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Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor

Rebecca Schneider



The god you call “dead” —is Dionysos [...]

—Euripides, *The Bakkhai* (1990:391)

Dionysus is the god of living labor, creation on its own time.

—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (1994:i–ii)

Dionysus is the god who either refuses to die, or who, twice born, dies again and again. Refusing to remain dead? Refusing to remain live? The difference is undecidable. His medium, recall, when not ecstatic trance, is theatrical masquerade.

The instability of the divide between life and death, or liveness and deadness, is, as so many have noted, something of a theatrical *thing*. Onstage, the lack of resolute demarcation between the live and the dead is the very stuff of the art form. We write of the haunted stage, or the mask of death, as given attributes of a medium we insist is nevertheless indelibly *live* (Barthes

Figure 1. Day 17 of Occupy Wall Street saw zombie bankers chasing money at Liberty Square, New York City, 3 October 2011. (Photo by Timothy Kraus)

1981; Carlson 2001). The dead *appear* live, so to speak. The live, dead. As Luce Irigaray writes of Dionysus (in the midst of writing about Nietzsche): “Here and not here. Here—dead. [...] The only skin he knows is a dead skin. [...] And, behind this effigy, he looks you straight in the eye” (1991:123, 26, 30).

Looking at another who is looking through a mask representing someone else—someone perhaps long dead—is, again, something of a theatrical thing. But not only is Dionysus the twice-born, repeatedly dead God of againness and theatre, he is also (no surprise) archi-Other to all things rational or polis-loving (such as Pentheus, his own mortal cousin). Dionysus is the god whose medium of appearance (and disappearance) threatens always to undo the polis, just as the polis depends for its very governability on the regulation of the sphere of appearance. As Judith Butler remarks:

To produce what can constitute the public [...] it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content—certain images of dead bodies in Iraq for instance are considered unacceptable for public visual consumption—but on what “can” be heard, read, felt, seen, and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths. Our capacity to feel and to apprehend *hangs in the balance*. (2004:xx–xxi; emphasis added)

In *Precarious Life*, Butler situates a public’s “capacity to feel and to apprehend” as one regulated by prohibitions regarding what can appear. That which cannot appear by extension cannot disappear, and thus can neither appear to nor disappear from account—no accounting can occur. An accounting for lives as valued and deaths as grievable is, she argues, essential to the maintenance of a public in which persons *appear* to have rights—appearance being basic to the conception and constitution of rights at all (see Rancière 2010).

For those who will not appear to count as dead there need be no accountability toward their lives. In *Precarious Life* in 2004 and in *Frames of War* in 2009, Butler’s primary example regarding the uncountable, ungrivable dead is the regulation against images of dead Iraqi soldiers in the US war against Iraq—those whose lives “do not appear as lives at all” (2009:50). These dead, without appearance, are also those without deaths that *count* as such. But we can also think of those without life/death (in the sense of appearing to count) as expendable migrant labor, trafficked sex workers, and other “flexibilized,” “feminized,” “shadow laborers” who lead lives outside of what counts as citizenry, that is, outside of the public sphere of appearance (Standing 2011; on counting, see also Rancière 2004). In ways that trouble the limits of thought, these are not just people with precarious lives (for as Butler has argued, all lives are precarious in that we are all injurable and vulnerable to death), but they are perhaps even more pointedly persons with precarious deaths—persons who may not appear either to live or to die, nor appear to *count* if dead. Beings without death cannot, after all, require physical security, healthcare, retirement support, sustainable resource management, or *jobs*, let alone obituary recognition. Indeed, such beings cannot exist. But do.

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Among those who cannot be acknowledged to die, immortal god(s) may only be on the proverbial one hand. Those on the other, more palpable hand, however, have been a major concern of 20th- and now 21st-century political theory: Hannah Arendt's refugees without "the right to have rights" (1973:296), Giorgio Agamben's "homo sacer" (1998), or Jacques Rancière's "those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not" (2010:67). The public's capacity to "feel and apprehend," as Butler writes, "hangs in the balance" regarding such beings. That is, not only do the stateless or migrant or *sans papiers* exist precariously, but "the public's" capacity to even "apprehend" (which is not the same as recognize [Butler 2009:4]) these persons as live or as dead—as injurable—is also precarious. And across debates on the matter, it seems unclear *who* "the precariat" are precisely. The category appears as flexible and dislocatable as its members, variously containing refugees, asylum seekers, homeless persons, women, migrant workers, the underemployed, the long-term unemployed—and even, in general, youth. The "precariat" also may contain a shifting number of protesters who, under the sign of statistical percentage—of *counting*—camp in flexible solidarity with the ranks of the nonpossessed, the dispossessed, and those whose homes have been repossessed.¹ The claim to precarity by "the 99%" is essentially the claim "we count!" as well as a demand for fiscal accountability from banks, corporations, and the wealthy minority who have benefited in obscene disproportion.

Walking Dead on Wall Street

Summon again the "dead" god of live theatrical appearance, Dionysus, as a segue to the people we cannot quite count as dead or live. Some such people may be those undergoing what Lauren Berlant has termed "slow death"—those within capitalism who are "marked for wearing out" (2007:762n20). Other people we call dead yet living are zombies, or, in the recent bacchanalia of Occupy Wall Street: capitalists themselves.

For OWS, to "occupy" means to pitch camp and visibly *live* in a site of protest, such as Zuccotti Park in the financial district of New York City. But the reveling sense of camp has been close at hand as well when, repeatedly, protest has taken the carnivalesque shape of white-face masks of mimes, Guy Fawkes's white-face grin, or legions of white-face zombie capitalists. In a 3 October 2011 protest action, OWS protesters representing the 99% bloodied themselves, munched on Monopoly money, and marched on Wall Street as zombies. Demonstrator Patrick Bruner told the Associated Press that the zombies were aiming at Wall Street bankers and financiers and "reflecting the metaphor of their actions" (Associated Press 2011). We can take him to mean that the protesters, acting zombie, intended to bounce zombieness back onto those who, classically, live off living labor without care for infrastructural means of accountability.

This ricochet between the living and the living-dead may seem confusing. In mid-20th-century film, zombies are most often surrogates for consumers and laborers, representing the middle and working classes more than the capitalists who front production. Think, for example, of those consumers who, at the close of George A. Romero's 1968 film *Dawn of the Dead*, are left as a soulless middle class, shuffling around a ruined shopping mall.² The popular 2011 television series remake of the comic book *The Walking Dead* also situates zombies as the "general

1. On the overlap of the Occupy Movement with issues of US homelessness and dispossession see Kingkade, Miller, and Knafo (2011).

2. The rich history of zombies is too large to unpack here but is certainly circum-Atlantic and linked to the flesh trade. A "zombie" (Haitian Creole: *zombi*; North Mbundu: *nzumbe*) is a corpse reanimated by witchcraft, hypnotism, or other means of manipulation. Drawn in large part from George A. Romero's 1968 film *Nights of the Living Dead*, the term is now indelibly linked to the living dead of horror fiction, cartoon, and film imaginary. The fact that OWS zombies appear now "live" (i.e., not in film, video, digital media, text, or cartoon) is an interesting aspect of the zombie marches, which began in the US as early as 2001, a fact Tavia Nyong'o in this issue links suggestively to "the awful carnage of the post-9/11 world" (Nyong'o 2012:147).

public.” On that show, more than 99% of Americans have succumbed to a zombie apocalypse. Suffering without infrastructure to support their deaths, they disastrously *walk*, which is to say they respect no distinction between public and private. But for OWS, the zombies are reflection machines, flexible theatres of the crowd, aimed to catch the visages of those who worship corporate wealth. The multitude of money-munching zombies marching on Wall Street, then, represent the few global hoarders themselves.

Clearly, OWS is critical of rampant neoliberal privatization. In this sense, zombies serve the movement’s cause in other ways. Ignoring private property, the undead simply walk. Thinking of Michel de Certeau’s distinction between tactics and strategies (1984:xviii–xxii), it’s too easy to accuse zombies of lacking an organized cohesive strategy in their walking—just as it is too easy to accuse OWS of lacking itemized, strategic demands against radical wealth inequality. Instead of making demands to the *existing* state, global financial institutions, or multinational corporations (thereby empowering and reproducing those sources of inequality), OWS deploys tactics (such as zombie walking, human microphones,³ and public camping) fervently aimed to “call attention to, and oppose, the reproduction of inequality” (Butler 2012:10). Their actions call attention to the enormity of the problem of capitalism’s fundamental relations. Rather than issue a set of “possible” demands to a structure intent on remaining intact, their demands appear “impossible” as they are aimed at reimagining the most basic elements of human exchange, basic means of sustainability, and basic approaches to what humans, plants, animals, air, and earth can hold in *common*.

In the interest of critiquing capital relations and imagining other modes of being-in-relation, it is fascinating that the walking dead protest actions of OWS are coupled with the tactic of living in public space. Living in public space (with explicit emphasis on human, nontechnological capacities such as the pointedly live human microphone) might seem paradoxically twinned with marching *as if dead*. But does the conjoining make a certain kind of sense? Does this very pairing critique a basic mode of capitalism’s relations?

In order to address this question, I would like to turn to theatre, as I think that theatre, as suggested at the opening, has a particular purchase on the flexible, undecidable space between registers of what is live and what is passed. In asking what it is about occupiers acting zombie that addresses and critiques this particular moment in “late-late” capitalism (what Christopher Nealon has humorously called “really, *really* late capitalism” [2004:580]), we are at least in part asking: why the dead, live? The overt theatricality of zombies’ ambivalent stance between life and death is a register of precarity, and note that not only is precarity an economic condition particular to those without infrastructural support, but it is also arguably one of the theatre’s own basic and most fruitful properties—what Eugenio Barba termed “precarious balance.”⁴ What, if anything, can be made of this?

3. The “human microphone” is a technique of live amplification, without the use of actual mics, speakers, or battery-powered bullhorns, all of which require permits in New York City for “public” use. Using amplification technology without a permit can result in up to 30 days in prison. The park where Occupy protesters camped, once known as Liberty Plaza, is not actually a public park but is privately owned by Brookfield Office Properties, landlords to Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase, who renamed the park Zuccotti Park after company chairman John Zuccotti in 2006. There, protesters adopted a people-powered method of sound amplification by which any speaker pauses after a short phrase, the phrase is loudly repeated by those who can hear it, and it is then passed back through the crowd by means of the ancient technology of oral repetition bordering on chant. A drawback of this method is that it is time consuming, but, perhaps, so is the Occupy movement itself.

4. Eugenio Barba writes of “precarious balance” as a primary tool in a global arsenal of theatrical ploys to catch and retain attention through “acts” (in Barba and Savarese 2005:32). One of his key examples is Étienne Decroix, the famous mime, whom Barba presents in a photograph balancing at the point of almost falling. In fact, teetering precariously in the position of “almost but not quite” can be considered a primary attribute of mimesis in general (see Bhabha 1994:129).



Figure 2. Étienne Decroix, one of Eugenio Barba's key examples of "precarious balance" as a primary tool of theatrical ploys to catch and retain attention. (Photo by Ingemar Lindh; from Barba and Savarese 2011)

First let me say clearly that I am not suggesting that overt theatricality is new to protest—street theatre is, historically, almost synonymous with resistance, either carnivalesque or agitprop. Nor am I ignoring the fact that theatrical zombie makeup has been many times deployed in 20th-century popular visual culture to illustrate the addictive ills of consumerism. So I am not attempting to suggest that protests of late late capitalism within late late capitalism are any more or less theatrical than protests or revolutionary actions at any other times or within any other economic organizations; think of the robust theatricality that surrounded the October Revolution

in Russia, for example, when Vsevolod Meyerhold would try to provoke his *Masquerade* audience at the Imperial Mariinsky to join the Bolshevik cause and spearhead a "theatre of the entire world" (Clark 1995:85). Indeed across the struggles for and against capitalism, 20th-century artist-activists often approached resistance as a labor of theatrical action, and theatre as a vehicle of revolution. So the presence of overt theatricality in the Occupy movement is almost completely predictable—just as theatricality is predictable, and volubly present, in current Tea Party protests in which advocates of extreme-wealth-for-the-very-few dress up together to party like it's 1773 in powdered wigs, gartered stockings, frilly blouses, and silver-buckled shoes.

So, my question is simply this: If theatricality has long been a part of protest, aimed at provoking collectivity and enlivening active participation, and if indeed the liveness of the action is part of the power of appearance in the public sphere, then why does Occupy choose to appear as so jubilantly "as if" dead? Is there something more we can say about this deadness that might tell us something about our lives in capitalism, as well as tell us something about theatre?

A Slow Walk to the Live Theatre

I've proposed a trip to the theatre itself as a mode of inquiry into the relationship between theatre and deadness, and capitalism and deadness. I turn to the theatre to think about the living dead in order to discuss negotiations between liveness and deadness as relations—*capital relations*—that reside at a certain classical heart of capitalist approaches to labor. I suspect that theatre's long reliance upon "immaterial labor"⁵—its workers' capacities to make something out

5. In "Precarity Talk," the roundtable edited by Jasbir Puar in this issue, Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović take issue with the equation of the theatrical production of affect with the rubric "immaterial labor." They underscore the materiality—the bodies—involved in the production and circulation of performance, affect, and relationality and point out that those bodies, making the work, are not immaterial. The commodity that is their labor is composed in the material of their laboring bodies, etc. (see Puar 2012). Their point is well taken, and perhaps a better phrase should be found to distinguish the production of object commodities from the production of affective relations that do not result in objects separable from bodies. In the absence of a better phrase, however, for the moment I will remain with "immaterial."

of nothing materially present—might allow us to better understand those relations in contemporary capitalism’s “language economy” that binds capital to the production and circulation of affect (Marazzi 2011).⁶

Ultimately I will discuss a particular moment—a slight pause—taken by a live actor in a particular theatre on the particular evening of 29 January 2011, when I first began to think about late late capitalism’s double sense of late in particular relation to a stage. Might late late capitalism contain both the sense of a time lag—to be late as in not on time—as well as the other sense of late, as in, to be dead? To be a *late* late capitalist? How out of time, how dead, how *late* do we have to get to provoke real and sustained change? Can waiting (*occupying* ourselves in a kind of meantime or prolonged interval...late...later...) be a strategy of resistance, or is it part of the problem itself?

Let’s go to the theatre. It is 29 January 2011. But as we won’t arrive on time, let us take our time and, on our way, walk together through a couple of points about capitalism. First a point of nomenclature: Late late capitalism is otherwise known as neoliberalism. To quote Marshall Sahlins from *Waiting for Foucault, Still*: “Whatever happened to ‘Late Capitalism’? It became neoliberalism” (2002:59). Sherry Ortner cites Sahlins in “On Neoliberalism” to add: “there is no hard-and-fast distinction between late capitalism and neoliberalism, and in many ways neoliberalism is simply late capitalism made conscious, carried to extremes, and having more visible effects” (2011). Of course, if we play with the multiple meanings of “late,” and substitute “dead” for “late” in Ortner’s sentence, then neoliberalism sounds like Chris Harman’s phrase in his book by the same name: “zombie capitalism” (2010). Naomi Klein terms late late capitalism “disaster capitalism” in order to underscore the many actual dead across the globe who have perished in the violent path of so-called development (2008).

Maurizio Lazzarato writes of the burgeoning of immaterial labor in late late capitalism and argues that immaterial labor is key in the reproduction (through consumption) of “the capital relation” by which capital gets to buy labor, and labor puts itself up for sale. Immaterial labor produces, and through consumption reproduces, a flesh-based architecture, a human *mise-en-scène* of affective social relations that support the *social* habitus through which “the capital relation” is naturalized:

Immaterial labor finds itself at the crossroads (or rather, it is the interface) of a new relationship between production and consumption. [...] The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor (its essential use value being given by its value [...] as cultural content) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the “ideological” and cultural environment of the consumer. [...] Immaterial labor produces first and foremost a “social relationship” [...] This activity makes immediately apparent something that material production had “hidden,” namely, that labor produces not only commodities, but first and foremost it produces the capital relation. (1996:138)

In an experience- or event-based economy, that is, one dependent upon producing and circulating affective relations, any actions that keep the social factory functioning we might do well to call theatre. Theatre is after all a passage-machine, circulating affect from producers and laborers (theatrical producers, directors, actors) to consumers (spectators) who, in turn, produce affective responses of their own. This is a circulating exchange of affect in which producers and consumers exchange places in an ongoing manufacture of “the live” (sometimes today called “creativity” or “event” when not directly labeled theatre, as it was by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore in their influential 1999 book, *The Experience Economy: Why Work Is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*). Note that these theatrical “capital relations”—relations circulated through

6. Monikers for neoliberal post-Fordism and its immaterial engagements abound: “language economy,” “affect economy,” “event-based,” “time-based,” “experience economy,” and “innovation economy” are among them.

the “interface” or semisimultaneous production and consumption of immaterial affect—may still replicate commodity capitalism’s approach to the live and the dead as, surprisingly, states of labor.

Let me explain. Recall that for Marx, dead capital is capital that is not in immediate use, such as the machinery of a factory in off-hours or a theatre on Monday night. Capital that is not immediately engaged with living labor, or otherwise revested by circulation through the live, is dead capital. Dead capital constantly depreciates. The benefit live laborers bestow saves the capitalist’s capital from decline. Living labor brings dead capital (back) to life, recirculates value through the “dead” by means of a liveness understood as labor. In this way, capitalism is a circulation machine that depends upon crossing a border from live-labor-in-time, pause, to dead capital, pause, to the reinvestment of dead capital through live labor in time. This circulation machine animates dead capital with live labor in and through the production and consumption of the *dead labored live*.

Also recall that for Marx, capital, once produced by live labor, can also be called congealed or dead labor:

Capital is dead labour, that vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him. ([1867] 2011:257)

Marx positions dead or congealed labor as parasitic on living labor as it is living labor alone that generates value. No matter how much dead labor capital acquires (as material wealth, means of production, etc.), accumulation will never satisfy, because what preserves value is the ongoing extraction of the labor of the live.

Might we say that dead labor is not only the theatre machinery on a dark night, but the actor herself when not actively laboring (in her case, producing affect as commodity)? For labor is first and foremost a matter of time—“socially necessary [...] labour time”—a time that takes place across the living worker as her expended living labor (46). Because Marx makes clear that the laborer offers her labor power as a commodity (186–87), even as that labor generates further commodities, labor-power-as-commodity would be—like any commodity—congealed or dead when not circulating or otherwise at work.

It is almost humorous to think of commodities as congealed quantities of “homogenous human labor” (46) and then to think of the laborer, who offers “his living self” as a commodity (187), as a “living self” that is congealed or dead when not productively employed in generating capital for the capitalist. In this schema, commodities and laborers alike become like little packets of isolated temporal duration, frozen liveness, congealed as potential, posed as *tableaux vivant*—the packaged duration of the live labor of the laborer. Reanimation is then another word for work, or for exchange. Reanimation is what resists ruin or decay—otherwise known as the depreciation of capital. For remember that capital rots with distance from liveness, or distance from *labor considered to take place as time*. It may be, in fact, that another descriptor of capitalism in all its latenesses may be “live arts.”

One of my larger questions here is whether theatrical acts and objects, that is, temporal media based in the time lag, challenge capitalism’s relationship to time or underscore it. We usually think of monetized capitalist time as secular, linear time—invested in forward driven productivity and development (see Chakrabarty 2000; Jackobsen and Pellegrini 2008). Theatre, on the other hand, is famous for backward time—the temporal lag—the “syncopated time” referred to by Gertrude Stein (see Schneider 2011:31). We are somewhat accustomed to assuming that theatre’s overt temporal drag might challenge capitalism’s forward marching time—and we can here think about how most of Brecht’s techniques are composed of manipulations of time: interruption, the turn-around pause of the not/but, and the backward drive of

historicization. But the time lag (which I would argue is inherent in theatricality and manipulated rather than invented by Brecht) is not necessarily, in and of itself, critical of “capital relations.” For the time lag is essentially built into capitalism, even if built in as capitalism’s own drag, its own Achilles heel.

How is the lag built into capitalism as its own potential demise? As Harman writes, all commodities (and remember that labor is a commodity) are signatories of lag time. “Production requires a certain lapse of time” between laborer, producer, and consumer, he writes, and that dead time is the site of depreciation and miscalculation leading to over-accumulation, leading to crisis (2007:42–43). In time and of time, capitalism is always undergoing “continual transformation” as any price structure is immediately disrupted and there can be no equilibrium in which value remains constant. The time-lapse between the creation of a commodity and its exchange, is exactly where crisis in the system occurs, as value can have shifted dramatically in the balance. Marx’s term for the crisis-ridden temporal pause is “interval.” But this interval is also necessary to the system itself, which depends upon the time lapse as a mode of circulation, as the machinery of exchange. As Marx wrote in *Capital*, “If the interval in time between the two complementary phases of the complete metamorphosis of a commodity become too great, if the split between the sale and the purchase become too pronounced, the intimate connection between them, their oneness, asserts itself by producing—a crisis” ([1867] 2011:128).

There is a further complication of the interval in exchange. Recall that any product is born immediately as congealed labor. It enters the interval between production and consumption as dead—immediately late—out of joint. Any product is already anachronistic, dead labor, tableau vivant in need of reanimation by its purchase and subsequent further exchange if it is to resist remaining in a state of decay, depreciating as dead capital. The time lag, or interval, inherent in the production of a commodity (whether object or affect) is at once necessary to capitalism, and is also its potential downfall in the form of a small crisis of pause that over time can accumulate to disaster.

As already mentioned, theatricality comes out in force when capitalism is under attack, as in the myriad masks of Occupy Wall Street. And though mimetic acts are common in many protest actions, perhaps there is a particular way in which theatricality can underscore capitalism’s fault lines and vulnerabilities. Do particularly theatricalized live acts playing dead rather perfectly describe capitalism’s own inbuilt relations on the precarious borders of what counts as live and what counts as dead, where some suck the life out of others, and where live labor, “dead labor,” and the machinery of reanimation continually circulate in a drama of parasitism?

At the Theatre, Live

Here we are, having walked to the theatre! We’ve arrived late. We are ushered into the auditorium after watching the first act on a TV screen in the lobby. We take our seats. It is Saturday night, 29 January 2011. At the front edge of the stage is an actor playing a banker. “I am dead,” says John Gabriel Borkman, otherwise known as Alan Rickman. We are at BAM’s Harvey Theater, where Rickman looks out to squarely face the sold-out house of 1,000 spectators. Behind the actor, stage left and stage right and along the back wall, large mounds of snow and ice are melting, leaving puddles of water on the floor that slowly seep into the 19th-century drawing room set. The long skirts of Ibsen’s women have, for over an hour now, dragged lengthy wet swaths across the stage floor. The soggy skirt-prints in the parlor are mesmerizing. They erase any footprints that might have left their mark, and, drawing attention to the melt, they work to underscore the instability in any effort to separate an outside from an inside, a freeze from a thaw, a then from a now, or an imprint from its erasure.

Reminder: we are at the theatre. The ice is fake—neither really melting nor really wet, and the snow that blows in billows is no snow at all. “I am dead,” says Rickman with authority, as he plays as the ruined capitalist, Borkman, live. Meanwhile, the walls of the theatre appear



Figure 3. Alan Rickman, Lindsay Duncan, and Fiona Shaw in Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, directed by James Macdonald, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, January 2011. (Photo by Richard Termine)

to be crumbling around us in seeming ruin. But as everyone knows, the walls are not crumbling at all. BAM's Harvey is preserved as if crumbling, reconstructed—much like *John Gabriel Borkman*—as an arrested portrait of decay in motion. Rickman told the *Village Voice* that “To me, *John Gabriel Borkman* isn’t an old play—it’s brand new and of the moment” (in Soloski 2011). Ruin is apparently conducive to the twin appearance of “the brand new” and the insistently classical as decay furnishes the sensation that we are, already, the future. The future, that is, in ruins. The future: the late, late past.

Time lag is theatre’s stock in trade. Sometimes referred to as its hauntedness, theatrical time drags across the stage as somewhere and sometime is played, again, somewhere else, sometime else. Theatre is elsewhere-here and elsetime-now. And it’s often the dead, live, who seem to strut and fret again in and through our insistent reanimations. Banker Borkman’s declaration “I am dead” may be brand-new-1896 in 2011, but the words are only as true as they are false. Rickman is not the “late” John Gabriel Borkman. We see him blinking and sweating and being Alan Rickman earning his paycheck by acting his part of the living “dead” banker. Before Rickman said these words, “I am dead,” he, as Borkman, took a slight pause. The full phrase had been “It seems as if...I am dead.” The pause, held just so, between “seems as if” and “I am dead” was just long enough. Almost but not quite *too* long, it theatrically tore a hole in the screen of then and now, small enough to cause only a slight crisis in the armature of illusion—large enough to touch depreciation.

“It seems as if...,” the banker says.

Pause.

The *actor* now pauses and looks at the audience.

“I am dead.”

He holds the dead moment for an interval, but only just. Slowly but surely, and avoiding a crisis that could bring down the whole system of make belief, the actor turns back to face the

scene just behind him.⁷ Reanimating the dead banker once more, the play continues to unfold until, eventually, tired and happy, we all clap our hands, don our coats, and head back out into the cold.

Live theatre. Live theatre has long imagined itself to be dead. Cinema was said to have killed it again, after a precedent slaying by photography. Its modern visionaries of note — Zola, Stanislavsky, Artaud — constantly desecrated the habit of theatre's *own* conventions to strangle it from within. Theatre, it appears, has long been its own voracious parasite and the source of its own perpetual ruin. Any artwork that traffics in theatre or the theatrical (which is not the same as performance or the performative) can be ruined by that traffic, or (worse by some accounts) can be traffic in ruin. We can track a persistent investment in theatre's ruin value (another way, perhaps, of saying antitheatricity) running through visual art history as well. It's the decay we love to hate. The decay that just won't quit. A decay — the theatrical — tinged always with the feminine, the queer, the undead.

And theatre has long capitalized on the romance of its carcass-like curvature — appearing always only *as if* dead. As Herbert Blau so elegantly put it:

Whatever the style, hieratic or realistic, texted or untexted — box it, mask it, deconstruct it as you will — the theatre disappears under any circumstances; but with all the ubiquity of the adhesive dead, from Antigone's brother to Strindberg's mummy to the burgeoning corpse of Ionesco's *Amedée*, it's there when we look again. (1982:137)

That is, theatre, like its god, dies and refuses to die at once — the “adhesive dead” are “there when we look again.”

What is the truth claim in theatre's constant threat to decline into the very ruin it also sells itself as being? Why does it *labor* to bring ruin to liveness night after night as the dead played live? If it is indeed consistently threatened by other media, perhaps it never dies because you can't kill the already dead. That is, there may be a certain living ruin value in theatre. Perhaps we depend on theatre to circulate liveness/deadness as a kind of social relation, to illustrate, even pronounce depreciation as an “other” to the operations of accumulation supposedly taking place in the economy at large.

Another way to ask the question would be as follows: Is theatre's circulation of living ruin a reanimation of “dead capital” in some way that promotes the machinery of the entire operation?

Perhaps today's slow-moving carcass of theatre is actually the affect economy's shadow self, its dead (s)kin. Its outmodedness and liveness are actually essential (it is brand-new 1896). It circulates depreciation like a hole in the screen, or an eyehole in a mask, and feeds the affect factory just enough to promote reanimation. In this, the theatre induces what Stephen Greenblatt has called (in relation to the dead, to theatre, and to the market): “the circulation of social energy” (1988) — a circulation vital to exchange.

It is the regulation of the means to social energy that seems, then, to be in question. As Butler, cited at the opening of this essay, notes, “The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and [...] what will not.” Theatrical acts and the energy of reanimation they contain and hold in the intervals — at the precarious border between stage and house, life and death, public and private — can be amplified by the human microphone of a multitude and perhaps this time refuse to turn back into the banker's usual play at hand. Played through the mouths of OWS zombies, Borkman's “It seems as if...I am dead” might be a cry that places an

7. Richard Schechner makes a distinction between make belief and make believe (2002:35). However, speculating in financial capital requires that make belief and make believe be brought into precarious proximity. Melissa Cooper has argued that the “operative emotions” under neoliberalism have ceased to be either “rational interest [or] rational expectations” but have become “the essentially speculative but nonetheless productive movements of collective belief, faith, and apprehension” (2008:10).



Figure 4. In a 3 October 2011 demonstration, Occupy Wall Street protesters representing the 99% bloodied themselves, munched on Monopoly money, and marched on Wall Street as zombies. (Photo by David Shankbone)

emphasis on seeming rather than being—for to *seem as if* dead is not to be dead, and the *seeming* impossibility of OWS's demands become their living potentiality. To act as living dead ricochets relations among zombies on the move *between* the states of living labor and dead labor—that is, they purposefully stand precisely in and as the interval of crisis that Marx identified, in order to make that very precarity *count*.

Here it may be worth citing Stephen Greenblatt at greater length. In his chapter “The Circulation of Social Energy” Greenblatt argues that mimesis is always already a matter of exchange not conditioned by private property. I read him to suggest that mimesis, while enabling the energy of exchange precisely in and through the interval, is always potentially in resistance to one of the primary aspects of capital relations—the condition of private ownership. His concluding paragraph might describe a kind of becoming zombie, as he essentially positions himself as living dead:

I had dreamed of speaking with the dead, and even now I do not abandon this dream. But the mistake was to imagine that I would hear a *single* voice, the voice of the other. If I wanted to hear one, I had to hear the many voices of the dead. And if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice. The speech of the dead, like my own speech, *is not private property*. (1988:20; emphasis added)

Leaving the Theatre, Walking the Street

Now, at the close of this essay, I cannot gracefully suture the interval between actor/banker Rickman/Borkman dead-panning “I am dead” in January of 2011 in the comfort of the theatre and the zombie protests of OWS later that same year. I have presented a negotiated space between live labor and dead labor as a space arguably both basic to theatre, and constitutive

of capital relations. But theatre “proper,” in the faux rotting interior of BAM’s Harvey, is not exactly Zuccotti Park, where protesters walked as living dead in an attempt, dangerous at times, to reflect that deadness back onto bankers.

Perhaps Mayor Michael Bloomberg should reread his Euripides. A careful, slow reread of *The Bacchae* might encourage him in the ways of Cadmus and Tiresias. He might, then, buy up stock in white pancake, monopoly money, and fake blood. Instead, more in the mode of Pentheus, in November of 2011 Bloomberg declared that the OWS protesters present a health hazard. This hazard was his stated reason for mobilizing the police to evict them on the night of 15 November.

Apparently, the hazard was that they were *living* in the park. Living, apparently, is hazardous to health!

The health of whom, we must ask.

Or what?

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