

The Undead: Bodies In Between: Fleshing Out Some Cultural Theories

Humanities & Social Sciences Seminar (Medicine)
& Anthropology 898 / Religious Studies 890 (Graduate)

Spring 2008
Tuesdays, 1:00-3:50 p.m.
21 MacNider Hall, School of Medicine

Barry F. Saunders, PhD, MD
Associate Professor of Social Medicine
Adjunct Associate Professor, Anthropology & Religious Studies
Clinical Associate Professor, Medicine & Family Medicine
345-B MacNider Hall, School of Medicine
843-8272 (fax: 966-7499)
bfsaunde@med.unc.edu

Seminar Description

This seminar will explore thresholds between life and death—by examining bodies that seem to straddle, linger upon, or recross them. Undead bodies refuse classification as unambiguously alive or dead: they may seem to be both, or neither. They may be corpses with agency, living bodies that emulate dead ones, hybrids of animate and inanimate, immortals with flesh.

For purposes of this course, the *materiality* of the undead will distinguish them from other, more ethereal kinds of ghosts, spirits, shades, immortals. Materiality is about structure, form, texture, change. As bodies (or body-parts), the living dead are anomalous. They violate norms of embodiment, behavior, exchange. Their deviance call for “theory”—rather insistently—but their materiality also brings theory down to earth (if ever theory was somewhere else). The undead summon us to consider how relations between death and life are negotiated in particular cultural settings. But other relations are conjured as well: colonial racism, capitalist violence, repressed sexual desire.

The course will pursue two kinds of inquiry. First, case studies: specific representations or exemplars of living death: vampires, zombies, chimeras, cyborgs, prematurely-buried, resurrected... and especially embodiments of biomedical modes of undeath: transplantation, implantation, transfusion; deep coma, brain death; resuscitation and near-death; tissue culture; cryogenic preservation... Second, we will explore cultural theories that speak to structures and effects of undeath: e.g., Freud on the *unheimliche* (the uncanny), and mourning; Kristeva on abjection and horror, Žižek on the monstrous, Marx on vampire capital; Agamben on the camp and the *muselmann*.

The seminar will be emphatically cross-disciplinary: around half the course hours will be shared between medical students and graduate students (from anthropology, religious studies, literature, and more). Our approaches will be anthropological, historical, and philosophical. We will work to translate for each other the specialized languages of our respective disciplines.

Objectives

This seminar will develop appreciation of how bodily norms, and definitions of life and death, vary over time and across cultural settings. It will encourage critical reflection on modes of dying, and of repressing death. For students of medicine, it will encourage engagement with disciplines and literatures outside biomedicine. Students will be invited to think comparatively and correlatively. By the end of the term, students should be able to discuss:

- How some forms of embodiment can challenge demarcations of life from death;
- How the living relate with the dead in some previously-unfamiliar cultural settings;
- How technologies—including writing and media technologies—address, and modify, boundaries between life and death;
- How contemporary medicalized refusals of mortality compare with those of other/earlier cultures;
- How extra-medical disciplines can contribute to reflections on medical practice and knowledge;
- Why medicalized embodiments solicit critical engagement by humanities scholars and social scientists.

Structure

This seminar brings together medical students (in their second year of study) with graduate students from various disciplinary corners of the University. In addition to shared seminar time (1:00-2:50), graduate students will also be involved in supplemental discussions each week (3:00-3:50) and in two additional sessions—another 18 hours over the semester. These discussions will address additional reading each week. Medical students are welcome (but not expected) to attend any graduate seminar discussions for which they do the additional reading.

Requirements

The first seminar requirement is participation, based on engagement with readings. Students should be mindful of differences of disciplinary background. (These differences will themselves be worth discussing.)

Weekly med student reading assignments will average 25-30 pages. Certain readings will be “must-read” items for all seminar participants. Some weeks there will a choice of readings for med students—such that everyone will do one and come to class prepared to “unpack” it for the rest. Grad students will be doing considerable additional reading each week, and reporting on that as well. Some shorter readings are linked online and others will be shared in advance.

We will sometimes undertake in seminar to re-read particular passages, alone or together. Toward that possibility, students should bring printed readings to class. Laptops should be opened infrequently if at all: they do not serve well as props for discussion.

Each student is required to submit, by March 4, one 3-page paper that responds thoughtfully and critically to one of the readings of the course, or to some cluster of readings.

Each student is also required to submit, by April 29 (a week after the last class), a substantial essay (med students: 8-10 pages; grad students: 12-20 pages), synthesizing historical, philosophical, and/or sociocultural perspectives on some bodily form or practice of “undeath.” The topic chosen for this paper should be discussed with the instructor by the end of February. Bibliographic research must make use of Davis or Perkins Library print resources (*not* just HSL and WWW). Collaborative research is welcomed (with a more substantial paper).

Each student will make a ten-minute presentation of work-in-progress, based on her/his researches, during one of the last three shared seminar sessions (April 1, April 8, April 22). Discussion and feedback from peers and instructor can be incorporated into the final paper. Presentations will be scheduled by choice or lottery.

Graduate students may be asked to serve as consultants for med students developing research topics and literatures in unfamiliar archives.

Written work should be thoughtful, carefully-edited, and well-organized. Essays will be evaluated for vigor and care of their handling of ideas, and quality of writing—as well as for research effort, particularly in humanities and social science literatures, and associations (including frictions) developed with topics discussed in seminar.

Schedule

	<i>HSS+Grad</i>	<i>Grad</i>
	<i>17 students</i>	<i>9 students</i>
Jan 15	1-3	3-4
Jan 22	1-3	3-4
Jan 29	1-3	3-4
Feb 5	1-3	3-4
Feb 12	1-3	3-4
Feb 19	1-3	3-4
Feb 26	1-3	3-4
March 4	1-3	3-4
<i>March 18</i>		<i>1-4</i>
March 25	1-3	3-4
April 1	1-3	3-4
April 8	1-3	3-4
<i>April 15</i>		<i>1-4</i>
April 22*	1-3	3-4

(*potluck supper? perhaps later time/different day?)

Sessions, Topics, and Readings

- * reading for all students
- ◆ reading for med students
- △ reading/s to be chosen/divided among med students
- ♣ reading for grad students

Session 1 (January 15):

Course Introduction: Writing and Reanimation

- case of mesmerism
- historicity of aesthetic sensibilities: Victorian Gothic
- speech, textuality, telegraphy
- technologies and body techniques

- * Poe, Edgar, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,"
<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/PoeVald.html>
- ♣ Ware, Tracy, "The 'Salutary Discomfort' in the Case of M. Valdemar,"
Studies in Short Fiction (1994) 31, 471-80.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=7&hid=21&sid=de12ebe3-f634-419e-a889-6a142a423483%40sessionmgr9>
- ♣ Barthes, Roland, "Textual Analysis of a Tale by Edgar Allan Poe," *The Semiotic Challenge* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1994), 261-93.

Session 2 (January 22):

The Uncanny, *Das Unheimliche*

- case of the automaton
- more Gothic
- the eyes, the gaze, castration-anxiety
- animism and "primitive" thought
- repetition, return of the repressed

- * Berry, Paul (director), Ian MacKinnon, and Colin Batty, "The Sandman" (1991), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMFolaY-VWY>
- * Freud, Sigmund, "The 'Uncanny'," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 219-52.
<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html>
- ♣ Hoffman, E.T.A., "The Sandman," *Tales of E.T.A. Hoffman*, translated by Leonard Kent and Elizabeth Knight (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), 93-125. [Etext (different translation):
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/7207/sand1.html>]
- ♣ Weber, Samuel, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment,"
Modern Language Notes 88:6 (1973), 1102-33.

Session 3 (January 29):

Transplantation

- case of brain-dead donors, case of cadaver-organ recipients
- late-modern redefinitions of death, US and Japan
- somatic exchange

- ◆ Lock, Margaret, "Inventing a New Death and Making It Believable," *Anthropology and Medicine*, 9:2 (2002), 97-115.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=3&hid=8&sid=c4278d50-a9e4-4f49-b59d-ff0c13c776df%40sessionmgr9>
- △ Lock, Margaret, "Technology in Extremis," in *Twice Dead*, 57-77.
- △ Lock, Margaret, "Technology as Other: Japanese Modernity and Technology," in *Twice Dead*, 149-66.
- △ Lock, Margaret, "Social Death and Situated Departures," in *Twice Dead*, 191-208.
- ♣ Lock, Margaret, *Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001).
<http://webcat.lib.unc.edu/record=b5142007>

Session 4 (February 5):

Immortality in Vitro

- case of tissue culture, HeLa
- biotechnology remaking biology

- ◆ Landecker, Hannah. "Immortality, In Vitro," in *Biotechnology and Culture: Bodies, Anxieties, Ethics*, edited by Paul Brodwin (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), 53-72.
- ♣ Landecker, Hannah, *Culturing Life: How Cells Became Technologies* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007).

Session 5 (February 12):

Chimeras

- case of Frankenstein's *daemon*
- patriarchy and hideous progeny
- horror
- electromagnetism and artificial life

* Turney, Jon, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), chapters 1 & 10: 13-25 & 200-222.

♣ Turney, Jon, *Frankenstein's Footsteps*, introduction & chapters 2 & 4: 1-12, 26-42, & 64-90.

♣ Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*.

Session 6 (February 19):

Life Not Worth Living

- case of the *Muselmann* in Auschwitz
- biopower, "bare life"

* Agamben, Giorgio, "The Muselmann," *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 41-86.

♣ Agamben, Giorgio, "The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern," from *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 119-88.

Session 7 (February 26):

Vampires

- case of Dracula
- blood-exchange
- morphology and metamorphosis
- desires and repression
- imperial archives and capital

* Stoker, Bram, *Dracula*: selections.

* Rickels, Laurence, Lectures 1-2 in *The Vampire Lectures* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1-25.

♣ Rickels, Laurence, "Introduction" & Lectures 3-5, *The Vampire Lectures*, ix-xix & 26-63.

♣ Richards, Thomas, "Archive and Form," in *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 45-72.

♣ Neocleous, Mark, "Introduction," *The Monstrous and the Dead: Burke, Marx, Fascism* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2005), 1-8.

♣ Neocleous, Mark, "The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires," *History of Political Thought* 24:4 (Winter 2003), 668-84.

Session 8 (March 4):

Zombies

- case of the Haitian zombi
- case/s of horror-film zombies
- colonialism: race and the extreme Other
- fugu poisoning
- psychogenic death
- consumption and desire

* Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth, "Women Possessed: Eroticism and Exoticism in the Representation of Woman as Zombie," in *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, edited by Margarite Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1997), 37-58.

△ ♣ Davis, Wade, "The Zombie in Popular Culture and Haitian Folklore," *Passage of Darkness* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988), 56-75.

Session 8 (cont):

Zombies, cont.

△ ♣ Davis, Wade, “Everything is Poison, Nothing is Poison: The Emic View,” chapter 6 of *Passage of Darkness*, 181-212.

△ ♣ Davis, Wade, “The Bizango as an Arbiter of Social Life,” *Passage of Darkness*, 272-84.

♣ Hurston, Zora Neale, “Zombies,” from *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 179-98.

* *Response paper due*

Grad Session (March 18):

Funeral Casino

- case of Thai Buddhist ascetics
- funeral ceremony
- memory and the state

♣ Klima, Alan, *The Funeral Casino: Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002): Chapter 1 “Introduction,” Chapter 6 “The Charnel Ground,” & Chapter 7 “The Funeral Casino,” 1-30, 169-290.

Session 9 (March 25):

Anatomic Afterlives

- case of Digital Humans
- death in biomedical spectacle

* Waldby, Catherine, Chapter 1 “The Visible Human Project: An Initial History” [selected pages] & Chapter 6 “Revenants: Death and the Digital Uncanny,” from *The Visible Human Project: Informatic Bodies and Posthuman Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-8 & 136-156.

♣ Waldby selections above, plus remainder of Chapter 1, Chapter 2 “Posthuman Spectacle,” Chapter 5 “Iatrogenesis: Digital Eden and the Reproduction of Life,” & Chapter 7 “Technogenesis: The Posthuman Visible”

Session 10 (April 1):

Student Presentations I

Session 11 (April 8):

Student Presentations II

Grad Session (April 15):

The Crypt and the Self

-case of self as “cemetery guard”
-introjection, incorporation, mourning, melancholy

- ♣ Freud, Sigmund, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey, vol. 14 (London, Hogarth Press, 1955), 239-58.
- ♣ Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok, “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation,” in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, edited and translated by Nicholas Rand (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 125-38.
- ♣ Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok, “‘The Lost Object—Me’: Notes on Endocryptic Identification,” in *The Shell and the Kernel*, 139-56.
- ♣ Johnson, Lawrence, “Introduction” to *The Wolf Man’s Burden* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 1-27.
- ♣ Derrida, Jacques, “Foreward: *Fors*: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok,” translated by Barbara Johnson, in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf-Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, translated by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), xi-xlvii.

Session 12 (April 22):

Student Presentations III