beloved's zombie-like (rather than purely ghostly) qualities and its implications for Morrison's depiction of the sociomaterial entanglements that both accompany and constitute slavery.

Furthermore, this thesis' focus on the corpse's 'double position' as an intermediary (non)human subject enables a more situated and nuanced response to texts in which new materialist perspectives have already been adopted. Indeed, the primary argument of chapter three involves complicating readings of the zombie as a new materialist icon in favour of a more sustained focus on symbolic and epistemological repercussions of its fantastic ontology. Alternatively, Part 3's interrogation of the corpse as a literary metaphor reveals how *Zero K's* representation of the cryopreserved corpse as a site of 'preservative paradox' exposes how transhumanism's neo-humanist ambitions are undermined by its posthumanist technological protocols. In addition, its interrogation of *Being Dead*'s

decomposing corpses as scientifically estranged subjects reveals how Crace's appreciation of ecological connectivity is supplemented by an equal scepticism towards 'reading' the non-human world in any definitive manner.

In addition, this thesis has demonstrated how the corpse is not entirely beholden to the logics of its artistic deployment. Indeed, many textual responses to issues of human materiality are intimately entwined with the necro-corporeal entities through which they are diffracted. By exploring new materialist concerns through a diverse array of necro-corporeal figurations that commonly recur within contemporary narrative — dissection, mutilation, reanimation, preservation and decomposition — we have witnessed how the corpse's diverse articulations channel and influence particular responses to human materiality. In the work of DeLillo, anxieties surrounding the subject's increasing technoscientific augmentation and aesthetic immortalisation are explored through the cryopreserved corpse, a figure whose paradoxical ontology discloses the reactionary impetus of such procedures. In that of Whitehead, the reanimated corpse crystallises concerns over contemporary society's pervasive tendency to exploit and redirect innate biological compulsions, whilst its fantastic nature figures sociomaterial entanglements as fundamentally incomprehensible. Alternatively, Cornwell's deployment of the dissected corpse to explore the insights afforded by forensic knowledge ultimately undermines such knowledge by exposing the inadequacy of its visual logic. In each of these instances, the corpse's (non)human agency becomes capable of reconstructing meanings beyond the narrative agency in which it is situated, providing specific realisations and responses to new materialist concerns.

Although this thesis has repeatedly demonstrated the new materialisms' ability to evoke exciting and illuminating readings of the dead body, it is in order to focalise the literary corpse's capacity to provide variegated and divergent instantiations of new materialist thought that the project has prioritised literary readings of the corpse over in-depth theoretical analysis. That is to say, rather than utilising the corpse as a figure with which to launch specific challenges to new materialist concepts or theorists, this thesis has deliberately deployed a theoretical 'light touch' to allow the chosen literary corpses and texts to retain the analytical spotlight. Such a focus facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the corpse's utility as a conceptual tool with which to situate and expand new materialist modes of thought and enables more sustained analyses of the texts in question. Indeed, whereas philosophical or theoretical texts may provide generalisable insights into the corpse's functionality as a new materialist subject, literary texts provide specifically situated case studies that imaginatively facilitate more nuanced encounters with the corpse as a (non)human subject within a range of particularised contexts. Furthermore, it enables the "new materialisms [to] benefit from…literary imaginative modes of thinking…[that] offers its own creative epistemology" in which self-conscious acts of imaginative dramatisation disclose the necessity but also the impossibility of artistically 'capturing' the material world (Tischleder 2019, 131).

Correspondingly, this thesis has demonstrated that the literary corpse is not so much a figure through which new materialist theories such as 'thing theory', 'transcorporeality' or 'hauntology' are frictionlessly expressed, but rather one that crystallises a particular vision of the new materialist project. Specifically, this necro-corporeal vision is one that indexes the challenges of attempting to derive non-human knowledge through the perceptual and intellectual apparatus of the human subject.

As we have seen, the corpse's evocation of epistemic recalcitrance derives from its status as both a representationally and conceptually problematic subject of analysis. Neither human nor matter, the corpse's indeterminate ontology makes it a theoretically ambiguous figure, lacking the constitutional anthropocentrism of the human subject or the assuring 'apartness' of quintessentially non-human subjects such as rocks, birds, or bottles (Schwartz, 4–5). Of course, it is precisely such clean and clear ontological divisions that the new materialisms aim to displace (Bennett 2010, vii). And yet, within the corpse, this intimacy becomes both affectively and conceptually uncomfortable. Undoubtedly, the corpse's multiple post-mortem transformations provide an evocative articulation of the materiality that has always composed and comprised the human subject (Edwards, 41). And yet, it is precisely due to the corpse's residual anthropism — the lingering emotional, political and cultural attachments to our own dead — that makes it such a powerful subject (Lauro 2016, 151; Klaver 2005, 80). Neither subject nor object, the corpse is "not really the living person, nor is it any reality at all. It is neither the same as the person who was alive, nor is it another person, nor is it anything else" (Blanchot, 256). The corpse, therefore, presents a complex contradiction in which anthropocentric concerns become the necessary preconditions of non-human thought.

Above all, the necrotic narratives explored in this thesis testify to the corpse's ambivalent 'double position' as a (non)human subject that provides tenuous access to the material world. In Cornwell and Ellis, the anthropic regimes of ontological regulation that transform the disarticulated deceased into inert objects ultimately invest such objects with a newfound strangeness and epistemic excess that challenge the material and intellectual authority of the frameworks in which they are situated. As such, the material knowledge 'disclosed' by such corpses is consistently counterpointed by surprising acts of material

destabilisation that estranges traditional conceptualisations of matter. In the novels of Morrison and Whitehead, the reanimated corpse testifies to the fundamental epistemological inaccessibility of material agency by encoding it within a supernatural register that defies rational comprehension or explanation. Such fantastic corpses render sociomaterial entanglements legible whilst simultaneously insisting that the complexity of such operations exceeds human understanding. Meanwhile, Crace and DeLillo's alternate representations of decomposition indicate that their intense appreciation of materiality is only tangentially accessible through the imaginative apparatus of aesthetic projection. Regardless of the necro-corporeal figuration under assessment, each of these texts expresses a profoundly ambivalent orientation to the corpse as an entity that simultaneously discloses and distorts material knowledge.

Furthermore, this double position is not limited to the corpse as an imaginative figure but also extends to the role of language as a medium that renders the material world perceptually sensible but also irrefutably recalcitrant. Linguistically registering the corpse's ontological indeterminacy, the fraught politics of aesthetically depicting the corpse foregrounds the ambivalence of the literary medium as one in which the insurmountable 'otherness' of matter becomes more legible, whilst *simultaneously* indexing the limitations that necessarily delineate and confine such forms of expression. By re-presenting otherwise insensible activities and objects within the realms of discourse, literature "is neither restricted to, nor is it independent of, the world of human affairs, but brings into view the manifold entanglements between people and things" (Tischleder 2019, 129), thereby allowing a tenuous access to matter that is always undercut by language's ever-shifting precarity and resistance to definitive meaning.

In this regard it becomes appropriate to (somewhat begrudgingly) reiterate the oft-cited etymological relationship between the terms *corpse* and *corpus* (Edwards, 185). Throughout the thesis, this commonplace observation has been circumvented to avoid the reductive reading that diminishes both corpse and text to objects to be deciphered (as is often the case in its utilisation).[95] However, having arrived at a more nuanced understanding of the corpse's relationship to language it becomes useful to reassess this link. Like the corpse, literature is an imperfect medium capable of disclosing *something* about the material world that usually escapes the human subject's sensory and perceptive apparatus, but in a compromised manner that necessarily withdraws from definitive understanding. Therefore, returning to the logical realignment that gives this thesis its title, we might say that literature, too, is 'dead as a doornail' in its corpse-like propensity to simultaneously reveal and conceal material vitality.

In this way, literary depictions of the corpse induce an ambivalent 'double position' towards the possibility of attaining epistemological access to the non-human. Consequently, the corpse's indeterminate status as a (non)human subject encourages a 'cautious materialism' that both recognises the undeniable reality of human materiality whilst also acknowledging that it is necessarily through a residually anthropic contemplation of the human subject that such material access is afforded. This cautious materialism is particularly informative for the new materialisms given current debates. As noted in the thesis' introduction, Breu identifies the need to reconcile divergent approaches of non-human thought into "a theoretical model that can both attend to the intra-activity of entities (human and nonhuman) as well as the resistance, excess and recalcitrance of entities" (21) as one of the primary challenges

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[95] For example, see: Crossland (74), Angel (16) and Doig (48)

facing the new materialisms. Whilst by no means *reconciling* these sensible and recalcitrant

materialisms, the figure of the corpse neatly encapsulates their tensions as a subject that

facilitates non-human thought through a residually human vessel. As such, the corpse's

position as a (non)human subject that encourages a more proximal relationship with the

material world whilst ultimately respecting its unassailable otherness fittingly encapsulates

the productive challenges that characterise new materialist thought.

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