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Zombies, Robots, Race, and Modern Labour

> The myth of the zombie, of the living dead, is a work myth.[1]
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> [Slavery] reduces man to a mere machine.[2]

In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the unnamed protagonist is denounced by an African American war veteran as "a walking zombie! … a walking personification of the Negative … ! The mechanical man!" As a black man subservient to white controllers, the protagonist is a non-human "thing" who does the "bidding" of his masters.[3] The image recalls the stage of Hegel's master-slave dialectic at which the slave seems to exist solely for the master, possessing no independent consciousness.[4] Ellison's equation of zombies and robots as emblems of such "negation" was not new. Mechanical men and the living dead had long been working together in U.S. literature of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to embody the dehumanizing effects of racial oppression and (relatedly) labour exploitation. Conceived as soulless bodies or mindless matter, undead and mechanical figures emblematized how slavery and wage-labour relations reduced persons to things. They also registered the mind-numbing effects of repetitive, alienated labour, and of racial ideologies that denied black interiority. These were not their only symbolic functions, of course: in different ways, each figure had been linked variously with anxieties about colonial dispossession, the subordination and objectification of women, ideological indoctrination, market expansion, techno-scientific progress, and the

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[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 470.

[2] Frederick Douglass, "The Nature of Slavery" (1855): http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/45/my-bondage-and-my-freedom/1512/the-nature-of-slavery-extract-from-a-lecture-on-slavery-at-rochester-december-1-1850/ (accessed 14 September 2015).

[3] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 94.

[4] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* [1807], Vol. 1 (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), 182-4.

hubris of creating or restoring life, among other things.[5] But it is in connection with race and labour anxiety that the deepest and most persistent parallels between zombie and robot mythologies are apparent in U.S. culture.

When the terms "zombie" and "robot" entered American English in the 1920s from their respective Afro-Caribbean and Eastern-European roots, each had a close association with involuntary servitude. The word "robot" first appeared in Czech playwright Karl Čapek's 1920 play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* to denote an artificial humanoid worker, and was derived from the Czech for bound labour, *robota,* which derives in turn from the word for slave, *rab*.[6] The hugely successful play was quickly translated worldwide; *R.U.R.* ran for 184 performances in New York City from 1922 and the word "robot" passed into popular usage, increasingly replacing the terms "automaton" or "mechanical man."[7] Although the idea of the humanoid machine had already long been present in western culture, Čapek's work sparked renewed interest in the idea, specifically in connection with industrial production, and gave it a new name. The term "zombie" was also rooted in slavery. William Seabrook's bestselling account of Haitian voodoo *The Magic Island* (1929) is credited with popularising the term in the United States as a reference to a living-dead labourer.[8] This

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[5] For instance, both the robot and the zombie have been interpreted as *memento mori*: on robots, see Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 51-2; on zombies, see Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," *boundary 2* 35.1 (2008): 88 (85-108).

[6] Eric Wilson, *The Melancholy Android: On the Psychology of Sacred Machines* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2012), 9.

[7] See Thomas S. Hischak, *Broadway Plays and Musicals: Descriptions and Essential Facts* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2009), 399. A young Spencer Tracy had his Broadway debut as one of the robots: see Brenda Loew, ed., *Spencer Tracy: A Life in Pictures* (n.p.: New England Vintage Film Society Inc., 2012), 29.

[8] See David Inglis, "Putting the Undead to Work: Wade Davis, Haitian Vodou, and the Social Uses of the Zombie," in Christopher M. Moreman and Cory J. Rushton (eds.), *Race, Oppression and the Zombie: Essays on Cross-Cultural Appropriations of the Caribbean Tradition* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2011), 42-59; and Gary D. Rhodes, *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2006), 30, 75-82. Earlier published references do not refer to an enslaved human corpse, but (typically) to a ghost, spirit or deity, and it is not clear precisely when the soulless corpse idea emerged in Haiti: see Ann Kordas, "New South, New Immigrants, New Women, New Zombies: The Historical Development of the Zombie in American Popular Culture," in Moreman and Rushton, *Race, Oppression and the Zombie*, 15-30 (see esp. 16-17). In Louisiana voodoo, *zombi* referred to a serpent deity: see Rhodes, *White Zombie*, 75, 82; and Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 11.

Haitian zombie was not the predatory, flesh-eating zombie familiar today, which developed in later twentieth-century horror film.[9] Rather, the zombie as it first entered U.S. popular culture from Haitian lore was a form of automaton: a "soulless human corpse," raised from the dead or deadened in life, to work for a voodoo master.[10] As such, it offered the ultimate embodiment of alienated labour power, and of how slavery negates the subjectivity of the person enslaved.[11]

Whereas Čapek's *RUR* gave a new name to an existing idea, numerous critics have claimed that American audiences would not have connected the zombie with any established cultural traditions or conventions (except perhaps mesmerism and hypnotism, in which consciousness, though not abolished, is suppressed or suspended).[12] The Haitian-derived figure is distinguished from other versions of the walking dead such as the biblical Lazarus, the mummy, the vampire or the monster of Shelley's *Frankenstein* in that it lacked the capacity for thought, volition or human connection that all of these figures possessed in

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[9] I discuss the cannibal zombie's emergence further in my conclusion.

[10] William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929), 93. The spellings *zombi* and *vodou* are considered more accurate renditions of the Haitian Creole, but as I am concerned with the zombie's appropriation in U.S. literature, I am using the conventional Anglicization of each word. On the differing accounts of the zombie's origins, the prevalence of zombie-like figures in numerous African traditions, and various possible etymological derivations from Central and West African languages, see Christopher M. Moreman and Cory J.Rushton, "Introduction: Race, Colonialism and the Evolution of the 'Zombie'," in Moreman and Rushton, *Race, Oppression and the Zombie*, 1-15 (see esp. 2-3) and Hans-W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi," *The Journal of American Folklore* 104.414 (1991): 466-94.

[11] I am speaking here of how Anglophone texts presented the Haitian lore, rather than Haitian cultural understandings of the figure. Critics making observations along these lines include Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2010), 12-13; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2002): 779-805 (esp. p. 794); Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 37-38; Isak Niehaus, "Zombies," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* William A. Darity, Jr., ed, Volume 9 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008), 180-181.

[12] Suggesting connections with earlier representations of mesmerised, hypnotised and/or somnambulist subjects, see, for example, Bishop, 73 and Kevin Boon, "And the Dead Shall Rise," in Deborah Christie and Sarah Lauro, eds., *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (Fordham University Press, 2011), 5-8, on the somnambulist slave Cesare from German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Wiene, 1920). Intriguingly, *Caligari*'s Cesare has also been compared with the robot: see, for example, Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 271; Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 44 (also alluding to the zombie).

some degree.[13] This essay, however, will show that undead figures resembling the mindless zombie began to appear in American letters well before the Haitian figure was introduced. Further, it will argue that where Haitian zombie mythology proved most compatible with those established tropes—in symbolising the dehumanizing effects of labour exploitation and racial oppression—is precisely where there had already been greatest resonance between tropes of living death and mechanical being, and that both tropes prepared the way for and inflected American appropriations of the Haitian zombie. This is already apparent in the text that first introduced the Haitian figure: Seabrook's *The Magic Island* describes the zombie as a corpse endowed "with a mechanical semblance of life" and likens zombies to "automatons."[14]

The overlap between zombie and robot mythologies has received surprisingly little attention, notwithstanding the explosion of critical interest in each figure in recent decades. The two are sometimes linked in passing, almost as if the connection goes without saying: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, for instance, refers to the zombies appropriated from Haitian folklore as "human robots."[15] Brinda Mehta refers to zombification "reducing [individuals] to a robotic state of (non)-existence."[16] The entry for "zombies" in Thomson Gale's *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* states "in Haitian voudou superstition, a zombie is a dead body revived by magic to act as a soulless robot."[17] Amy Wilentz remarks that the zombie is "the living dead … but he's also the inanimate animated, like the robot of industrial dystopias."[18] Susan Zieger suggests that "the zombie surpassed the robot as a figure of [alienated white modernity] in the

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[13] See, for example, Bishop, 109-10; Boon, 7; David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 101.

[14] Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, 93, 101.

[15] Jeffrey J. Cohen, "Undead (A Zombie Oriented Ontology)," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23.3 (2013): 409 (397-412).

[16] Brinda Mehta, "Re-creating Ayida-wèdo: Feminizing the Serpent in Lilas Desquiron's *Les Chemins de Loco-Miroir*," *Callaloo* 25.2 (2002): 667 (654-70). Comparably, Fay describes the zombie as "humanity's *mechanical nature* come to life": Jennifer Fay, "Dead Subjectivity: 'White Zombie,' Black Baghdad," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8.1 (2008): 92 (81-101), emphasis added).

[17] Gordon J. Melton, ed., *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology,* 5th ed., Vol. 2 (n.p.: Thomson Gale, 2001), 1709-10.

[18] Amy Wilentz, *Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter from Haiti* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 96.

1930s."[19] Minsoo Kang contends that the automaton is "akin to a zombie, a living mummy, or a vampire, as it crosses the categories of animate/inanimate, living/dead" and that both zombies and robots are "dead things … act[ing] like living creatures."[20] In a footnote in their "Zombie Manifesto," Lauro and Embry hint that "the automaton and the animate corpse may be the kissing cousins of the fantasy world" in that each has "suspect consciousness" (given the essay pays homage to Haraway's posthuman "Cyborg Manifesto," it is surprising that they do not address these parallels further).[21]

The numerous passing and partial connections previous critics have drawn between robots and zombies suggest the importance of treating these figures together to better understand their complex genealogies. The present essay cannot hope to comprehensively map the extent to which the cultural labours of zombie and robot-type figures have overlapped in the United States, let alone do justice to their equally important differences. But it does begin the work of connecting the critical conversations surrounding each figure by comparing how they were deployed in American-authored texts of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to express the denial or loss of self experienced by slaves, workers and victims of racial oppression. Exploring their parallel functions reveals a strong pre-existing tradition of mindless but animate figures to which American audiences could have related the Haitian zombie. It also underlines how American writers made connections between chattel slavery and wage-labour relations in representing the horror of modernity, with undead and mechanical bodies serving alike on the plantation or the factory floor as what Ellison calls "walking personification[s] of the Negative." While focusing on the United States, I do not mean to suggest that the associations I explore were confined to this cultural terrain. But given that the United States was the Haitian

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[19] Susan Zieger, "The Case of William Seabrook: *Documents*, Haiti, and the Working Dead," *Modernism/modernity* 19.4 (2012): 749 (737-54).

[20] Kang, *Sublime Dreams*, 51-2. Kang notes E. T. A. Hoffmann's description of an automaton as a figure of "living death or inanimate life" in his 1814 story "The Automaton," 51.

[21] Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," *boundary 2* 35.1 (2008): 105 n. 56 (85-108). At another point, they refer to the modern cinematic zombie as a "nonconscious consuming machine," 99. Annalee Newitz's *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (Duke University Press, 2006) considers zombies alongside robots, cyborgs, and serial killers as monstrous embodiments of the capitalist system.

zombie's point of entry into Anglophone culture; given how closely the idea of the robot worker became allied with mechanized mass production in the United States;[22] and given that the American culture industry (especially Hollywood film) exerted such influence over how zombies and robots evolved from the early-twentieth century onward, it offers a relevant vantage point from which to consider their similarities.

For Deleuze and Guattari, "the myth of the zombie, of the living dead, is a work myth" and a quintessential "modern myth."[23] The same might be said of the robot. The walking corpse and the artificial humanoid are ideas that can be traced back for millennia, as we will see, but the high concentration of such figures in American representations of labour exploitation in the period of industrial and "high" imperial capitalism suggest that they are figures particularly well adapted to express anxieties generated by those productive modes. In the final section of this essay, I will suggest that comparing the profound shifts in how zombies and robots were imagined in subsequent decades through to the present day might help us to describe the cultural logic of late capitalism, and assist us in (re)assessing the usefulness of "modernism" and "postmodernism" as critical categories.

Americanizing the Zombie

The idea of the artificial human has ancient roots, but the old myth gathered new force in age of mechanized mass production, when the image of the robot was used increasingly (as Kang notes) to represent the "industrial hell of laborers" and "themes of exploitation, dehumanisation, and class conflict."[24] In Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.,* the idea of the mass-produced robot worker gives concrete expression to Marx's conception of how industrial capitalism converts "things into persons and … persons into things," for it literally compounds the categories

[22] See Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

[23] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 470; *Anti-Oedipus* [1972], trans. Hurley et al. (London: Continuum, 2004), 368.

[24] Kang, *Sublime Dreams*, 278, 267. On representations of workers as "mechanicalized men" and "mere machine[s]" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 65-93; and Stephen Patrick Rice, *Minding the Machine: Languages of Class in Early Industrial America* (University of California Press, 2004), 28-32.

of worker and commodity.[25] The *R.U.R.* company manager Domin asserts that "to manufacture artificial workers is the same thing as to manufacture gasoline motors," and posters marketing Rossum's products as the world's "Cheapest Labor" underline the correspondence with how capitalism reifies the worker as a quantity of saleable labour-power.[26] The Marxian resonances were not lost on American reviewers when the play debuted on Broadway: for John Corbin in the *New York Times,* for instance, Čapek's "manikins" unmistakably embodied the dehumanization of "the proletariat" by "our mechanized civilization."[27] Although the idea of the artificial worker was not new, *R.U.R.* developed the idea in the industrial context in unprecedented depth. While the play offers a broad allegory of industrial capitalism, it is striking that Čapek also associates the robots with American capitalism in particular, reflecting United States' position as the foremost industrial power in the post-WW1 world: the Rossum's company manager sits at "a large American desk," and points out that robot workers were invented "exactly four hundred years after the discovery of America."[28] It is an index of the play's resonance with American audiences that the word "robot" so quickly displaced other expressions to become the standard term for the humanoid machine. The word "robot" entered American English from foreign origins, but it spoke directly to United States contexts.

In an intriguing parallel, the foreign term "zombie" was likewise associated specifically with American capitalism when it entered American parlance. In William Seabrook's *The Magic Island,* the zombie is not distanced as an exotic, primitive figure but appears in the context of "modern big business" in

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[25] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Volume 1 [1867], trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 209. Interestingly, Marx saw workers as "living appendage[s]" or "conscious organs" of the larger "automaton" constituted by the factory system and its machinery (my conclusion returns to this point), 503, 544.

[26] Karel Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots): A Fantastic Melodrama,* trans. Selver, Paul (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1923), 1. This translation was used in the original Broadway production: see Robert M.Philmus, "Matters of Translation: Karel Čapek and Paul Selver," *Science Fiction Studies,* 28:1 (March 2001): 7-32. In G. K. Chesterton's 1911 story "The Invisible Man," a line of mechanical domestics known as Smythe's Silent Service are marketed similarly, with slogans including "A Cook Who Is Never Cross" and "A Butler Who Never Drinks": G. K. Chesterton, "The Invisible Man" in *The Annotated Innocence of Father Brown* (Mineola NY: Dover, 1998), 107, 110 (102-20). A novel element in *R.U.R.* is that the robot workers are themselves mass-produced by robot workers, further confounding worker and commodity.

[27] John Corbin, "A Czecho-Slovak Frankenstein," *New York Times*, 10 October 1922, 16.

[28] Čapek, *R.U.R.*, 11.

"Americanized Haiti."[29] In a celebrated passage, Seabrook recounts how his Haitian friend Polynice assured him that zombies were "not a matter of superstition" and that revivified corpses were providing unskilled labour for Hasco, the Haitian-American Sugar Company. Seabrook was startled, he recalls, for Hasco was "perhaps the last name anybody would think of connecting with either sorcery or superstition"; it is "American-commercial-synthetic, like Nabisco, Delco, Socony." This part of American-occupied Haiti is effectively an extension of the United States itself: Hasco's "immense factory plant" in Port-au-Prince is just like "a chunk of Hoboken" with "clanging machinery, steam whistles, freight cars."[30] The zombie Seabrook introduced as a Haitian figure was, in this sense, already American. Indeed, Seabrook seems to have given the image of the zombie labour gang more prominence than it actually had in Haiti: it is striking that Zora Neale Hurston's account of zombie lore in her anthropological travelogue *Tell My Horse: Voodoo Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938) does not record any stories of zombies working in troupes on large plantations or foreign-owned factories. Rather, the stories she relates are of individuals zombified by their fellow Haitians, and the motive for zombification might be quite personal, such as repayment of a debt to a family member or acquaintance.[31] There is a dearth of other evidence, although it is widely accepted that it was the experience of large-scale plantation slavery that led to the emergence of the zombie myth in Haiti.[32]

Whatever its accuracy, the Haitian zombie's association with labour regimentation in modern industry persists in the first American zombie movie,

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[29] Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, 94-5.

[30] Seabrook, *The Magic Island,* 95-6. On how intensive sugar production was revived under American occupation, see Kerstin Oloff, "'Greening' The Zombie: Caribbean Gothic, World-Ecology, and Socio-Ecological Degradation," *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 16.1 (2012): 31-45.

[31] Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* [1938] (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 179-98. This is consistent with subsequent accounts of Haitian *zombi* lore such as Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 281-3. Distinguishing labour exploitation from other motives for zombification in Haitian tradition, see Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi," 474-5.

[32] See Ann Kordas, "New South, New Immigrants, New Women, New Zombies: The Historical Development of the Zombie in American Popular Culture," in Moreman and Rushton, eds., *Race, Oppression and the Zombie*, 17 (15-30): Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, 37-8 and n. 6 above.

Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932).[33] Set in Haiti, the film stars Bela Lugosi as a greedy European plantation owner and voodoo master, Murder Legendre, who raises dead men to labour in his cane fields and sugar mill. There are immediate resonances with the history of chattel slavery in colonial Haiti and with the more recent forced labour of native Haitians under the American military occupation (1915-34); as Patricia Chu observes, the fact that Legendre is "a foreigner turning Haitians into zombies" brings the theme of colonial domination to the fore.[34] But the spectacle of blank-eyed, shuffling zombies working heavy machinery in the film's famous sugar-mill sequence must also have evoked the deadening effects of industrial labour on the factory assembly line for American audiences, as numerous critics have observed. Kyle William Bishop remarks that if Legendre is "a lord who oversees slave labor, he is also the factory owner, the new capitalist" while the zombies represent the downtrodden proletariat:

> [Legendre's] army of zombies operates the machines of production, cranking a massive grinder by hand and transporting a seemingly endless supply of sugar cane to the mouth of the mill. … Legendre's factory is an appalling hyperbole of the furthest limits of a capitalist system.[35]

The connection, left implicit in *White Zombie,* would be made explicitly in Jacques Tourneur's zombie film *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), in which a plantation owner describes "the work drum over at the sugar mill" as a "version of the factory whistle" for his zombie workers.[36] Although the rational, efficient body of the robot was obviously better adapted to represent the scientific management of labour in the context of mechanized mass-production than the

[33] A theatrical treatment, Kenneth Webb's unsuccessful Broadway play *Zombie* (1932), had appeared in the same year: see Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*, 62 and Rhodes, *White Zombie*, 256.

[34] Patricia E. Chu, *Race, Nationalism and the State in British and American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26. McAllister notes that for twentieth-century Haitian intellectuals the *zombi* has been used to describe the repressive conditions of living under foreign-backed dictatorships: Elizabeth McAllister, *Rara! Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora,* Volume 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 108.

[35] Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*, 76-8. For similar analyses, see Rhodes, *White Zombie*, 45; Inglis, "Putting the Undead to Work," 43; Chu, *Race, Nationalism and the State*, 38.

[36] Jacques Tourneur, *I Walked With a Zombie* (RKO, 1943).

lethargic, shuffling zombie, the latter figure was nonetheless well-suited to embody the deadening effects of the industrial regime.

It is worth recalling that Marx himself used tropes of living death to describe capitalist labour relations, but in a somewhat different way. For Marx, it was the capitalists who were the living dead, "vampire-like" in their parasitism on the working class. Insofar as accumulated capital was "dead labour," the rule of the capitalist over the worker was "the rule of things over man, of dead labour over living."[37] The workers were alive, and their living labour was needed to "awaken [other objects] from the dead." And yet, because Marx sees living labour "losing its own soul" and vitality in this process, ultimately the worker too becomes a figure of living death akin to the soulless zombie.[38] (Marx's image of capital as a vampire also anticipates how the more recent idea of the zombie as a predatory cannibal has been deployed as a symbol of capitalist expansion, as will be addressed briefly in this essay's conclusion). On the other hand, because the zombie body is not manufactured but reanimated, it is less suited than the artificial robot to simultaneously represent what Marx called the "necromancy" of commodity fetishism, in which the products of human labour "appear as independent beings endowed with life."[39]

In its early American appropriations, the zombie raised the spectre of "slavery enduring within modernity," calling attention to the continuities between slavery and the supposedly "free" wage-labour relations of industrial capitalism.[40] Turning this around, it also offered a reminder of the modernity of plantation slavery: in his powerful study of the Haitian Revolution *Black Jacobins* (1938), CLR James maintained that the large-scale regimentation of slave labour on the

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[37] Marx, *Capital,* 342, 989-90.

[38] Marx, *Capital,* 289; Marx, Karl, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 461 cited in Mark Neocleous, "The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires," *History of Political Thought* 24.4 (2003): 668 (669-84). Connecting Marx's vampire with the zombie, see McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 141-2. See also Terry Eagleton on Marx presenting "both capitalist and capital [as] the living dead": Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), 200.

[39] Marx, *Capital,* 165.

[40] Zieger, "The Case of William Seabrook," 740. Notwithstanding its domestic resonance, the zombie continued to be associated with exotic locations in the 1930s, from Haiti and Africa to Cambodia: see Chera Kee, "They are not Men... They are Dead Bodies!: From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again," in Christie and Lauro, *Better Off Dead*, 9-23.

Caribbean sugar plantation created "the first modern industrial workers" and this view has since found widespread acceptance.[41] Moreover, as the creation of European imperial powers, the Haitian slave plantation was (in the words of Paul Farmer) a "quintessentially Western" phenomenon.[42] That a folkloric figure should emerge from this background that would have resonance for western audiences in the era of advanced industrial capitalism is therefore hardly surprising.

It makes all the more sense given that American audiences were already acquainted with zombie-type figures *avant la lettre.* The prevalent folk belief in the *literal* existence of zombies that Seabrook and subsequent investigators found in Haiti was unmatched in the United States,[43] but the idea of the soulless, living-dead labourer was present in *literary* traditions. Whereas Dendle, Bishop and others agree with Kee that "[t]here were no strong pre-existing mythologies connected to the zombie in the United States—no rules or conventions with which U.S. audiences would have been familiar"[44]—I argue that the zombie was compatible not only with those established ideas of the living dead but also with a tradition of representing slaves, workers and racial "others" as humanoid machines—the tradition to which Čapek added his robots.

Nineteenth-Century Ancestries

In 1829, the African American anti-slavery activist David Walker memorably framed the degraded position of American blacks as an undead condition, asking white Americans, "what is the use of living, when in fact I am dead?"[45] For

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[41] For contemporary elaborations of James's view in relation to the zombie, see Chu, *Race, Nationalism and the State*, 9; Kieran Murphy, "White Zombie," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 15.1 (2011): 47-55.

[42] Inglis, "Putting the Undead to Work," 45 citing Paul Farmer.

[43] Louisiana voodoo contained no equivalent figure: see Kordas, 15.

[44] Kee, "They Are Not Men," 20, citing Peter Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2001), 2-3; compare Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*, 38, 69, 109-10. Seabrook himself supposed the zombie idea might be "exclusively local" to Haiti, *The Magic Island,* 93. Cohen, by contrast, recognises that "[t]he zombie's literary heritage is obscured by the fact that its progenitors do not pass under the term 'zombie'": see "Undead," 208. But the only progenitors Cohen points to (Frankenstein's monster and the medieval Icelandic *draugr*) are unsatisfactory since they possess volition and consciousness.

[45] David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* [1829], ed. Peter P. Hinks (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 75.

millennia, various cultures had conceptualised slavery as a form of "social death" (as Orlando Patterson has shown) and that idea assumed great prominence in antebellum abolitionist and anti-racist discourse in the United States, especially in African American slave narratives.[46] One example is the 1849 memoir of Henry Box Brown, who describes the slave's "unrequited toil upon the plantation of [the] master" as "a living death; a death never ending"; in the same year, Henry Bibb described his enslavement as "linger[ing] out almost a living death."[47] Frederick Douglass deserves special attention here. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Frederick Douglass refers to the "tomb of slavery" and to enslavement as "a life of living death."[48] The slaves' sensibilities were "more or less deadened by their bondage," Douglass maintained, and if you were to "ask the slave what is his condition—what his state of mind—what he thinks of enslavement? … you had as well address your inquiries to the *silent dead*."[49] Douglass's image of the "droves of human stock" who are "food for the cotton-field and the deadly sugar-mill" moving with "dead, heavy footsteps" resonates strongly with the zombie sugar-mill workers of *The Magic Island* and *White Zombie*.[50] In his earlier *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass described how his own "breaking" by the overseer Covey reduced him to a "beast-like stupor," recalling: "my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died … behold a man transformed into a brute!"[51]

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[46] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) traces this idea across multiple cultures and continents.

[47] Henry Box Brown, *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* (Boston: Brown and Stearns, 1849), 19; Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (New York: H.W. Bibb, 1850), 62. Compare Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: H. Jacobs, 1861), 82, likening sexual slavery to being "drag[ged]" through a "living death."

[48] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), 247, cf. 95; 301-2.

[49] Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 284; 434 (original emphasis).

[50] Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 447.

[51] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* [1845] (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849). Elsewhere, Douglass suggests that to be truly mindless—"to get rid of thinking!"—would be a relief (40). The relationship of the metaphor of the slave as beast of burden to metaphors of the slave as walking corpse will warrant separate attention.

While never with Douglass's depth of insight, white commentators employed similar rhetoric. William Lloyd Garrison, for instance, held that slavery "entombs" men and compared emancipation to the "resurrection of the dead," while Wendell Phillips wrote of the "blighting death which gathers over [the slave's] soul."[52] In her *A Key To Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), Harriet Beecher Stowe remarked how slaves were typically imagined as "dead, and void of rights," and people might well doubt that "the slave is a human being" since the effects of enslavement left "nothing left in the soul, by which to say, 'This was a man!'"[53] The prominent historian Richard Hildreth memorably described slavery as death-in-life in his work *Despotism in America* (1854):

> The slaves are confined to the constant repetition of a few simple mechanical acts; and continually employed as they are in this constant round of stupefying labor … the soul falls into a deep and death-like slumber. Drugged with such a stupefying cup, so artfully administered, the soul murder if not complete, is closely approximated.[54]

The slave's body might continue to labour, but his/her "mental and moral capabilities" were subject to "premature decay."[55] The resemblance to "the bodies without souls" of Haitian zombie lore is striking, particularly when we consider that Haitian lore envisaged the zombification of living persons through the use of stupefying drugs.[56] Hildreth's rhetoric also resonates with common critiques of repetitive factory labour: Friedrich Engels's view that the division of labour was "deadening" for workers, whose "physical and mental powers decay in [the] utter monotony" was shared by many American commentators.[57] The

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[52] William Lloyd Garrison, "Preface" in Douglass *Narrative of the Life*, ix; and "To the Public," *The Liberator*, 1 January 1831, 1; Wendell Phillips, "Letter," in Douglass *Narrative of the Life*, 49, xiv.

[53] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to* Uncle Tom's Cabin (Boston: Jewett and Co., 1853), 110, 106.

[54] Richard Hildreth, *Despotism in America* (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1840), 65.

[55] Hildreth, *Despotism in America*, 79.

[56] See the account in Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 196, 204. Advertisements for the film *White Zombie* (1932) invoked a provision of the Haitian Criminal Code that forbade the use of stupefying drugs: see Rhodes, *White Zombie*, 33.

[57] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* [1845] (London: Penguin, 2009), 143; comparably, Hegel held that a factory "presents a sad picture of the deadening of human beings," but hoped that further mechanization would obviate the need for monotonous labour entirely: *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* cited in Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 257. On the use of similar

ready transference of the trope of the living-dead worker between Southern plantation and Northern factory reminds us, like the zombies in Seabrook, that large-scale plantation slavery was an essentially modern system in its regimentation of labour. Meanwhile, the sheer frequency with which anti-slavery advocates felt the need to remind audiences that slaves had souls is an index of how widely slaves and "negroes" generally were regarded in opposite terms, as soulless bodies.[58]

Contemporaneous fictional texts offer equally vivid representations of alienated labour as living death. In Herman Melville's fictional travelogue *Mardi* (1849), for instance, the slaves on the island of Odo endure "a life of deaths" growing taro for their overlords in trenches resembling "graves."[59] In the "extreme south" of the island of Vivenza in the same novel, transparently allegorising the U.S. South, a slave-driver insists that the "souls have been bred out" of the race of slaves, who "have no thoughts, no cares."[60] Melville also deployed the image of the "working corpse" in industrial wage-labour settings, as in his sketch of a New England paper mill in "The Tartarus of Maids" (1855), which depicts "rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper" within a complex resembling a "sepulchre."[61] Comparable visions of the laborer's condition appear in nineteenth-century poetry. One of the best examples my searches have uncovered is a poem entitled "Death in Life," published anonymously in *The Continental Monthly* in 1864, which describes how a person who "toil[s] from sun to sun" may continue to "exist/When life is slain" as a mere "thrall."[62] This idea was developed at greater length by Edwin

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rhetoric in contemporaneous American commentary, see David A. Zonderman, *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 45-50 and David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 352-57.

[58] This dehumanising view of black people as "body sans mind" would long outlive the system of racial slavery it had served to legitimate: see Charles Johnson, "A Phenomenology of the Black Body," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 32 (Fall 1993): 608 (590-614).

[59] Herman Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 853-4.

[60] Melville, *Mardi,* 1188-90.

[61] Melville, "The Tartarus of Maids," in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839-1860* (Evanston: Northwestern UP and Newberry Library, 1987) 328, 324 (323-35).

[62] Anonymous, "Death in Life," *The Continental Monthly* 6.5 (1864): 516-19 (ll. 1-2, 12); the condition is described in general terms before the speaker moves to his own personal case which is the result of a broken heart.

Markham in his celebrated 1899 poem "The Man with the Hoe," inspired by Jean-François Millet's painting of the same name, which presents a "[s]lave of the wheel of labor" with "emptiness … in his face," his toil having made him "dead to rapture and despair, / A thing that grieves not and that never hopes." He is a mere "shape" that is "soul-quenched" and stripped of "humanity," prompting the poetic speaker to ask, "Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?"[63] Moving between factory and plantation, the figure of the corpse-worker brings out the continuities between chattel slavery and "wage slavery" as dehumanising labour regimes.

Such figures also remind us of the connection between racial ideology and labour exploitation, particularly as the former served to legitimate the latter. In Stephen Crane's story "The Monster" (1891), for instance, the figure of the undead black man serves to allegorise how African Americans were objectified as "body sans mind,"[64] and also evokes the historical guilt of slavery. Henry Johnson, a black coachman, is severely burned while saving his white employer's son from a house fire. His guilt-stricken employer, a doctor, treats Johnson but is warned by a friend: "He is dead. You are restoring him to life … he will be a monster, *and with no mind*."[65] Johnson is reported dead in the papers, and becomes a living-dead "thing" in the eyes of the town.[66] In one scene, the doctor's son presents his black servant-cum-saviour to his friends "with the air of a proprietor," standing the ostensibly mindless object on a box before a crowd in a manner reminiscent of a slave auction.[67] A clearer and more literal version of the zombie slave idea

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[63] Edwin Markham, "The Man with the Hoe," [1899; revised 1920] in David Lehman (ed.), *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 186-7.

[64] Johnson, "Phenomenology of the Black Body," 608.

[65] Stephen Crane, "The Monster," in *The Red Badge of Courage and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169 (147-201), emphasis added.

[66] Crane, "The Monster," 166, 183.

[67] Crane, "The Monster," 189. As it happens, the recovered Johnson is not actually mindless; my point relates to how he is perceived. Young, who reads Johnson as a "black Frankenstein," notes that he was already dehumanised as a "coon" prior to his disfigurement: see Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: University of New York Press, 2008), 85. Bishop considers Crane's "monster" as precedent for the later cannibal zombie, rather than the Haitian zombie: see Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*, 97-8. Dimmer allusions to the historical burden of slavery surround a zombie-like figure in Ambrose Bierce's supernatural tale "The Death of Halpin Frayser," (1891), in which the eponymous hero encounters the risen corpse of his mother, "a body without a soul" with a "blank stare" showing no "intelligence." Bierce emphasises that the Fraysers are Southerners—a prominent Tennessee family whose fortunes have survived "the wreck

can be found in Mark Twain's novel *The American Claimant* (1892). In that text, the character Colonel Sellers devises a process called "materializing" which he believes will enable him to revive dead persons and deploy them as unpaid, undead workers. Calculating that New York policemen are paid four dollars a day, Sellers reflects "I'll replace them with dead ones at half the money."[68] Sellers anticipates that these working corpses "won't eat, they won't drink" and will "cost never a cent for rations or repairs." Instead, "they shall walk forever … with all the muscle and spring of their pristine vigour"—a vision that corresponds closely with the idea of the Haitian zombie enduring "servitude even in death."[69]

Twain's vision of an undead labour regime is tied specifically to the memory of African slavery as well as modern wage-labour, hinting at continuities between them: Sellers speaks resentfully of how "servants that were your slaves once" start acting like "master and mistress of the household" and "ought to be killed" then revived as obedient corpses "under better control."[70] Well before Seabrook located the zombie in the midst of "Americanized Haiti," Twain had very explicitly imagined soulless corpses labouring on home soil. Scholars looking at the Haitian zombie's entry into U.S. culture have yet to take account of such precedent, although two critics discussing *The American Claimant* have referred in passing to these workers as zombies: Messent remarks how the materialization scheme replaces "complex human agents" with "compliant, automatic, and thoughtless zombies," while Armstrong notes how Twain's text implies that "from the point of view of Capital, a zombie is an ideal worker."[71]

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wrought by civil war": Ambrose Bierce, "The Death of Halpin Frayser," in *The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 65, 62 (58-71).

[68] Mark Twain, *The American Claimant* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co, 1892), 43–5. Although the name for the scheme derives from the idea of "materializing" departed spirits (which Sellers dismisses as preposterous) it instead involves reviving bodies, and Sellers refers repeatedly to "dig[ging] up" the dead, 46.

[69] Twain, *American Claimant*, 44. Willentz, *Farewell, Fred Voodoo*, 96.

[70] Twain, *American Claimant*, 81–2.

[71] Peter Messent, "'The Chronicle of Young Satan' and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*: A Transnationalist Reading," in Joseph Csicsila and Chad Rohman (eds.), *Centenary Reflections on Mark Twain's* No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger (Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 60 (51-70); Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 98. On the comparable idea of "duplicates" being reproduced out of living print-room workers in Twain's novel *No. 44, the Mysterious Stranger*, see Cindy Weinstein,

The above examples have shown that the Haitian idea of the zombie as a mindless yet animate corpse was by no means unprecedented when it entered U.S. culture. On the contrary, the body without a soul had became a standard figure for describing the conditions of the slave or factory worker in nineteenth-century letters, and the racist denial of black subjectivity. Another key trope through which American writers represented the negation of the enslaved or racially othered subject was the humanoid machine, and I now want to consider to what extent this closely related tradition warrants consideration as further precedent for the zombie figure adopted from Haitian lore.

Zombies, Robots, and Zombie-Robots

In his 1813 poem "Queen Mab," Shelley wrote that obedience "Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame/ A mechanised automaton."[72] Like the walking corpse, the idea of the artificial human involves a conflation of animate and inanimate, and as such it served equally well to express how slavery (in Frederick Douglass's phrase) "defac[ed] those characteristics of its victims which distinguish *men* from *things."*[73] While the robot was particularly apt to express the mechanization and reification of labour in the modern factory, as we saw with *R.U.R.*, the idea had a long association with chattel slavery that went back at least to Aristotle, whose conception of the slave as a living tool or machine was invoked and contested by American writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Toni Morrison.[74]

The Literature of Labor and the Labors of Literature: Allegory in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 160-73.

[72] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Queen Mab" (1813), in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Bruce Woodcock (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), 3-65 (ll. 178-9). The Oxford English Dictionary defines an automaton both as "a piece of mechanism [that] appears to move spontaneously" and a being whose actions are "involuntary" or "without active intelligence": *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); both zombies and robots may be classed as automata in the latter sense.

[73] Douglass, "Slavery and the Slave Power" (Address delivered in Rochester, New York on December 1, 1850), cited in Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 16-17.

[74] Tim Armstrong ably addresses "the slave-machine equation" in *The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); see in particular 81-85, 98. For Aristotle's view of slaves as "animate tools" and on other classical Greek precedents for the robot such as the animated tripods and metallic serving maidens of Hephaistos in Homer's *Iliad,* see Kevin LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks in Early Modern Literature*

In antebellum letters, metaphors of undead and mechanical being were used interchangeably to describe the slave's condition: thus, Douglass characterises slavery both as "living … death" and as "reduc[ing] man to a mere machine."[75] In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (originally subtitled "The Man Who Was a Thing"), George Harris's master insists that slaves are "labor-saving machines."[76] Crucially for our purposes in seeking precedent for the zombie, it is the expectation of mindless obedience that is the basis for the comparison: like the zombie, the mechanical worker acts solely in accordance with the master's will. The same can be said of how the mechanical worker trope was deployed in industrial wage-labour contexts to express the reduction of the worker to a quantity of labour power, mindless yet animate. In 1911, Frederick Taylor himself recognised the risk that his system of scientific management would turn the worker into "a mere automaton, a wooden man" but pointed out that "the same criticism … can be raised against all other modern subdivision of labor."[77] Taylor was quite right, of course: as I have mentioned, commentators had been warning throughout the nineteenth century that the increasingly repetitive, mindless nature of factory labour reduced workers to "mere machines."[78]

Figures that actually *unite* mechanical and undead attributes appear in nineteenth-century texts, underscoring the connection of these tropes. An 1831 article in the Boston Mirror proposed that a mindless man was "a mere animated machine—a living mass of corruption—a fettered slave—a moving sepulchre."[79]

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and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2013), 106-110, 9, 21 and Page Dubois, *Slaves and Other Objects* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 82–100.

[75] Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 95 and "Slavery and the Slave Power," cited in Buccola, *Political Thought of Frederick Douglass*, 26.

[76] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or, Life Among the Lowly* [1852] (New York: Penguin, 1981), 55; on the subtitle, see Stephen Best, *The Fugitive's Property: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago, 2004), 2.

[77] Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Dover, 1998), 65-6.

[78] See n. 21 above. Examples of the kind of criticism Taylor encountered may be found in Samuel Gompers, "The Eight-Hour Work Day," *American Federationist* 4.2 (1897), 2; and "Machinery to Perfect the Living Machine," *American Federationist* 18 (1911): 116-17. In an ironic inversion of such tropes, the hero of Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court* (1889) envisages a "Man-Factory" that would "turn groping and grubbing automata into men" (London: Penguin, 1986), 159.

[79] [Unattributed], "The Human Mind," *The Bouquet: Flowers of Polite Literature* 1 (1831), 62 cited in Rice,

The title character of Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) is an expressionless, "cadaverous" figure who labours "mechanically" and is viewed by his employer as a mere instrument before he commences his famous passive resistance.[80] In Twain's *The American Claimant,* Colonel Sellers's "materialized" workers are also zombie-robot hybrids, for Sellers speaks of how the behaviour of a "materialized negro" could be made mechanically "adjustable" so the master could "turn on more talk, more action, more emotion … with a screw or something."[81] In this vision, the black servant is both walking corpse and machine—a mindless, obedient thing. Hegel himself had combined undead and mechanical imagery in contending that the division of labour made "labor … that much deader" and the laborer "more mechanical" as the worker's "consciousness" was reduced to "the last extreme of dullness."[82]

Again like the zombie, the robot could serve both as a work myth and a race myth. Contrary to the suggestion of Annalee Newitz that robots have been "marked as physically other, but not in a racial sense,"[83] the idea of the humanoid machine lacking mind or soul was used extensively to symbolise the racist denial of black interiority. One example from nineteenth-century American literature is Haman, the "iron slave" from Melville's "The Bell-Tower" (1855), whose name seems to combine "human," "half-man," and the "sons of Ham," as persons of African descent were commonly designated in antebellum discourse. His creator Bannadonna, who has callously murdered one of his human workers and prefers to view human beings from a distance that obliterates their "intelligent features," insists his slave has "no soul."[84] In Ambrose Bierce's story "Moxon's Master" (1893), discourses of blackness and orientalism converge in a racialised robot: a being with "proportions suggesting those of a gorilla—a

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[80] Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," in *Moby-Dick, Billy Budd, and Other Writings,* ed. G. Thomas Tanselle and others (New York: Library of America College Editions, 2000), 656, 644.

[81] Twain, *American Claimant*, 82.

[82] G.F.W. Hegel, "Philosophy of Spirit 1803-4," cited in Albany cited in James Henderson and John Davis, "Adam Smith's Influence on Hegel's Philosophical Writings," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 13.2 (1991): 191 (184-204).

[83] Newitz, *Pretend We're Dead*, 11-12.

[84] Herman Melville, "The Bell-Tower" [1855] in *The Piazza Tales,* 178, 183, 180; on the associations of "Haman," see Carolyn Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 153.

tremendous breadth of shoulders, thick, short neck and broad, squat head, which had a tangled growth of black hair and was topped with a crimson fez" that is actually "a machine—an automaton chess-player" (recalling the orientalism of Kempelen's "Mechanical Turk," the eighteenth-century hoax of a chess-playing machine).[85] The figure is introduced after two friends debate whether "a machine thinks about the work that it is doing," with the protagonist maintaining that thought is impossible "in the absence of a brain."[86] A less literal example appears in Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" (1843), in which the servant Aminadab is described by his master as a "human machine" and exhibits "great mechanical readiness" in his subservience. The relationship of the servant to his master is expressly likened to the relationship of the body to the controlling mind and in emphatically racial terms: Aminadab has a "smoky aspect" and embodies "man's physical nature" while Aylmer is "pale" and represents "a type of the spiritual element." The distinction between white and black, man and machine, is the distinction between "matter and spirit" (recalling Aristotle's view of the master-slave relationship).[87]

Racial associations persist in early twentieth-century representations of robots. An actual working robot presented to the American public by the industrial giant Westinghouse in 1930 was modelled after an African American field-hand. Described in their publicity as a "mechanical negro," the creation was named "Rastus Robot," Rastus being a common slave name.[88] Even as they were promoting the latest goods produced by wage-labourers in their ultramodern factories, Westinghouse chose to hark back to an earlier mode of production through racist nostalgia, exploiting the persistent association of blackness with

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[85] Ambrose Bierce, "Moxon's Master" [1893], in *The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 94-5 (89-96); Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, 180, and Klaus Benesch, *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 91 both note the Kempelen connection.

[86] Intriguingly, Moxon's creator maintains in this debate that all "dead, inert matter is actually "alive" (Bierce, "Moxon's Master," 91), another instance of overlap between undead and mechanical tropes.

[87] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark" [1843], in *Young Goodman Brown, and Other Short Stories* (New York: Dover, 1992), 20, 15, 23.

[88] [Unattributed], "Rastus Robot, the Mechanical Negro," *Radio-Craft*, February 1931, 469 (469 and 509).

servility.[89] It is striking that the very text that introduced the term "robot" to American audiences, Čapek's *R.U.R.,* associated the figure with racial domination in colonial contexts, specifically in the Americas: Rossum's robot factory is located on a "distant island" where an exotic slime provides the raw material for their manufacture (recalling H. G. Wells's 1896 novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*) and the company produces "Robots for the Tropics" specially adapted for plantation labour, with one executive boasting that Rossum's has "dumped five hundred thousand tropical Robots down on the Argentine pampas to grow corn."[90] The tropical island robot, like the tropical island zombies serving an American corporate giant in Seabrook's *Magic Island*, can be seen to reflect the "displacement, in Imperialism proper, of the core process of [capitalist] accumulation … to tropical zones in far-flung, never-visited places across the equatorial horizon."[91] References to the intervention of "missionaries" on behalf of the robots and a governess's complaint in Act 1 that robots are a "pack of heathens" worse than "animal[s]" have obvious imperialist connotations.[92]

In some representations, artificial humans and the living dead even looked similar. Although today's popular image of the zombie as decaying corpse differs markedly from that of the sterile robot, this has not always been the case. According to Seabrook and Zora Neale Hurston, what distinguished the Haitian zombie was its "blank" eyes and "expressionless" visage, rather than any signs of putrefaction; indeed, they specified that in Haitian lore a body could only be resurrected "before it has had time to rot."[93] The early cinematic zombies reflect this, showing no decay but resembling living humans except for their vacant expressions and stiff movements.[94] The essential characteristic is the appearance of mindlessness, rather than cadaverousness, which is why (as noted earlier) the

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[89] On the racial associations of later twentieth-century robot figures, such as *Blade Runner*'s replicants, see Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 76.

[90] Čapek, *R.U.R.*, 50.

[91] Julian Murphet, "Introduction: On the Market and Uneven Development," *Affirmations: of the modern* 1.1 (2013): 10 (1-20).

[92] Čapek, *R.U.R.*, 41, 64, 66; she protests Rossum's selling "thousands and thousands of these heathens," 82.

[93] Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 101, 93-4; cf. Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 183-4, 191.

[94] This is the case in both *White Zombie* and *I Walked With a Zombie,* for example.

zombie can more readily be compared with mesmerised or hypnotised subjects than with Frankenstein's monster, vampires and other undead figures. On the other hand, the robot's technological sophistication was not always outwardly visible: those in Čapek's *R.U.R.*, for instance, are manufactured from organic, fleshy material and appear human except that (like the zombie) "their faces are expressionless and their eyes fixed" and their movements somewhat rigid; accordingly, they could be played by live actors (today we might call them androids).[95] In the same year that Seabrook introduced the Haitian zombie as a soulless body endowed with a "*mechanical* semblance of life," the American social theorist Stuart Chase defined the robot as a "mechanism of flesh and blood," citing Čapek's play.[96] The animated doll Olimpia from E.T.A. Hoffman's much earlier tale "The Sandman" (1816) was indistinguishable from a living human, furnishing Sigmund Freud with an illustration of his concept of the uncanny in 1919.[97] The famous image of the robot Maria as a futuristic woman of bronze in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) epitomizes an aesthetic of mechanical perfection that is far removed from the morbid zombie, yet this metallic figure is actually a substructure that is concealed for the majority of the film by a fleshy exterior that makes Maria appear human.

As for actual working robots, those fashioned from the eighteenth century onwards had typically been naturalistic rather than stylized in appearance, and efforts to create life-like machines persisted into the twentieth century: Westinghouse's "mechanical negro" Rastus, for instance, had a naturalistic appearance with soft rubber skin.[98] In their lookalike representations, robots and

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[95] Čapek, *R.U.R.*, 2. Pallid makeup was used in the Broadway production, giving the robots a cadaverous appearance: see Ronald Harold Wainscott, *The Emergence of the Modern American Theater, 1914-1929* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 120. On early modern uses of "android" for organic artificial humanoid humans, see LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks*.

[96] Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 93; Stuart Chase, *Men and Machines* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 142.

[97] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" [1919], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 339-76 (p. 348).

[98] "Rastus Robot, the Mechanical Negro," 469; in contrast, their more famous robot Elektro (created in 1937-8) was decidedly stylised and metallic. On earlier realistic automatons, see Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 36. Contemporaneous pulp fiction robots were more often of the clanking metallic kind: examples include Edward Hamilton's "The Metal Giants," *Weird Tales* 8.6 (December 1926), Francis Flagg's "The Mentanicals," *Amazing Stories* (April 1934) and Bob Olsen's "Peril Among the Drivers," *Amazing Stories* (March 1934).

zombies each offered the unsettling image of a humanoid form lacking human interiority, and it was this, not gleaming metal or festering flesh, that made them such fitting emblems of the dehumanised worker or racial other. Indeed, this is the image of the robot Ellison would call on in *Invisible Man,* when he describes the black college students with their "faces frozen in solemn masks" and "voices mechanically raised in the songs the visitors loved" with "shoes shined, minds laced up, eyes blind like those of robots."[99]

The comparisons I have offered will require complication and qualification, of course. For one thing, whereas the "unthinking, unknowing" zombie had to be controlled from without,[100] an automaton acts in accordance with engineering which might be more or less sophisticated. Accordingly, the mechanical servants in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts were not always imagined as mindless but were sometimes presented as being capable of skilled labour or even tasks requiring reasoning, although lacking a soul or emotions. Thus, when Captain Ahab envisages a mechanical man in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, he imagines that it would have "no heart at all" but "fine brains."[101] Comparably, the Tin Man of Frank L. Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and its better-known 1939 film adaptation longs not for brains but a heart.[102] In Čapek's *R.U.R.*, robots possess computational intelligence and serve not only as menial workers but as administrators, although they are presumed to be soulless. This distinction is partly traceable to a fundamental difference in the nature of

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[99] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 111, 36.

[100] Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 181. However, it appears from Hurston's account that the enslaved corpse was not always conceived as wholly mindless in Haitian lore; for instance, although she states that zombies "cannot formulate thought," she relates stories in which zombies speak and retain some memory or feeling (including the famous case of Felicia Felix-Mentor, found at her former home in apparent distress saying, "This is the farm of my father. I used to live here," 196) and the imperative of leading a resurrected corpse past its former home because it would otherwise "recognise it and return," 183. I intend to write elsewhere on how scholars have perhaps been too rigid in requiring absolute non-sentience when seeking precedent for the zombie.

[101] Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 512-13; in contrast, the ship's carpenter is described as a "mere machine of an automaton" whose mind is an "unreasoning wheel," 509-10. Classical ideas of the soulless but intelligent "homunculus" are discussed in LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks*, 60-61.

[102] Tik-tok, another of Baum's mechanical men introduced in *Ozma of Oz* (1907), announces that he is fitted with "Smith and Tin-ker's Improved Com-bi-na-tion Steel Brains": see Bruce Mazlish, *The Fourth Discontinuity: The Co-Evolution of Humans and Machines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 47-49.

zombies and robots: whereas the zombie is created by reanimating an existing organic body or depriving matter of mind, the robot is an artificial being and invites the fantasy of adding mind to matter.

Artificial servants also have a tendency to turn on their human masters, either through malfunction or because (despite assumptions to the contrary) they actually do possess some form of sentience and a will to freedom, as turns out to be the case in *R.U.R.*.[103] In Melville's "The Bell-Tower," for example, the "iron slave" Haman strikes his master dead in the course of his mechanical routine, and the tale's epigraph expressly compares the potential for machines to run out of control to the revolutionary potential inherent in racial slavery: "like negroes, these powers own man sullenly … while serving, plot revenge."[104] Comparably, the racialised automaton in Bierce's "Moxon's Master" resists its "repressive" programming and murders its creator, thus "mastering its master" as the title suggests.[105] While stories of robot rebellion obviously register anxieties about the dangers of techno-scientific progress and the hubris of usurping God's creative function—in this recalling *Frankenstein* and the medieval Jewish legend of the Golem—they also carry overtones of race and labour uprising.[106]

This tendency of robot-type figures to run amok is a further point of contrast with the Haitian-derived zombie slave. In their accounts of Haitian zombie lore, Seabrook and Hurston relate that zombies could be released back into a natural death if they were fed salt, but they mention no instances of zombies regaining

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[103] Lines cut for the American translation referred to the robots having gained souls through their suffering: Čapek, *R.U.R*, 70. On the tendency of robot figures in earlier British and American silent films to turn on their creators, see Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 48 and Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Berg, 2013), 59. On the more complex role of the robot Maria as faux-revolutionary *agent provocateur* in Lang's *Metropolis,* see Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*, 291-5.

[104] Melville, "The Bell-Tower," 174.

[105] Bierce, "Moxon's Master," 96. The automaton chokes Moxon in a sequence that distinctly recalls how the risen corpse chokes the hero in Bierce's "The Death of Halpin Frayser." Intriguingly, Haman in Melville's *The Bell-Tower* is referred to as "the Domino," from the Latin for master: Melville, "The Bell-Tower," 177, 182-5.

[106] On the overtones of race uprising in *Frankenstein* itself, see Young, *Black Frankenstein*, 19-30; relating *Frankenstein*'s revolt to working-class oppression, see McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 95-6, 101-4, 111.

sentience and turning on their masters.[107] Nor do the early Hollywood zombies revolt. Despite the suggestive title, even the film *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) does not depict a zombie uprising; rather, human beings released from a zombifying spell attack their former oppressor at the film's conclusion.[108] However, zombies may constitute a threat to humans insofar as they serve as their masters' henchmen, and this has definite overtones of racial vengeance in the film *Ouanga* (1936) in which a mixed-race Haitian woman raises zombies to attack the white fiancée of her white American lover, vowing "I'll show him what a black girl can do!"[109] In broader terms, Lauro and Embry contend that the zombie would have been evocative of slave rebellion simply by virtue of its Haitian origins, in light of Haiti's revolutionary history.[110] This was certainly a connection the Jewish-American novelist Guy Endore made in his powerful but neglected novel of the Haitian Revolution, *Babouk* (1934). The novel follows a group of captive Africans through their transportation on a "ship of the dead" to join the "zombies" onshore in Haiti where, despite having pronounced themselves "dead," they gain revolutionary consciousness through collective ritual and rise up to quite literally deaden their masters.[111] Almost three decades later, Jean-Paul Sartre would envisage a similar reversal in his 1961 introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, warning colonial masters who have viewed their subjects as "dead souls" that "in these shadows from whence a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombies."[112] But such uses of the zombie

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[107] Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 101; Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 195.

[108] Kee notes that advertising for *White Zombie* and other zombie films played on racial fears, typically depicting a white woman endangered by a black zombie, in "They Are Not Men," 15.

[109] *Ouanga* (George Terwilliger, 1936).

[110] Lauro and Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto," 87, 90, 96-7.

[111] Guy Endore, *Babouk* (New York: Vanguard, 1934), 47, 101.

[112] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface" [1961], in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Contance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 13 (7-34). Bishop distinguishes Hegel's master-slave dialectic from the zombie-voodoo master relationship in that the former requires mutual recognition, whereas the mindless zombie can recognise nothing, in *American Zombie Gothic*, 70; on the other hand, citing Susan Buck-Morss's argument that Hegel was inspired by the Haitian Revolution, Murphy proposes that "Hegel's master-slave dialectic and the Haitian zombie could … be considered as twins born out of Saint Domingue [Haiti]," in "White Zombie," 53; cf. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 2009), 14-20.

are infrequent compared with the prevalence of robot rebellion in contemporaneous texts and film-texts.[113]

In texts preceding the Haitian zombie's emergence, the oppressed subjects who are presented metaphorically as the living dead are also associated occasionally with insurrection. Examples include David Walker's 1829 appeal, which declares black Americans "dead" yet warns white oppressors that "degraded and abject as you have made us … [m]y colour will yet, root some of you out of the very face of the earth!!!!!!"[114] Edwin Markham's "The Man with a Hoe" depicts the oppressed worker as a mindless corpse but nonetheless predicts that "this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world."[115] Other texts present more symbolic reversals in which the master's dependence on the (un)dead slave deadens the master by extension, again recalling Hegel and also affording comparison with Marx's idea of the capitalist as vampire, mentioned earlier. In Melville's allegorical depiction of Southern slavery in *Mardi,* the overseer who drives Vivenza's cadaverous slaves is himself "a cadaverous, ghost-like man" whose name is Nulli, suggesting "nullification" or negation (through the Latin *nullus,* none). The blank, pallid law-copyist in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" ceases to labour mechanically and achieves a "cadaverous triumph" over his employer through his infamous "passive resistance."[116] Abolitionist writers often referred to the deadly consequences of slavery for the enslavers' souls, and Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* extends this idea to North-South relations as a whole: northerners were "linked to a decaying corpse" in their connection with southern slavery, and their dependence on its "guilty profits" was "deaden[ing]" them in moral terms.[117]

In the opening of this essay, I cited Ralph Ellison's linkage of mechanical men and the living dead as "walking personification[s] of the Negative." But Ellison's

[113] Asimov began writing his 1940s stories of sympathetic, conscientious robots partly because he felt the "stock plots" of robot rebellion had become so overworn: Isaac Asimov, "Introduction," in *The Rest of the Robots* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1964), 10-11.

[114] Walker, *David Walker's Appeal,* 75.

[115] Markham, "The Man with the Hoe," 187 (l. 48).

[116] Melville, "Bartleby," 652-3, 666.

[117] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 438; he had earlier described white Americans who acquiesced in slavery as (in biblical phrase) "like unto whited sepulchres … within full of dead men's bones": *Narrative of the Life*, 121.

Invisible Man itself envisages a quasi-Hegelian "negation of the negation" in which these figures are redeemed as paradoxical emblems of empowerment. By the novel's conclusion, the protagonist recognises the advantages of "playing dead" as he imagines himself practising a kind of subversive subservience in his battle with the white establishment, musing, "They wanted a machine? Very well … I'd serve them well and … they'd learn that it could be as polluting as a decaying body." He retreats to a hole underground but insists it is not "a grave" and he is not "dead"; rather, he is "hibernat[ing]" in preparation for action.[118] In line with Melville's idea of the "negroes" who "while serving, plot revenge," he realises that because his white oppressors presume him to be mindless, it is they and not he who are the "sleepwalkers" and "it is possible to carry on a fight against them without their realizing it."[119] As these few examples have shown, humanoid machines and the living dead could be symbols of resistance as well as oppression; detailed analysis of these further connections must await further study.

What remains? Zombie Apocalypse in the Desert of the Real

Walking corpses and automatons were key figures through which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American writers confronted the impacts of modern slavery and industrial capitalism. Exploring how their symbolic functions overlapped shows that, at least as a metaphor, the idea of the worker or racial other as a soulless body was well established prior to the Haitian zombie's advent in United States culture. Subsequently, zombie and robot mythologies evolved in ways that brought different anxieties to the fore. Although each figure's evolution took multiple and often contrasting directions, traceable to fundamental differences in their make-up, in some respects they have continued to perform similar cultural work. In the brief space remaining I want to suggest how continuing the comparative project commenced in this essay to take account of these shifts might assist critics who maintain (following Jameson) that we should continue to distinguish between "modernism" and "postmodernism" as modes of response to different phases of capitalist development.

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[118] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 509, 6, 13.

[119] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 5.

George Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) led the reinvention of zombies as flesh-hungry predators, not summoned up to serve human masters but arising spontaneously after some catastrophe.[120] Moving in ever-growing hordes, this cannibal zombie became a horror-movie staple in the later twentieth century and persists as the subject of the current zombie craze in twenty-first century popular culture. The post-Romero zombie typically has an infectious bite and the resultant zombie plague threatens to devour and/or assimilate all humankind.[121] Unthinking yet ravenous, it offers a literal embodiment of mindless consumerism—something the 1978 movie *Dawn of the Dead* and its 2004 remake underlined with a shopping-mall setting—and "[as] it consumes … it makes more consumers," reflecting the processes by which commodification invades new spheres of life.[122] Like the market system itself, the zombie horde exhibits an expansionist drive yet is "perfectly indifferent to its actual, worldly, dimension or reach" (giving it an advantage over Marx's image of capital as "vampire-like").[123] Where the pre-Romero idea of the zombie as a soulless drudge was apt to express the reification of workers in the industrial and "high" imperial phases of capitalist development (including its racial dimensions), the

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[120] See Peter Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 6-7. The cause of the zombie plague is sometimes left vague, as in Romero, but is often traceable to government-corporate collaboration in the military-industrial complex and biotech industries: see Johnston, "Phenomenology of the Black Body," 112-13 and Kristine Larsen, "Thank You for Making Me Human Again: Alice and the Teaching of Scientific Ethics," in Nadine Farghaly (ed.), *Unraveling Resident Evil: Essays on the Complex Universe of the Games and Films* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2014), 167-85.

[121] On the emergence and persistence of the zombie contagion idea, see Dendle, *Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*, 5, 13-14 and Phillip Mahoney, "Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Zombie: From Suggestion to Contagion," in Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz (eds.), *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2011), 113-29.

[122] Lauro and Embry, "Zombie Manifesto," 99; they note that the 2004 remake's zombies are "notably faster" which "may parallel the rate at which the capitalist necessity of consumption drives us forward." The zombie has also been invoked as a figure for the persistence of outmoded economic models, most fully in John Quiggin, *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk Among Us* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and for how the neoliberal economy is artificially sustained: see Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx* (London: *Bookmarks,* 2009), and McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 1-2 on "zombie banks."

[123] Murphet, "Introduction," 16. The two images may be linked, insofar as the idea of the vampire's infectious bite probably influenced the zombie's development into a plague figure: see Bishop, 104-5. On Marx's use of vampirism as metaphor for the capitalist logic of unlimited accumulation, see Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London, 1983), 90-1; for one effort to reconcile Marx's vampire with the zombie as representing different "moments" in the "monstrous dialectic of modernity," see McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 253.

zombie plague better expresses the "late" multinational phase of capitalist development—the more complete conquest of the market and the commodity form in what the inaugural issue of this journal called "a neutral and inhuman matrix of infinite equivalence."[124] If we accept the Jamesonian view of postmodernism as the aesthetic presentation of how the market might be experienced as a pure form,[125] then the "zombie apocalypse" is an emphatically postmodern *denkfigur*.

Race persists as a latent concern in zombie texts and film-texts: for instance, Jon Stratton (2011) has used Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" to analyse parallels between zombie invasions in recent films and the xenophobic rhetoric surrounding asylum-seekers and other displaced peoples who are constructed as sub-human invaders.[126] Overall, however, the zombie has become a less exotic figure and its association with racial servitude has been largely superseded, even as the division of labour along lines of nationality and ethnicity persists globally.[127] Indeed, the zombie's evolutions and migrations may be considered an index of uneven global capitalist development, for while the idea of the zombie as soulless slave has receded in the overdeveloped West, it has gained strength in parts of the so-called "developing" world as different populations experience new forms of proletarianization, as Comaroff and Comaroff demonstrate in the case of rural South Africa.[128] The geographical (re)distribution of the racialised zombie drudge as a folkloric figure reminds us that, even today, the spread of modernity's neutral matrix is incomplete.

Whereas the zombie stopped working and became a chaotic consumer, the artificial humanoid continued to serve humans. And while zombies remained

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[124] Murphet, "Introduction," 4. For instance, Lauro and Embry find the zombie horde emblematic of a world in which all avenues of alterity and resistance have been foreclosed by commodification and individuality is coopted by individualism so that "there is no outside of [capitalist] ideology," in "Zombie Manifesto," 106-7).

[125] Murphet, "Introduction," 16.

[126] Jon Stratton, "Zombie trouble: Zombie texts, bare life and displaced people," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2011): 265-81; see especially 267, 275.

[127] Kee, "They Are Not Men," 22.

[128] Comaroff and Comaroff, "Alien Nation," 18-20 and *passim.* On further global processes through which new populations are being "subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead," see Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.

mindless, portrayals of robots as sentient, sensitive and even soulful became increasingly common from the mid-twentieth century onwards. These portrayals are often sympathetic, from the thoughtful, conscientious robots of Isaac Asimov's fiction, through the poignant, poetic "replicants" of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) to the ethically and environmentally conscious robot hero of Disney-Pixar's *Wall-E* (2008).[129] The popular theme of the artificially intelligent being who seeks human recognition and equal treatment offers clear parallels with the struggles of ethnic minorities.[130] But the sentient machine could also be imagined as part of a larger system and, as such, it might threaten the control, assimilation and/or destruction of humankind, thus affording comparison with the zombie plague. Examples include the Skynet artificial intelligence system from the 1984 film *The Terminator* (1984) and its sequels, which seeks to destroy humanity using its robot "terminators," and the Borg in the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a plague of artificial, electronic humanoids programmed to conquer and assimilate other species into one networked machine-being. On encountering new species for conquest, they transmit the message "We Are the Borg. You Will be Assimilated. Resistance is Futile."[131]

The threat need not be physical. In the Wachowski brothers' film *The Matrix* (1999), the "hacktivist" character Morpheus reveals to the film's hero, Neo, that his perceived reality is actually a machine-generated, digital simulation

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[129] See Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 24, 65; Newitz, *Pretend We're Dead*, 123-25 and Chapter 4 *passim* (including discussion of the "romantic" robot). The film *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) presents a variant involving software rather than hardware with a romance between a human and a self-aware, emotionally complex operating system.

[130] See, for instance, Despina Kakoudaki, *Anatomy of a Robot: Literature, Cinema, and the Cultural Work of Artificial People* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 121-28 considering robots in relation to late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century race relations in the United States; Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 71-77.

[131] Cited in Mark Leibovich, *The New Imperialists* (Prentice Hall, 2002), 115. The idea of robots consuming humans is literalised in The Flaming Lips' song "Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots 1" (from their 2002 album of the same name), which imagined humanity under siege from robots "programmed to destroy us" and features the memorable lyric "you won't let those robots eat me." The narrator of Chesterton's "The Invisible Man" briefly imagines that an inventor's robots have eaten him, envisioning "rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acepholous clockwork," 116. Of course, other twentieth-century artists and intellectuals celebrated ideas of human-machine hybridity, from the futurists to Haraway and the cyborg; space does not permit me to explore these developments here.

concealing the desolate waste that is the "real" reality. "Welcome to the desert of the real," he says grimly.[132] The phrase derives from Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* and is highlighted by Slajov Žižek in his 2002 study *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* as expressing how in "late capitalist consumerist society, "real social life" itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake," its totality both "substanceless" and all-encompassing.[133] The Matrix trilogy was the consummate millennial expression of the trend in representations of machine-being away from the classic mechanical servant to a concern with artificially intelligent cybernetic systems and machine-controlled environments (the rogue computer system Hal 9000 in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* is an early example).[134] While this can obviously be related to technophobic anxieties arising from rapid advances in electronics and computing technology, it also corresponds more broadly with what Haraway has identified as a late capitalist transition "from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations [including race and class oppression] to the scary new networks" of "informatic" control associated with the post-industrial "world system of production/reproduction and communication."[135] These themes are particularly prominent in the dystopian "cyberpunk" fiction of the 1980s which, as Dinello observes, typically "locat[es] the conditions for technological dominance in the multinational corporation" (and here it is worth recalling that Fredric Jameson

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[132] Wachowski, Andy and Wachowski, Larry (prod.), *The Matrix* (1999, Village Roadshow Pictures).

[133] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), 13-14. Suggestively, the virtual agents of The Matrix in the Wachowski's film wear business suits. Considering *The Matrix* as well as *Tron* (1982) and *Videodrome* (1983) as reworkings of the "rogue robot" theme in relation to corporate power networks and the culture industry, see Newitz, *Pretend We're Dead*, 174-9 and Chapter 5 generally.

[134] Unlike earlier rebellious robots, HAL 9000 has no body as such but extends throughout the spaceship as a whole and regulates the very environment in which the astronauts move. A utopian version of this idea is offered in Richard Brautigan's contemporaneous poem *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace* (1967) which imagined humanity ceding all administrative functions to machines and embracing nature.

[135] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 162-62 (141-81); on Haraway's "networks" and the networks of global finance and capitalist exploitation, see Thom Kuehls, *Beyond Sovereign Territory: The Space of Ecopolitics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 108-113.

called cyberpunk "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself").[136]

As visions of circumscribed subjectivity, the zombie apocalypse and the desert of the real occupy similar imaginative terrain. The nightmare of human individuals being reduced to passive nodes in an all-pervasive machine system that programs us with artificial perceptions, needs and desires is comparable, if by no means identical, to the idea of our being reduced to mindless consumers through a global process of zombification.[137] Brian Holmes touches on this comparison when he refers to "the zombie-like character of our society" in which people are controlled by the "automatic pilot" of "cybernetic governance."[138] With respect to the role of technology in facilitating the corporatization of the globe and the absorption of alternative and oppositional cultures, we arrive at another connection between advanced machines and mindless zombies: the prospect of the former transforming us into the latter. Posthuman theory has seized on the cyborg—a human-machine hybrid—as a figure of utopian promise, but critics have also emphasised the potential for technology to usurp rather than extend human agency. Marshall McLuhan warned against the "zombie stance" we fall into when we fail to recognise "what [a new medium] does to us and with us," and these days our Voodoo master is most likely Apple computers or Samsung, as we are increasingly networked through, reliant on, programmed by and addicted to our "smart" electronic devices.[139]

While I am linking the zombie plague and the all-powerful machine network as expressions of the cultural logic of late capitalism, I do not mean to suggest that they were without precedent in the industrial era. I have already mentioned how

[136] Dinello, *Technophobia!*, 180, cf. 105, 267 and see generally 202-19; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 419 (n. 1). For Dinello, *The Matrix* is an exploration of the late-capitalist subject's "condition[ing] by the technological and corporate information-environment" which programs us with "artificial needs and desires," 176.

[137] Ironically, Agent Smith in *The Matrix* refers to human beings as a plague.

[138] Brian Holmes, *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2009), 15. Mahoney briefly compares the "zombie swarm" to the "digitally networked collective" but notes that the latter is often conceived in more positive terms, 122.

[139] Not to mention Google or Mark Zuckerberg. Marshall McLuhan, "The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," *Playboy Magazine* (March 1969): 1-34.

Čapek's *R.U.R.* presents the deadening dependence of human beings on increasingly sophisticated machines that ultimately overpower them, and the English writer Samuel Butler had raised concerns as early as the 1860s that machines might develop consciousness and evolve into a superior race that would subdue and supersede humankind. E. M. Forster's remarkably prescient story "The Machine Stops" (1909) envisions a global machine network supplying passive humans with everything from their food to their ideas, so that humans become mere "lump[s] of flesh" and (as one rebellious character perceives) "the only thing that really lives is the Machine."[140] And in the context of production rather than consumption, Marx himself had imagined the factory system as a "vast automaton, composed of various mechanical and intellectual organs," with workers reduced to mere appendages of the "mechanical monster."[141] We even find glimpses of something like a zombie plague. An anonymous poem widely reprinted in numerous American periodicals in the 1860s used a comparable image to describe the unreflective apathy of modern subjects, announcing "We are surrounded by the living dead, / … Mere walking flesh-piles, without heart or head."[142] In similar vein, the English writer and painter Wyndham Lewis proclaimed in 1926 that people in the mass were becoming "*automata:* they wish to be *conventional* … as near dead (feelingless and thoughtless) as they can get, without actually dying."[143] In the nineteenth century, corporations were often referred to as "bodies without souls" by commentators wary of their growing power, and Herman Melville was among authors to predict the capitalist system touching all things with its deadening palsy and converting the entire globe into "one great counting-house."[144] These

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[140] Forster's vision anticipates by eight decades Haraway's remark that "[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 152). LaGrandeur (2013) argues that Prospero's system of spirits in *The Tempest* and other early modern texts show precedent for the idea of the "intelligent network" (111-20 and *passim*).

[141] Marx, *Capital,* 503, 544.

[142] Titled "The Living-Dead," the poem was originally published in the Edinburgh-based *Chambers's Journal*. The poem also appeared in *The Living Age* 902 (14 September 1861): 640; in *The Liberator* 32.40 (3 October 1962): 4; and elsewhere.

[143] Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* [1926] (Santa Rosa CA: Black Sparrow, 1989), 151 (original emphasis); the troubling politics of this passages are considered in Rod Rosenquist, *Modernism* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 49.

[144] Remarking how corporations had "been aptly defined as bodies without souls," see "Democracy—What is it?" *The United States Democratic Review* 33.7 (July 1853) 1-28; Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 178.

were authors capable of imagining a world in which there would be no outside-of-media and no outside-of-the-market.

The claim I am making instead relates to the intensity and frequency of occurrence of these figures at different stages of capitalist development. To paraphrase Julian Murphet, the capacity to imagine something like a zombie or robot apocalypse was present in the industrial context, but in the more globalized, more fully market-saturated culture of late capitalism it has become that much easier to imagine and in some sense more "realistic."[145] Tracing the intersecting lines of development taken by living machines and the living dead will assist us in "traversing the long historical arc from realism to postmodernism as 'cultural dominants' of capitalism."[146] While the present sketch has been necessarily brief and selective, if the comparative project commenced in this essay is continued, zombies and robots will have more to tell us about each other, ourselves, and the cultural landscapes in which we move.

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[145] Murphet, "Introduction," 16.

[146] Murphet, "Introduction," 7.