Capitalist market-society overflows with monsters. But no grotesque species so command the modern imagination as the vampire and the zombie. In fact, these two creatures need to be thought conjointly, as interconnected moments of the monstrous dialectic of modernity. Like Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, the vampire and the zombie are doubles, linked poles of the split society. If vampires are the dreaded beings who might possess us and turn us into their docile servants, zombies represent our haunted self-image, warning us that we might already be lifeless, disempowered agents of alien powers. ‘Under the hegemony of the spirit world of capital,’ writes Chris Arthur, ‘we exist for each other only as capital’s zombies, its “personifications”, “masks”, “supports”, to use Marx’s terms’.¹ In the image of the zombie lurks a troubled apprehension that capitalist society really is a night of the living dead.

Arthur’s insight returns us to the salient image that proliferates throughout Sub-Saharan Africa today: the zombie-labourer. Having emerged in Haiti in the early twentieth-century, the earliest zombies were indeed ‘dead men working’, unthinking body-machines, lacking identity, memory and consciousness – possessing only the physical capacity

for labour. Unlike flesh-eating ghouls, who have come to stand in for them in the culture-industries of late capitalism, these zombies harbour the hidden secret of capitalism, its dependence on the bondage and exploitation of human labourers. However, because they are the *living* dead, zombies possess the capacity to awaken, to throw off their bonds, to reclaim life amid the morbid ruins of late capitalism. As much as they move slowly and clumsily through the routinised motions of deadened life, zombies also possess startling capacities for revelry and revolt, latent energies that can erupt in riotous nights of the living dead. Bursting across movie-screens and the pages of pulp-fiction, such zombie-festivals contain moments of carnivalesque insurgency, horrifying disruptions of the ordered and predictable patterns of everyday-life. Without warning, a rupture in the fabric of the normal transforms the living dead into hyper-active marauders. The maimed and disfigured seize the streets and invade shopping malls; authority collapses; anarchy is unleashed. Part of the attraction of such displays, and of much of the horror-genre generally, resides, of course, in its capacity to gratify as much as to frighten. As viewers, we (or at least many of us) derive a deep pleasure from images of fantastic beings wreaking havoc upon polite citizens of well-ordered society. And, here, we can locate part of the utopian charge animating zombie rebellions.

As Bakhtin reminds us, utopia often comes bathed in the grotesque. It does so in reaction to the anti-sensuous, anti-corporeal striving of official cultures to tame bodies and desires, enclose property and personality, regulate labour and recreation, control festivity and sexuality. Against the dreary and anti-corporeal seriousness of sanctioned modes of life, oppositional cultures engage in parody by way of inversion. They elevate the degraded and debased – outcasts, freaks, the simple-minded, and the hideously deformed. And they often do so by celebrating the bizarre, fractured and over-sized human body, deploying a *grotesque realism* that mocks dreary officialdom and inverts its values and symbolic orders. The utopian register of grotesque realism moves via a dialectic of inversion; the degraded now do the degrading, bringing low that which official culture has elevated, uplifting what has been suppressed. Yet, the utopian impulse highlights rebirth as much as degradation. ‘To degrade is to bury, to sow and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better’, writes Bakhtin. ‘To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs…’. Contrary to the defined and enclosed heroic