

COM 245
Spring 2019
Mid-Term Exam
Due: 22 February 2019, 4PM

First, a bit more “theory.”

Anyone reading recent contributions to the scholarly literature on zombies will soon encounter the names of Julia Kristeva and Giorgio Agamben. Kristeva is a Bulgarian-born philosopher, sociologist, psychologist, and feminist who has lived in France since the 1960s. Among the many ideas she is credited with introducing into contemporary intellectual life is that of “abjection.” In basic terms, this is a condition that is suspended somewhere between “life” and “death,” between existence as a “subject” and existence as an “object.” Something that is abject has been excluded and rejected, has been “marked off” or “cast out.” Such a “thing” threatens to dissolve the definitions on which individuality, personality, and identity all rest. The most startling confrontation we have with the abject is an encounter with death. The exposure to someone who was once alive but is no longer compels us to recognize that this is the fate that awaits each of us. Consequently, across cultures and religions death has been ritualized and thereby cordoned off from our everyday lives. Difference and separation have to be maintained, otherwise the basic categories of existence break down. As a result, the “normal” person’s response to the abject is revulsion, aversion, and horror. (You can look this up in Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Eng. Translation 1982).

Agamben is an Italian philosopher who has written on some of the most troubling issues of the 20th (and now the 21st) century. He is especially known for propounding the idea of “bare life”—a condition of existence that no rights and protections. “Bare life” can be killed without any of the usual consequences. Forms of life that are biologically “alive” but legally “dead” can be deprived of identity, autonomy, even control of their own bodies and minds. The examples Agamben cites include the millions of people who were incarcerated in Nazi concentration camps during World War II and more recently the millions of “stateless” people who have no permanent home or legal citizenship. Images of refugees streaming into Europe a couple of years ago should come to mind, or for that matter the “caravans” of migrants reported to be approaching the US/Mexico border. Think of how these people, or at least some of them, have been treated. (For Agamben, see *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1998). Because he has argued that certain policies of the US government, e.g., towards suspects in the “war on terror,” have reduced human beings to the condition of “bare life,” Agamben has become a controversial figure.

On the basis of these snapshots—that’s all they are—in theory, think about the films we have watched so far this semester. Then write an intelligent, well-organized essay on which film, in your opinion, most closely fits the archetype of the zombie as it might be understood in light of the ideas of “abjection” and “bare life.” You can do any reading or research that you like, on or off the syllabus (make sure you attribute any explicit borrowing), but don’t put vast amounts of time into this. Write your essay on the basis of what we’ve seen so far, what we’ve read, and what we’ve talked about in class.

4 to 5 pages, double spaced, e-mailed as a Word attachment to me no later than 4 PM, Friday the 22nd. Watch for an acknowledgement from me that I’ve received your essay. No acknowledgement within 24 hours means I haven’t received your essay, which will have negative consequences.

Here are a few aids to memory to help get you started.



