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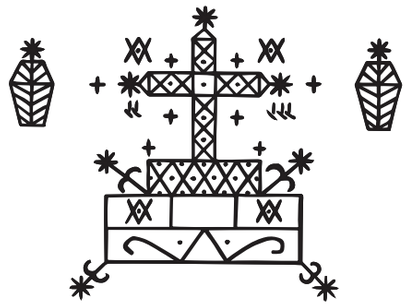
UNDEAD UPRISING

HAITI, HORROR AND THE ZOMBIE COMPLEX



JOHN CUSSANS

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PREFACE

THE ZOMBIE COMPLEX

> The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it.
>
> — G. W. F. Hegel[1]

In its passage from myth-figure to metaphor the zombie has come to perform a vast range of allegorical functions, its meanings as diverse as a displaced person eking out a precarious existence at the bio-political limits of late capitalist society or the unfeeling advocates of free-market fundamentalism who oversee it. The zombie apocalypse has been used as a metaphor for climate change advocacy, its denial, and as a blueprint for national disaster preparedness. In contemporary journalism zombie-the-adjective is attached to objects as diverse as banks, businesses, computer programmes, sociological categories and tweets. As a myth-figure the zombie has been used to reflect upon the destiny of souls and the meaning of the body after death, to denigrate African religious and cultural presence in the Americas, as a covert theme within neo-colonial propaganda and as a representation of collective guilt and trauma about the colonial slavery system. As a popular sociological allegory it has represented the effects of industrialisation and mass media on modern societies, the psychology of contemporary

1 Hegel (1952) 3

consumerism and changes in global labour practices. And as a philosophical thought-figure it has helped think the construction and critique of the category of the human, the nature of consciousness and sentience, the existence of the soul, distinctions between the living and the dead and material and immaterial modes of existence. But in whatever form they are imagined or whatever masters they are made to serve, zombies rarely speak for or about *themselves*. They are, in almost every case, dumb and mortally compromised *agents-without-autonomy*. In this sense zombies share the historical fate of the dead described by Stephan Palmié in *Wizards and Scientists*:

> They are denizens of a world that no longer exists, and, even though we may concede that our world reverberates with the consequences – intended or not – of the actions that the dead once took, the choice whether we want to see matters this way must remain ours. Paraphrasing Marx, one might say that, given this particular structuring of the past in the Western historical imagination, the dead have to be represented because they can no longer represent themselves.[2]

The zombie-figure, beginning its popular *un*life as a ghastly allegory for the horrors of colonial slavery and the potential of humans to be reduced, by sorcery and commerce, to soul-less, living-dead cadavers in the 1920s, has developed into the most ubiquitous figure for the end of humanity as we know it at the end of history. In the process the figure has evolved two very distinct behavioural characteristics: one entirely passive, docile and manipulable, governed by the will of a sinister external agent, the other utterly ungovernable, massively insurrectionary and driven only by a relentless need to feed. The extreme behavioural ambivalence of the modern zombie figure, at times entirely subordinate to an external authority, at others totally devoid of any human restraint, can be traced back to representations of the insurrectionary African slave armies of Saint-Domingue, who began a revolutionary war against slavery in 1791. It was widely believed at the time that these armies were in thrall to a diabolical

2 Palmié (2002) 5

serpent cult called Vaudoux, whose priests they were entirely devoted to and under whose influence they would commit acts of the utmost barbarity. In 1804 the victorious military leader of these slave armies - Jean-Jacques Dessalines - founded the Republic of Haiti, the first slave-free nation in the world, and the birthplace of the modern *zombi*, a figure whose mystical roots lie in the displaced African religion secretly forged by slaves under the execrable conditions of the colonial, plantation economy.

The multiple and often contradictory metaphorical meanings associated with the figure, and its ubiquity and resilience in contemporary popular culture, are the chief components of what I refer to here as The Zombie Complex. It is a nod in the general direction of Carl Jung's formulation of psychological complexes: a core pattern of emotions, fantasies, fears and ideas *clustered around a central motif*. Unlike Jung I am not interested in the notion of personal or individual complexes but in more broadly cultural and social ones. The idea is more directly indebted to Stephan Palmié's formulation of an Afro-Cuban *nganga* Complex, a concept modelled upon the ritual cauldrons of the Afro-Cuban *Palo Monte* tradition in which spirits of the dead are housed. Within this religion a man-made artefact (the *nganga*) takes on characteristics of a living *being*, one which must be continually fed to prevent it running out of control and killing its master, maker or owner. This magical giving of predatory sentience to an inanimate thing is imagined by Palmié as a kind of allegorical reversal of the processes by which a human being was made into a mere tool within the slavery system. As such the *nganga* "dissolves the distinction between objects and persons" while at the same time speaking of the violent history of "dehumanization under slave-labor-driven forms of plantation-production":

> Thinking with *ngangas* (or *zonbis*, for that matter) allows us access to an analytic dimension that radically exposes, rather than merely metaphorises, a dimension of the now globalised moral dis-order that first emerged, in stunningly drastic form, on those New World production sites where a novel regime of value made it possible to productively merge depersonalised humans with machines, treat their bodies as sheer sources of

> extractable value, and terminate their lives solely in regards to considerations of utility.[3]

The Zombie Complex then refers to a range of ethical, psychological and political thought-problems clustered around the central figure of the living-corpse which, though ostensibly fictional, stubbornly reminds us of the horribly actual limits (or lack of limits) of humanity, the individual and the human. Ultimately at stake in the Zombie Complex are a series of questions about consciousness, violence, morality and economics, and a dialectic of remembering and forgetting, awareness and oblivion about the *un-being*'s historical origins and the conditions which have accelerated and propagated its spectacular ubiquity at the dawn of a new millennium. In this sense the zombies that concern *Undead Uprising* are all, in one form or another, *zombies of historical consciousness*.

In order to untangle the diverse range of things and meanings the term zombie has been applied to, and to temporarily suspend its collapse into the semantic abyss of endlessly proliferating metaphoricity, I have traced the figure's path from its ancestral roots in Haitian folklore, its migration into Western popular culture, its transformation into a literary, cinematic and popular allegory for a range of social ills, to its becoming a generalised figure of speech in popular parlance for anything that refuses to die properly. In the process I ask what useful correlations might be drawn between contemporary metaphorical uses of the zombie figure and its folkloric and possessed revolutionary ancestors, and what this might tell us about the way Haiti has been imagined since the revolution that brought it into existence. As I trace the zombie's mindless path through Anglo-American popular culture, I make readings of some of the best known literary and cinematic examples of Voodoo-horror, asking how their chimerical optics have distorted the realities of Haiti and how the magic of cinema and media spectacle raise questions for consciousness, autonomy and agency in their historical, political and individualistic modes. I also question the ways in which Voodoo-horror can be seen in reverse as it were, as a kind of modern magic, used on its users to keep the historical and political realities of Haiti obscured and occulted. Although the

3 Palmié (2006) 877

zombie plays a leading role in *Undead Uprising* it is only one of several themes through which Haiti has been viewed from the outside in overtly *diabolical* terms: demonic possession, cannibalism, human sacrifice and insurrectionary barbarism form an essential cluster of Black practices imagined to be at the dark heart of "chimerical" Haiti. As such they are the central themes in the "horror" of the book's title. All the examples of Voodoo-horror discussed here are subsequently contextualised in terms of the political realities of Haiti at the time of their dissemination elsewhere.

I am aware that bringing the Haitian folkloric *zombi* into critical proximity with its flesh-eating, apocalyptic and philosophical cousins might well be taken as an example of what Donald Cosentino and others have called Vodou Chic, something scholars within the Haitian Studies community look upon disdainfully. Their disapproval is understandable given the historical role of sensationalistic and distorted representations of Vodou and the popularly associated *zombi* figure in hostile, foreign propaganda. I have tried to avoid making any unsupported claims or inferences about an assumed authentic Haiti beyond the distortions of Voodoo-horror or about the practices of actual Haitian Vodou. This is not to deny the reality of either. It is rather to insist that undead uprisings happen primarily in the realm of fiction and myth and that, because my focus has been on representations of Voodoo-horror and zombies which have had wide and popular circulation in the English-speaking world, the Haiti of which I write is, first and foremost, the mist-enveloped one they point to with osseous fingers.

In his book *Haiti: State Against Nation* the historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot wasted no time dismissing reductive explanations for the peculiarities of Haitian political life to what he called "the myth of Haitian exceptionalism" (the idea that there is something fundamentally irrational about the Haitian mind that makes a reasoned analysis of its political history impossible). I agree wholeheartedly with Trouillot's criticism. Both the *zombi*-myth and the cult of Vodou have been dominant themes in the perpetuation of the idea of Haiti's irreducible particularity and as such they have been used to render its place in modern, global history unthinkable. But it is precisely at the intersection of the general unthinkability of horror and the particular

unthinkability of Haiti's role in modern, universal history that the thinking of *Undead Uprising* operates. In order to bring a serious account of Haiti into the analysis of the sensationalist tropes discussed here I have re-situated them in relation to contemporaneous accounts of the political and social realities of Haiti at the time that Voodoo-horror was entertaining audiences elsewhere. In other words I have attempted to look through the refracted image of a diabolical Haiti to the real Haiti that ostensibly lies beyond them. To do so I make reference to a history of the politics of Haiti drawn from a range of scholarly works. It is important to emphasise however that I am an armchair historian and my personal experience of Haiti is far too limited to draw upon in any empirical way. As such the real Haiti beyond the sensational distortions is still an imaginary one, the product of a different kind of discourse, more academic, trustworthy and respectable no doubt, but no less immaterial for that.

THESE PEOPLE, THOSE THINGS

So what can the zombie swarms that lay spectacular waste to human civilisation in films like *World War Z* possibly tell us about the representation of Haitian history and culture? Surely even proposing a correlation is to perpetuate the profoundly prejudicial vision that has viewed Haiti as a place of savage barbarism and unthinkable horror for two centuries? Yes, of course the contemporary zombie figure has its cultural roots in Haitian folklore, but today's zombies have nothing to do with that history. To propose as much will only perpetuate the racist and xenophobic stereotypes that have distorted western perceptions of the country since colonial times, undermining its struggle for international legitimacy, political recognition and independent self-governance ever since. And I agree, very much so. But still I think the task may prove valuable for our understandings of the real and historical Haiti as well as offering new ways of tackling and countering the mediums of misrepresentation it has been subject to. There is no doubt that zombies and other broadly Vodou tropes in modern and contemporary horror films have been detrimental to Haiti's image to the outside world and have at times coincided directly with international foreign policy towards the country. By entering more deeply into their

chimerical optics, exposing and analysing their narratives and effects, correcting, replacing or détourning if necessary, and comparing the images that horrify us with those from other, less sensational or emotive representations, I believe we might eventually arrive at a more realistic, sober and politically pragmatic view of the country (and our views of it) without altogether negating the intoxicating powers of horror that make the films, novels and travelogues I write about here so alluring and grimly affecting.

With this in mind there are three relatively distinct ways in which a film like *World War Z,* a popular example of the contemporary zombie genre from 2013 (based on Max Brooks's best selling novel of the same name), could be read in relation to Haiti. The first is the simplest: a history of the zombie trope. From this perspective we could trace a history of the figure from its roots in Haitian folklore, through the major phases of its figurative and metaphorical transformation, pointing out the most important shifts in this evolution from which the constitutive features and meanings associated with each particular version emerge. Zack, the personal name Max Brooks gave the mass-being of the zombie apocalypse in the original novel, for instance, is clearly an apocalyptic cannibal-type zombie, which began its cinematic *un*-life in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968. Insurrectionary, predatory and insatiable, this new form of zombie brought its folkloric and classic cinematic ancestors to the brink of spectacular extinction. We could reflect upon the meanings of this flesh-eating transformation, why it became such a popular trope in the latter half of the 20th century (and even more so at the turn of the new millennium), the sudden increase in the speed and appetite of zombies, the central theme of a zombie plague in these narratives and their circumstantial and metaphorical meanings for representations of contemporary and historical Haiti. But again, it could reasonably be argued that the flesh-eating zombie marks such a radical species break in the zombie-continuum that any reference back to Haiti is now even more unwarranted than it already was. In response we might cite Phillip Mahoney who has argued that prescient fears about contagious mass-zombie uprisings in contemporary horror films were expressed by crowd psychologists of the late 19th century, who advanced explicitly racial and clinical

theories of susceptibility to violent, insurrectionary and collective behaviour in ways that echo those of the colonial authorities of 18th century Saint-Domingue shortly after the Haitian Revolution. Still a stretch? OK. Let's try another angle.[4]

The second approach we might call "theoretical". It examines the scholarship on particular Haiti-related horror tropes and films, the theoretical concepts and analytical tools it uses, asking how these might help us to understand and interpret the broader cultural politics of representation within which Haiti has been framed.[5] Gerry Canavan for instance, drawing on a range of social theorists and political philosophers (notably Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe), has proposed that incarnations of the zombie figure in popular culture constitute "a hyperbolic re-enactment of the imaginary racial demarcation into life and anti-life that is crucial to the construction of the contemporary biopolitical state".[6]

> Although not every modern state reaches a final moment of unbounded extermination – most staying instead within regimens of legal and customary segregation, ideological norms, imprisonment and unjust practices of labour exploitation – we nonetheless find the terrible exterminative potential of biopolitical logic lying in wait for us in all temporal directions: such terrors as colonialism, imperial warfare and the Holocaust in the past; the militarised American inner city, post-invasion Iraq and Afghanistan, genocides in Rwanda and the Sudan, post-earthquake Haiti, post-Katrina New Orleans and any number of similar horrors in the present; and

4 Philip Mahoney 'Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Zombie: From Suggestion to Contagion' in Boluk and Lenz.

5 See Boluk and Lenz *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* (2011), Bishop *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (2010) and Christie and Lauro *Better off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (2010).

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> finally the fantasy of social breakdown that dominates the contemporary imagination of the future, the zombie apocalypse.[7]

From this perspective the apocalyptic flesh-eating zombie represents a kind of zero-degree race figure, the ultimate expression of the *race-which-is-not-one*, an undivided and literally *in*human race that must be eradicated before it contaminates and annihilates the very foundation of the body-politic (i.e. us living humans). As such it clearly has characteristics in common with the depiction of the revolting slaves of Saint-Domingue, who, within the dominant reasoning of 18th century European race theory, were hereditarily predisposed to subhuman savagery and consequently, to reasoned, colonial domination. With this in mind one could point to the ethnic and cultural characteristics of *World War Z*'s hero-figure Gerry Lane, an Anglo-American, former UN investigator, and friendly, loyal, caring, Caucasian father-figure, played by Brad Pitt. Known outside his film roles for humanitarian work against poverty and AIDS in the developing world, and for his support of embryonic stem-cell research, his character's entire nuclear family, including their zombie-orphaned, newly-adopted, Latino son manage to survive the global apocalypse completely intact. "If you want to help your family," the Army General in charge of the military response to the epidemic tells him early in the film, "you better help us stop this thing". Having survived the fall of fortress Jerusalem and an airplane crash in which all the passengers except himself and a newfound female compatriot from the Israel Defence Force die, Lane makes his way to the World Health Organisation Research Facility in Wales. When asked by the scientists why he had come there and what he needs from them, Lane tells them bluntly "Your worst disease". The camera cuts to a close-up of a leering, Black, dreadlocked zombie, bashing its grimacing face against the glass wall of the lab. "You want a what?" a doctor asks. "A deadly pathogen. With a high mortality rate. But curable," he explains. The doctors tell him that he would need a bacteria not a virus. But that has been tried before and failed. Zombies don't have circulatory systems. "You can't make a dead person sick". "I believe these things have a weakness," Lane responds. Cut to full-

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screen shot of the zombie-doctor looking suddenly scared. “And this weakness *is* weakness. It’s *our* weakness”. Cut back to a close-up of the leering zombie snarling against the glass.

Scenes such as these suggest that barely-concealed racial meanings are still embedded in contemporary zombie narratives, even if the figure has been ostensibly deracinated since 1968. But again one could argue that drawing inferences about Haiti from such an optic simply repeats accusations, made since the beginning of the 20th century, that western representations of Haiti in popular fiction often have covert (and at times overtly) racist implications. So what’s new? The contemporary paradox of the zombie, as many commentators have noted, has to do with their being just like us but not us at all. And although this difference is absolute and universal for all humans within apocalyptic zombie narratives (i.e. it is technically “anthropological” rather than “ethnological”) the residual traces of racial and cultural differences are clearly inferred within them. But to reduce the politics of Haiti to those of race and its representation is not only to grossly simplify Haitian culture, history and society but also to perpetuate racist myths about Haiti that have been used to denigrate the Republic since its independence in 1804. Once again, we are in agreement.

Shortly after the bifurcation of the zombie-continuum in 1968, the figure found its way into the philosophical field of Consciousness Studies when the so-called zombie problem was introduced to debates about the nature of consciousness. The general schema of the problem, first outlined by Robert Kirk in an article for the journal *Mind* in 1974, was the conceivability of a being that looked and acted exactly like a human being but lacked sentience (i.e. reportable conscious awareness of its own sensations and reactions). Although zombie was perhaps not the most appropriate name for this hypothetically insentient being, as with Romero’s flesh-eating ghouls, the living-corpse moniker stuck, perhaps because of something stubbornly abject at the core of the “difference that makes a difference”. The general form of the zombie problem can be traced back to philosophical debates between materialists and idealists in the 18th century, a period in which moral justifications for slavery were bound up with an emergent philosophy of the enlightened, autonomous, self-conscious human being, distinguished by higher, universal and progressive purposes

from the mere brute, automaton or machine. Following this line of reasoning one can draw a critical-theoretic arc that connects beings like Zack to the *thing-like* status of slaves in the colonial plantation system.[8] The Haitian Revolution coincides with one of the most influential statements in the philosophy of human self-consciousness and difference, Hegel’s ‘Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage’ in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Despite being concerned explicitly with how humans can be reduced to the status of mere things, and the struggle to the death they must engage in to win true freedom, Hegel chose not to mention the Haitian Revolution, which he would have been familiar with from reports in German newspapers at the time (as Susan Buck-Morss has convincingly shown).[9] Within Hegel’s philosophical schema the zombie coincides with the figure of the slave, a mere human thing, spiritually unenlightened and unable to achieve self-consciousness, political subjecthood or autonomy, who must wage a war of extermination in order to win its liberty.

Anthropological debates about what constitutes the properly human, forged in the historical milieu of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, still haunt the zombie figure in its spectacular slave-like, insurrectionary and actual modalities, all of which fundamentally challenge Enlightenment claims about the agency and autonomy of thinking, self-conscious and fully individuated human beings. From the perspective of a bio-politically inflected cultural theory then, historical and political meanings can be read off the flesh-eating zombie trope that have relevance for both contemporary and historical representations of Haiti and the revolutionary subjects who founded it, which have contributed to myths of Haitian exceptionalism ever since. The issue of zombic-difference, as articulated in contemporary culture and philosophical thought, might therefore hold up an uncanny historical mirror to the constructions of racial, cultural and human difference upon which these myths have been constructed since the colonial era. Furthermore, in the expanded media-sphere of contemporary, global mass culture, celebrity humanitarians like Brad Pitt, fighting world poverty one day and the zombie apocalypse the next, explicitly draw

8 See Markus and Žižek (2009), *Žižek* (2006)

9 Buck-Morss *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (2009) 21-65, 87-107

the real politics of post-disaster Haiti into the spectacular orbit of Hollywood blockbusters. Fictional zombie killer one day and actual human suffering eradicator the next, Pitt draws our attention to the more abstract and extended systems of meaning, knowledge and value production that are constituted by, and constitutive of, a spectacular global society in which Haiti has had a momentous but largely occluded role.

A final way to connect Haiti to *World War Z* is to compare it with contemporary pictures of Haiti like that represented by Raoul Peck's film *Assistance mortelle,* released the same year. Peck's documentary takes an inside view on the international and government effort to reconstruct Haiti after the earthquake of 2010, exposing the calamitous involvement of thousands of multinational aid agencies and their collective incapacity to respond in any practical or constructive way to the massive human catastrophe taking place there. Peck, a Haitian-born film-maker who served for a period as minister of culture for the first government of René Préval (1996-97), was able to gain (almost) unrestricted access to the international disaster relief operation, including the visits by Hollywood celebrity humanitarians like Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, George Clooney, Sean Penn and their patron saint Bill Clinton. The film exposes the debacle that ensued in the wake of a disaster that caused the deaths of as many as 300,000 people and in which billions of dollars of international aid money was almost entirely redirected back to the coffers of the donor nations.[10] Even though the

10 The estimated number of deaths has been a contested issue in the five years since the disaster. Several factors have contributed to this, not least the human scale of the catastrophe. They include the necessity to deal immediately with the tens of thousands of injured and homeless, the fact that many people buried their dead in informal graves and that many more uncounted bodies were dumped into local landfill sites. The official Haitian government figure in 2013 was 316,000 deaths. A U.S. government report, published one year after the disaster for USAID (the US Agency for International Development), put the figure between 46,000 and 85,000. According to the UN Haiti Humanitarian Action Plan of 2013 the number was estimated at 217,300. Claims were made at the time that the Haitian government was deliberately inflating the figure in order to receive more international aid, an accusation, as we will see, that was

Haitian government was largely excluded from the IHRC (Interim Haiti Recovery Commission), ostensibly because of corruption fears, most of the money still managed to evaporate before any concrete re-construction projects could be realised. Peck's conclusion is that foreign aid has done more harm than good in Haiti and that if well-meaning foreigners want Haiti to flourish they should stop supporting the NGOs and their disaster-amplifying involvement in the country. Although *World War Z* and *Fatal Assistance* are poles apart cinematically there are clear discernible threads, already suggested by cultural theorists like Canavan and the symbolic involvement of celebrity humanitarians like Pitt and Angelina Jolie, that have to do with global disaster response, the philosophical concepts of bio-power and bare life, and the international politics of humanitarianism, "celebrity" or otherwise.

Throughout *Undead Uprising* I use all three approaches, but not in a systematic or methodical way. I have relied primarily on textual sources – both written and visual – and the images, claims and argumentation contained within them. These have tended to fall broadly into four main areas: i) popular, sensationalist and documentary representations of Haiti, Vodou and zombies in literature, television and film, ii) scholarly critiques of said representations, iii) academic studies about the cultural significance of the zombie figure and iv) scholarly accounts of Haitian history and Vodou. Moving between four fields my thinking has taken on a broadly philosophical character responding to prompts from the contexts themselves. I have adopted a general structure that begins in 1929 with the publication of William S. Seabrook's notorious *The Magic Island*, the book that introduced the *zombi* and Haitian Vodou to popular international audiences, then, following a generally historical path, I discuss some the most popular and widely recognised depictions of Voodoo-horror from then to the present. In each chapter I situate these representations in the context of the actual politics of Haiti at the time of their making, asking what if any impact they may have had on foreign policy towards the country and how Haitian writers and politicians attempted to counter them. With each

probably a consequence of the enduring legacy of Duvalierism in Haiti, a regime that tactically exploited international aid under the pretext of being a bulwark against Communism in the Caribbean.

case study I focus on the nature of the Vodou knowledge upon which the particular representations were based, mapping their mythical, popular, cultural evolution. One exception to the general pattern is Chapter Three – 'The Romance of Revolutionary Vodou' – in which I discuss the ethnographic reclamation of Vodou by Haitian scholars in the 1920s and '30s, attempts to counter sensationalist accounts of the religion in Anglo-American popular culture, and the consequences of these for the emergent *Noiriste* politics of Duvalierism in the 1950s. Ultimately the aim of *Undead Uprising* is to explore how Voodoo horror and zombie films, staples of Anglo-American popular culture since the 1920s, have contributed to a fantastical, diabolically exotic, and racist optic on Haiti that has served the interests of foreign powers ever since the world changing events that began on the northern plains of Saint-Domingue in August 1791.

INTRODUCTION

DEMONS THROUGH THE ETHER

I was born at the height of the terror. Conspiracies were rife, invasions and popular uprisings, real or imagined, were swiftly and ruthlessly dealt with, as they had been since the election eight years ago. Crippled by chronic heart disease, diabetes, degenerative arthritis, its veins swollen with phlebitis, the stricken body of the president limped through the palace that had become his private prison. A student of Vodou since the 1920s, friend and confidant to many *houngans* (Vodou priests) and *mambos* (Vodou priestesses), François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, so named because of the esteem and admiration in which he was held by the thousands of poor Haitian peasants he had, as a dedicated country doctor, cured of yaws before his Machiavellian rise to power, was now a world famous Voodoo Dictator. His sunglasses-wearing private army of Tonton Macoute, named after the bogeyman of Haitian folklore who prowled the night looking for bad little boys and girls to put in his straw bag, had been given the power to enact summary justice against anyone who might conceivably pose a threat to the leader's absolute authority.

In the early days of his presidency the small, bespectacled and infirm, but always impeccably well-dressed Duvalier said that he wanted to kill three hundred people a year. His regime was now executing the same number every month, many reputedly dispatched by the president's own hand.[1] Those whom he did not kill himself he observed through

1 Most of the "facts" in this section are taken from Elizabeth Abbott's *Haiti: The Duvaliers and their Legacy* (1991). It should be noted that many

a peephole in the palace's private torture room, its walls painted rust-brown to camouflage the blood smeared over them. The palace even had a coffin-shaped iron maiden for particularly special cases. Never completely convinced that known conspirators were truly dead unless he was present himself, he demanded their heads be delivered to him at the palace. An estimated 3,000 prisoners were murdered at the Dungeon of Death, Fort Dimanche, a former U.S. military base that had become the main facility for incarcerating, torturing and killing political prisoners during his reign. Many prisoners were placed in *cachots*, coffin-like cells with no room to move, until they died. Those not beaten or tortured to death died of dysentery, tuberculosis or "having their blood sucked from them by scores of vermin", as one journalist at the time put it.

There were hundreds of other prisons in Duvalier's Haiti where torture was routine. Like their leader, many powerful Macoutes had private cells in their own homes. The bloated corpse of one murdered conspirator, Yvan Laraque, a member of the U.S.-based resistance group *Jeune Haiti*, who had launched an heroic but ill-fated invasion against the regime in 1964, was propped up for ten days in an armchair at a major intersection in the capital Port-au-Prince under a Coca-Cola sign saying Welcome to Haiti!

It was believed by some Haitians that shortly after becoming president Papa Doc had made a pilgrimage to the great cave of Trou Foban, known since the time of slavery as the dwelling place of notoriously powerful and evil spirits. The president, aided by a group of powerful *houngans*, had ceremonially invited the spirits to a new home in the presidential palace. Rumours had been circulating since a major heart attack in 1959 that the president had been taken over by the very demons he had made a pact with. They had eaten his soul, leaving only the living carcass behind. In short Papa Doc was now a *zombi*. To consolidate his image as a man dedicated to the spirit of death he donned the bowler hat, funeral coat, dark glasses, white gloves and distinct nasal tone of Baron Samedi, keeper of the cemeteries and master of the dead.

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of them are derived from private conversations and newspapers and that her sources are not cited in the book. As we will see, some of Abbott's claims depart markedly from objective journalistic reporting, especially when it comes to the purportedly darker practices of the Duvaliers.

When, finally, the Organisation of American States decided to act on reports about the widespread, systematic political repression and the hundreds of deaths in police custody, Duvalier announced to an apparently adoring nation: "Bullets and machine guns capable of daunting Duvalier do not exist. They cannot touch me... I am already an immaterial being". Should any Haitian schoolchild doubt that he was indeed a living incarnation of the historical founders of the Haitian nation, he penned his *Catechism of the Revolution* to be read out loud before classes:

> "Our Doc, who are in the National Palace, hallowed be thy name in the present and future generations. Thy will be done at Port-au-Prince as it is in the Provinces. Give us this day our new Haiti and never forgive the trespasses of the anti-patriots who spit every day on our country. Let them succumb to temptation, and under the weight of their venom, deliver them not from any evil".

None of these horrors I knew anything about until twenty years after the death of the Great Voodoo Dictator. Intimations of the terror of Haiti under his rule had however made circuitous inroads to our semi-detached family home in Acomb, on the outskirts of York (an historical city in the north of England) where, a decade later, my sister and I would enjoy regular Friday night Appointments with Fear, horror film double-bills emanating from the suddenly sinister television set in the corner of our otherwise safe and cozy living room. Our first encounter with the dark powers of Voodoo-horror came through *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*, a portmanteau film, made in 1965, that tells the stories of five men brought together by chance on an outbound commuter train from London to the suburbs. Through the mysterious power of his tarot deck the sinister Dr. Schreck reveals to each of his fellow passengers their terrible fates. The third to have his story read is Biff Bailey, a chipper, happy-go-lucky jazz trumpeter. When Schreck turns over his fourth card, The Devil, Biff quips "That's my mother-in-law!" "Do not jest at the image of a god", Schreck warns, especially not "the powerful and malign god of Voo-doo!"

And so the fable of Biff Bailey begins: Biff has a regular gig playing jazz standards at the Caravel club in London until he is offered a new booking in the West Indies, at the Flamingo club in Dupont on the

island of Paiti. Biff is more than happy with this arrangement, especially when the women of the island flashed their "white smiles at him from dark lips – from mouths that were sometimes Negro, sometimes Spanish, and sometimes tantalizingly both".[2] While chatting with outgoing resident trumpeter Sammy Coin about where the real action is, Biff notices that the cigarette girl at their table is wearing a medallion depicting a grotesque, gaping-mouthed face. When he tries to make a gag about it the girl rushes away and the diners fall suddenly silent in glaring condemnation. Sammy explains quietly that the monster is the Voodoo god Damballa, and Voodoo is the one thing you don't make cracks about.[3] "Not round here. Look around man". He does. "All the chicks are wearing them!" Biff observes. Unperturbed by Sammy's warning to stay clear of the Vodou ceremonies that take place at night, deep in the jungle, Biff, drawn by the alluring rhythms that permeate his sleep, makes his way to a clearing where a ceremony is in full swing. Keen to capture some authentic Paitian beats to stir up the nightclub crowd back home, Biff excitedly scribbles down the drum patterns on a sketchy musical stave. But before he can finish the transcription he is discovered by four shirtless and face-painted members of the Vodou congregation, who manhandle him into the centre of the proceedings, and he is brought before high-priest. Outraged that Biff would try to steal the music of the gods, the priest rips his notebook to shreds and warns him that Damballa is a jealous god, and wherever Biff goes, the god will be avenged.

Back in London, paying no heed to the warning, Biff plays his own version of the Voodoo tune with the image of the god decorating the stage behind him. Half way through the number the doors of the club blow open and a powerful wind tears through the building blowing the score around the room, ripping up tablecloths and over-turning chairs. The punters rush for the exits in panic but the band plays on. Unshaken by the wrecked nightclub and Sammy's insistence that he

2 The quote is from John Burke's novelisation of the film (Burke 78). Thanks to Andy Sharp (English Heretic) for the loan of the book.

3 Within the Vodou pantheon of deities (or *lwa*) Damballa is the great sky serpent that encircles the universe. A primordial father figure, patron of waters and heavens and a major *lwa* within the tradition, he is syncretised in with the Catholic St. Patrick.

destroy the score, Biff chooses instead to take it home to perfect the middle section. As he walks the empty streets he feels like he is being followed. He bumps into a tall Black man who asks him for a light. Safely back in his apartment Biff pours himself a stiff drink as the windows and doors slam shut around him. Then the main lights go out. He fumbles in the dark for a table lamp. When the room is once more illuminated he is face to face with another Black man whose face and chest are painted with the telltale markings of the Vodou devotees. As the man reaches toward his throat Biff faints in terror. Taking the score from Biff's jacket pocket the man slowly leaves the unconscious trumpeter's apartment. The film dissolves back into the train carriage, Biff Bailey wide-eyed in fear. "That'll teach me not to steal tunes" he jokes. "Well, how do I get out of this?" he asks. Schreck turns over the final card. As with all the others, it is the Death card.

It was not however Biff Bailey's nocturnal forays into the Voodoo nights of Paiti that led to my interest in the revolutionary history of Haiti, the role of Vodou therein, and their representations in popular culture, but a labyrinthine path that owed more to another story in *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*, that of Franklyn Marsh, snooty art critic and ardent sceptic about all things mumbo jumbo. The story tells of a third-rate painter called Eric Landor who publicly tricks the famous critic, in front of an entourage of obsequious, sycophant collectors, into evaluating the work of a young artist that the gallery is allegedly thinking of exhibiting in the future. Upon examination of a canvas Marsh announces that it was "clearly the work of a creative artist of considerable promise. Notice the wide sweep of colour, the balance, the brushwork, together with a certain denial of the accepted standards, the mock critical humour of the entire composition. You could learn a great deal about painting from this young artist Mr. Landor". "Then I should very much like to meet him" Landor replies. "Would that be possible?" he asks the gallerist. "He's here now, as a matter of fact" she replies. The camera pans down to reveal that she is holding the hand of a dungaree-clad chimpanzee. Marsh's entourage erupt with affected hilarity as the humiliated but indignant critic makes a hasty exit. Over the coming weeks Landor torments Marsh at a number of high-profile art world events. Marsh begins his speech to The City of London Council for the Preservation of Painting: "My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am extremely honoured to have been asked

to address this fine organisation which has done so much to foster an interest in the arts". Landor, unnoticed by the critic, holds up a paper napkin folded and cut into a string of dancing monkeys. "The world of art today..." Marsh continues before registering the offending item. "The... world... of art... today", he falters, "of art... today". But it's no good. He holds a napkin to his forehead and, to the great concern of the toastmaster and dignitaries, sits back down in his chair, unable to carry on. Eventually the humiliations prove too much and Marsh decides to act. From his parked car he watches Landor lock up and leave the gallery. It is late and the streets are empty. As Landor crosses the road, Marsh starts up his car, steps on the accelerator and mows the painter down, severing his hand in the process. When the artist finally comes round, realising he will never be able to paint again, he returns to his gallery with a revolver and blows his brains out in front of the mirror. The last shot we see as he falls to the ground is his remaining hand clutching at the air. The shot of the dying hand cuts directly to one of a living hand emerging from the back of Marsh's car as he drives home in the rain. But this hand has no body attached to it, just a stump, blood congealed around the wrist. For the next two days and nights Marsh is tormented by this revolting, disembodied thing: reaching for his collar, crawling up his trouser leg, clambering on his writing desk and throttling him while mid-flow in his writing. But nothing he does – throwing it in the fire, stabbing it with a letter opener, locking it in the petty cash box or dumping it in a river – seems to stop it. Finally, driving home after a drink with his work colleagues, and smugly contemplating his assumed triumph over Landor's severed extremity, the hand appears on the windscreen, grabbing the wiper. Marsh veers off the road in terror and crashes into a ravine. "Is he hurt bad?" a detective at the scene asks as Marsh is being lifted into the ambulance the following morning. "He'll live" the medic reassures him, "but he'll be blind for the rest of his life poor guy". Screams from inside the ambulance. "Still, there's lots of things a blind man *can* do".

That zombie hand haunted me too. For nights after watching the film I couldn't sleep without the lights turned on, convinced that the severed appendage was hiding under my bed, behind the curtain, in the cupboard... somewhere. That horrible *un*-thing had crawled from the television set and into my mind. That it was "only in my head" was

no reassurance. Presumably it had only been in Franklyn Marsh's head too. Now it was in mine. Everyone knows dead hands can't walk. But when your mind is *damaged* they can. On those nights that the infernal thing plagued my sullied brain, my dad would sit at my bedside until I was asleep.

Eventually, of course, I forgot about the hand. Until, that was, a decade later, while studying Art History at university, when I was directed by my supervisor to an article on 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism' in a recently published collection of essays by the French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille. The book was called *Visions of Excess* and the encounter was to prove a lasting one. What I found there was a philosophy of the kind of things I had assumed to be far below the proper remit of such a distinguished discipline as Art History. Bataille's thinking set the experience of horror, mental delirium and abject matter against dignity, civility and academic propriety, undermining the worthy principles upon which sensible philosophy and the cultural hierarchies it served propped themselves up. For a residually angry and discomfited working class young man from the North, having found himself somewhat unexpectedly in what felt like a very upper-middle class environment, Bataille's writing had quite an appeal. Not only did Bataille evoke the dark eroticism and dizzying excesses of the horror films I had been watching since childhood, long since relegated to the annals of crass cultural kitsch, but the critical legitimacy of Bataille in 1980s academic circles gave me an unexpected license to make the powers of horror the subject of what was to become a long-term project, one for which a certain latchkey subcultural capital had an unexpected and welcome cachet.

INTIMATIONS OF A PHANTOM HAITI

By the early 1990s I had begun a PhD in Cultural History, investigating the so-called Video Nasty controversy in the U.K. from a critical perspective extracted from the unruly and anti-methodical writings of Bataille. Video Nasty was a popular term, coined by the Conservative, Christian, moral crusader Mary Whitehouse and quickly picked up by the British tabloid press, to identify a number of low-budget, very violent horror films available in rentable video

formats from local retailers in the 1980s. The films were considered to be in breach of the Obscene Publications Act of 1959, which was being surreptitiously circumvented by the new media format. It was at the end of this project that several threads of the research formed themselves into a supplementary appendix: 'Demons Through the Ether: Magnetism, Mediation and Sacred Contagion'. To summarise drastically, Bataille's theory of sacred revolution, articulated in several essays and collaborative projects written and realised during the 1920s and '30s, proposed a contagious, *Acephalic* (or headless) and collective expenditure of social wealth, a kind of exponential, revolutionary *potlatch*, triggered by a sacred and explicitly sacrificial ritual.[4] It was precisely the forces of base materialism, intimately encountered in the ritual of sacrifice, that Bataille believed had the potential to ignite "real revolution". Although such ideas were a long way from the concerns of the largely unwitting producers of Video Nasties or their censors, there was in the rhetoric of the latter a recurrent appeal to fears of imitative violence – the so-called copycat effect – and intimations about the sinister, hypnotic characteristics of such films which, they proposed, could set young people with suggestible minds down the slippery slopes of video-addiction towards violent, sadistic and imitative psycho-pathology. At the extreme and overtly propagandistic end of the censorial spectrum some critics, closer to Bataille in spirit than their academic sociologist detractors, proposed that the Nasties, as they came to be called, posed an unprecedented mental and moral health risk that could bring society to a point where "left-wing revolutions occur or right-wing dictators after the pattern of Hitler may arise and pose as social saviours".[5]

The notion of a copycat effect was a recurrent idea in media censorship and criminality debates throughout the 20th century. By the mid 1960s the term had come to describe crimes allegedly committed in imitation of those read about in books or newspapers,

4 For the most overt expressions of Bataille's revolutionary fervour at this time see his 'The Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade' (1930), 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' (1933), 'The Notion of Expenditure' (1933) and 'Popular Front in the Street' (1936) (all in *Visions of Excess*) and 'Toward Real Revolution' (1936) published in *October 36*.

5 Barlow and Hill *Video Violence and Children* (170)

heard about on the radio or seen in plays or films. It was, effectively, a new term for post-hypnotic suggestion, a phenomenon that had been discussed widely in academic circles and the popular press since the late 19th century. An earlier name for the effect was The Werther Syndrome, after a spate of emulation suicides that followed the publication of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1774. The basic formula goes something like this: certain individuals from particular social groups or of specific psychological types are so susceptible to the effects of dramatic representations that they will tend to act out the things they have seen in "real life" (a theme addressed directly, and controversially, in films like Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* in 1971 and David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* of 1983). The notion of contagious, imitative behaviour, triggered by contact with virulently sacred forms of base matter-energy, was central to Bataille's theory of revolution, and his thinking on this matter was directly informed by ethnographer colleagues like Michel Leiris and Alfred Métraux (the person who first introduced Bataille to the work of Marcel Mauss, and who would go on to write one of the most important books about Haitian Vodou – *Voodoo In Haiti* – in 1959). Bataille was also influenced by contemporary psychological theories which were shaped by the history of hypnosis and concerned particularly with the mechanisms of imitative behaviour. Pierre Janet, who during the 1930s outlined a psychology of the *socius* that emphasised the inter-subjective and imitative foundations of the self, was an important influence on Bataille's theory of "contagious subjectivity".[6]

For Bataille, contagious, inter-subjective behaviour like laughing, yawning, sexual excitement, crying or anger, evidenced the porousness of individual boundaries and suggested that the other with whom one communicates is already, in some way, interior to the self. Janet's theory of the imitative subject was itself indebted to debates about hypnosis and hypnotic suggestion in the 19th century, which in turn find their historical roots in the practice of animal magnetism, invented by Anton Mesmer at the end of the 18th century, on the eve of the French Revolution, under whose influence patients would fall into convulsive and contagious emotional crises.

6 See Lawtoo.

One of the most thorough accounts of Mesmer's role in the development of 20th century dynamic psychiatry is Henri Ellenberger's classic *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, which also contains an important chapter on Janet. As we will see, Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism was based on the assumption of a vital, ethereal fluid permeating all physical bodies, from planets to molecules, which, when blocked, caused ailments of all kinds in humans and animals. Cures were exercised with the aid of specially prepared tubs, called *baquets,* which contained magnetised water and iron-filings connected together with wooden and metal rods. Mesmer's system combined physical theories of magnetic conduction between material bodies with an interpersonal therapeutic technique that involved the induction of physical and emotional crises in patients through the use of "passes" (the movement of the magnetiser's hands or wand over the patients' bodies). Mesmer's theories and techniques were to become hugely popular in late 18th century Europe and, importantly, in France's colonial territory of Saint-Domingue. It would also prove to be very important for the development of modern, clinical psychology in the 20th century, while at the same time leading to a Mesmeric occult revival, as artificial somnambulism became associated with Spirit communication, telepathy and clairvoyance. The ethereal medium through which the magnetic will of the Mesmerists was allegedly channelled would also become equated, by the mid 19th century, with new forms of technological communication and emergent mass mediums.[7]

From the debate about Video Nasties and the copycat effect, through Bataille's theory of sacred revolution and mimetic contagion, to the influence of Mesmerism on modern psychology's recurrent pre-occupation with hypnotic suggestion, possession trance and dissociated personality disorders, a complex of parallel themes emerged suggesting that these aberrant and disturbing behavioural propensities were survivals of psycho-social states that modern society and culture

7 See Erik Davis's *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (1999) and Jeffrey Sconce's *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (2000) for historical accounts of this general trend.

had not yet managed to fully transcend, propensities which, for the ethnographic Surrealists of Bataille's circle in the 1930s, might be channelled into the practice of revolutionary ecstasy. For the British censors of the 1980s such black arts were being given a new potential for anti-social expression through the influence of the unrestricted, unlicensed and, importantly, privately reproducible new form of mass media (i.e. video player-recorder). This complex of concerns was intimately associated with ideas about the return of archaic or primitive subject formations that had the potential to bring about uncontrolled and unpredictable social change if unchecked. Unsurprisingly such fears found their expression in modern horror films themselves (most notoriously perhaps William Friedkin and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* of 1973) where the themes of demonic possession, Satanic rites, voodoo sorcery, criminal hypnotism and zombiedom characteristically exploited semi-conscious collective fantasies about the return of savage non-western, non-White and pre-modern cultures mired in primitive superstition. But even though a certain Phantom Haiti was already hovering on the horizons of my thinking I was still caught off guard by the following claim I stumbled across in Ellenberger:

> In Saint Domingue, magnetism degenerated into a psychic epidemic amongst the Negro slaves, increasing their agitation, and the French domination ended in a bloodbath. Later Mesmer boasted that the new Republic – now called Haiti – owed its independence to him.[8]

This audacious claim seemed utterly fantastical and not a little delusional. It was, I assumed, the product of Mesmer's notoriously egomaniacal personality. But digging a little deeper into the revolutionary history of Haiti one soon encounters the story of Bois Caïman, the legendary Vodou ceremony that reputedly inaugurated the Haitian Revolution. This signal event in the history of Haitian national independence took place in the Alligator Woods on the northern plains of Saint-Domingue in August 1791 where, as legend has it, during a torrential rain storm, a secret gathering of Maroons and rebellious slaves participated in an austere ceremony presided over

8 Ellenberger 73

by the priest and former slave-driver Dutty Boukman and the priestess Cécile Fatiman. During the ceremony a black pig was sacrificed, its blood drunk, and an oath sworn to the God of the Blacks and the Spirit of Liberty that would bind the participants in a pact to the overthrow of their White masters and the plantation-slave system. A week later hundreds of sugar plantations lay in smouldering ruins, thousands of White slave-owners had been killed, and a thirteen-year revolutionary war of independence from colonial slavery had begun. Although there was, as yet, no suggestion that Mesmerism (or animal magnetism, as it was called at the time) had a role to play in the Bois Caïman ceremony, the coincidence of a conspiratorial religious ritual, involving blood sacrifice, and setting in motion a violent, insurrectionary uprising, which in turn led to massive expenditures of social wealth, was about as Bataillean as a revolutionary event could be. And so, intermittently, over the next few years, I gave a number of public lectures exploring the relationship between Bataille's religious and revolutionary theories, the ethnographic Surrealism of his contemporaries, and the relationship between sensationalist misrepresentations of Haitian Vodou in horror films and the actualities of Haitian history and culture. And as I dug deeper into Mesmer's claim about the role that magnetism had played in the Haitian Revolution, it began to appear much more plausible than it had at first seemed.

KLINIK ZONBI

It was largely because of these interests that in December 2009 I was invited to speak at an academic symposium at the Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The Ghetto Biennale was conceived and curated by the artist photographer Leah Gordon and Atis Rezistans, a group of sculptors who had been making work in an area on the Grand Rue in Port-au-Prince, called Lakou Cheri, since the 1990s. The founding members of the group André Eugène, Jean Hérard Celeur and Frantz Jacques (aka Guyodo), and other core members (including Ronald Bazin (aka Cheby), Jean Claude Saintillus and Evel Romain) all live and work in the lakou, making Vodou-themed figurative sculptures that combine wood, metal, waste materials, discarded objects and human bones in a rough-edged, unpolished

and often grotesque manner, usually containing sexual, religious and death-related symbolism that owes much to the guiding influence of the Guede family of spirits within the local community. At this, the first of several Ghetto Biennales to take place in their neighbourhood, artists from around the world were invited to make and show work in the same environment as their hosts. The symposium organised to compliment the event was called 'Of Revolution and Revelation', a title taken from a three-volume work on Christianity, colonialism and modernity in South Africa by the anthropologist couple John and Jean Comaroff, and it was there that I first presented my thesis about Bataille and Bois Caïman to a largely Haitian audience.

In the hotel where the attendees were staying I met Cameron Brohman. Cameron is a social entrepreneur who was at the Biennale to promote Slum Toys, one of his Brandaid micro-marketing projects that was attempting to establish a community of young artisans in the Cité Soleil, a notoriously poor and historically conflict-ridden district of Port-au-Prince, who would produce toy tap-taps, the brightly decorated local buses in Haiti, made with materials gleaned from local landfills. Cameron had spent many years living in Haiti working as the secretary for legendary choreographer, dancer and ethnographer Katherine Dunham, who, in the 1990s, created a botanical garden in the grounds of Habitation Leclerc, the former residence of Pauline Bonaparte, Napoleon's sister. Dunham had acquired the property in the 1940s and converted into a school of dance and Vodou. Cameron had managed Dunham's botanical garden project for several years. Over the course of several conversations I had with him while visiting Grand Rue, Habitation Leclerc and the garbage dump close to Cité Soleil, I explained to Cameron why I was in Haiti and the questions driving my research. In one of these conversations we struck on the idea of creating a comic-book project called *Klinik Zonbi* based on 1950s horror comics, using the archetypical tropes of zombie narratives from Haitian folklore and popular culture that would tell the story of Vodou in Haitian history and the way it had been manipulated by foreign interests who wanted to represent the country in a negative light. The general idea was of an artistic and educational, anti-imperialist de-programmeming project that would be designed and drawn by young artists in Port-au-Prince, produced locally and distributed via art-related markets in Europe and the U.S. The idea of

Klinik Zonbi had parallels with the *Goute Sel* ("a taste of salt") literacy programmeme established by the *Ti Legliz* (little church) movement in the 1980s that was instrumental in bringing down the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier. Eating salt, as people in Haiti know, is the only known cure for zombiedom, the state that many observers felt the country had collectively fallen into after thirty years of intolerable dictatorial oppression.

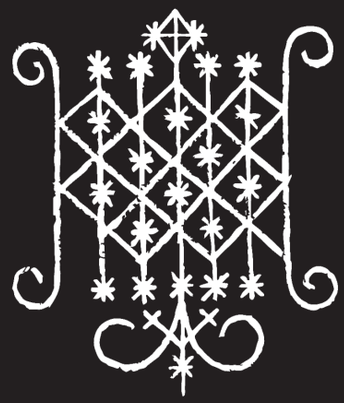
Although plans for *Klinik Zonbi* drifted out of focus over the years that followed the 2010 earthquake, it is still part of the long-term goal of *Undead Uprising* which, like *Klinik Zonbi,* seeks to connect the story of popular misrepresentations of Haiti and its culture back to the historical, political and social realities of the country in ways that will be of educational and artistic value for audiences on both sides of the chimerical optic with which Haiti has often been viewed from outside. So, although on the surface *Undead Uprising* may look like a Weird Stories version of Haitian history, the intention is to explore the ways in which these misrepresentations have influenced and shaped foreign perceptions of Haiti and, by extension, foreign policy perspectives and attitudes both inside and outside the country. In so doing I hope to re-connect and re-think the psychological, cultural and political anxieties subtending xenophobic tropes within horror cinema back to the actual political contexts that their chimerical optics often overtly distort and occult. I ask if popular representations of the mythical monsters derived from the real horrors of colonial violence in Saint-Domingue are still implicated in those histories? Are there ways to resurrect the repressed or occulted histories of colonial, race and class violence from these massively popular forms of horror narrative? What are the implications of such narratives for our understanding of the contemporary geopolitics in which Haiti is involved? And how do the mechanisms of imaginary psychic communication with an abjectly configured otherness within relate to wider mechanisms of political ideology and propaganda?

In Bataillean terms one could say that I enjoy thinking about the imaginary encounter with an appalling and unbearable otherness that is at once both within and without, an idea indebted to my reading of ethnographic Surrealists like Michel Leiris and Michael Taussig. In this sense I am still invested in the primitivist cultural stereotypes and reactionary subject formations that Voodoo-horror films perpetuate

and exploit. I don't want to make apologies for this, nor do I want to find a rational justification for it. That is not my intention. But the language of interest and investment point in imprecise and multivalent ways to the nebulous mechanism I am trying to expose the workings of. That mechanism, if this is indeed the right term, is the cultural construction of subjectivities on two ends of a mediated network of imaginary and symbolic relations: on one side European, English-speaking subjects like myself, encountering sensational, salacious and unsettling representations of fantastical otherness in popular and mass culture, and on the other side the actual people and culture that these fictions ostensibly, and in a generally far-fetched way, refer to. What is much harder and less palatable than offering a sober corrective to sensational misrepresentations of Haitian culture is to propose that the vicarious pleasures of horror may share characteristics with an outsider's understanding of Vodou rites and ritual. While being conscious not to perpetuate the Anglo-American demonization of Vodou that has been ongoing for several centuries, I also recognise the disingenuousness of a politically correct "care-bearisation" (Leah Gordon's term) of a religion for which animal sacrifice and possession by discarnate spiritual beings are fundamental to its ritual practice. Obviously Vodou is a religion for which the other within constitutes a fundamental metaphysical foundation. To be ridden by a deity, to be dispossessed of one's self, to undergo a prolonged and arduous ritual of initiation or to be present at the sacrifice of living creatures are not experiences a person is likely to remain unchanged by. And they do, in practice and in fact, pose profound existential and moral problems for what we might broadly call the Western mind. Furthermore fears of Vodou amongst the colonial authorities of Saint-Domingue were not unwarranted. Far from it. Vodou seems to have been a religion of resistance since before the revolution, one in which it played a vital role.

From this perspective there seems little doubt that Vodou has had an intentionally scary dimension to it, particularly as a practice which evolved secretly under the auspices of a terrible and incredibly sadistic system of colonial violence, inspiring conspiracies and insurrectionary strategies of counter-terrorism against that very system. Furthermore Vodou continues to have a role in anti-imperialist struggles for Haitian nationhood and collective identity as the Haitian authors and artists

continue to affirm. I am thinking specifically here of people like Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, her late father, the *houngan*, Max Beauvoir, others involved in the KNVA (National Confederation of Haitian Vodou) and the scholars of KOSANBA (The Congress of Santa Barbara), a number of whom the book in hand is deeply indebted to. Although I am not suggesting that the other within we encounter vicariously through horror films has any direct relationship with the workings of the *lwa* or the spiritual beliefs of *Vodouisants*, I do want to suggest that, from the particular place from which I write, there is something in common between vicarious, cinematic encounters with that which is absolutely other but inside us still, and an imaginary encounter with supernatural intelligences like those of the *lwa*. I have tried to leave this speculative channel of occult communication between the two kinds of encounter as open as possible throughout the writing of *Undead Uprising*.



PART ONE