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Schizosophy of the Medieval Dead

ARMY OF DARKNESS

Capitalism and Schizophrenia

Jacques Lacan argues that love signifies an imaginary relationship. The emotional exchange between two lovers is a fantasy in which each lover attempts to capture his or her self in the other. It is a narcissistic “passive desire to be loved” achieved by unconsciously seeking out an idealized image of oneself in the beloved, who serves the lover as a medium for objectification (Feldstein 335). To love, then, is to project an ego-ideal onto another body and reify the self as image. The crucial thing in love is the aim, the means, the process of reifying oneself as image, not the culmination of the process. If it were to culminate it would cease to be love.

Deleuze and Guattari do well to equate this definition of love with schizophrenia in *Anti-Oedipus*, arguing that schizophrenia is the normative condition of the late capitalist subject. “Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring-machines, universal primary production as ‘the essential reality of man and nature’” (5). As with love, what matters in the schizoid universe of capital is not a consummation but a process—the process of commodification and “sociodesiring-production.”

Media images are formative elements of late capitalist identity. They produce an imploded sense of social (un)reality in a way similar to how lovers relate (themselves) to their lovers. The late capitalist subject must engage in an imaginary relationship with the “essential reality of man and nature,” a reality that is created and supported by technology.

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In postmodern space, the “natural” is the technological. The terminal “extensions of man”¹ that comprise our physical, mental and social space are the defining characteristics of the human, not some innate, organic gestalt. To be human is above all to be a productive capitalist, a mediatised technocrat governed by “the dementia of the capitalist machine and the pathological character of its rationality” (Guattari 53).

Unlike their arch-enemy General Freud, Deleuze and Guattari do not merely speculate about whether or not civilization is pathological. They assume it is, building their “schizosophy” on the foundation of madness.² For them, it is not a question of one being mad; it is a question of intensities, of the degree to which one is mad. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing. “Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough” (*Anti-Oedipus* 131). Not a breakthrough to a transcendental self, but possibly to a new subject-position or a different state of desiring-production. Such a breakthrough can be misperceived as a breakout and escape from the desiring-machine of capitalism, which, as the one and only postmodern matrix, has no boundaries or walls and thus cannot be escaped.

This chapter examines the schizoanalytic breakdown/breakthrough binary by way of Sam Raimi’s multigeneric science fiction/horror/comedy *Army of Darkness* (1993), the third and final film in the *Evil Dead* trilogy. Since its release fifteen years ago, *Army of Darkness* has garnered little attention from academic critics; the wildly juvenile antics, slapstick routines and cartoon ultraviolence make it difficult to take the film seriously. But beyond all of the absurdity lurks an astute critique of advanced capitalism and its pathological effects, rendering the film a critical theory.³

Protagonist Ash is a simple, ordinary man who works as a cashier and housewares clerk at a discount store. A demonic presence he encounters while on vacation in a remote cabin in the northern American woods sends him back in time to Arthurian England. Initially

he is enslaved, mistaken as a spy for a rival kingdom. Once he gets his hands on certain futuristic technologies (i.e. the shotgun and chainsaw that were sent back with him), however, the medievalites deify him, believing he is a messiah sent to free them from the “deadite” zombies that terrorize them. The enslaved becomes the savior, and Ash leads an army of medievalites to war against an army of deadites commanded by Ash’s undead doppelgänger. In the end, “good” Ash defeats “bad” Ash and emerges as a stereotypical hero.

My reading of *Army of Darkness* treats the film as a pathological wish-fulfillment invoked by the powers of late capitalism in which the war can be interpreted in three ways: human vs. inhuman, Ash vs. self (as pathologized by late capitalism), and Ash vs. capitalism (as the machine that perpetuates a society of the figuratively undead). Ash’s journey back in time is a schizophrenic delusion of grandeur exposing his machinic unconscious. In the objective capitalist world, Ash is a cog; in his subjective dream world, he is a king. And yet his kingship is contingent upon his technological savvy and the late capitalist ethic that codes his desires and inscribes his identity onto the social fabric. While his schizoid fantasy may seem agential, it only reifies his status as a common postmodern subject.

I also read *Army of Darkness* as a critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory. The violence of the film serves as an allegory for the theoretical violence they employ in their work on schizophrenia and capitalism, namely *Anti-Oedipus* and its sequel *A Thousand Plateaus*, which they claim are fraught with revolutionary potential. The film suggests that this potential is limited to being realized by purely violent measures accomplished at the expense of truth. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari, while certainly innovative and stylish, are not as revolutionary as they are subject to the very system of oppression they seek to capsize and subvert.

Postmodern Slavery

In the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix*, Morpheus reveals the "truth" about "reality" to Neo. "You're a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind." A simulation created by sentient machines (who were themselves created by humans), this prison is a cybernetic paraspace⁴ in which subjects unknowingly exist as digital, disembodied selves while the machines farm their dormant bodies for the bioelectricity they generate. The real world is a dark, apocalyptic wasteland devoid of capitalism. But capitalism persists as the socioeconomic motor of the illusory matrix that the machines supervise, a motor essential to the simulation's functionality (originally the machines created a non-capitalist utopia, but human nature rejected it). The two parties entertain a simple Hegelian relationship. The machines need the humans for their bioelectricity, the humans need the machines for their (ir)reality, and each community's selfhood hinges on the mediation of this co-dependent relationship. In terms of class, the machines represent corporate powers whereas the humans represent a postmodern middle class of laborers whose machinic production of commodities is the musculature of those corporate powers.⁵ The humans are technologies, extensions of the machines that sustain their lives. Concurrently the machines are extensions of the humans, artificial intelligences created for the purpose of quickening capitalistic production who turn against their makers and recreate them as producing-machines. Both parties are excrescences of one another, and both are fluid technologies that need yet detest one another. This is the ontological nature of postmodern slavery: *the terminal dependence upon and surrender to the Other that is capitalist technology—an Other that, as an extension of the human, is also the self.*

The metaphysical and ideological fundamentals of postmodern slavery can be traced back to Nietzsche and the hermeneutic of suspicion he applied to traditional concepts of morality, truth and freedom. Nietzsche's slavemaster is Christianity, which he portrays as a desiring-machine intent on brainwashing humanity and liquidating the self by promulgating false senses of good and evil and free will. Postmodernity's slavemaster is late capitalism, which replaces Christianity in the Nietzschean schema. A potent desiring-machine, capitalism uses media technologies to construct a specific (im)morality and (ir)reality, to code desire and the body according to a consumerist ideal, and to convey the idea that freedom of choice exists.⁶ This latter component is the crux of postmodern slavery. In earlier stages of capitalism, class divisions and power relations were much more distinct—a wide gap divided corporate masters from working class slaves. That gap has considerably narrowed in the late capitalist era as the social hierarchy has homogenized into a giant, variable middle class ruled not by a higher class but by the system itself, which is served ready-made with its own precoded symbolic order and set of values and beliefs. Deleuze and Guattari say that “from the viewpoint of the capitalist axiomatic there is only one class, a class with a universalist vocation, the bourgeoisie” (*Anti-Oedipus* 253). Established by a principle of immanence, this categorical meltdown collapses the traditional master-slave relationship in which the identity of the one is assimilated by the other.

But the bourgeois field of immanence...institutes an unrivaled slavery, an unprecedented subjugation: there are no longer even any masters, but only slaves commanding other slaves; there is no longer any need to burden the animal from the outside, it shoulders its own burden. Not that man is ever the slave of technical machines; he is rather the slave of the social machine. (254)

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The system thus prescribes subjectivity as subjugated, and any attempt to achieve agency from it merely increases the intensity of one's subjugation. In *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003), even Agent Smith, the quintessence of the technological being, cannot "get free."⁷ The closest he can come to freedom is to become every single subject/slave in the matrix, a feat that culminates in his destruction. In the postmodern world, freedom is an intricate mythology that penetrates and produces the subject/slave on multiple levels, rendering the will to power an avowal of powerlessness.

This plays out in *Army of Darkness* from the outset. In the opening line of dialogue, the protagonist tells us who and what he is: "My name is Ash, and I am a slave." His confession of identity can be read in literal and figurative terms. Literally Ash has been captured by King Arthur and his subjects, who find him in the desert after the "evil dead" mysteriously hurls him back in time. They think he is allied with a rival kingdom ruled by Duke Henry, a longstanding enemy of Arthur. When we meet him, Ash is being escorted in chains back to Arthur's kingdom to be judged. His body belongs to the medievalites and the historical present he now lives in. But his body also belongs to the future present from which he came apropos his subject-position. A flashback shows us what Ash's "life script"⁸ used to entail: mild-mannered and somewhat moronic, he works at S-Mart in the housewares department. His everyday routine consists of stamping price tags onto merchandise, ringing up customers, and repeatedly urging them to "Shop smart, shop S-Mart." Conflating intelligence with consumerism as an advertising artifice, the mantra denotes Ash's status as an automaton that processes and echoes a language of intelligence/consumerism. His pale blue attire, a uniform worn by all S-Mart's employees, is as blasé and ordinary as his vernacular. Ash lacks a sense of individualism and purpose without being consciously aware of it. Unconsciously, however, he qualifies himself as a residual body. Hence the significance of his name, Ash, a byproduct, an exhausted remainder, the useless residue of the fires of the consumer-capitalist machine, which harnesses his "bioelectricity" and exploits his

body to maintain its functionality. Stating his name in the opening of the film is as much an affirmation of being enslaved as actually calling himself a slave: his name and identity reflect his selfhood and subject-position. Ash's bondage occupies two existential planes. His medieval enslavement symbolizes his enslavement by the technology of late capitalism. Despite his temporal displacement, he is a conventional postmodern subject.

By my reading, however, his temporal displacement is psychological, a schizophrenic breakdown that reinforces his status as a conventional postmodern subject. To use the language of Deleuze and Guattari, his experience in the past is an unconscious effort to deterritorialize himself, to become a "decoded flow" and capture the BwO (Body without Organs). "As for the schizo, continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, he plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the socius on the surface of his own body without organs" (*Anti-Oedipus* 35). Ash metaphorically enacts the nomadic way of the schizo by traveling back in time where he then traverses a vast desert and forest to retrieve a sacred book (the *Necronomicon*) containing passages that, read aloud, will both send him home and save King Arthur's kingdom from the deadites. It is a journey through his own heart of darkness during which he "plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization" in an attempt to manifest the BwO.

Such a manifestation is unrealizable, as Deleuze and Guattari note in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit" (150). Like Lacanian love, the important thing is the process of attaining the BwO, of moving towards it and setting desire in motion. Ash illustrates this process to negate the socius that has been inscribed on the surface of his body, i.e., his subject-position as surface. In reference to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the BwO,⁹ Scott Bukatman explains: "The Body without Organs is the state in which we aspire to dissolve the body and regain the world. So the contemporary drama of the subject, *terminal flesh*, is played out upon the *surface* of the

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body—‘depth’ is an illusion that belongs to a passing moment of a particular subjectivity” (328). Ash wears his heart of darkness on the outside of his body. He does not endeavor to manifest the BwO in himself, but rather *on* himself. The capitalist desiring-machine fashions him as a coded flow whose surface-movement is restricted, limited, cut off. His movement towards the BwO—a state Deleuze and Guattari would call his “becoming-thingness”¹⁰—is an unconscious struggle to decode himself, “to dissolve the body and regain the world.” If there is a master in the late capitalist system (other than the system itself), it is the coded body.

As Ash’s repeated articulation of his S-Mart mantra indicates, the code that speaks his selfhood is most visible in his own manner of speech. Even when he finds himself trapped in a precapitalist, preindustrial era, he cannot escape being spoken by the postmodern commoditocracy. Particularly revealing is his articulation of the mantra to the medievalites after being brought back to the castle. The Arthurian knights have just returned from a battle with Duke Henry and his men, many of which they captured, including Duke Henry himself. All of them are quickly sentenced to death. So is Ash, despite his protest that he “never even saw these assholes before!” He is thrown into an underground dungeon, attacked by zombies, and imperiled by collapsing walls of iron spikes. Aided by a chainsaw, he survives and climbs out of the dungeon. Arthur draws his sword and Ash coolly blows the sword in half with a shotgun. This monologue follows:

Alright you primitive screwheads, listen up. See this? This—is my BOOM STICK! It’s a 12-gauge double-barreled Remington, S-Mart’s top of the line. You can find this in the sporting goods department. That’s right, this sweet baby was made in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Retail for about \$199.95. It’s got a walnut stock, cobalt blue steel, and a hair trigger. That’s right, shop smart, shop S-Mart. You got that!

During the monologue, the medievalites stare at Ash in blank-faced confusion, not knowing how to respond, let alone what he means. Not only have they never seen a gun before, they have no concept of commodity production and distribution. Virtually every word Ash communicates is foreign to them; the gun specs, the retail price, the store he plugs—socially and ideologically, the medievalites are incapable of processing this capitalist lingo. The only thing they do understand is “boom stick,” which, in Ash’s view, is part of their “primitive” lingo and thus the one utterance that they will process and react to. Nonetheless he continues to provide information about the gun, residual information that in this context has neither purpose nor meaning. This linguistic residue reflects the residue of Ash’s selfhood. Overcoded by the language of consumer-capitalism, his body is “a power grid, tattooed with all the signs of cultural excess on its surface, encoded from within by the language of desire” (Cook 26). On the surface, the BOOM STICK monologue is absurd and intended to be comedic. But beneath the surface lies a commentary on the degree to which Ash, a representative everyman, is consciously and unconsciously territorialized as a desiring-machine. Moreover, the ridiculous nature of his dialogue, of his idiotic failure to treat the medievalites as non-capitalist subjects and disregard the code that tells him to do otherwise, alludes to the dreamlike quality of the film and the possibility that what we are seeing is in fact an agential fantasy formulated by Ash. In the beginning, the fantasy merely represents his status as a postmodern slave. But its unfolding sees Ash break his chains and become a hero and idol, a transformation he enacts by exorcizing his coded, “bad” self and literally going to battle with it.

Pop Doppelgänger

The increasing dominance of capitalist media technologies and their schizophrenizing powers has led to the popularization of narrative representations of the doppelgänger that function as socioeconomic analyses and critiques. Deployed as the split, fragmented self, the German term for “double” has established a special resonance in postmodernity. Outside of the science fiction genre, the doppelgänger is often a product of image-addiction and a disillusionment with the superficiality of contemporary culture and subjectivity, as in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* (the books and the films) and practically every David Lynch film.¹¹ Within the science fiction genre, it is often a product of capitalist virtual and cybernetic technologies, as in the Matrix trilogy, William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, and many of Philip K. Dick stories and novels.¹² Not in *Army of Darkness*. The highest technologies in this film are Ash’s shotgun, chainsaw and car. Here the doppelgänger is a technologized, late capitalist formation brought into being by way of Ash’s unconscious will to overpower his constructedness. I read his doppelgänger as a metaphorical illness invoked by the pathology of terminal culture. It takes the form of a zombie who calls itself “bad” Ash. Born from the physical body of Ash himself, “bad” Ash is a break-flow, a fragmented body spawned by a fragmented body, the schizogenetic residue of a residue. In an attempt to “get free,” Ash confronts the dark half of his broken self, a representation of *Ash as affectation*. Only by defeating his “bad,” constructed self does he move towards a revision of his subject-position. Ironically, he defeats his “bad” self with his “good” self, who is also a construction, his identity produced by and dependent upon the existence/antagonism of his Other, and vice versa. In the end, his subject-position, while it moves (in an act of deterritorialization), is not revised—it lingers on the same ontological plane as always(-already).

Ash's doppelgänger forms on his way to retrieve the Necronomicon when he takes refuge in a windmill.¹³ Ash inspects himself in a mirror, and his reflection moves of its own volition, turning up its chin and eyeballing him. He smashes the mirror. He retrieves one of the fragments and gazes into it. This time his image behaves and its movements correspond with his own. Ash tosses the fragment onto the floor. It shatters into smaller fragments, each of which reflects a miniature image of his full body. These miniatures leap out and collectively assault Ash, prodding him with a fork, firing at him with the shotgun, and finally stabbing him in the foot with a nail. Ash slips, falls, and loses consciousness. When he awakens, he thinks the fight was a dream. But he can't stand up: the miniatures have tied him to the floor.¹⁴ Two miniatures pry open his mouth while another dives off of a rafter beam into it. Gurgling and choking, Ash breaks free of his confines and stumbles to his feet. He tries to scald the miniature in his stomach by drinking a kettle of boiling water—as with most scenes in *Army of Darkness*, suspension of disbelief is mandatory here. The result is a literal rupture of selfhood.

Ash feels an itch on his shoulder, tears open his shirt. Lodged in his flesh is a bulging eyeball that seems to be pushing its way out. Hysterical, he dashes out of the windmill, exclaiming, "It's getting bigger!" He staggers and reels in a mad panic as the miniature enlarges and branches out of him. At last it escapes—an exact replica of Ash in appearance and stature. "I'm bad Ash," it says, "and yer good Ash. Yer goody little two-shoes." Ash stares in disbelief at his "bad" self as it taunts and punches him. Catching his wits, he blasts the doppelgänger's face off, dismembers the corpse, buries the body parts, and continues on his journey for the Necronomicon. Eventually he finds the book, but he fails to remember the entire sequence of words he must recite aloud to take it without awaking an army of the dead. He takes the book anyway and flees back to Arthur's castle, and the dead rise from their graves. Foremost among them is "bad" Ash, whose body parts stitch themselves together into the hideous, deformed monster that leads the deadites back to Arthur's castle to reclaim the Necronomicon.

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It's tempting to read Ash's experience in the windmill through the lens of the Lacanian mirror stage in which the child establishes its originary subject-position, recognizing its image in the mirror, identifying its station in reality (based on its image's station in fantasy), and delimiting a self/other binary. Ash is a symbolic child, after all, or at least a sleeper, and *Army of Darkness* tells the story of his birth/awakening, of identifying himself and vying to establish a new subject-position. Considering what happens after Ash looks in the mirror, however, Lacanian theory falls short. Lacan writes: "The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic" ("Mirror Stage" 4). Ash does not become an orthopaedic being. He becomes the opposite. He enters the windmill as a totality and leaves as a fragmented (and fluid) body-image—a quintessential Deleuzoguattarian subject. Not a neo-Freudian territorialized totality, but a deterritorialized multiplicity capable of flowing across the "glacial reality" of the BwO, "where the alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an organism—and also a signification and a subject—occur" (*A Thousand* 159).¹⁵

Dismantled, his doppelgänger freed, Ash is now in a position to produce something. What will he produce? Not his selfhood. One's selfhood, while not necessarily fixed, is always a post-production inasmuch as a new selfhood can only be created in lieu of another one. But now Ash can labor to negotiate his selfhood, if only temporarily: his labor is an act of deterritorialization that inevitably culminates in a reterritorialization accomplished in the climactic defeat and annihilation of "bad" Ash. Only "good" Ash remains, the heroic segment of his fragmented mind and body. He returns to the late twentieth century present (a return to consciousness) and his job at S-Mart by reciting a magical passage in the *Necronomicon*. He must also recite the words he failed to recall when he originally retrieved the book. Once

again, he can't remember them all, and so he opens the gateway for another manifestation of his doppelgänger. A second battle/deterritorialization and defeat/reterritorialization takes place, among other things (this final scene problematizes the theoretical texture of the film). I want to emphasize how Ash emulates capitalism itself, continually "reterritorializing with one hand what it was deterritorializing with the other" (*Anti-Oedipus* 259). He is an extreme case of late capitalist economy and technology, an operative schizo who decodes himself to the limit (Guattari 73).

Ash's failure to articulate the keywords to his salvation signifies his character. The keywords are "Klaatu Barada Nikto," an allusion to *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). In this classic anti-war science fiction film, an alien emissary, Klaatu, accompanied by the robot Gort, travels to earth on a mission of mercy; they intend to warn humans against the use of violent (atomic) technologies. Spoken aloud, "Klaatu Barada Nikto" prohibits Gort from destroying Earth after Klaatu is killed and then momentarily resurrected to deliver his warning: if humans "threaten to extend [their] violence, this Earth...will be reduced to a burnt-out cinder" by the robots, the true masters of the universe. Clearly scripted in the wake of World War II's nuclear holocausts and the dawn of the Cold War, the film foreshadows the machinic apocalypse of the Matrix trilogy, and the parallel with Klaatu and Christ is forthright (as it is with Neo). Ash, too, is a messianic figure—the savior of the medievalites, "the one" who quests for the grail-like book that has the power to destroy the tyranny of the deadites forever. Both Klaatu and Ash speak the words in an attempt to save humanity. Unlike Klaatu, however, Ash is a buffoon, a mediatized body spoken by the arid, "S-Mart" language of consumer-capitalist society. The words don't just confuse him; they don't concern him. He has difficulty remembering the last word, "Nikto," which he finally utters in the form of an incomprehensible cough, thinking it will suffice. It doesn't, of course. The deadites awaken and his doppelgänger exhumes.

Like the monologue concerning his shotgun, Ash's cough is intended to be funny and evoke a sense of idiotic enjoyment in his idiotic antics. But

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it serves as a badge for the way he has been territorialized by the capitalist machine to speak and perceive only the language of the machine. Moreover, the idiotic enjoyment audiences experience calls attention to the (pop) cultural idiocy that affects both Ash and postmodern subjects in general. Blatantly immanent in Ash is “[t]he diminishment of human consciousness that emanate[s] from pop culture” (Geyh xvii); in this capacity, he emblemizes the social machine of capitalism itself. Language here runs in the vein of William S. Burroughs, who, in his cut-up novels, deploys “language as a system, as code, as an already received structure against which we all struggle” (Porush 100). Ash’s struggle against the system/code comes from the molecularization of his molar, machinic unconscious, from the breakage of “bad” Ash and the army of deadites connected to him, all of whom are productions of “good” Ash’s constructedness.

Paradoxically, this constructedness allows Ash to enact a deterritorialization. Had the keywords resonated with him, neither his doppelgänger nor the deadites would have reanimated and he would have retrieved the Necronomicon without a hitch. Thus his “diminished consciousness” inhibits yet empowers and enables him. His salvation depends upon his mechanization. To redirect the flows of desire, he must unleash and disperse the “bad” and fight it with the “good” on the battlefield of the BwO. These terms are of course spurious (hence the quotations marks). It is only Ash’s unconscious that perceives his dismantled half as bad. In his diegetic reality, “bad” Ash is the hardworking S-Mart employee who constitutes Ash’s jejune, dehumanized exterior. “Good” Ash, on the other hand, is the passionate, creative *artiste* who has been repressed by sociocultural forces—repressed because, as a non-productive capitalist subject, he is actually the “bad” self, whereas “bad” Ash, in being productive, is actually the “good” self. This connotes that, in the late capitalist arena, to be good is to be a labor-intensive automaton, and the less emotional an automaton one is, the better. Appropriately, his doppelgänger is a zombie.

The Metaphor of the Zombie

Army of Darkness alludes to and plays on texts and tropes from different genres, most noticeably Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Like the film, the novel is multigeneric, comprising elements of fantasy, science fiction, comedy, and the "international novel." Allison Ensor describes the international novel as "a confrontation between an American and the older culture of Europe" (Twain ix), a style mastered by the stiff upper lipped Henry James. Raimi much preferred Twain's tongue-in-cheek style and adopted themes that recurred in his narratives. Ensor writes:

To begin with, there is the device of the "mysterious stranger"—someone from the outside, someone who does not fit, who comes into a community, often with disruptive consequences. Allied to this is the "unrecognized genius" theme, which was used again in Clemens' next significant novel, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Here, someone having a great deal of knowledge appears in a community too ignorant to recognize his worth and may or may not eventually win proper recognition from it. The difficulty in distinguishing dream from reality, found in Mark Twain as early as *Tom Sawyer*, appears once again, especially in the ending....The Hank Morgan we see at the end of the novel is also a good example of the Mark Twain theme of the "lost paradise." Like Adam, Clemens' favorite Biblical character, Morgan is cut off from an existence which he now sees (perhaps inconsistently) as a paradise to which he can never return, from "all that is dear...all that could make life worth living!" (x)

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Ash is analogous to Hank Morgan in conduct and circumstance.¹⁶ He is a mysterious stranger from the outside who doesn't fit and who disrupts the community of medievalites by stupidly awakening an army of deadites. This awakening allows his unrecognized genius to come to fruition. Using a Chemistry 101 textbook to make gunpowder, a basic knowledge of automechanics to soup up his car into a tanklike war machine, and silly know-how he likely picked up from a movie to train the medievalites how to fight, he leads the medievalites to victory. I have already mentioned the dream-reality schism. At the end of the film, Ash does rue his lost paradise, explaining to an S-Mart co-worker, "I thought about staying. They offered me the chance to lead them, to teach them. To be king. But my place is here." In contrast to Morgan, however, Ash retains his latent paradise shortly after this dialogue when his past/unconscious and his present/conscious implode.

To a lesser degree, *Army of Darkness* borrows from other texts. There is the extrapolation of *Don Quixote's* windmills (see note 13), *Gulliver's Travels'* Lilliputians (see note 14), and *The Day the Earth Stood Still's* Klaatu. There is the use of Arthurian legend and the quest for the Holy Grail (realized through the medium of *A Connecticut Yankee*).¹⁷ The Necronomicon originates in the horror narratives of H. P. Lovecraft; it is a book that in some of his tales contains a mythology of prehuman beings, and in others spells and incantations. In terms of characterization and scenery, Raimi applies a comic book sentimentality, as he does in many of his films.¹⁸ In terms of humor, he draws on the slapstick antics of The Three Stooges, whose violent horseplay Ash and the zombies emulate.¹⁹ *Army of Darkness* is a pastiche, a patchwork of "imitation[s] of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style" that has emerged as a response to "the disappearance of the individual subject" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 17, 16). Frederic Jameson contrasts this notion of postmodern pastiche with modernist parody. But for him pastiche composed in the realm of late capitalism is devoid of humor, "a neutral practice of mimicry...amputated of the satiric impulse" (17). Not in *Army of Darkness*. The film's humor is explicit

and unapologetic and more akin to modernist parody. Its schizophrenic composition makes it postmodern.

The fractal body of the film, its amalgamation of incongruous parts, reflects the physical and psychic body of the film's protagonist. Physically Ash is a cyborg. As he reminds us in a voice-over during a flashback to *Evil Dead II*: "The book awakened something dark in the woods....It got into my hand and it went bad, so I lopped it off at the wrist."²⁰ Ash replaces his hand with machinery: a chainsaw in *Evil Dead II*, a mechanical hand made of iron and chainmail in *Army of Darkness*, both of which he relies upon for survival. Ash is a psychic cyborg, too, subject to the machinery of late capitalism, which constructs him as a desiring-machine with a molecular unconscious that "is constantly being worked on by global society, that is to say, these days, by capitalism, which has cut individuals up into partial machines subjected to its ends" (Guattari 48). And so the film is also a desiring-machine, an extension of the capitalist system created under its patronage, a composite of breakdowns and schiz-flows borrowed from other sources and temporalities.

Perhaps the most significant component of *Army of Darkness*' pastiche is the metaphor of the zombie. In the postmodern era, the zombie has often served as a vehicle for expressing social and political anxieties, beginning most effectively with George Romero's debut film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) in which the zombies can be read as a representation of the atrocities of the Vietnam War. More recent is Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002). Unlike Romero's zombies, who are produced by "space radiation," Boyle's are produced by a virus and can signify contemporary post-9/11 fears of bioterrorism. Even more provocative is Romero's sequel to his debut, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), set in a shopping mall. Here zombies denote the lobotomized masses of middle class laborers and consumers that comprise late capitalist society. Additionally, "jokes about the death of capitalism, even while the capitalist instinct survives, are focused on the many goods displayed in the spotless temple of consumerism" (Nicholls 304). Zombies

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function in a similar fashion in *Army of Darkness*. Their function is more complex, however, in light of their kinship with Ash.

Ash's experience as an S-Mart employee represents the postmodern mass man socialized by the routine of commodity labor. In essence, it is the same experience of the zombie, who is also socialized by a routine, a job it comes back to again and again till death do them part: *to kill and reproduce*. As a laborer, Ash has an analogous job, at least vis-à-vis reproduction. The verbal and behavioral image he conveys of himself as an agent of S-Mart merchandise and ethics relies exclusively on the reproduction of S-Mart consumers. In the absence of a steady flow of consumers, he would be out of a job, just as a zombie would be out of a job if it did not perpetuate its kind. Ash also embodies the zombie as a consumer. Like all capitalist subjects, the "zombifying power of consumer fetishism" inevitably affects him, invoking a desire to consume for the sake of consuming, or rather, to reproduce the desire to consume (Harper). All this reifies Ash's subject-position as a postmodern slave; similar to the zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*, his only emotions seem to be those that facilitate his ontological purpose. The zombies' purpose is to produce in the form of killing machines. Ash's purpose is to produce in the form of a battery plugged into the capitalist machine. As Stephen Harper says: "Zombies function in *Dawn of the Dead* as a *lumpenproletariat* of shifting significance, walking symbols of an oppressed social group. This function is derived in part from their origins in the literature and cinema of the twentieth century, in which zombies are synonymous with oppression and slavery." Metaphorically speaking, the same applies to *Army of Darkness*' protagonist, who, in the real world of the postmodern present, is the true king of the deadites.

But this dynamic is inverted in Ash's (un)agential fantasy, where neither the zombies nor Ash himself are emotionally territorialized beings, and where their purpose is far more grandiose. Both parties are emotionally charged (and thus deterritorialized) beings, one intent on saving humanity, the other intent on destroying it. The behavioral patterns of the Ash we see

in S-Mart and the one we see in medieval England are diametric opposites. No longer the polite, modest, passive discount store employee, Ash is crude, bombastic, animated—a charismatic individual, although not necessarily an appealing one. This is apparent in his speech as much as in his actions. Obscenities and one-liners pepper his discourse. He actively incarnates the Lyotardian apothegm that “to speak is to fight” (10). No less belligerent is his conduct. A heated state of warfare (physical, psychological, linguistic, sexual, etc.) informs almost everything he does, and his general treatment of the medievalites, who he refers to as “primitive screwheads” and “primates,” is outwardly disdainful and antagonistic. Ash’s doppelgänger and his army of zombies exhibit comparable qualities, administering their share of one-liners and violence.

Unlike Romero’s zombies, Raimi’s are intelligent and deliberately brutal. These are not mindless drones, not representations of Ash the employee, but representations of Ash the hero, warrior and messiah, except for the doppelgänger, who *is* Ash, or at least one pole of his unconscious spectrum. “Good” Ash occupies the other pole, and in between swims the army of the dead. Ash is both protagonist and antagonist and must save the medievalites from himself. Notions of “good” and “bad” are therefore negated. Ash’s discourse implies this negation the first time he kills his doppelgänger. In response to being called “goody little two-shoes,” Ash shoots the doppelgänger in the face and says, “Good, bad—I’m the guy with the gun.” Morality isn’t the point. Both characters are equally barbarous. What matters is which character possesses the resources to capitalize on his barbarism most productively and efficiently.

“Good” and “bad” Ash and the deadites together signify Ash’s decoded self, which has been unplugged from the machine, freed from the prison of the “matrix.” Ash’s unconscious spectrum is a rhizomorphous warzone where the shattered fragments of his schiz-body can flow and interact, and the combat and bloodshed that these fragments entertain delineate the process of the deterritorialization of his coded self. The process concludes when

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“good” Ash kills “bad” Ash a second time, catapulting the doppelgänger into the night sky perched on a sack of gunpowder that explodes like fireworks. Ashes to Ashes—the doppelgänger returns to and reinforces the state of fragmentation that constituted his zombie-body (a stitched together mosaic of dead flesh) and his original body (an unconscious piece of the zombified Ash’s schizoid self). It is a reterritorialization for “bad” Ash, who is initially deterritorialized when he bifurcates from “good+bad” Ash’s primal body, creating two fluid organisms whose production capacity requires them to be foils for one another. The climax of “good” Ash’s deterritorialization, in other words, commences “bad” Ash’s reterritorialization. This opposition is as appropriate as it is imperative given capitalism’s dependency on both processes to maintain itself as a steady mechanism of production.

The death of “bad” Ash leads to the swift defeat of the deadites. Their defeat elicits the implosion of Ash’s unconscious spectrum and another consequent reterritorialization as the spectrum ceases to be a fecund space for production. Stasis sets in; there is no longer any work to be done. The zombies return to the earth—Ashes to Ashes for them, too—and Duke Henry and King Arthur’s empires unite in harmony. The opposition is liquidated, and violence (i.e. fluidity and procession) no longer possesses use-value. Ash must return home to be reterritorialized. He could stay and be king, but that would be an anti-productive venture, and whereas Ash has redefined his selfhood, if only unconsciously, he cannot free himself from capitalist subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari’s desiring-machines, their “lines of escape leading elsewhere,” are ultimately not escapist at all since “elsewhere” is a place that exists inside of the capitalist system. What Althusser says about ideology can be said about the ontological and metaphysical technoscape of capitalism: “what thus seems to take place outside ideology...in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology” (49). So

the inside is everything, or there is no outside, or the inside is the outside. Ash has no choice but to return from the past to the present, from his unconscious, decoded self to his conscious, coded self—back to the womb of the “matrix.”

Back to the Matrix

Raimi shot two endings for *Army of Darkness*. In the first, Ash retreats to a cave where he drinks a potion concocted from a recipe in the *Necronomicon*. Each drop of the potion will send him to sleep for one century, so he must take one drop for each century that falls between the medieval past and the late capitalist present. He takes too many drops and wakes up in a postapocalyptic wasteland. The last scene shows a gaunt Ash wearing tattered clothes and a long, shaggy beard—a Robinson Crusoe of the future. He climbs an embankment, gazes in horror at the ruins of a city, and helplessly screams and curses. This was the film’s original ending. For the purposes of my argument, it is ineffective for two main reasons, both the result of capitalist forces.

First is the marketability of *Army of Darkness* as a commodity. Its producers believed that concluding on such a negative, open-ended, catastrophic note would leave audiences dissatisfied and inhibit the film’s sales. For the film to make money, there needed to be a happy ending; Raimi had to abandon it. The second reason concerns the theoretical groundwork I have been mapping out. If Ash “returned” to a decimated future, from a precapitalist to a postcapitalist society, a reterritorialization could not be consummated, because there would be no means of sociodesiring-production. “Good” Ash would be entirely on his own, with nothing to plug into or to be plugged into. Additionally, a temporal shift to anything but

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the originary present would not be a reversion to the conscious, but rather a relocating to another manifestation of the unconscious, one in which the deterritorialization that had been achieved in the past unconscious has entropically fizzled out. In order to function according to the binding principles of late capitalism, he has no choice: he must go back to S-Mart and reinstall himself in his derivative subject-position. Without this reversion, the film ceases to be a critical theory. The breakthrough must experience a breakdown. It doesn't work except on the level of many early pulp science fictions: a stupid adventure tale for adolescent boys. Again, a desire to satisfy the consumer market induces the "happy" reinstatement of Ash in the consumer world.

The alternate ending brings "good" Ash back to S-Mart. The spirit of "bad" Ash hitches a ride, too, resulting in the implosion of past and present, conscious and unconscious, "good" and "bad." Like the ousted ending, Ash must drink the magic potion, but this time he also has to speak the magic words. He fails to speak them properly, and so the tiled floors and aisles of the discount store become another battlefield on which Ash can reengage in deterritorialization and the process of production. After he finishes telling his story to a dubious male co-worker, explaining how he "basically" spoke the magic words correctly this time, a customer turns into a zombie. Ash immediately slips back into the alpha male role of his unconscious self, and the role of Sheila, his medieval love interest, is replaced by a female co-worker. A proverbial damsel in distress, Sheila validates Ash's masculinity by submitting to it. (Even when she is zombified by "bad" Ash's kiss and becomes "bad" Sheila, she still submits to the hero in that "bad" Ash is merely one part of the hero's psychic body.) Ash pushes her aside as the zombie delivers a powerful backhand that sends him flying across the store into the firearms department. The zombie rips a cash register off of a checkout counter and threatens to drop it on S-Mart Sheila's head, screaming, "Die! Die! Die!" Ash arms himself with a rifle. He leaps onto a tabletop and blasts the cash register out of the zombie's hands. "Lady, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to

leave the store,” he says in a polite monotone. The zombie snarls, “Who the hell are you?” “Name’s Ash,” he replies, cocking his gun. “Housewares.”

A fight the likes of Looney Toons ensues. Ash unloads an absurd fusillade of bullets and the zombie leaps off of a trampoline and soars across the store with a trapeze artist’s grace before falling to the floor dead. Ash tears off his S-Mart uniform, beneath which is a black, futuristic cowboy outfit. He flips the rifle end over end like a gunslinger, sheathes it in a holster at his side, and embraces his co-worker when she dives into his arms. In voice-over, he says, “Sure, I could have stayed in the past. Could’ve even been king. But in my own way, I am king.” Then, tipping his co-worker over, he says aloud, “Hail to the king, baby,” and kisses her.

The association of Ash with a conventional masculine hero as portrayed by Hollywood cinema is overt: he becomes *Gone with the Wind*’s Rhett Butler, or *Die Hard*’s John McClane, or any of Clint Eastwood’s spaghetti western badasses. The latter reference is particularly apt as the development of Ash’s selfhood climaxes in the role of the mythical cowboy. This renders the deterritorializing journey through his machinic unconscious a process of becoming-cowboy commensurate with becoming-king. For Ash, the journey from present/conscious to past/unconscious back to present/conscious marks his metaphorical and actual journey from slave to king. Contrary to its agential objective, it also marks his reification as a late capitalist subject. Ash may be king, but the streets of his kingdom are paved with linoleum, the buildings built with canned goods and cardboard boxes of merchandise. His subjects are the S-Mart employees and their customers. The role of the medievalites he left behind has been sublimated onto them, and he is their messiah, sent to protect and serve them and make certain that the flow of capital is not jeopardized by the wiles of the evil dead (evil because it inhibits the production process by threatening to kill and decrease the number of workers and consumers). He is king “in his own way”—the way of the postmodern subject. He remains enslaved, especially if we read the scene as a megalomaniacal fantasy that we perceive through Ash’s point

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of view, in which case he is a pathological production of capitalism, free only by dint of madness.

Reading the scene literally yields the same result. While Ash's subject-position moves from a source of robotic subservience to dynamic power, he is still bound by the codes and ethics that originally constructed him. Rather than achieve transcendence, he consecrates an "eternal return" to that which is immanent in his body: the processes of capitalist reterritorialization and deterritorialization whose ongoing flux stabilizes the "social axiomatic" (*Anti-Oedipus* 258). Ash thus represents the socius itself. He is slave and master at once—the outside. Or he is the inside, caught in an incessant state of becoming between the two, the slash in slave/master. Either way, he has reached the limit of capitalism as a schiz-flow. "Hence one can say that schizophrenia is the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit, by substituting for it its own *immanent* relative limits, which it continually reproduces on a widened scale" (246).

A distinction between Ash as slave/master and mere slave can be drawn by comparing the way he names himself here and in the film's beginning. Recall how in the beginning Ash, in chains, admits to being a slave. When he introduces himself to us, he associates his name (and residual identity) directly with slavery ("My name is Ash, and I am a slave"). In the end, he not only escapes his chains, he holds a weapon—a powerful technological extension that demarcates a key coordinate of his selfhood. He also stands on a table above a crowd in a position of power accentuated by an up-angle camera shot. When he introduces himself to the zombie, he does not directly associate his name with slavery, but he does implicitly. "Name's Ash. Housewares." He links his identity to the department he works in, reminiscing his earlier monologue when he apprises the medievalites of his shotgun's marketable qualities. The zombie doesn't know what "housewares" means. Nor does it care. "I'll swallow your soul!" it croaks, oblivious to his

treatment of it as a shopper. The humor of the exchange stems from the notion that everyone and everything, even death, is a potential consumer. In any case, Ash still remains a slave bound by commoditocratic chains. But he is a slave amongst lesser slaves (co-workers and consumers) bound by the chains of the commodity. The difference between Ash and them is that he has realized his full potential as a capitalist desiring-machine. As in his medieval fantasy, violence illustrates this potential. The pathway to freedom in *Army of Darkness* consists of tapping into the unconscious and harnessing and unleashing its savage libidinal energy.

While Deleuze and Guattari don't dwell on it, violence is an inevitable consequence of their theory. It is in fact integral to the map of schizoanalysis they draw in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, which are designed to derail and smash the structure of psychoanalysis. Dependent on constant breakage, collapse, rupture, cutting and fluxing, schizoanalysis itself defines a violent arena in which the territorialization processes are not smoothly accomplished. The method of narration that Deleuze and Guattari use to articulate it is likewise violent. They engage a machinic, fractured syntax that reflects their subject matter; they compact a number of methodologies (mainly philosophy and psychology, but also history, sociology, anthropology, and literary theory) to unpack their subject matter; and scatological references stain their writing like graffiti. Their revolutionary style depicts the revolutionary "investment" they believe the schizophrenic process has the power to invoke in subjectivity.²¹ All this is violent conduct. Even many of the authors they cite to further their arguments are violent in practice (e.g. Schreber, Artaud, Burroughs, Kafka).²² In short, Deleuze and Guattari fight violence with violence, arguing for an agential outpouring of the technology of capitalism in contrast to an inhibiting Oedipalization of it.

Army of Darkness can be read as an allegory of such an undertaking. This raises a seminal question: Is there any other way to jack out of the matrix other than by means of violent praxis? Is, as Baudrillard claims, "theoretical violence, not truth...the only resource left to us" (163)? If so, this is another

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instance of how Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of escape" are not altogether escapist. They certainly offer a new way of negotiating and abiding the matrix. But the way remains, like Ash, bound in chains. Deleuze and Guattari admit it. "But in every respect, capitalism has a very particular character: its lines of escape are not difficulties that arise, they are the conditions of its own operation" (*Anti-Oedipus* 67). One could say the same thing about their theory: in every respect, it is as much an open range as a jail cell—despite whether or not it is "good" or "bad" in comparison with the praxis it seeks to overthrow. In this sense, they are virtual writers of fiction, as Scott Bukatman indicates: "Deleuze and Guattari are cyberpunks, too, constructing fictions of terminal identity in the nearly familiar language of techno-surrealism" (326). And like many cyberpunk writers, Deleuze and Guattari's fictions are deeply theoretical, critiquing the postmodern condition by mapping out its coordinates and, most importantly, by technologizing desire.