Zombie Hypercalyps(is)

1.

The monster is a semiotic reminder, a social semiophor, a grotesque ornament of our mediascape. Its imaginary significance (supernatural), shifts in response to the new interdefinitions that involve it: with respect to the new status of animals and robots**,** the discipline of automation.

The paleo-monster that lurked and ambushed us in our collective imaginary was the effect of an ambivalent sentiment of attraction/repulsion, pity, and fascination with the animal world. With those nearer to us, subject to domestication (pets, livestock) and those more distant (game animals and wild beasts). But once biotechnology has signaled the end of domestication—with stables and barns—“beasts” must cease to be Cartesian protein-based machines. And they will become, with us, the actants of a new contract of co-domestication, foretold by Aesop, Phaedrus, and Lafontaine. It has even been suggested (and so far rejected) that we extend the Declaration on the Rights of Man to include the great apes!

The monster becomes the attractor and repulsor of a new hybridization of man and machine; the monstrous machine is not the robot, but the Cyborg, which has long been hypothesized, dreamed of, and debated in terms of the “post-human,” or the “Terminator.” And the ‘sex appeal of the inorganic,’ (Perniola) with the commingling of automatisms of every grade and order, mechanical and digital; a hybrid crossbetween human and inhuman; an understandable mutationin the digital age of cerebral machines pulsing with ‘angels,’ that is, with messengers both analog and digital, frozen and disembodied (in Italian *an-gelo* contains “chill”, Savinio).

2.

There is, in any case, an (ugly) semiophorthat shows that the West can still produce fables and that “Myths can continue to flow**”** (Wittgenstein). A new collective actant, the current apex of monstrosity, which does not meld nature and culture, the animate and the inanimate, but situates itself between life and death: the Zombie. The Undead, an exo-darwinian figure evolved from the Caribbean *ghol* of A&I, and coming to occupy, brainless as it is, the neural laboratories and manuals of analytic philosophy (by the name of Zimbo). “*This disconcerting fantasy helps make the problem of phenomenal consciousness vivid* (sic!) *especially as a problem for physicalism*,” says the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy in the lengthy entry dedicated to it.

The Undead, testaments to a macabre, suburban decadence, have become the icons of globalization. The sinister site of their abandoned burial-grounds—Zombistan—has infiltrated the collective imaginary to the point of producing carnivalesque city parades of neogothic and grotesque masks. A Bakhtinian Halloween in which the present gardens return to their origin, the cemetery, just as the contemporary cities to the Necropolis. Swarms of young activists, between protest and parody, participate *perinde ac cadaver* in festive and civic-minded marches ofhalf-rotten Undead. The dead do not laugh, but the Undead do bite. “*One laughs instead of devouring*” (Canetti); the infected bite of the zombie is replaced with the laugh of the costumed simulators. These are the “Zombie walks,” semi-spontaneous flash mobs, alternative performances with respect to the processional model of political marches.

The zombie, an imperfect corpse, is resituatedin a new cladistics of the horror genre, in a teratological taxonomy that has been redistributed. The Undead now staggers definitively into the contemporary mediasphere; it is a new syllable of semantic content in the word “Horror”. Its foul genre occupies a place of prominence in the imaginary biodiversity of de-massified culture. Its survival strategy obligates it to adapt to the environment and strive to endure. It has already faced off against all the superheroes, from Spiderman to the Hulk, from Giant-man to Wolverine. It has been placed in relation and in tension with all the figures of horror: Devils and robots, cyborgs and aliens, replicants and clones, ghosts and mummies, werewolves and body snatchers, extraterrestrials and vampires, with which it shares some similar differences. “The zombie, solidly intra-terrestrial with its corrupt physicality, is the opposite of the ectoplasmic angels and ghosts and of the mechanical perfection of the robot…Among the dead returning from their conservation society, the zombie reawakens like the mummy or the skeleton, from which it stands apart due to its state of decomposition. The Skeleton is dry and articulated like the robot, while the Undead provokes disgust for the advanced rottenness that deforms and discolors it; the Mummy, better preserved, for good reason, sits between the skeleton and the zombie that shares, along with the Golem, its uncertain gait. But it is in the vampire that the Undead finds its more toothy rival in sepulchral semantics, due to their shared cannibal instincts. A “mytheme”(Lévi-Strauss) with the same “emergent” properties, but differing in lifestyle and nourishment: the Vampire is (still, but not for much longer) the elegant inhabitant of abodes and sepulchers, while the zombies frequent common graves and middle-class supermarkets, amusement parks, prison islands, and even the set of Big Brother; the seductive, however degraded, Vampire sucks blood from the erogenous zones, while the zombies, just barely escaping the incinerator, rise all rumpled from their coffins and devour strips of human flesh on the spot, raw and unseasoned.” We have already said so elsewhere (Fabbri,), but one trait still demands our attention. Zombie is the collective name for rebels against the cadaveric tautologies of ontology: “*the dead lie and the living have peace*.” The Undead, however, do not join the choir invisible of the dead – the “*mighty masses of the Afterlife*” (Canetti) – with which they still share some salient traits: openness, growth, rhythmic slowness, equality, concentration, etc. Zombies are a rhizome in motion, a wolfpackof Deleuzian memory, a collective permanently straining towards a single end: the hunt for man. A prey that, from the spiteful perspective of the dead, does not deserve to survive. The pack—which in Italian, *muta,* is, etymologically, movement, revolt, and hunting party—is turned obsessively to the communion of an unspoken collective meal. “*They all grab, bite, chew, swallow the same thing*” (Canetti), that is human beings, reduced to a disintegrated mass. Leaving out the theme of altruism, C. Lévi-Strauss, reasoning on cannibalism, saw the social life as “*the lower limit of predation” and* held that “*All told, the simplest means of identifying the other with one’s self is still to eat it.*” Collective cohabitation would be the effect of the deliberate suspension of the primary, devouring difference between prey and predator, and the Zombie is one regressive suspension of this stabilization.

3.

Zombies horrify us because they are not They, the radically Other; they are both Us and You, with a humanity that revolts us due to the atrocious suspicion that we are a part of it. But furthermore, they frighten us as protagonists of the “Hypercalypse” of postmodern pandemics, the mass extinctions that occupy the whole planet as their theater of operations. In fiction, the Undead represent the epidemic noise that infests humanity’s state of health, the infective and viral manifestation of death in its return to life. Their planetary conquest anticipates and perhaps foretells a hecatombic, obsidional world. The Living who survive, besieged by hunters in sectarian islands, must re-kill the rebellious, risen Zombies, while they infect the living and revive them as Undead. Life resists death and the Undead assails life. Like a kamikaze, it advances toward its living adversary without fear of re-dying. The comprehensive result is the end of all forms of burial and a non-humanity, uncivil because unburied - as Vico would say. Consecrated, therefore, to the ghosts that devour their own flesh: necrophobia and necrophilia. In the techno-scientific simulation there already exists a diagnostic model of these paradoxical parasites, with calculated prognoses. To eradicate the infection requires quantifiable reductions in the number of Zombies: with swift and violent strikes, one might avoid the collapse of humanity, overcome by the new, extinct barbarians. It is, indeed, the Hypercalypse.

It is difficult, if not acrobatic, to correlate the brainless swarms of the monstrous imaginary with the whole of the socio-cultural collective, with the social history of technology and the idea of the human, but it is in the heart of our mythologies that the anti-behavior of the living provokes the contact with the dead. How to avoid, then, turnkey sociological solutions: the zombie as a social hieroglyph, *“a symptom of cultural dissatisfaction and economic crisis*” and other solecisms: desacralization and modernization, and so on? And yet, notwithstanding everything, what we are expecting etymologically from the Hypercalypse are revelations that respond to the most cogent questions about individual necrosis and collective narcosis. On the current statusof the person, identity and belonging, rendered fluid by medicine: are patients in a deep coma –PVS, persistent vegetative state—still alive (almost-subjects) or undead (almost-objects)? Still. The biblical exigency that the dead bury the dead was an extraditionary precaution to impede the permanence of the deceased as unwieldy Ancestors. Ritually weeping to liberate, or at least clarify the future. Now the Undead, Lazaruses reawakened from unknown transcendences, add an inescapable “historical” interrogative to the present of the living: “*How do we live with the experiences of the past? Without the pressure of planning for the future?*!” In terms of contemporary presentism, are the living and the Undead not, perhaps, equivalent?

In the absence of answers, the decomposing, cannibal images of the Zombie will continue to trouble our dreams.