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the post- 9/11 aesthetic: repositioning the zombie film in the horror genre

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The Post-9/11 Aesthetic: Repositioning the Zombie Film in the Horror Genre

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

I dedicate this scholarly enterprise to my daughter, Tousey Green; I love you always and forever. To my parents, Tom and Judy Trowbridge, all my love; your belief in me was immeasurable in seeing me through completion of this project. I would like to thank all of my family, friends (insert your name here), mentors, colleagues, and students during this writing process, all of whom have influenced me in ways large and small.

To my grandmother Dr. Virginia Litres, who gave me a copy of her dissertation before she passed away; this simple gesture of handing over the metaphorical baton pushed me to continue even when I did not want to anymore. While perched on a bookshelf, it served as a continual (and plaguing) reminder of the endgame.

To my committee members, a hearty thank-you for all your time and efforts in advising along the way and helping me reach the finish line.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores a body of films produced after the events of 9/11, and while examining this specific point of departure, the author presents the argument on the vast cultural relevancy of the omnipresent zombie. These films are interrogative and complex, offering the viewing audience a rich tapestry of interwoven meanings. Furthermore, the author suggests that the zombie trope has, in fact, left the genre altogether, reinserted into a style of films he labels as “non-zombie appropriation.”

Chapter 1 introduces the zombie genre as both part of the larger horror genre aesthetic and as its’ own legitimate subgenre. The zombie has a rich cinematic history, going back more than seven decades; heretofore, the last decade continues to see an unabated release of the viewing world’s favorite creature. Chapter 2 examines *28 Days Later* and the sequel *28 Weeks Later* as critical films functioning as works that refocus the zombie for the twenty-first century. As no serious discussion of filmic zombies can occur without the immeasurable significance of George A. Romero, chapter 3 concentrates on the auteur reclaiming a genre he helped to invent with his films *Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead*. These two works show a director that refuses to rest on his laurels by encoding these films with rich post 9/11 concerns.

In chapter 4, the examination of the disparate films *Equilibrium* and *The Happening* discuss the utilization of non-zombie appropriations, films with no

discernible zombies, but for all intents and purpose, imitate that specific narrative. By way of conclusion, chapter 5 continues the non-zombie trope with the abstract (and indeed postmodern) *They Came Back*. The chapter ends with a broadening of the context and with other concerns for the argument.

This dissertation should be of interest to both horror scholarship in general and zombie films in particular. It aims to provide a sophisticated reading a significant body of works and add to the ongoing and critical legitimization to this important style of cinematic artistry.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Like the archaic man the zombie’s universe is a mysterious and uncivilized one bordering ours, with its own unique codes of discipline that are impossible to comprehend with human logic.”

—James F. Iaccino, *Psychological Reflections of Cinematic Terror*

“The horror of the zombie movie comes from recognizing the human in the monster; the terror of the zombie movie comes from knowing there is nothing to do about it but destroy what is left.”

—Kyle Bishop, *Raising the Dead*

Zombies¹ are everywhere! At present, they are the shambling hordes, still moving with deliberate slowness or (more times than not) in the hyper-accelerated pace² of the post-9/11 world. Their cultural currency³ has no equal in terms of the monsters that haunt people’s nightmares, or, as Jake Horsley succinctly writes, “The horror film’s most basic function is to threaten us. Consequently, it can and must with more disturbing, subversive, dangerous (and hence repressed) ideas in our culture, or our society” (221). Echoing Horsley, Paul Wells espouses in the *Horror Genre* that

A major theme of the horror genre is therefore the expression of the ways in which individuals try to maintain control of their lives in the face of profound disruptions which only comment on the frailties and brutalities of the status quo and its habitual norms.

Fundamentally, then, horror texts engage with the collapse of social/socialized formations. These range from the personal to the familial, the communal, the national, and the global. (9–10)

There are almost as many classifications for horror as there are horror films to watch. In order to suture a working definition to this dissertation, Horsley and Wells offer declarations on the principle role of this genre in relation to the movie-going public. Certainly, at this juncture, the kairotic moment⁴ relates to the climate of extreme pressure for the United States and the global community, metamorphosed through the moving image and articulated unremittingly by the tropes contained in recent horror of the last decade.

All the same, inside the horror genre, it is not the slasher film, ghost story/haunted house, demonic possession, or participatory/sadomasochistic narrative that “threatens” viewing audiences at the local Cineplex and on the small screen. By their sheer tenacity and relentlessness, the zombie continues to consume the hearts and minds of our collective consciousness, reigning supreme over all monsters. As David Flint, in *Zombie Holocaust*, notes,

While other monsters have faded, the zombie seems as relevant as ever—perhaps even more so, given the increasingly uncertain world we live in, where the idea of humanity being wiped out by a biological, nuclear, or chemical attack seems ever more feasible—an apocalypse is at the back of everyone’s mind. (224)

Zombie films,⁵ since their birth with *White Zombie* (1932),⁶ continue to serve as a subgenre under the larger umbrella of horror, but in no traditional sense can they

be considered subpar or second-tier; in fact, they create feasible narratives in the ubiquitous age of chemical warfare. Additionally, and unlike other creatures, the identification of fear comes from the filmic zombie⁷ representing neither/nor, present/absent, conscious/unconscious, and a list of other diametric categorizations.

Zombies have come roaring back with a vengeance, serving as a barometer for society, writ large. Beyond filmic representations, individuals now own the zombie as their particular emblem, so they co-opt this rich symbol at the same rate of an impending pandemic. Some recent examples of the zombies' manifestation include the following disparate appropriations: as an "emergency preparedness campaign" for the CDC (Center for Disease Control),⁸ used in television commercials to sell⁹ the 2012 Honda Civic©, as an "interactive experience"¹⁰ at Busch Gardens's© annual Howl-o-Scream©, seen wandering around Manhattan as part of the Occupy Wall Street movement,¹¹ on episodes of *Dancing with the Stars* as well as *America's Got Talent*, and, perhaps most disturbing of all, in national news¹² where citizens have been attacked by individuals in a zombie-like manner.

Recently, the zombie presence has been stalking the small screen as well with AMC's© *The Walking Dead*. The storyboards come directly from the massively successful line of comic books¹³ (in the graphic novel tradition) created by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore. Now in its third season, and including the director Frank Darabont,¹⁴ the series focuses on the human/zombie dichotomy but purposefully shows partiality toward the human side¹⁵ of the evolving narrative. Indeed, the zombies only fill a small fraction of the plot, leaving the viewing public wanting

more of this multifaceted storyline. In point of fact, zombies and *The Walking Dead*, in particular, are interwoven into the milieu of popular American culture as obsession continues to build.¹⁶

The zombie ceaselessly roams throughout America and around the world; the number grows as the variety of platforms increases exponentially. In its tenth consecutive year, the Toronto Zombie Walk¹⁷ continues to be the annual meeting place for individuals to live out zombie fantasies for the weekend. Another example includes the annual gathering of zombies at the Monroeville Mall (shooting location for the original *Dawn of the Dead*), located outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the event includes film screenings, panel discussions, and zombie crawls.¹⁸

An increasing number of literatures¹⁹ expand the popular cultural canon with print versions of the zombie. Max Brooks has two bestsellers: *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* (2003) and *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2007). In the first case, Brooks parodies other popular “survival guides” yet remains serious, with no hint of irony in the overall tone of the book. Second, *World War Z*²⁰ offers a recitation based on the accounts of multiple survivors of a worldwide zombie apocalypse. Other titles include philosophical works like Scott Kenemore’s *The Zen of Zombie: Better Living Through the Undead* (2007) and even illustrated children’s books such as Greg Stones’s *Zombies Hate Stuff* (2012).

Horror’s family tree has some twisted root to be sure; one needs to look no further than the inclusion of J-horror²¹ and “torture porn”²² into the expanding narrative of cinematic depravity; furthermore, these particular styles allow the

notion of the abject²³ fertile ground and rich material to interpret. Of course, the horror genre remains steeped in a rich allegorical tradition, and any attempt to render a working definition of meaning remains tenuous at best. However, beyond using the aforementioned concepts of horror articulated by Horsley and Wells, the following chapters adhere to the theoretical frame of Isabel Pinedo's useful paradigm for what she constitutes as "postmodern horror," films released after 1968. She locates five characteristics that work in tandem, maintaining, "Horror constitutes a violent disruption of the everyday world. Horror transgresses and violates boundaries. Horror throws into question the validity of rationality. Postmodern horror repudiates narrative closure. Horror produces a bounded experience of fear" (90). Although not mentioned by Pinedo, these five tropes correspond suitably into the zombie world; undoubtedly, it is no accident that 1968 serves as a placeholder particularly with the indubitable importance of *Night of the Living Dead* for the horror genre and as the birth of the modern zombie.²⁴ Additionally, this helps to contextualize how form follows content.

It would seem that horror and zombie films would be antithetical to box-office success. What are the appeals of horror other than to have the opposite sex sit close to someone on a date in a darkened movie theater? Thomas Sipos offers possible categorizations for this affinity for horrific images; he feels that these classifications include the following: horror as catharsis, metaphysical transcendence, sympathy for the "other," and as ideological palette (247-58). Debunked by most scholars, the cathartic release is borrowed heavily from Freud and the concept of the uncanny. In short, the audience undergoes repressed

anxieties, and by observing a horror film, it will give an emotional release and banish those apprehensions. The transcendence simply creates a sense of wonder or awe when the audience interrelates with a film. On a personal level, the viewer can identify with the monster and create a compassionate reaction when witnessing said “othering.” Lastly, and certainly applicable to the zombie genre, the film’s images seek to convey a deep-thinking message for the individual viewer to absorb, usually accomplished through subtext.

Expanding the context further, one must look at the larger implications of the horror film and its bastard offspring, the zombie film. Steven Schneider voices, “For better or worse, the metaphorical nature of horror film monsters has facilitated their entrance into our collective consciousness” (12). Correspondingly, Robin Wood posits, “To study the evolution of a genre is to study a national (un)consciousness.” Too, Noel Carroll, in the canonical *Philosophy of the Heart*, puts forth, “If at present we find ourselves in a horror cycle, by hypothesis, we could attempt to explain its provenance and tenacity by isolating the sources of social stress and the anxieties with which the cycle correlates.” Schneider’s, Wood’s, and Carroll’s complementary statements highlight the enduring power of cinema to reflect back to society a litany of social anxieties. To be sure, one only needs to look at the actual volume²⁵ of zombie films that continue to spread like a transmittable synecdoche, incapable of irreducibility: a celluloid pandemic of epic proportions.

The fretfulness of the Cold War (a previous overarching preoccupation encoded into horror films) turns into a forgotten ghost of the past, relegated to the history books; however, new fears arise and are replaced by the perceived threat of

terrorists and dirty bombs, while simultaneous efforts are made to identify the enemy. Slavoj Žižek, in “Are We in a War? Do We Have an Enemy?” describes this paranoia: “[T]he division friend/enemy is never just a recognition of factual difference. The enemy is by definition always (up to a point) invisible. It cannot be directly recognized because it looks like one of us” (5). Audiences continue to seek the cathartic experience through the vehicle of the moving picture, yet we are left with remnants of an emotional release, as actual violence continues to plague America and, indeed, the globe stage as well. From a historical standpoint, the isolationist polices that once protected North America can no longer contain external threats. Perhaps, in this new “us versus them”²⁶ world, the gated community acts as a new type of suburban defense to protect a society suffering from perpetual paranoia in the wake of 9/11. This real-world applicability becomes implemented by film directors as they reflect back cultural fears through celluloid verisimilitude.

To attempt an explanatory discourse would be a difficult undertaking, yet there are certainly markers (the literal voluminous number of zombie/zombie-themed films released in a little over a decade since 9/11) one can consider as a strategic point of departure. Certainly, the aftermath of 9/11 continues to produce attention on zombies with the aforementioned success of *The Walking Dead* and the fever-pitched anticipation of the *World War Z* (2013)²⁷ motion picture, serving as two examples. One possible explanation for the continued veneration of zombie cinema follows what Kyle Bishop²⁸ labels a “shift in cultural consciousness,” precipitated by ever-increasing anxiety (17). In particular, this responsiveness

shows that viewing audiences, and especially American audiences, continue to be drawn to films with an apocalyptic narrative, with particular emphasis on what Andrew Tudor²⁹ calls the “metamorphosis narrative”; zombie films, by default, and almost without exception, address humanity at the end of the world,³⁰ who struggles with a collective threat and varied metamorphic implications.

Slavoj Žižek opines in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* that Americans carry a profound connection to depictions of devastation; he proposes that, while viewing the catastrophic image, the long-lasting emotional effects remain indicative of the fear of social alteration. In short, the general public has their “way of life” unfathomably changed by terrorism. Similarly, K. Silem Mohammad echoes this concept of the World Trade Center³¹ becoming illustrative of both the present and absence; thus, the image lingers, and public awareness does not subside. These examples show the need for the external image and the deep-seated changes to the individual essence.

The question arises for the researcher: why study horror, and particularly, the zombie endlessly roaming inside the horror genre? The academy generally snubs its collective noses for more highbrow fare,³² despite continued box-office success stories³³ and adoration by popular culture. Even so, one role of film is to reflect reality back to the viewer, and horror remains an effective way to offer inroads into our philosophical inscape; the psychological dynamic separates these types of films from others. Paul Wells, in *The Horror Genre*,³⁴ reinforces this position by pronouncing, “Arguably, more than any other genre, it has interrogated the deep-seated effects of change and responded to the newly determined grand narratives of

social, scientific, and philosophical thought” (3). The subversive nature of zombie films does not allow for any catharsis,³⁵ yet it calls into question the very nature of what it means to be human. Second, Umberto Eco³⁶ calls horror films “open works”—texts that allow for an increasing amount of complexities exacerbated by abstruseness; these texts (films) are rife by the nature of the image reflecting back disconnectedness in the contemporary world.

Andy Coghlan,³⁷ in “Pure Rage: The Making of *28 Days Later*,” espouses that “infectious diseases are indeed the new paranoia that’s striking Western society.” Even so, another problem arises when looking at this selective body of films in terms of how to locate the difference between contagion and disease.³⁸ Are they the same, or do they have distinct characteristics? Identifying the source has never be a simple tasks, as Richard Smith elucidates that,

[b]ecause Romero and Russo refused to fix a definitive cause for the epidemic in *Night of the Living Dead* (radiation from a returning space probe is bandied about as a probable catalyst), one wonders which way this infection is traveling—from the ground up or the other way around? And precisely who is infecting whom? The implication is the that the sins of the living, their bitterness, their rejection of spontaneity in favor of habit, have driven the deceased to an eternal, shambling unrest. (45)

As one of the tropes of the horror/zombie film is to create anxiety-inducing experiences for the viewing audience, the lack of clarification helps to perpetuate the complete absence of narrative closure. In terms of diseased narratives, other

contagion films³⁹ continue to be released along with the zombie-themed motion picture.

An overriding supposition of this dissertation hinges on the assertion of zombie themes inserted into dissimilar films outside the horror genre. The power of the metaphoric zombie has usurped other genres including science fiction, the thriller, and even melodrama. Unquestionably, the looming remnants of September 11, 2001,⁴⁰ continue to make over the zombie into a new configuration, creating a rich body of texts to examine. In what follows, the attention focuses on particular films that exhibit mannerisms of a concept loosely defined as “zombie appropriation.”

The following chapters explore seven films that have been produced in the last decade. In chapter 2, the focus is on *28 Days Later* and its worthy sequel, *28 Weeks Later*. The post-9/11 themes are rampant in Danny Boyle’s fresh take on the zombie genre, namely the hyper-accelerated pace of the creature and a heretofore unseen amplified intensity.⁴¹ Interestingly, it is the DV (Digital Video), hand-held camera that gives *28 Days Later* its metaphorical teeth. The film also shows the infected acting different in that each victim transmits the “rage virus” by vomiting on the next victim, forgoing the traditional mastication technique. In the sequel, a direct correlation can be made for American themes, as soldiers occupy a foreign space (Great Britain) under the guise of establishing control in a reconstructed world. These two films, on the one hand, overlap and share comparable thematic issues, yet, on the other hand, each carries the pandemic subject matter to different areas of concern.

Chapter 3 focuses on George A. Romero's homecoming to the genre he invented! By the 1960s, the filmic zombie had already had a three-decade-plus corpus of works. Romero's name is one and the same with zombie, or as Pete Dendle aptly states, "Romero is the Shakespeare of the zombie film" (121). *Night of the Living Dead* distinguishes itself from its predecessors, creating the modern-day zombie; the film does not have a hypnotic drug administered by a zombie master or a mad scientist, nor does it contain any presence of Voodoo magic. Most importantly, this film introduces what Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* coins the "mass zombie," and the zombie horde—functioning as mass threats—remains a constant in films (236). Arguably, the zombie genre died after 1985, after the release Romero's ill-received *Day of the Dead*.⁴² However, the master returned to form by releasing no fewer than three zombie films in a five-year period. I concentrate on two of these films: *Land of the Dead* (2005)⁴³ and *Diary of the Dead* (2007). *Land of the Dead*, Romero's first zombie film in 20 years, serves as his diatribe against the post-9/11 world and is, perhaps, his most political film to date. *Diary of the Dead* breaks new ground by attacking the nature of the hyper-accelerated world, commenting on the nature of the saturated, mass-media culture of present society; the film employs the "found footage" technique,⁴⁴ and Romero creates his most aesthetically diverse work to date.

Chapter 4 attempts to explicate the non-zombie narrative with the 2002 film *Equilibrium* and the 2008 film *The Happening*. In the first example, the plot seemingly follows those of the science-fiction, dystopia categorization, yet zombie tropes underpin the narrative arch in sum. Here, the characters mimic zombie traits,

devoid of any conscious thought or human emotion. In the second example, an unidentified, airborne substance causes the characters to lose their ability to reason. The effect of coming into contact with this unknown killer forces the individual to commit suicide by any means necessary. Both films appropriate the zombie outside of the horror genre and are illustrative of this rich metaphor.

In chapter 5, the non-zombie adoption continues with the 2004 film *They Came Back* (*Les Revenants*). Interestingly, this film toys with the notion of the dead returning from the grave without explanation and being reunited with their families. However, these “zombies” show no signs of decomposition, do not appear menacing, and surely call into question the notion of presence/absence: instead of either/or, these individuals appear to be a problematic presence *and* absence, creating multiple layers of abstraction. The chapter concludes with remarks about the project and original contributions and leaves the reader with further food for thought, although not “Brains.”

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ The myriad of what defines a zombie remains voluminous. To contextualize, zombies, in the filmic sense, roughly divide into three categories: the golden age of cinema (voodoo based), *Night of the Living Dead* (the standard for all zombie films after 1968), and post-9/11 (fast zombies for a changed world).

Simon Cooper explains, “Unlike other monsters whose pure otherness makes them relatively easy to hate and fear, the zombie, because it confuses the boundaries of death and life, of the human and non-human, arouses feelings of dread and anxiety, suggesting a fate that could befall us all. This ambivalence has also given the zombie a figure a powerful allegorical quality, one historically mutable—at various times standing in for the uncanny, the dehumanization of humankind under colonialism, a victim figure of capitalism, and now the technosciences. Precisely because the zombie coalesces around an empty core, it can be invested with the changing fears and anxieties of the culture” (n.p.).

Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry articulate, “Therefore, unlike the vampire, the zombie poses a twofold terror: There is the primary fear of being devoured by a zombie, a threat posed mainly to the physical body, and the secondary fear that one will, in losing one’s consciousness, become a part of the monstrous horde. Both of these fears reflect recognition of one’s own mortality and ultimately

reveal the primal fear of losing the 'self'; however, in the figure of the zombie, the body and mind are separated antinomies. The zombie is different from other monsters because the body is resurrected and retained: only consciousness is permanently lost. Like the vampire and the werewolf, the zombie threatens with its material form. Whereas the vampire and even the intangible ghost retain their mental faculties, and the werewolf may become irrational, bestial only part of the time, only the zombie has completely lost its mind, becoming a blank—animate, but wholly devoid of consciousness" (89).

Kevin Boon offers a classification of zombie types, divided into nine categories: (1) zombie drone—classic zombie in the vein of *White Zombie*; (2) zombie ghoul—Romero zombie; this type of zombie is "in nearly every zombie film or novel made after the mid-eighties; (3) tech zombie—*The Stepford Wives* and *The Siren of Titan* novels; (4) bio zombie—*28 Days Later/Quarantine* films; (5) zombie channel—*The Rising* and Stephen King's *Cell*; (6) psychological zombie—*Dr. Caligari* and *The Manchurian Candidate*; (7) cultural zombie—*The Machinist*; "The main characteristics of cultural zombies are that they acquire the basic qualities associated with zombies, though they occupy narratives that do not employ fantasy, science fiction, or the supernatural," writes Boon; (8) zombie ghost—Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemer," where the spirit of a man remains trapped between two worlds; and (9) zombie ruse—a market tactic utilized to get individuals to buy a particular product.

Interestingly, Romero adapted "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemer" to the screen with the co-directed *Two Evil Eyes*.

² Extreme recent examples of these fast-moving creatures include Steve Miner's *Day of the Dead* (remake) and the hybrid (zombie/vampire) in *I am Legend*.

³ In "Cinema Revisited: Death on Two Legs," Bennet O'Brian underscores the continued importance of this genre; he states, "Compared with other horror subgenres like creature flicks or slasher flicks, the zombie movie innocuously appears as mindless bloodletting but actually addresses omnipresent anxieties about the fragility of the social structure, the failings of the government, and the loss of humanity in the face of a catastrophic event. On the other side of the slab, *zombie movies are capable of greater cultural relevancy* as they reflect something we fear we have already become; one more upright body in an unthinking, unfeeling mob or ravenous consumption, each helplessly locked into a routine that has led us to our collective ruination. This is the latent attractiveness beneath the layers of rotting flesh; the zombie's movies unrelenting criticism of consumerism" (n.p., emphasis added).

⁴ Jamie Russell denotes, "The fear of natural disasters and terrorist attacks certainly seem to have found a pop culture outlet in the zombie movie. It's something that has led to some unlikely intersections. We live in unsettling, uncertain times where—for whatever reason—our faith in the cohesion of the social order has been profoundly shaken. The zombie myth, which has evolved over the decades to become less about race or magic than about the apocalypse itself, seems to become the perfect expression of our fears" (192).

⁵ Kim Paffenroth speculates, "Anyone who watches zombie movies must be prepared for a strong indictment of life in modern America. It is not just because of the dismemberments, decapitations, and disembowelments that these films are not 'feel good' movies, but because of their stinging critique of our society. It is this pointed critique that lifts them above the ranks of other horror movies. But it is a critique that is not wholly unbelievable or misguided" (21–22). I concur with this assessment, as zombie films serve as a didactic lesson for the viewing audience and lay bare the dark underbelly of our own existence.

⁶ It could be argued that *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*) (1920) is the first zombie film. The film contains shards of the zombie narrative from a psychological standpoint

because of the somnambulism elements, yet it is not a fully realized rendering in comparison to *White Zombie*.

⁷ Pete Dendle writes on the reflective nature that coexists between the zombie and the human positing: “We fear the absence of spirit, the loss of subjectivity identity which is the antecedent for all psychic processes. Just as we revile the zombie for existing as no more than cold matter driven by the most basic of drives, we dread the same thing in ourselves. By not killing the spirit but consuming the flesh, the zombie makes it apparent to us that it perceives us much the same way that we perceive them: nothing more than a heap of flesh and fluid” (12).

⁸ See www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies/htm. Used as a national campaign for emergency preparedness, the CDC director, Dr. Ali Khan, states, “If you are generally well equipped to deal with a zombie apocalypse you will be prepared for a hurricane, pandemic, earthquake, or terrorist attack.”

⁹ One has to look at this advert a bit ironically considering the number of times zombies have been used to lambast conspicuous consumption.

¹⁰ People pay money to be chased through the theme park. Here, one can live out the post-apocalyptic fantasy of the end of the world, or feel like a character in a movie. *Zombieland* parodies this concept when the characters use the Ferris wheel and other carnival attractions to try to escape from the zombie horde.

¹¹ Depending on perspective, one could consider this usage of the zombie image functioning as both performance art and as a rich symbol for protest.

¹² This incident occurred on May 26, 2012, in Miami, Florida, making national headlines. The Miami-Dade police department identified Rudy Eugene (who was naked) attack Ronald Poppo, a homeless man, eating a substantial portion of the victim’s face, in what the authorities called a “zombie-like” attack. What made this incident so brutal was the length of time of the incident and the fact that it was captured by a nearby security camera.

¹³ To date, there have been 103 issues of the comic books released by Image Comics. The first issue was released in 2003, and original artist Tony Moore has been replaced by Charlie Adlard. There have been several special limited releases and compendiums as well.

¹⁴ Darabont is mainly known for adapting Stephen King novels to the big screen, notably *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *The Green Mile* (1999), and *The Mist* (2007).

¹⁵ This is not the first occurrence of privileging the human aspects over the zombie narrative. *Dawn of the Dead*, considered by many to be the greatest zombie film ever produced, includes a large portion with no zombie/human interaction at all; it occurs after the band of survivors arrive at the mall and, by default, hermetically seal themselves off from the chaos of the outside world.

In “Eating Dawn in the Dark,” A. Loudermilk pontificates, “*Dawn of the Dead* is more the one of the best horror films ever made, as Roger Ebert declared in the *Chicago Sun Times*, because it has snared the popular mind far beyond its genre, demographic, and era. Romero’s magnum opus—itsself a commodity—has earned a place in the American imagination by undermining that very imagination’s dependence on commodity culture” (85).

¹⁶ See *Rolling Stone*, Issue 1169 (Nov. 2012). In “Secrets of the Zombie Factory,” David Peisner reports that 10.9 million people watched the season 3 debut on October 14, 2012. This statistic caused “it [to become] the most watched episode of a cable drama in history” (16).

Several factors contribute to this increased awareness/admiration for *The Walking Dead*. First, the rabid comic book / graphic novel aficionados create a built-in fan base. Second, the executives wisely decided to create a “midseason” episodic template, in the “cliff hanger” tradition. To achieve greater coverage, the first two seasons were split down the middle, fueling interest and keeping the series in the public consciousness; therefore, the first half of the episodes were shown in the spring, tabling the latter half until October. Third, it has been reworked into a video game version, further increasing the demographic of the viewer and tapping into wider markets. Fourth, at a recent horror convention (Spooky Empire, Oct. 2012, Orlando, FL), I witnessed second-tier and minor actors of the series being mobbed by adoring fans; the convention circuit acts as a proving ground for the most dedicated of fans, building recognition for the franchise. As well, the characters of both the television and comic series have been licensed by McFarlane Toys (Todd McFarlane of *Spawn* fame) into a successful toy campaign.

¹⁷ See torontozombiewalk.ca. The tenth-anniversary walk took place on October 20, 2012. This event gains popularity with each successive year, drawing large crowds from across the globe to descend like multitudinous hordes on the urban landscape.

¹⁸ See monroevillezombies.com. In addition to an annual invasion at the mall, there is a museum inside the mall dedicated to the love/history of the zombie.

¹⁹ A general search on Amazon.com yielded 1,124 hits using the term “zombie” and searching in the books category; this number relates to those released in the last 90 days. The total number of possible entries was 14,080.

²⁰ Currently in post-production and with a tentative release date of June 21, 2013 (according to IMDB), the film adaptation of Brooks’s novel stars Brad Pitt as a United Nations agent who trots the globe in order to grapple with the zombie epidemic.

²¹ Japan continues to garner critical attention in the film world based on the talent of fearless directors, especially Takashi Miike. For an extended discussion, see David Kalat’s 2007 book-length study, *J-Horror: The Definitive Guide to The Ring, The Grudge, and Beyond*.

²² A relatively recent phenomenon, “torture porn” privileges ultra-violence, and, by default, forces the viewer to become participatory with this violence. This occurs most notably in the *Saw* and *Hostel* franchises and to a lesser extent in the *Final Destination* series. Considering that Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and other real-world atrocities have reached national exposure, this begs for a further investigation of these violent films as a litmus test for cultural markers.

²³ Of course, I am applying Julia Kristeva’s concept of the “abject.”

Ann Jerslev, applying Kristeva’s concept to the splatter movie, but certainly with zombie film applicability, offers that “[a]bjection is about the unbearable, horrifying, and yet pleasure state of completeness and nothingness at the same time. Abjection thus signifies a floating, and at the same time unbearable and pleasurable state in-between, always pointing psychologically to the lack of boundaries. The lack of distinction between ‘I’ and ‘you,’ between mother and child, and finally, pointing towards death as the place where the notion of difference no longer carries any meaning” (20).

Jonathan Crane highlights the notion of the abject at length, positing, “[T]he abject marks us as always already fallen and decayed—always moving toward nothing. It is not death that the abject signifies; rather, the abject represents just how close my body is to death. When we take account of our chary connection to the dead, we must consider our relationship to the monster. What is a monster other than a reanimated corpse? We may turn our back on the dear departed and hurry home once the coffin lid is strewn with dirt, but the horror film returns us back to the dead and

forces us to confront that which we had hoped to confine to the quiet grave. Whatever abjection we strive to avoid, the corpse being the most potent of all abjects, we can be assured that the contemporary horror film will most certainly accommodate its grotesque return. The recurrent return of the always identical must speak of some fundamental absence that cannot be filled. It is a junkie's habit, an addiction that can only lead to further degradation. This is not based on the desire to see wayward sexual impulses restrained. It is a need to tear away the veil and see the truth of human existence emerge as living death" (30–33).

²⁴ The critical reception and the cultural impact of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) cannot be overstated, for George A. Romero established the model that others continue to follow to the present day. The amount of material written on this movie would fill several volumes.

Jake Horsley laments that, "with *Night of the Living Dead*, the science fiction and horror genres merged, in a marriage made in hell, and gave birth to a new creature. The film gives us a monster alright, but the monster is us. Romero shows a real gift—almost a genius—for making the fantastic seem mundanely plausible, and for creating and authentically apocalyptic atmosphere; this is the way things might be if our reality suddenly turned against us. It's not hysteria he show us; on the contrary, it's the crazy, desperate attempts to 'remain calm,' under such utterly preposterous circumstances, that give these scenes their authenticity. Romero was making a film about the breakdown of order, and it must have seemed logical—and essential—for him to fit the form to the content, and break down the conventions of the genre, even as the story itself broke down those of reality" (219–25).

R. H. W. Dillard (the first academic to render a close reading on *Night*) sees the film functioning on the level of the commonplace. "The graveyard is no neo-expressionistic set," he concedes. "The film is, then, the story of everyday people in an ordinary landscape, played by everyday people who are, for the most part, from the ordinary locale. The way in which *Night of the Living Dead* transforms the familiar and ordinary world into a landscape of unrelenting horror reveals the film's moral nature and the deep and terrible fear that is at its heart" (17–20).

Jamie Russell, in *Book of Dead*, believes that, "[b]y collapsing the boundaries between the normal and the monstrous, the living and the dead, Romero signaled a new stage in the zombie's development. Zombie filmmakers no longer had to hide behind half-baked plots and silly special effects. Instead they could instead approach serious issues with a grim apocalyptic nihilism that was shocking and exhilarating in equal measure. Although few critics were able to see it at the time, there was far more to *Night of the Living Dead* than just its visceral impact. *Psycho* might have recalibrated the focus of modern horror, but it was Romero who widened its scope. This was a film that dragged American horror kicking and screaming into the modern age" (65–70).

With respect to the narrative arch, Heather Hendershot states, "*Night of the Living Dead* takes place in real time (there are no forward jumps or flashbacks), bringing us an hour and half of a group of people defending themselves from murderous zombies. This temporal continuity is quite unusual in contemporary film. Most narrative films contain cuts and take place over a few days in various locations" (3). True, Romero does make extensive use of master shots (particularly in the middle sequence), yet the notable exception comes from a few strategically placed shock cuts. The shadows and the dark corners of the farmhouse help to illicit a sense of suspense and impending doom.

Kyle Bishop underscores Romero's importance in "Raising the Dead," essaying, "The anthropological origins of the zombie are important to recognize, but what makes the zombie narratives unique to cinema are not the shambling foes themselves but rather the stories they tell. Zombie folklore and Vodoun traditions clearly set the stage for the zombie horror movie as it is known and recognized today; poisoning, premature burial, loss of cognition, slavery, the return of the dead, an death itself are all key factors of zombie cinema. But the classic zombie movie owes its unique existence to George A. Romero, who Dendle calls the 'Shakespeare of zombie cinema.' Romero took a rather

insipid, two-dimensional creature, married it to an established apocalyptic storyline, and invented an entirely new genre” (198).

Desson Thomson proclaims, “The film’s stark, almost documentary imagery imbues it with spooky gravitas as a plague of zombies emerges from the grave to devour every living being in sight. And its freewheeling camera movement, decades before the self-consciously fidgety camera of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), gives us the queasy sensation that the cinematographers are jumpy newsmen doing their nervous best to follow the action” (210).

Night of the Living Dead has been remade three times. The 1990 version, directed by Tom Savini with the screenplay written by Romero, updates the original version into color. Also, from a financial standpoint, it served as a way for Romero to recoup monies he lost in the well-known copyright issues with the original film.

See Ben Hervey’s book-length study on *Night of the Living Dead*, released by BFI (British Film Institute).

²⁵ Muntean and Payne, in *The War on Terror*, write that “this critical symbolic function of zombies is strikingly similar to what many commentators saw as both the literal and symbolic function message of the September 11 attacks—that America’s global, financial, and political hegemony had only been attainable through the subjugation and abjection of distant lands and peoples. The September 11 attacks, then, functioned according to a logic quite similar to that of the zombie films, albeit with terrifyingly real consequences. While it might be assumed that such uncanny thematic similarities would sound the death knell for the zombie films in the post-September 11 era, surprisingly the opposite has been true, with more mainstream zombie films produced since 2002 than in the thirty-three years between the release of *Night of the Living Dead* and the September 11 attacks. Yet the September 11 attacks were not simply a reawakening of the sense of collective vulnerability that permeated the Cold War era. The attacks—furtive, fulminant, and precise—engendered a profound change in the form of America’s collective (and personal) sense of vulnerability” (244).

²⁶ A myriad of examples of placing defined terms of the individual to the “other” (that which is not me) can be seen in *Land of the Dead*, as the privileged elite reside in Fiddler’s Green while the poor humans and the zombies are locked out of the ivory tower in the sky. In *The Happening*, the audience hears a voice from behind a door proclaim, “You ain’t from around here,” as a clear signal that these out-of-towners are not accepted by the locals. Similarly, in the French zombie film, *La Horde* (*The Horde*), the zombies are referred to as “chinks,” echoing that country’s involvement with the Vietnam War.

²⁷ In the initial month since its official release, the *World War Z* trailer accumulated nearly 20 million hits on YouTube alone.

²⁸ Bishop, in “Dead Man Still Walking,” explains that “[t]he terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, caused perhaps the largest wave of paranoia for Americans since the McCarthy era. Since the beginning of the war on terror, American popular culture has been colored by the fear of possible terrorist attacks and the grim realization that people are not as safe as they might have once thought” (17).

²⁹ In Andrew Tudor’s indispensable *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, he insists, “The second and ‘collective form of the metamorphosis narrative is distinctive in character and restricted in period. Here, though metamorphants may well slaughter and maim with the best of them, it is the metamorphosis itself which is the primary threat. Collectively, we have become potential victims, to be transformed into zombies, gibbering maniacs or diseased wrecks. No combination of expertise and coercion can halt the growing threat of metamorphosis, and all humanity is helpless in the face of the spreading ‘infection.’ Yet however vast its scale, the heart of this narrative lies in the emphatically

internal quality of its threat. It is not simply that we will be fundamentally altered in the process; that our humanity itself is at risk" (97).

³⁰ Both *Land of the Dead* and *28 Weeks Later* deal with society living in a "restructured" urban space. This breaks relatively new ground in zombie cinema and offers rich analysis, especially in tandem with American intervention with and democratization of the Middle East.

³¹ It is worth citing at length here. Mohammad writes, "This dynamic of the uncanny is not limited to human bodies, or even to animate beings. Terms like 'zombie' have enjoyed increasing currency in both theoretical and popular discourse as ways of referring to any attenuated modes of existence in which an original presence is supplanted by a phantasmic placeholder, as when Bulent Diken writes that the World Trade Center survives after its destruction as a 'spirit, zombie, or fetish' in media consciousness. In this image, perhaps, we see the ultimate emblem of Undeath: an edifice endowed with consciousness by public sentiment only after its destruction, at which time it becomes a kind of inanimate zombie. Or it has in a sense been animated, but only as a set of phantom tombstones for itself. A stillness that in 'life' was in no way remarkable (all skyscrapers are still) becomes inextricable in 'death' for our association of it with a haunting and haunted absence" (92).

³² Steven Schneider, in the *Horror Film Reader* (ed. Sliver and Ursini), accurately writes, "Though sneered at by the highbrow, largely ignored by mainstream academics, and censured by society's self-proclaimed moral guardians, it can hardly be denied that horror fiction (including cinema) serves a variety of psychological functions in society (167-92)."

Gerald Mast and Bruce Kawin argue that, "as an officially despised genre, the low-budget horror film was (and still is) free to take outrageous creative chances and adopt controversial attitudes toward the issue of the day—or eternity" (490).

Similarly, in his nonfiction work *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King concludes that, "[b]ecause books and movies are mass media, the field of horror has often been able to do better than even these personal fears over the last thirty years. During the period (and to a lesser degree, in the seventy or so years preceding), the horror genre has often been able to find national phobic pressure points, and these books and films which have been the most successful almost always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people. Such fears, which are often political, economic, and psychological rather than supernatural, give the best horror a pleasing allegorical feel—and it's the one sort of allegory that most filmmakers seem at home with. Maybe because they know that if the shit starts getting too thick, they can always bring the monster shambling out of the darkness again" (18). King continues, "When the horror movies wear their various socio-political hates—the B-picture as tabloid editorial—they often serve as an extraordinarily accurate barometer of those things which trouble the night-thoughts of a whole society. More often the horror movie points even further inward, looking for those deep-seated personal fears—those pressure points—we all must cope with. This adds an element of universality to the proceedings, and may produce an even truer sort of art" (132-33).

Interestingly, King has two novels in the zombie category. His 1990 novel *The Stand* deals specifically with a post-apocalyptic America in the wake of a pandemic. In *Cell* (2006), the storyline addresses the theme of terrorism and the use of brainwashing via a cell phone signal that turns the individual into a zombie. His little-known short story "Night Surf" (the basis for *The Stand*) falls into the contagion category as well.

³³ Post-9/11 success stories include *Dawn of the Dead* (remake), *28 Days Later*, *Shaun of the Dead*, and *Zombieland*. *28 Days Later* and *Shaun of the Dead* were both independent films, while *Dawn of the Dead* and *Zombieland* had major funding through the studio system.

³⁴ Wells states, “[W]hile science fiction primarily concerns the external and ‘macrocosmic,’ horror concerns the internal and ‘microcosmic.’ In other words, the horror genre is concerned with fundamental fears: the primal fear of the unknown and that which may end life at any moment.” He continues, “The horror genre has become increasingly concerned with the relative and fragile nature of existence. Although the monster may be understood to operate within the doubling framework on many occasions, it is pertinent to conceive of it as a metaphor; a projection of particular threats, fears, and contradictions that refuse coexistence with the prevailing paradigms and consensual orthodoxies of everyday life. The monster may also be perceived as a direct and unfettered expression of the horror that surround us. It comes to represent the disintegration or de-stabilization of any one dominant perception or understanding of what it is to be human. The central generic image of the corpse reminds the viewer of its extinction. Anxiety arises, thereafter, from the conceptualization of the ‘un-dead’, or ‘the dead that walk’ are intrinsically symbolic forms, literally embodying states of ‘otherness’ which are intrinsically related to humanity but are ultimately a parallel and threatening expression of it. The frisson of the horror text for the audience is underpinned by the expressed desire to experience feelings which relate to taboo agendas and limits of gratification. This is the ‘given’ of the genre’s appeal—horror fans enjoy the pressure of being frightened and enjoying emotional extremes. It is therefore not surprising that the horror film has flourished in periods of social difficulty or collapse because it offers the wholeness of the monster, the enigma of the meaning, and a dissociated context to engage with. In illustrating and commenting upon the deep-seated anxieties of its time, the horror film thus performs a necessary social function, for to challenge and disturb is to insist upon a liberal democratic process that both reflects and critiques its socio-cultural moment. Although seemingly nihilistic in outlook, the horror film can continually remind an audience of the things about which it should neither be complacent nor accepting” (2–35).

³⁵ Jonathan Lake Crane, in *Terror*, emphasizes that “[o]nly the contemporary horror film comes close to the terror of everyday life. The horrific constructs available do not offer any possibilities beyond that of being able to confront terror. *The engagement with such images is neither cathartic nor reassuring*: it simply demonstrates that one’s sight, if nothing else, still clearly registers the world. Watch a horror film is a reality check; it is the entertainment equivalent of checking CNN’s Headline News for the latest tragedy or scanning monotonously bleak headlines over black coffee and apple danish” (7–8, emphasis added).

Lauro and Embry echo Crane: “Therefore the zombie once again deters the possibility of catharsis. The boundary between man and slave that allows one to shift the burden of necessity onto the other—and whether in ancient Greek society or in the global capitalist’s superstructure of today—is threatened by the zombie: no appetite is sated, all become slaves” (100).

Their statements align with the supposition that we (the viewing audience) want the cathartic experience, especially considering all of the anxiety wrapped up in the post-9/11 world. However, as the viewer seeks this much needed catharsis, in fact, it remains continually deferred or denied.

³⁶ In Eco’s seminal text on semiotics, he espouses the principal belief of “openness” as an interpretive tool and as a way to create meaning; this “openness” is predicated on the observer’s ability to explore a work and create meaning. Beyond author intent, one can create a multiplicity of meanings by channeling Eco’s precepts.

³⁷ Coghlan contributes frequently to the *New Scientist*.

³⁸ Richard Smith continues, “The fragility of identity remains an abiding concern in contemporary horror films, which cling with almost religious fidelity to certain aspects of the Romero-Russo paradigm (the barricading of a make-do shelter, the infighting of those barricaded) while tailoring the specifics of infection in question to the tenor of the times” (43).

³⁹ These films include *Dog Soldiers* (2002), *The Signal* (2007), *30 Days of Night* (2007) [*REC*] (2007), *The Invasion* (2007), and *Contagion* (2012).

Of particular interest is Oliver Hirschbiegel's *The Invasion* (2007). This film reworks the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) along with the 1978 version and Abel Ferrara's 1994 version, *Body Snatchers: The Invasion Continues*. Hirschbiegel's adaptation depicts the alien invasion as a 48-hour bug.

⁴⁰ In *Firestorm*, Stephen Prince believes that "[w]riting about the films of 9/11 raises two kinds of issues that have been widely studied by scholars. These are issues of trauma and cultural memory as encoded into film."

⁴¹ "By [Boyle's] accelerating the rhythm of the scenes between the living and the dead, the characters have no real time to reveal their ideologies and are instead downgraded to purely impulse based reaction. This shift in the structure of zombie horror signaled a departure from visceral intensity, with the zombies themselves taking the limelight from the humans who resist them," writes Pete Dendle (19).

K. Silem Mohammad reinforces this notion, positing, "[m]ore to the point, the alarming shift from representations of zombie as slow-moving to fast-moving predators signal a mass awareness that these Undead figures, without losing their fierce relevance to our contemporary condition of permanent crisis, have changed the visceral referent of their terror inducing power from the relatively placid, yellow-to-orange -alert realm of the Uncanny to the full-bore red-alert level of the Real" (101).

⁴² *Day of the Dead* went into "cult" status once it went to the ancillary markets, namely VHS rentals, word-of-mouth, and fanzines.

⁴³ Heather Hendershot proclaims, "Horror is the best genre for literalizing our anxieties and fears, and zombies up the ante by virtue of their mundanity. Dracula is the fancy monster, a top-shelf creature who will look soulfully into your eyes before passionately sucking the life out of you. Zombies are rot gut, the old lady in the house coat next door who just wants to eat your brains out. Zombies scare us because, to use Romero's refrain, they are us. At a literal narrative level, this means that in most zombie movies anyone can become a zombie, instantly switching from 'normal' to 'abnormal' (and Romero insistently asks, which is which?). But on a more metaphorical level we are all zombies because we wander numbly through life, ride the bus to work, shopping at the mall, going through the motions of normality. And not unlike the undead of *Land [of the Dead]*, we are distracted by sky flowers, pretty art films, and vapid Julie Roberts movies that illustrate 'the triumph of the human spirit'" (5).

⁴⁴ The "found footage" method of storytelling has roots back to *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), shamelessly copied in the *Blair Witch Project* (1999). In "Cinema Revisited: 9/11 and the Evolution of the Frightening Image," Bennett O'Brian speculates that the "grainy digital footage taken during a chaotic event will inevitably conjure up subconscious memories of destruction and death from New York ten years ago. Perhaps we have reached a point when the frightening images achieved with conventional camera tricks are too easily dismissible and 'found footage' has become more mentally acceptable because, over the last decade, the eye has been trained that real life's truly horrific images (the one we wish we could unsee) are the blurry, pixelated amateur footage taken by eyewitnesses" (n.p.).

In addition to *Diary of the Dead*, many films fall into this category: *Cloverfield* (2008), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (2006), *Apollo 18* (2011), *Paranormal Activity* (2007).

Chapter 2: *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*: Resurrection of the Zombie in the Post-9/11 World

“Indeed, there is always something “nearly me” about the monster.”

—Jen Webb and Sam Byrand, “Some Kind of Virus”

As global audiences poured into movie theaters to watch Danny Boyle’s¹ (re)appropriation of the zombie film, *28 Days Later* (2002)² served as a visual (and still at that time) fresh reminder of the unforgettable and traumatic events of 9/11. Centrally then, this is an important film to frame the narrative of a differentiated zombie, heretofore, witnessed by a viewing public. Moreover, in the wake of 9/11, real (and perceived) threats of potential pandemics³ gripped an already distressed public. Jamie Russell, in *Book of the Dead*, asserts,

tapping into millennial fears about biological warfare, chemical attacks[,] and viral outbreaks, *28 Days Later* proved the perfect index of the western world’s post-9/11 apocalyptic anxieties. The fact that film’s release coincided with the SARS panic seemed less like serendipity than proof of how well it had plugged into the zeitgeist. (179)

The undead awaken from their two-decade-long slumber to, once again, stimulate the public and reflect reality back to us. Arguably, the genre suffered a setback when audiences stayed away from zombies following the release of *Day of the Dead*⁴ in 1985, favoring slasher films instead.⁵ Some horror scholars argue that the influence

of the *Resident Evil*⁶ series continues to have a lasting impression on the subgenre, yet these films appeal to a generation of audiences who share an affinity for the first-person shooter aspects of the widely popular Capcon game.⁷ Nevertheless, the aesthetics of *28 Days Later* forces the viewer into an uncomfortable situation. The DV (digital video)⁸ and hand-held camera work of Boyle's film—with its nod to realism—serve as diametrically opposing stimuli to the gamer-based framework⁹ of *Resident Evil*. Furthermore, it is *28 Days Later* that serves as the lynchpin for the plethora of zombie-themed films produced in the last decade; Kyle Bishop anoints this increase in zombie-themed features as the beginning of “the zombie renaissance” (19).

Boyle desires to jolt the audience with representative violence. As the film opens, the establishing shot focuses on multiple scenes of chaos: random acts of senseless violence culled from stock images of the 24-hour news cycle;¹⁰ the viewing audience witnesses these events against the backdrop of a television screen. Furthermore, the camera pulls back and pans to the right to reveal the fact that we are watching a chimpanzee¹¹—who is restrained and held in a crucifixion pose on a black, medical table—watch the violent events running concurrently on a series of monitors;¹² the POV (point of view) creates a dualistic approach with subtle cinematography. The image segues to a quick cut of a surveillance camera at the “Cambridge Primate Research Centre,” and the image captured by the camera shows a group of masked individuals entering the facility. In two rather short sequences, the metaphor of the omnipotent camera (already encoded into the mind of the viewer) sutures the individual to the narrative. The image for the post-9/11

moviegoer¹³ suggests that a particular “image,” as it were, may, in fact, be constructed for us and not grounded in reality. In other words, Boyle (through particularly effective use of camera) begins to weave a complex tapestry of meaning with this synecdoche.

The doctor/researcher—played by David Schneider—who works at the research center informs the animal liberators that the chimps are highly contagious and infected with “rage,” so the freed animal attacks one of the liberators, setting off an inevitable chain reaction: everyone becomes infected very quickly and audiences have no time to react without the typical incubation period.¹⁴ Simon Cooper, in *Arena* magazine's online edition, astutely notes that

if the scientific accident, the standard scenario for horror and science fiction cinema, is able to be successfully negotiated as merely an irrational fear within the terms of our risk society, the hyper- accelerated process of infection revealed so viscerally in contemporary horror film is suggestive of another realm of contestation with techno-scientific politics.

However, the sequence differs from classical films where the mad scientist “accident”¹⁵ does not present wide-ranging and immediate danger. The effect for the viewer feels similar to reading a work of literature in medias res. Here, the narrative of the first five and a half minutes of film creates disjunction and disorients the individual trying to construct meaning from these sequences. Thus, the effect remains powerful, as there are no opening credits¹⁶ at the beginning of this film; instead, the image fades to a black screen with the words “28 Days Later . . .” appearing at the bottom right of the screen. Thwarting the typical privileging of a

film's title, the viewer sees the name of the film only as a descriptive subtitle in a small font on the bottom right of the screen; the effect creates a double move on the part of the director. On the one hand, his cinematic technique allows the viewer to be absorbed completely into the narrative, while, on the other hand, the ellipsis acts as a visual marker of incompleteness and a construction of events; the audience barely has time to catch its collective breath with this initial filmic shock and awe.

Boyle begins the actual narrative with the introduction of the film's central character. Jim, played by Cillian Murphy,¹⁷ awakens¹⁸ in the hospital in the next shot. Nick Muntean and Matthew Thomas Payne, in "Attack of the Livid Dead: Recalibrating Terror in the Post 9/11 Zombie Film," ascertain that "Jim awakens in *28 Days Later* to a new radicalized 'survival of the fittest' zeitgeist" (251). In extreme close-up, the camera looms on Jim's eye,¹⁹ so that as the lens pulls back, it reveals him to be naked and tied to machines in the hospital bed. The juxtaposition of this shot, in terms of mise-en-scène, replicates the shot of the restrained chimpanzee in the opening sequence. The quality of the shot, in addition, has a dreamscape effect to it, and as Jim becomes conscious²⁰ to his new reality, so do we become aware of our own new existence in the post-9/11 world. Because of his coma, the period of a normal rest cycle has been warped by his extended sleep of one month.

Aesthetically, the viewer sees this character in an ostensible "last man on earth" scenario. Jim does not seem fully aware of his new surroundings, and the silence renders this method of discovery more difficult for the confused protagonist; there are no ambient noises as he makes his way through the empty corridors of the hospital. Here, the camera forces the viewer's attention to observe a series of

payphones with all of the receivers swaying in unison. Of course, in the post-apocalyptic scenario, all attempts at “normal” communicative methods have been abandoned. As he continues along, he has enough survival sense to pick up cans of soda lying haphazardly around a soda machine and place them in a plastic bag.

Boyle creates a powerful aesthetic, through cinematic verisimilitude, that carries most of the first two-thirds of the film. For example, Jim walks across the Westminster Bridge²¹ alone as music begins to play in the background. His repeated and desperate calls for help fall on deaf ears, and unbeknownst to him, the pound notes blowing through the street have no monetary value. The music²² continues to build as he walks toward a billboard with notes for the missing.²³ Jim’s actions begin to imitate life as the audience cannot help but think about the iconic images of New York City and loved ones desperately trying to find missing people.

A common theme running throughout the majority of zombie films is the loss of hegemonic²⁴ powers (government: military and civilian and religious institutions) and the ways in which these forces control society; it is not by accident that the audience sees the camera hold on Jim as he stares at the larger-than-life wooden cross inside a cathedral. The iconography of this image should reinforce the belief system of the individual, yet in diametrically opposing fashion, as Jim navigates the stairs, the graffiti-filled walls lament, “repent, the end is extremely fucking nigh.” In essence, street graffiti and the cross of salvation have been leveled to an equal playing field. Jim views the church pews littered with corpses from the gallery and has to come to terms with the fact that the world has turned into a wasteland: no sanctity exists inside the protection of God’s walls. Boyle reinforces this metaphor as

the first contact between Jim and the “infected” is a priest,²⁵ so he knows that all signs of signification carry no meaning in his new (and still discovering) reality.

The inciting moment occurs as the number of infected/zombie/rage carriers exponentially increases. The streets come alive with the infected,²⁶ and unlike other zombie films, these monsters move with speed²⁷- even when they are set on fire! The shambling zombie (so easily identifiable as the status quo of the last 40 years of cinema) has been replaced as a real and immediate threat. In “Reanimating the Living Dead: Uncovering the Zombie Archetype in the Works of George A. Romero,” Michel Bloom offers,

by [Boyle] accelerating the rhythm or scenes between the living and the dead, the characters have no real time to reveal their ideologies and are instead downgraded to purely impulse based reaction. This shift in the structure of zombie horror signaled a departure from social satire to visceral intensity, with the zombies themselves taking the limelight from the humans who resist them. (19)

In counterpoint to previous zombie films, it takes massive destruction to stop the hordes²⁸ from overtaking the individual. In effect, Jim is saved by a group of survivors; henceforth, the individual can no longer utilize his/her self-reliance to survive these threats.

Boyle finally attempts to establish a familiar narrative. Jim’s backstory has been deferred as the viewer tries to identify with him as he discovers this new and forever-changed world. Jim (not archetypal in his characterization) is a bicycle courier who had been hit by a vehicle. While describing his story to Mark (Noah

Huntley) and Selena (Naomie Harris), he states that he is “hallucinating,”²⁹ which reinforces the theme of post-9/11 films. Selena informs him about the virus and the infection. Jim asks about the government as he states, “Of course there’s a government, there’s always a government.” In effect, we see that the hegemony leaves a vacuum when erased, and the thought seems inconceivable to the individual who has “relied” on this power as a sign of stability in the world. Instead, Mark gives him the new rules of survival with the loss of all normal means of protection—police, government, and the military—and the lessons are as follows: (1) never travel alone, and (2) only travel during daylight unless there is no alternative. Similarly, *Zombieland* (2009)³⁰ parodies the notions of the rule for survival³¹ by utilizing successful techniques of the genre.

This film differs greatly from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and Ben’s ability to take charge of a group in order to keep certain death at bay. Ben remains a strong leader throughout the narrative; whereas, Jim must cultivate his leadership capabilities. Conversely, Jim wants to find his parents,³² and as perhaps the last source of “power,” the nuclear family, he sees that they have committed suicide rather than try to survive in this new world; they die clutching a photograph of a young Jim and leave him a note on the back of it. The group stays at his house for the night. Jim, in a daze, lights a candle and walks around the house in a hallucinatory state. Boyle intercuts footage of family home video as we watch him in this in-between state of consciousness. The image creates an archway between the past and present and the ways in which the mind works like a video recorder.³³ Also, the shock cut violently interrupts the peaceful moment of recollection, jolting both

viewer and character alike. Jim finds that the infected are his neighbors from a few doors down. During this melee, Mark is bitten and Selena violently attacks him with a machete; he is attacked with extreme prejudice.³⁴ The horror of this scene—replete with blood flying through the air and landing on the walls—shows ultra-violence as a necessary means to an end.

The viewer comprehends the need for these characters to establish bonds for protection. Selena and Jim walk alone on the empty city streets;³⁵ she tells him about the 10-to-20 second rule³⁶ and the split-second decision that has to be made in order to survive in this new reality. In the distance, they see Christmas lights illuminating a window of a high-rise building. As they go into a building, they are chased by the infected, and it is here that they meet Frank (Brendan Glesson) and Hanna (Megan Burns) hiding in flat 157. During this brief respite, they discuss the liability of having Frank and Hanna join them in their efforts to survive; Selena presents her *modus operandi* to Jim as the survival of the fittest. Of course, they are unable to stay in the flat because of a lack of water. In essence, the viewing audience has left the “safe house” aspects of the zombie narrative where the defense must include barricading oneself from the invading horde of the undead.

Although we see a sense of escape, the overarching theme focuses on a narrative of relentless pursuit. Boyle, at this point, shifts focus in narrative by ostensibly turning the film into a “road film,”³⁷ yet, in spite of this formulaic convention, they still are barely able to make their escape through the tunnel. Conversely, in stark contrast to the film’s overall monocratic look, the film brief turns to a moment of brightness, punctuated by the group’s trip to a grocery store.

To be sure, this image of consumption and the amassing of “free goods” strikingly reinforces the themes of Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*. This homage differs in that these four individuals stay on the move as opposed to a group barricaded in a mall for half of the film, enjoying the spoils of consumerist nirvana.

The group has to scourge for gas, and Jim “breaks the rules” as he goes off without the protection of the others. Recapitulating the opening sequences, Jim calls out in the darkness and says, “hello,” and it is here that he faces an infected child. Here, without anyone witnessing his fight for survival, Jim dispatches the young boy with extreme prejudice. Jim returns and does not tell the group about the incident. Again, the film demonstrates another brief respite with a “perfect day” scenario: the group lounges on the grass and watches wild horses run in the distance, and atmospheric music wafts in the background. Kathi Maio underscores the effect of these brief moments; she proclaims, in “Mission Accomplished at the Zombie Jamboree,” that the film has a “willingness to allow the central characters their humanity and to allow both characters and audience members to find momentary relief in moments of humor, tenderness, and even natural beauty” (193). The importance of this scene illustrates that Selena begins to change and become more human by realizing that the sense of the communal/familial creates a meaningful existence.

The film’s third dream sequence sees Jim repeat screams for help as he feels that he has been abandoned by the group. He is comforted by Frank (who has been standing guard over the group) and tells him, “thanks Dad.” The effect of Jim’s acknowledgement is two-fold: sarcasm or literal in that he believes (in the dream

state) that Frank is his father.³⁸ As they leave the next morning, Jim awakens and jumps into an already moving vehicle. In the distance, they see all of Manchester burning. The cinematography of this CGI/matte shot, coupled with one of the few extreme long shots in the film, shows destruction on a mass scale; this edible image recaptures the destruction and chaos of Midtown Manhattan on the morning of 9/11, blurring the boundaries between art and life. Furthermore, the shot carries resonances the trauma of the afterimages of 9/11, without cathartic release.

They arrive at the 42 blockade, thereby ending the road narrative portion of the film. Overall, the motionlessness should indicate a respite from the contagion. Frank's frustration spills over as no military personnel are there to meet them. In his rage, he tries to shoo a bird away from a carcass,³⁹ and during this interchange, a drop of blood lands in his eye. Just before he is dispatched by camouflaged soldiers, he apologizes to the others for losing his temper. Jim does not have a chance to dispatch his former father figure as a hail of bullets enters Frank's body.

They are rescued and escorted to a palatial estate that has been fortified and turned into a military encampment; it is here that they meet Major Henry West (Christopher Eccleston), who acts as a seemingly kinder foil to Rhodes's⁴⁰ character in *Day of the Dead*. The major explains the defenses of the compound, and in one of the most powerful images in the movie, he shows Jim a soldier in chains, Private Mailer⁴¹ (Marvin Campbell). The major explains, in a roundabout way, that Mailer is an "experiment" and will teach them about how long it will take the infection to starve its host. As the major turns away, Jim observes the enslaved character reaching up to him with a pleading look on his face. To be sure, the racially encoded

implications⁴² of this scene are not lost on the viewing audience. In addition, Mailers military rank⁴³ shows his overall unimportance in the stringent hierarchy of the enlisted man.

Another important parallel vis-à-vis *Day of the Dead* occurs when everyone gathers at a long dinner table for the evening meal, replicated in both films as a sense of the reassertion of military/hegemonic power. It is here that Boyle clues the viewer into the fact that one month has passed since the start of the infection. The moment has a feel to the sense of the communal and a brief respite- a return to normalcy in the post-apocalyptic world. However, this bastardized dinner party does not remain a happy occasion for the respective participants, for the infected interrupt this scene with an invasion on this quasi-military installation. What the viewer sees is a relentless assault—albeit by a horde of unarmed zombies whose actual bodies are the weapon⁴⁴—and a complete decimation by a group of jubilant soldiers;⁴⁵ this exacerbates an already tense situation, so one aggressive action, in turn, causes another. Jim learns the real truth that the soldiers want women for procreation. In terms of hegemonic power,⁴⁶ the viewer senses a (re)assertion that forces can still control even with the loss of civilized society.

Boyle attempts to establish a sense of decorum and humanity into the narrative. Nevertheless, in the midst of this chaos, Sergeant Farrell, played by Stuart McQuarrie (as the voice of reason), tries to stop the other soldiers from losing their humanity. He acts as the philosopher king for the group and stands as a soldier par excellence: the creed of the soldier protects society as his/her sworn duty. Jim and the sergeant are briefly detained in the basement⁴⁷ before being escorted to the

woods for execution. In this scene, Jim manages to hide in a pile of bodies—metaphorically becoming one of the dead/infected—and escapes over the wall into the literal land of the dead. The importance of this scene serves as the central synecdoche. Jim (forced into a fight-or-flight scenario) chooses to embrace his rage and animalistic side. Jim appropriates, perhaps more than any other zombie narrative, the human/zombie dichotomy.⁴⁸ Here, he lives, for all intents and purposes, as the other half, while simultaneously unafraid of becoming the other. Particularly in this escape scene, once Jim does make the fateful jump, he enters into another realm, physically transforming himself by going native and embracing his own heart of darkness. We see him “awaken” yet again, and this Everyman chooses to take on the role of savior for the two helpless female characters. Jim sounds the alarm at the blockade and proceeds to take on the soldiers using guerilla tactics, and by using these insurgency methods, he kills one soldier and frees Mailer from captivity; this runs counter to the entire film, yet it reinforces a powerful theme of freeing the chained and oppressed African American Private Mailer. Moreover, no other scene in the film shows compassion to the infected individual.

Jim, first acting as an observer as Mailer attacks his former comrades, enters the house to enact his own brand of justice. In quick succession, Jim kills a fleeing soldier at the front door with a knife, leaves one soldier to die who has run out of bullets, and viciously attacks one soldier by bashing his head against the wall and plucking his eyes out; this recapitulates the ultra-violence utilized by Selena earlier in the film when she eliminates Mark, and, without question, these are the two most violent scenes in the entire film. Selena should kill the blood-soaked Jim⁴⁹ who

stands before her, but she pauses, thereby giving him the benefit of the doubt. As they make their escape, Jim is shot by the major,⁵⁰ yet Mailer has his revenge against his oppressor, returning the favor and subjecting his white superior to the infection.

The elliptical nature of the film (and as metanarrative) occurs when the screen returns back to a black screen with the words “28 Days later” at the bottom. On the one hand, did the audience witness “a day in the life of” these characters surviving a new reality of dealing with contagion and a global pandemic? This framing of the narrative, on the other hand, indicates an epilogue,⁵¹ but it leaves more questions than answers with the elapsed black screen. Jim awakens (again) to find that they have survived the ordeal of the last month. Additionally, the ending sequence provisionally “seems” like a happy ending, yet as the survivors construct their sign for “hello,” a half-second quick cut shows the letters “hell” from a bird’s-eye-view shot. The jet flies over to signal a possible salvation, but this ending remains problematized by several alternative endings.⁵²

28 Days Later, although a UK production, highlights an American sensibility⁵³ because of the still very fresh wounds of 9/11. Jim serves as an Everyman character and as a rich symbolic element for the post-9/11 world.⁵⁴ We see a reawakening of his character after the fact, his negotiation of a changed world, and his ultimate identification with the infected. What positions this film both inside and outside classical zombie tropes is the rich tapestry of meanings encoded into the narrative. Indeed, the audience wants a cathartic experience—violence and terrorism as a real part of life—yet the viewer is not exiated from the events of our new reality. At best, the zombie metaphor can be repositioned both as a trope for the horror genre

and as possible real-life future reality for society at large. To be sure, the Americanization of the sequel⁵⁵ (and as a continuation of the plot) occurs with greater frequency in *28 Weeks Later*. The shards of implied meaning only hinted at on the periphery of the first film come to the forefront in Juan Carlo Fresnadillo's⁵⁶ worthy addition to the franchise, implying overt ideological meaning.

Comparatively, *28 Weeks Later* begins like its predecessor, deficient of opening credits and straight into the narrative of the story; the consequence for the audience (although already familiar with the narrative) reaffirms a disorienting effect wherein the viewer attempts to construct meaning from the action. During this unusual establishing shot, the audience sees a couple (Don and Alice, who are not named yet, played by Robert Carlyle and Catherine McCormack respectively) preparing a meal and discussing a longing to see their children. The cinematographer (Enrique Chediak) enhances this scene by using only available lighting—a lit candle—clouding our sense of the space they are occupying in the frame of the shot. Additionally, this opening three-minute sequence leads the viewer to believe that the two characters are alone; the master shot helps to facilitate this assertion. In fact, they are preparing dinner for an entire house full of people, as there are four other people in the space with them. At the dinner table, replicating the meal at the military compound in the first film, it is Jacob (Shahid Ahmed) who tells the group that their world is an “us versus them” reality.

In their hermetically sealed environs, it serves as a brief respite from the chaos of the outside world, until they hear frantic knocking at the door. A young boy begs to be let inside, and after some hesitation, they allow him in and offer some

semblance of protection. The boy tells everyone that his parents chased him. As this transpires, a girl goes to the door to peak outside,⁵⁷ and the moment of eerie calm is interrupted as the infected break in inciting another moment of extreme pressure. Moreover, the intensity of this brief sequence creates fear on the part of the audience with effective use of handheld camera work.

The camera focuses on Don's eyes (showing his fear) as he opts to abandon his wife in order to save his own life; the viewer sees his wife at the window being snatched by the infected as her husband runs for his life. Here, Don runs while being chased by a horde of the infected, so the intensity of the scene is highlighted by an overhead camera as it swoops down and tracks his frantic run; the effect can be felt by the audience as it seems as if the horde will surely overtake this lone victim. As with the first film, nondiegetic music occupies fast-paced action, creating more intensity. Don manages to jump into a boat, as Jacob (who was already in the boat) falls to his death, and escape even as the infected are not deterred by the water. Ironically, the camera cuts to a calming aerial shot of the blue sky and a seemingly normative view of the world, juxtaposing chaos with extreme beauty.

The screen cuts to black after 11 minutes of action, and by extension, the audience has just witnessed a vignette as opposed to plot segmentation. Here, to differentiate itself from the first film, a series of cue cards—factoids about the post-outbreak world—further explains the events of the last six months: “28 days for the mainland [UK] to be destroyed, 5 weeks for the infected to die of starvation, 11 weeks and American-led NATO forces enter London, at 18 weeks the mainland no longer has an infected, 24 weeks and reconstruction begins” (font of this last cue

card is all capitalized). These brief shots are intercut with aerial footage⁵⁸ of downtown London. A few tenants can be gleamed from this sequence. First, the emphasis of “peacekeeping” falls into the hands of the United States, and second, Fresnadillo creates a theme of “repatriation”⁵⁹ as survivors attempt to resume a new life in their homeland. To further emphasize a post-9/11 theme, the last overhead shot of the sky shows a jet plane flying, so the flight path mimics that of a crash into a skyscraper; this effect occurs with subtle editing and works as a metaphorical trope: inedible iconic images of a still-fresh traumatic event.

The audience finally arrives at the six-month (28 weeks) mark and with the powerful introduction of a sniper’s scope. Doyle (Jeremy Renner⁶⁰) views his world through his weapon; essentially the POV shot of the camera and the scope are one in the same. By implication, the audience knows that the utilization of surveillance remains a dominant theme of modern life coupled with the fact that Doyle and his fellow sniper compatriots⁶¹—all strategically located on a series of rooftops—all joke about the people who cannot see them. Zani and Meaux explain: “The mythology of order is narrated not by television commercials but through the ever-present sniper scope and security camera POV shots, which convey the American military’s sense of control over the reconstructed society” (114). The image of the crosshairs of the scope creates, in the viewer’s mind, the theme of omnipresent danger and the feeling of being watched in terms of the Panopticon.⁶² The sniper’s heightened position allows them to control those below in exposed conditions, and in real verisimilar terms, they can dispense “punishment” at a moment’s notice.

Repatriation begins when the citizens arrive at the airport to be processed, and as they walk through the terminal, the military presence can be felt as soldiers stand “at the ready.”⁶³ Tammy (Imogen Poots) and Andy (Mackintosh Muggleton) are back in their homeland. These individuals are shuffled off to a waiting train, so a guide tells them over the PA system they are in the “Green Zone,”⁶⁴ also known as District One. Additionally, as the guide speaks, the camera cuts to surveillance cameras of the people on the train, which reinforces the sniper scope from the earlier sequence- the individual always being watched by the all-knowing eye of the camera lens;⁶⁵ this theme finds reinforcement in the micro- and macrocosmic. The surveillance camera POV is juxtaposed with a large number of bird’s-eye-view shots; this suggests a double-move on the part of the director to interweave this metanarrative into the frame of the storyline.

The children’s repatriation becomes complete when they are reunited with their father at the train station; this represents a homecoming of sorts and the return to and near nuclear family.⁶⁶ When a medical officer, Scarlet (played by Rose Byrne), sees the children entering, she voices concern to her superior. In fact, they are the first children allowed back into the city.⁶⁷ Scarlet believes that the virus/contagion could return, and General Stone (Idris Elba) states he will kill it with a “code red.” This scene feels more intense as the viewer sees a screen shot of surveillance cameras in the command center/defacto war room. The story returns to the children and the father, and he escorts them to a penthouse suite, ostensibly their home for the interim period. Don’s “story” (version of events) is intercut with scenes from the opening sequence, and the brief images serve as a reminder to the

audience of his primal fear; the shock and the immediacy of experience can be felt with these particularly effective jump cuts.

An effective metaphor of surveillance continues to be reinforced in the narrative frame of the story, so the viewer witnesses the potential of the characters (unknowingly) being sniped from a great distance. The darkness of the night further helps to hide these men as their uniforms facilitate invisibility to the naked eye. In this sequence, the snipers are on duty on various rooftops inside the Green Zone; moreover, the crosshair of the snipers' scope centers on the frame of the shot: the total composition of the shots replicates a real-world sensibility, and this particular vignette pays homage to Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)⁶⁸ and reflects the Americanization of the narrative with the heavy-handed military presence.

The perceived safety of the compound does not seem to fully allow the two children to find peace. They sneak out of the Green Zone and are spotted by one of the snipers as they attempt to flee. While running through the city, they find a scooter lying on its side. In this sequence, Tammy goes inside the building to retrieve the keys for the vehicle, yet the camera pauses (a half second too long) on a sticker on the window of this business,⁶⁹ which serves as reminder that the security cameras are always running. After retrieving the keys from a corpse, the camera returns to another brief respite. The children ride through this post-apocalyptic world⁷⁰ without a care by seemingly forgetting the reality of their surroundings; the repatriation does not seem complete without a return to their home. Zani and Meaux state that,

given that they can only expect to empty home to return to, their action emphasizes the psychological state that they (and by extension we, the viewers) have an idea of home, with all that it implies about family, a shared past, and the value of community. The psychological power of home is such that it is more important to the children than the relative safety of the fortified city. (102)

Once there, they discover their mother hiding in an upstairs bedroom, and the mother's actions mimic the infected, as she seems to be more animalistic than human. The children and the mother are evacuated by the military and returned to the safety of District One.

A key image between this sequel and the first film can be drawn when the mother finds herself restrained on a bed; this shot could be superimposed for the chimpanzee in the opening shot of *28 Days Later*. The only subtle difference between the two shots rests with the animal mimicking a Jesus Christ pose. However, in both cases, the animal and the human are both case studies for scientists trying to unravel the inexplicable. Fresnadillo further emphasizes the mother's entrapment with the use of extreme close-up shots on her eyes⁷¹ that works on two levels: the doctor trying to exam his subject, and her own projected fears with the audience absorbing and identifying with her primal terror.

It is the arrival of Don's wife that propels the narrative forward, for the audience discovers that she acts as a carrier. In fact, Alice has the rage virus but does not succumb to the infection; her immunity makes her unique condition a valuable commodity for the survival of the human race. Don reunites with his wife, but the

reunion does not last long. During this short exchange, a dramatic turn of events occurs: he kisses his wife on the lips, she infects him with her saliva, and he plucks out her eyes as she lies helplessly confined to the bed. After the initial chaos of the film's opening, we return to uncertainty and the reintegration of the virus back into the population. The threat, as it were, remains on the periphery of the last 45 minutes of the narrative, yet the fear of returning contagion looms omnipresent, even against perceived security; the audience finds safety in characters that seem to have a return to normalcy. Nevertheless, the rest of the narrative arch of the story finds these survivors unable to escape this unquestionable time of extreme pressure.

Fresnadillo, like Boyle, shows hegemonic power of a controlling military. As promised by the representative leader of the military-industrial complex, General Stone delivers on his missive by initiating the "code red." Scarlett and the children make their escape while the civilians are ushered into a containment area. While this commotion ensues, Andy finds himself being ripped away by the riotous crowd. In the containment area, Andy comes face-to-face with his infected father. He climbs into the ventilation shaft in order to evade certain infection. This causes the door to give in as the weight of the crowd forces it open, so the infected (and those trying to escape) all spill out into the streets. The snipers—who until this point have served as a rooftop presence—find themselves in a precarious situation. In another nod to real-world scenarios,⁷² the snipers must mark and identify their targets, as protocols dictate their every action. However, General Stone informs the snipers to terminate everyone within sight of their scope.

Ironically, Doyle abandons his post on the roof; this act alone serves, in metaphoric terms, as a valid decision on not being a psychological zombie. To be sure, the military experience remains part and parcel of the soldier as automaton: an individual cannot think or reason and must follow orders without question or hesitation; this indoctrination⁷³ begins with the stripping away of the civilian way of life and a complete immersion into a militarized way of thinking. Andy reunites with his sister as several people try to avoid the sniper fire from above, reigning down certain death. Here, Doyle leads Scarlet, the two children, and a few others out of the building. In this short span of time, Doyle now is on the receiving end of the gunfire, and he must use his specialized skillset to survive and to protect the helpless civilians. Doyle knows that they have a finite period of time to escape, as the inevitable firebomb will cleanse the city of the infected.

Another brief respite from the chaos occurs when the survivors retreat to beyond the limits of the district. Andy and Tammy, briefly reunited with their parents, return to state of being alone in the world. In this same sequence, while speaking with Scarlet, Doyle explains why he left his post and, in effect, becomes the defacto “voice of reason.” Doyle learns from Scarlett that the children can possibly hold a cure to the rage virus, so he initiates an effort to get everyone to a predetermined extraction point. Of course, some of the infected survive the firebombing. In a heated exchange with the pilot, Doyle states, “fuck the chain of command. I need an extracting.” His acerbic statement disavows the power of his superiors and uses the objective “I”⁷⁴ in this frantic cry for help.

The survivors are forced to deal with those still infected with the virus and the remnants of a reestablished hegemonic power in the military authority. A powerful gas mists over the entire city; the infected are killed while Doyle, Scarlett, and the children hide inside a car. Doyle races against the clock as an exterminating detail arrives with flamethrowers to clean up and ensure total annihilation of the virus. Doyle performs a selfless act by pushing the vehicle to help the others escape certain death, for he is burned alive as a fireball engulfs his body.

Scarlett and the children are left alone after Doyle's heroic actions, so they make their way out of the city; the gas tries to overtake them as the car drives away from the ominous white cloud.⁷⁵ The situation becomes more intense as they are chased by a helicopter that rains down bullets on the car. Scarlett drives the car into the tunnel of the Metro station, barely escaping certain death. In this underground setting, the camera changes focus as the viewer sees the night-vision/crosshair scope⁷⁶ of the rifle become the POV shot. The camera's movement creates a claustrophobic effect with the use of available lighting coupled with a *Blair Witch Project* (1999)⁷⁷ style sensibility for the viewing audience. Additionally, this sequence highlights the stock-in-trade element of the horror genre: the subjective point of view. For example, the darkness of the tunnel creates the penultimate fear of unknown with the character's fumbling along in a pitch-black environment. In shocking fashion, the infected Don returns and smashes Scarlett's face in with the sniper rifle. This event causes the children to be left alone and shows an interesting element of the film harkening back to a similar theme in *The Shining* (1980).⁷⁸

Comparatively speaking, both films have deranged fathers relentlessly chasing their children.

Frequently, horror narratives include “the final girl,”⁷⁹ as Carol Clover alludes to in her seminal text *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1992). Heretofore, viewers commonly had seen an individual woman battling the killer—particularly with slasher films—after all of the characters have been eliminated, yet this ending sequence shows the stalker/killer (in terms of the infected father) trying to dispatch his children where rage unwittingly controls him. In this final confrontation, the father infects his son with the virus/contagion, and the daughter shoots her former father in order to protect her sibling; she serves as a penultimate final girl⁸⁰ when facing certain death against a familiar image as opposed to an unknown, masked assailant. Andy, like his mother before him, becomes infected but does not turn. During the last few minutes of screen time, we assume a supposed happy ending as the children make it to the stadium (hand-in-hand) and are evacuated.⁸¹ Returning to bird’s-eye view, they fly out over the city as the screen fades to black. The black screen typically used to signal the ending of a film only serves as in epilogue here because the viewer witnesses a brief 30-second shot of the infected running toward the Eiffel Tower. On the one hand, this suggests an opening-ended narrative⁸² and allows for the continuation of the story, while, on the other hand, it also allows for a belief in the totality of the contagion where no one escapes death.

Certainly, both of these films are complimentary—with the American angle (addressing specific post-9/11 connotations) implied in one and overt in the other—and they serve as rich texts to decode for the viewer. However, films (like all

forms of texts) are never stable, and meaning never becomes codified in any conventional sense of the word. Martin Rogers offers insight into this post-human⁸³ condition that certainly has carry-overs into the post-9/11 world. As Sarah Lauro⁸⁴ and others are beginning to discover, this relatively new field of study opens up many avenues for those who wish to study the zombie in a myriad of forms, shapes, and formats.

Chapter 2 Notes

¹ *28 Days Later* was Danny Boyle's fifth feature film. His first two features, *Shallow Grave* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1996), established him as a director to watch. Boyle made two American films: *A Life Less Ordinary* (1997) and *The Beach* (2001). Both were unsuccessful. See Mark Kermode: In *Sight and Sound*, he proclaims, "For those who love the home-grown independent spirit of Boyle's first two pictures, it's tempting to see *28 Days Later* as a return of the prodigal son, chastened by the bland excesses of American film-making" (60). *28 Days Later* started an upward trajectory for the director, which includes *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) winning Best Picture at the Oscars© and the well-received *127 Hours* (2010).

² Glenn Kay cites that the film grossed \$45 million in the United States and Canada and \$83 million by the end of its theatrical run.

Arnold Blumberg notes that "in all, the film [was] shot for nine weeks on a budget of about \$8 Million. The production used Cannon MiniDV digital video cameras" (18).

³ Sandy Hunter, in *Danny Boyle: Interviews*, feels that the obvious reference to a "pandemic" would be the AIDS epidemic. Boyle, however, sees the virus in terms of Ebola.

⁴ *Day of the Dead* suffered from a relative period of prosperity during Ronald Regan's tenure in office. Audiences instead identified more with *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) and the caricature of zombies in Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video (1983). In short, zombies lost their metaphoric currency.

⁵ By the mid-1980s, Jason Voorhees (*Friday the 13th*) and Freddy Krueger (*Nightmare on Elm Street*) had become household names.

⁶ *The Resident Evil* franchise includes five films: *Resident Evil* (originally subtitled *Ground Zero* but removed after attacks of 9/11) (2002), *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004), *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007), *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010) and *Resident Evil: Retribution* (releasing fall 2012). *Resident Evil: Degeneration* (2008) utilized computer graphics instead of live action, associated with the protocols/narrative of the game.

Jovanka Vuckovic explains, "*Resident Evil* was as much of a success in North America as it was in Japan. The game raked in over \$600 million worldwide, and it didn't take long before a \$35 million American film adaptation was announced. Ironically, as Vuckovic notes, Romero was set to direct the first *Resident Evil* film after previously directing a successful Japanese commercial for the video game; his script was turned down for being too gory. Vuckovic labels *Resident Evil* as a "formulaic action thriller." Nonetheless, the film grossed over \$100 million worldwide at the box office (112-14).

⁷ The global popularity of the video game helped fuel the film franchise.

⁸ See Glen Kay: "In a milestone for the film industry, *28 Days Later* was one of the first digital video productions to be picked up for distribution by a major studio (Fox), and one of the first films to be shot in digital video and not look completely amateurish. The format actually serves the movie well; combined with the cast of mostly (at the time) relative unknowns, it lends a documentary feel to the proceedings" (233).

When interviewed by Joe Kane on the format, Boyle stated, "We shot it on digital video for all sorts of reasons, some to do with being able to keep control of the film because we kept the costs down and some to do with the fact it's curiously appropriate for a film about survivors that these cameras are used, because these cameras are survivors as well—you would still be able to use these cameras if you could find batteries. Because they're people, everybody knows how to use them. They're not like movie cameras which, you know, need training to use. So there was something wonderful about using them like that" (182).

See also "Pure Rage" featurette. Boyle continues, asserting that DV (digital video) has a "grittiness" about it as opposed to film. "When you want something like this to feel really, real, it is an appropriate medium to use' [and it creates a] 'plausible' [and] 'atmospheric world.'"

⁹ See Wikipedia on *Resident Evil* (Film Series): "Despite a negative reaction from critics, the films have become the most successful movies series based on a videogame and the franchise has collectively brought in US\$675 million on a \$183 million budget."

¹⁰ CNN 2 debuted on January 1, 1982. It was the first 24-hour news that ran in 30 minute repeating broadcasts. For an in-depth discussion of the "CNN Effect," see Piers Robinson: *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News Media, Foreign Policy and Intervention*.

¹¹ See Martin Rogers: "The human subject is fundamentally wet and meat-like. It behaves like a lower-level primate (perhaps the chimpanzees of the opening shots). It incessantly consumes, to the point where it must consume itself. And human subjects are always breeding, very much like viruses. In fact, bodily reproduction becomes horrific in this film, not only via the zombie's method of reproduction (infection through contact with fluids, biting, etc.) but also in the forced breeding of the soldiers at the camp" (129-30). To his second point, the "forced breeding" is implied, and Jim's rescue of Selena and Hanna saves them from being raped and subjected to the soldier's nefarious desires of repopulating society.

¹² Anna Froula observes with respect to this sequence: "[W]e are watching multiple, conjoined screens through the eyes of one primate test subject. Boyle's apocalyptic nightmare vision transforms Kubrick's vision [*A Clockwork Orange*] of the effects of social conditioning against the violence into a rage-causing contagion in the blood. As the hand-held camera documents, the virus is extremely contagious and fast-acting, passing through the saliva and the blood, recalling cultural fears about AIDS transmission as well as embodying the post-9/11 panics over Anthrax and the SARS, West Nile, Avian, and Swine flu viruses" (198). She expands, "like the opening scene that serenely juxtaposes the chaos of social rage with the civilized structure or the primate lab, this image of jet contrails reminds us how any community that poses a threat to dominant power structures is expendable and, thus, collateral damage" (204).

Nick Muntean and Matthew Payne echo Froula: "Given the crucial role played by the media in the representation and constitution of September 11's traumatic effect, it is perhaps not that surprising then that *Dawn* [remake] and *28 Days Later* foreground the ascendant ubiquity of the 'information society' with their hyper-mediatized introductory credit sequences, both of which feature montages of stock footage of random acts of violence from around the world" (248).

¹³ In *Better Off Dead*, Sorcha Fhalinn asserts that, “in *28 Days Later*, an abandoned London relocated the apocalyptic horror by standing in for the post-9/11 New York, which, though not a deliberate decision on the part of the director, Danny Boyle, is invoked throughout the film. For all the resonance of apocalypse and doom these events have become layered with—by historians, journalists, and eyewitnesses—these cinematic representations of the end of the world, or indeed, the breaking point of the mind (which in philosophical terms, is the end of the world), are crucial if we are to fully understand the underlying raw emotions of terror, rage, and needless destruction which have accompanied the chronicling of these historic moments.” Continuing, “The definitive break is important as it seems to be preoccupied with moments of Western cultural anxieties. It can also work individually or collectively, based on the severity of the dehumanization at work” (142).

The same can be said for Alex Cox’s *Revenger’s Tragedy* (2002), a film adaptation of the 1606 Jacobean play. In post-production on 9/11, the film serves as a compendium piece to *28 Days Later*: both films are British productions with overarching Americanized themes. Interestingly enough, Christopher Eccleston stars in both films and has the lead role in *Revenger’s Tragedy*.

¹⁴ A character is bitten/infected and the others wait for the individual to “turn” into one of the undead. Boyle levels this concept with a near immediate becoming of the other.

¹⁵ Simon Cooper offers, “The sheer speed of assimilation suggests an assimilative process that rapidly and ruthlessly makes the world over in its own image.” Moreover, “The very things we fear in the realms of science fiction and horror are emerging possibilities enabled through the techno-scientific industries our governments are so keen to attract.” Through research and development, it seems plausible that the military-industrial complex could conceivably authorize a study of this nature.

¹⁶ Films rarely begin without opening credits. Christopher Nolan uses this same technique in *Inception* (2010) to throw the audience off balance and absorb the viewer directly in the action of the story.

¹⁷ Cillian Murphy was a relative unknown prior to the release of *28 Days Later*. Arnold Blumberg cites that both Ewan McGregor (who had already been in two Boyle films) and Leonardo DiCaprio were in contention for the role of Jim. Murphy has gone on to star in a slew of films: *Cold Mountain* (2003), *Batman Begins* (2005), *Red Eye* (2005), *Sunshine* (2007), *Inception* (2010), and *In Time* (2011).

See *Danny Boyle: Interviews*: Tom Charity notes, “as Murphy points out, this is a kind of second-coming for Jim, a rebirth into a grave new world” (71). Jim seems to awaken from hibernation much like the crew in the opening sequence of *Alien* (1979).

¹⁸ Martin Rogers, in *Zombie Culture*, essays that Jim awakens as posthuman; he writes, “*28 Days Later* does not explicitly seem to visualize cybernetic organisms, though we can perhaps give in to the temptation to read the images of Jim, naked and connected to intravenous devices, as a depiction of this seamless augmentation. Such intravenous drip systems are machines, and no matter how simple they appear, they are in fact a wondrous technology or intercession, allowing doctors to ‘jack in’ to a formerly closed portion of the circulatory system and manipulate the information it transports—blood and its various components. Jim ‘wakes up’ to this state, perhaps visualizing the anxiety over this form of emergence into post-humanism, or perhaps into its wonder. The seamlessly articulated human subject will in fact exist in a world quite different than its previous physical environments, and this will be the source of great terror or pleasure” (125). Rogers articulates an interesting point here on Jim as a cybernetic organism; certainly, his assertion follows the particular protocols of the science fiction film genre wherein machines rule the world.

¹⁹ Carol Clover suggests, “At one level, this ‘screen eye’ is simply another in a long row of examples of the traditional call for attention. The ocular opening images of cinematic horror apostrophize its

collective eye. But insofar as it introduces a narrative that necessarily turns of the problems of vision—seeing too little (to the point of blindness) or seeing too much (to the point of insanity)—and insofar as its scary project is to tease, confuse, block, and threaten the spectator’s own vision, the opening eye of horror also announces a concern ‘with the way we see ourselves and others and the consequences that often attend our usual manner of perception. Horror privileges eyes because, more crucially than any other kind of cinema, it is about eyes’ (166-67). Clover, referencing J.P. Telotte, posits the drastic importance of eyes in establishing thematic issues between the spectator and the image captured on celluloid. In relation to Jim’s discovery processes throughout the film, and his metaphorical Everyman status, this casts an interesting point of departure for further study.

²⁰ Froula proclaims, “This description of a zombified national conscience, or unconsciousness, serenely ignorant of or genially unfocused on the all-too-real horrors of daily life emphasizes the banality or imperial privilege in context to the oppressed” (204). Her examination reinforces the Everyman quality of Jim with universal applicability.

²¹ See “Pure Rage” DVD supplemental. The production team was able to coordinate with the city to make it seem empty; the effect for the viewer, particularly for those individuals who are accustomed to seeing a crowded bridge, is quite dramatic. In terms of aesthetics, it lends itself to a more believable landscape as opposed to a Matte shot.

As Arnold Blumberg comments in *Zombieman*, the production team shot early in the morning using multiple cameras, and sometimes they were able to shoot footage for only a few minutes to achieve the desired effect of an abandoned city.

The Road, also a post-apocalyptic film with a heavy-handed cannibalism theme, attempts to create a similar feel with a monochromatic color scale and Matte shots. However, the verisimilitude in *28 Days Later* creates an authentic cityscape for the viewer.

²² Godspeed You! Black Emperor (a post-rock Canadian band) complements this sequence; this highly regarded cult band normally does not license any of their songs. Known for long instrumental arrangements that ebb and flow and rise to crescendos, the non-diegetic music accompanies the action in near perfect symmetry. It is interesting to note that the music comes from previously released material. See *F#A#∞* Album: “East Hastings” 17:58, Kranky Records, 1998.

IMBD notes that Boyle utilizes the “second movement” of this song. Additionally, the song “appear[s] in the movie but not on the soundtrack album.” Blumberg feels that the atmospheric music “drops the viewer helplessly into the middle of a deserted and dangerous London” (19).

²³ Tony Nigro sees the recent spate of zombie films as ostensibly war films. He proclaims, “At their most primal, zombie movies are war movies, stories of us versus them. The zombies of both *28 Days Later* and *Dawn of the Dead* [remake] bring war-torn chaos to the fragile world as we know it. The London of *28 Days Later* is littered with prescient ‘Have you seen me?’ flyers that easily could have been posted in Lower Manhattan. The archaic Milwaukee seen from the air early on in *Dawn of the Dead* could be a country at war—or maybe one occupied by foreign military. As images go, both play to our massively confused consciousness.”

To be sure, these images are evocative of the so-called “War on Terror” in the wake of 9/11. This key moment in *28 Days Later* is a bit serendipitous.

Tom Charity confirms that the scene with the fliers was shot prior to 9/11. Boyle had toiled with the idea of editing it out of the film because of sensitivity issues, yet he decided the image was too powerful to take out.

²⁴ Of course, I am applying “hegemony” in terms of Antonio Gramsci’s use of “cultural hegemony.” Using Marxist ideology, he believed this power explains how the capitalist society maintained and controlled the masses. For a detailed discussion, see *Unraveling Gramsci: Hegemony in the Global Economy* by Adam David Morton (2007).

²⁵ With respect to the zombie/infected priest, Zane and Meaux argue, “the message is apparent: not even the sacred is sacred anymore” (104).

²⁶ David Flint underscores that “the infected, with their red eyes and relentless fury, are a frightening variant on the zombie template.” Henceforth, “the impact of the fast, running ‘zombies’ can’t be overstated. The shuffling dead would never seem so threatening again” (185). For symbolic elements, he proclaims, “employing the infected as a metaphor for the breakdown of the social structure governing our behavior towards one another, the film suggests that anger—‘rage’ itself—has become the defining emotional response in late capitalist societies,” and citing Boyle’s comments on the nature of real violence (citizens consumed with rage), “The truth is this sort of thing [random acts of senseless violence] is happening more and more. It’s not some abstract monster, the monster is in all of us. We are all capable of flying into a violent rage” (180).

²⁷ This is not the first appearance of “fast” zombies; the relatively obscure Italian film, Umberto Lenzi’s *Nightmare City (Incubo sulla città contaminata)* (1980) has fast zombies that terrorize the citizenry in their quest to drink blood.

For a detailed discussion of Italian zombie films, see Jay Slater’s *Eaten Alive*. The success and influence of *Dawn of the Dead*, in the Italian market, created a frenzy of releases by Argento, Bava, and Fulci—among others. The influence of these European directors created a thriving (sub)subgenre.

²⁸ See K. Silem Mohammad: “Shots in which huge crowds of the infected chase the film’s protagonists through the streets of London are chilling in their suggestion of real-life scenes of politically and religiously motivated mob violence, and even more chilling in that the social impetus for the violence is absent; there is not specific social grievance, only the mayhem that generally attends such grievances.” Thus, “It finally matters little whether the zombies in these films are ‘really’ Undead or merely ‘sick’: the physiological conditions they have entered fundamentally change their ethological composition, and thus their status as persons or nonpersons” (99-100). First, his comments reinforce repeated images of stock footage, especially from “evening” news programs, in which the individual viewer only sees (real) horrific images of violence. Secondly, Mohammad’s remarks echo sentiments made by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in seeing humans as “living dead” persons—using vague language in an attempt at “othering.” See www.defense.gov/transcripts: In a press briefing on February 12, 2002, Rumsfeld—using rhetoric that mimics Orwellian “double-speak”—famously stated, “There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. The ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

²⁹ Similar to news reports in which individuals expressed disbelief about 9/11.

³⁰ According to IMDB, *Zombieland* grossed over \$75 million domestically. US audiences were primed for an American version of *Shaun of the Dead*. Columbus, played by Jessie Eisenberg, has 30 rules to survive the zombie apocalypse: “don’t be a hero,” “look in the back seat,” “double tap,” and “avoid public restrooms.” As a nod to pop cultural, these “rules” are familiar to the conventions of the genre, and also to gamers—numbering in the 100s—including the *Left 4 Dead (L4D)* series (2008-current), and *Call of Duty: Black Ops 11* (2012). In this second example, the narrative of the videogame has a first-person shooter, of course; additionally, it includes three separate scenarios to survive the zombie apocalypse.

Additionally, *Zombieland* focuses on the hyper-textual, as the rules over survival are superimposed over various vignettes where characters are seen “breaking” these rules and paying the price for their disregard of these precepts.

³¹ Max Brooks’s (son of Mel Brooks) widely successful *Zombie Survival Guide* has an entire section on “Weapons and Combat” techniques. Although humorous, he writes with complete conviction believing that that the zombie apocalypse is nigh.

³² Glenn Kay explains, “But in between, there’s still time for philosophical debate and psychological subtext as Murphy’s character comes to terms with the deaths of his family and friends. Many of the secondary characters serve as surrogate fathers for Murphy, until his character comes to grips with his predicament and takes control of his destiny” (233).

³³ Jim trolls his subconscious to recall images from his memory, similar to rewinding a videotape to a certain day/time to relive the same event.

³⁴ See Froula: “Foreshadowing the logic of 9/11, the response to the threat must be as or more barbaric than the threat itself. Through the pretensions to the tools of “civilized warfare” long enjoyed by the US-British Coalition—including long-range missiles, “smart bombs,” and bunker busters dropped from the relative safety of the air—are absent from the scene, empire by force is not. Rather, the grisly hand-to-hand slaughter with a machete evokes the jungle combat in developing countries that are cinematically associated with zombies because of oppression, overpopulation, and imperial pasts” (199).

³⁵ “The zombie trope may well buy into this counter-capitalism as part of the generalized assault it seems to make on global capital. So many examples—*the Dead* series, *Last Man on Earth*, *The Omega Man*, and *28 Days Later*—show the heart of capitalist settlement littered with detritus of modern civilization: paper and old clothes drifting among the bodies on pavements, cars uselessly lining the streets, and looted stores opening wistfully out onto the emptiness beyond. Perhaps what we can suggest about this use of the trope is that the zombie is the worm that turned. Capitalism produced and overproduced it, and now it is eating capitalism,” so argue Byrnard and Webb (92).

Also, see Martin Rogers and his assertion of the city as a “non-biological machine.” Rogers, channeling Julia Kristeva, proposes, “The abject threatens life and therefore must be ‘radically excluded’ from the place of the living subject. Consider the city of London for a moment in biological terms—as a body. When Jim’s network of survivors escape London, they are actually expelled from the body of London. The survivors literally burst out of a tunnel to leave the city limits, repeating the act of expulsion of waste from the human body via any number of its orifices. The infected have taken over the city, as zombies often do in the genre, and this new social order has no place for human subject. This nightmare vision of London is one of an urban system independent of human presence. The great metropolis has become a nonbiological machine: the traffic lights continue to blink, but for no one; car alarms fulfill their programming, but protect the car from no one. The dead city continues on purely in its machine functions, itself a spatial/national automaton unlike the walking dead that now haunt its streets” (128).

³⁶ Different from zombie films preceding this one, wherein a character has a varied (and not rapid) window of time before an individual “turns” and becomes the undead.

³⁷ See Jack Sargent and Stephanie Watson: *Lost Highways: An Illustrated History of Road Movies* (2000). Their book-length study examines a cross-section of films that fall under the guise of a “road” narrative.

³⁸ This tender scene reinforces Glenn Kay’s assertion of Jim and his defacto father figure.

³⁹ See *Resident Evil: Extinction*. In one scene, zombie birds circle above their prey and eventually attack the humans below.

⁴⁰ Rhodes acts like a megalomaniac while Major West seems composed.

⁴¹ See Froula: "As West explains this experiment to a cowering Jim, the infected soldier falls to the ground and vomits blood before reaching pitifully for Jim. Not only does the captive Mailer's dark skin signify the terrors of the US-UK Slave trade, but his tortured form also allegorizes the condition of the prisoners of the "War on Terror," those the Bush administration renamed "detainees" and "enemy combatants." Regarding Guantanamo Bay's Camp X-Ray, Anne McClintock writes that the innocent prisoners, which the Red Cross estimates to be roughly 90 percent of the total prison population, are "reduced to zombies, unpeopled persons, dead men walking, bodies as imperial property." This scene's opening subjective shot from Mailer's perspective and his soldier's uniform warn of a permeable boundary between being an agent of military rule and being a body policed by it" (202-03).

⁴² Adilifu Nama, in *Black Space*, believes that "although *28 Days Later* is set in Britain, the film dramatically resonates with the cultural politics of race in America, a characteristic that arguably might have contributed to the film's successful reception by American moviegoers" (64). He continues: "Unfortunately, the subversive elan woven into the critique of British society and its military-industrial complex as 'sick' is attained at the expense of reanimating retrograde signifiers of the black 'other' as contaminated and contaminating. By presenting a black male as a diseased subject of observation, *28 Days Later* evokes the historical use of black men in America as human guinea pigs to observe the effects of syphilis" (65). Here, drawing parallels to the Tuskegee incident, he concludes, "the black man in *28 Days Later* is an object to pathological spectacle and voyeuristic subjection" (66).

Similarly, in *Zombie Manifesto*, Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry articulate, "Here we see zombie 'subjectivity' on display, for it remains the subject of scientific observation and the powerless subject of dominant force; still the Queen's subject, the medical subject, and subjected to violence, this zombie has ceased to be an agentic subject and now belongs to the object world" (107).

⁴³ Private (in most military services) is the entry-level position for enlisted personnel.

⁴⁴ One cannot help but think about terrorists who act as martyrs for the cause, particularly by using explosives strapped to their bodies to inflict mass casualties on unsuspecting victims.

⁴⁵ See Fhlainn: "Soldiers are trained to dehumanize themselves when in combat and their subjects by the actions of the dehumanized combatant. The zombies herein present narratives of primal rage and violence on their persons and on the community. *28 Days later* delineate[s] between the violence between the disease in the modern world by reducing human action to animal rage (which the disease itself is named and place[s] us with the inner world of an infantry unit acting as a microcosm of the outside world" (141).

⁴⁶ See Flint: *Zombie Holocaust*. He writes, "However, It's the uninfected humans who are the real monsters here. In a more successful twist on Romero's *Day of the Dead* military subtext, the film shows the real danger comes not from the infected—who will soon die—but from Christopher Eccleston's band of militaristic survivors. Eccleston's group cling to power as the world crumbles around them, and have unsavory designs on the two female survivors. The inference being that, if these people are the future or humanity, then perhaps we would all be better off dead" (186).

⁴⁷ Though a brief scene, it is interesting to note that the incidents at Abu Gharib prison came to light just two years after the release of this film: the world learned about rape, mistreatment, and humiliation (among other war crimes) at the hands of US personnel.

⁴⁸ Jen Webb and Sam Byrnam posit, “Jim takes on many of the physical and emotional characteristics of the ‘infected’ so that he might survive the horror being dealt out by his own kind. The zombies in the film have been infected with a viral rage; Jim avoids the infection, but can’t avoid or control his innate, personal rage. The effect in either case is practically identical: for all intents and purposes, in the moments of rage Jim is zombie. In fact, the deleted scenes show Jim running unmolested among a pack of the infected to gain entry into the soldiers’ house: he sides with the zombie in order to kill his human tormentors, and even the zombies can’t tell he’s not one of them” (86).

However, they offer that “[l]ike Jim in *28 Days Later*, we may perform as zombies at times, yet we can always pull back and return to the human condition because we have not yet crossed the boundary which marks the end of self-awareness, removes the human subject from the symbolic order and returns it to the Real” (96).

Comparatively, Flhainn argues, “This psychological break from reality in both films [*28 Days Later* and *Jacob’s Ladder*] is a chemically induced form of zombification: the chemical (or, indeed, biochemical) form of pure rage acts as a frightening reminder or the body driven to violence when reason and order have collapsed or have been (temporarily) eclipsed” (141).

Jacob’s Ladder (1990) serves as a prime example of the soldier as zombie and underscores a real-world applicability dealing with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Adrian Lyne creates a more psychologically nuanced film as opposed to other filmic war narratives, utilizing the thriller genre coupled with horror film underpinnings.

⁴⁹ “Not even Jim, the film’s nominal hero, is above such base human emotions. His own regression into savagery in the film’s fraught climax suggests that the virus is in some ways already a part of all of us. Appearing for Selena covered in mud and blood after his own inner rage has led him to butcher the squad of soldiers, the film raises the very real (but sadly ignored) possibility that he might be mistaken for ‘one of them’ and struck down by the woman he just fought so hard to save,” writes Jamie Russell (180).

⁵⁰ See Muntaen and Payne: “Jim and West engage in a final confrontation, with control over the new social order at stake. Jim’s asymmetric confrontation with the major and his men is not only a battle of personalities (Jim is the righteous hero, while West is the misguided militant), but their battle is reminiscent of Rambo-style action films in which a lone vigilante reestablished a social order by exercising his righteous will. Jim defeats West and his men by ‘going native,’ using guerilla tactics to lure West away from the compound while a horde of zombies make their uncoordinated frontal attack” (293).

To be sure, there are comparisons to be made between the final action sequences of *28 Days Later* with particular respect to the first Rambo film—*First Blood* (1982). However, Jim has to find his baser instinct in order to survive, while Rambo already is hard-wired to action because of his previous training as an elite soldier. In both cases, these heroes utilize self-preservation after being mistreated by powerful forces that seek to snuff out their lives.

⁵¹ See Blumberg: “the epilogue was shot on 35mm film to suggest a break with the style of the rest of the movie and provides a soothing sense of calm to the happy finale.” By utilizing a different format for the ending sequence, Boyle creates a different aesthetic as opposed to the cold austerity of the rest of the film.

⁵² The DVD supplementals for *28 Days Later* contain three alternate endings. In one nearly four-and-a-half minute sequence, Selena and Hanna take Jim to the hospital to operate on him after he is shot by Major West: he dies on the table (bringing the narrative full circle from his original awakening) as Selena screams for him to breathe. The final shot ends with the elevator doors closing to black as

they walk down the hallway. In another ending, Selena and Hanna stand on the Hello sign without Jim. These various endings offer rich asides on the speculative nature of cinema in terms of finding thematic meaning.

⁵³ See Jamie Russell: “The critical and commercial success of *28 Days Later* signaled that the genre had entered a new phase. Phenomenally popular with audiences on both sides of the Atlantic (though particularly in America, where the addition of an alternative, darker ending helped its kudos among horror fans) it was hailed as the first visceral and intelligent zombie movie in recent memory” (179).

⁵⁴ See Froula: “I argue here that the figure of the zombie in post-9/11 cinema re-animates the ramifications of US foreign policies in the Middle East in particular and is a dominant cultural metaphor within American culture in general. In its exploration of social anger run amok, *28 Days Later* dramatizes the imperialist worldview and the material realities that informed the Bush Doctrine of preemptive war and the conditions of the Iraq invasion and occupation” (195).

⁵⁵ Kathi Maio comments, “Fresnadillo’s film is best enjoyed as an indictment of the American quagmire in Iraq” (195).

⁵⁶ Fresnadillo came to the attention of Boyle through his film *Intacto* (Intact) 2001. Last year, he released *The Intruders*, starring Clive Owen.

⁵⁷ The space seems to follow the protocols of the “safe house” narrative established with films like *The Birds* and *Night of the Living Dead*.

⁵⁸ As a comparative, see *Dawn of the Dead* (remake). Zack Snyder uses a few key aerial shots in the first 15 minutes of the film; these are similar in suggesting satellites, targeting, and surveillance.

⁵⁹ Offering relatively new ground for the zombie sub-genre, *28 Weeks later*, along with *Land of the Dead*, explores the concept of a reconstructed society and what it means to survive after the fact.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Renner had some experience with features prior to this film; however, he mainly worked on various Television series. Similar to Cillian Murphy, his output dramatically increased after his involvement with this project: *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007), *The Hurt Locker* (2008) (which won Best Picture and a film where he again plays a military role—EOD [explosive ordinance disposal] expert, as opposed to a sniper), *The Town* (2010), *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), and *The Bourne Legacy* (2012).

⁶¹ See www.usmcsnipers.org for general information on snipers. Among the military services, the Marine Corps snipers are general held as among the best shooters. Recently, the Marines opened up the school to other Special Operations groups like the US Navy Seals and Army Rangers. In an all-volunteer group, those who attend go through a rigorous vetting process, and once there, only have one chance to pass the school. Historically, many do not complete the course to become christened as “Scout Snipers.”

⁶² See Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. Utilizing Jeremy Bentham’s building designs for prison, Foucault sheds light of the ways in which observing a subject can modify behavior in order to achieve a desired effect.

⁶³ A heightened state of alertness.

⁶⁴ In *Firestorm*, Stephen Prince notes, “The American military leads a NATO force into England to secure and stabilize the country and to protect ‘friendlies,’ i.e., Brits who are not zombies. The Americans hole up in a secured compound they call ‘the Green Zone.’ This was also the name of the Republican Palace area in Baghdad where the Coalition Provisional Authority made its headquarters.

The movie thus established that one of its gambits will be an allegorical rendering of the Iraq War” (284).

⁶⁵ Paul Lewis, in *The Guardian*, proclaims that there are more cameras per citizen than anywhere else in the world.

The citizenry of London, in particular, continue to discuss the merits of closed-circuit television and obvious “invasion of privacy” issues.

⁶⁶ See “Code Red” featurette: Danny Boyle—who served as executive producer on the sequel—states that there is “enormous value to the world centered on the family.” By zeroing in on this one particular family, the macrocosmic works in conjunction with the microcosmic, so the grand totality of this catastrophic event is reduced to its lowest common unit: the nuclear family.

⁶⁷ See “Code Red” featurette: Danny Boyle calls the Green Zone part of “a clean new world.” The viewer recognizes the makeover between the old London and the new, revitalized London. One cannot help but make the association between the peacekeeping operation in the Middle East and bases established by the United States.

⁶⁸ James Stewart’s character, L.B. “Jeff” Jefferies, uses his elevated position to spy on all his neighbors. For all intents and purposes, his binoculars are the same as the sniper scope of Doyle, who also enjoys his own form of voyeurism.

⁶⁹ Standard disclaimer used by establishments to let patrons know they are being recorded.

⁷⁰ As a comparison, Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men* (2006) also shows a vision of London on the verge of an apocalypse; this London is a dystopian city with warring factions, and the city is policed by a Big Brother-style force that seeks to dispel all immigrants from the city.

Also, Slavoj Žižek, in the *Children of Men* DVD supplementals, discusses the film as metacinematic, referring the use of billboards and Television advertisements to “other” the illegal aliens. *28 Weeks Later* uses the surveillance camera as the omnipresent “eye in the sky.”

⁷¹ See previous comment on emphasis of eye shots by Carol Clover.

⁷² From my own eight-year experience in the United States Marine Corps, and having served under both United Nations and NATO operations, I know that all actions require standard ROE (rules of engagement) that dictate how a situation must be handled: combat operations require that all personnel carry a rules of engagement card on their person at all times. In this scene, the general utilizes a “scorched Earth” policy as opposed to the typical protocols of collateral damage.

See www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_military. According to the Department of Defense, Collateral Damage is defined as the “unintentional or incidental injury or damages to persons or objects that would not be lawful military targets in the circumstances ruling at the time. Such damage is not unlawful so long as it is not excessive in light of the overall military advantage anticipated from the attack.”

⁷³ See also the following terms: “military training” or “recruit training.”

See www.reference.com/brose/Indoctrination: “Indoctrination is the process of inculcate ideas, attitudes, cognitive strategies or a professional methodology. It is often distinguished from education by the fact that the indoctrinated person is expected not to question or critically examine the doctrine they have learned. As such it is used pejoratively. Instruction in the basic principles of science, in particular, cannot properly be called indoctrination, in a sense that the fundamental principles of science call for critical self-evaluation and skeptical scrutiny of one’s own ideas.”

⁷⁴ Strictly forbidden, the use of first-person “I” becomes a taboo word from the moment one begins military training. I went to MCRD (Marine Corp Recruit Depot) Parris Island, South Carolina from September 6 to November 30, 1990. This was the first concept taught to me by the drill instructors: “I” was immediately replaced with “this recruit.”

⁷⁵ Like *The Mist* (2007) and *The Fog* (1980 and 2005 remake), the death occurs when the character comes in contact with it.

In terms of real world applicability, this metaphor serves as a continual (and alarming) reminder that “dirty bombs” could be initiated by terrorists, toxic (biochemical) warfare on an unsuspecting public.

⁷⁶ The military uses “night vision” technology to acquire targets in limited visibility.

⁷⁷ This film uses a camera that is not fixed in location. The shaky effect tends to create a more realistic effect for the viewer.

⁷⁸ Both fathers are infected with a type of rage: one is psychological and the other is viral/contagion. In both cases, the fathers have lost their capacity to reason, as evidenced by their attempts to murder their children.

⁷⁹ Clover coined this term. In many films, one “final girl” is left to battle with the killer; she usually escapes or overcomes the odds to dispatch the killer/stalker in the ending sequence of a film. Thematically, this was used heavily, particularly during the exploitation era of the 1970s thru mid-1980s.

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that Tammy is a teenager and much younger than the typical final girl. Usually, sexual overtones accompany this representation.

⁸¹ Denotes “real world” operations where refugees (displaced persons) are evacuated from a dangerous area to safety.

⁸² *28 Weeks Later* does not include “alternative endings.”

⁸³ Rogers projects, “The zombie—masquerading as ‘the infected’—offers just such a gauge for the technological boundary, leading us to a post-human condition. Furthermore, it allows for the visualization of the convergent or retrograde crossing of the machine toward sentience in the form of embodied viruses.” Adding, “Our film genres have become unstable because our conception of the body is unstable: it is so thoroughly confused and implicated in the technological that body-horror and medical- or science-horror have become the same thing. Human consciousness is no longer solely figured through bodies. In the post-human world, the horror/sci-fi hybrid will visualize these transformational anxieties. Just as soldiers experience sensation from limbs long since amputated, the human body, amputated from its biological-consciousness, will haunt the living information of self-aware technology” (130-31).

⁸⁴ See: *Better Off Dead*. This edited collection offers rich new territory in ways in which to configure the zombie; these include zombie walks/crawls, zombie mobs—as entertainment and as protest—in both the United States and abroad, performance art, and how “zombie” has been coopted into the lexicon.

Chapter 3: Recrudescence: George A. Romero Reclaims His Throne with *Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead*.

“Romero’s zombies are like our own collective conscience, gnawing away at our souls.”

—Jake Horsley, *The Blood Poets*

In 2005, *Land of the Dead* (a film Guilia D’Agnolo-Vallan describes as “firmly rooted in its time, defining an epoch”) shambled into theaters signaling a return to a director who had been conspicuously in absentia from the genre for two decades.¹ Possibly one of the director’s most explicitly political² films, this continuation of the original trilogy shows the world through the post-9/11 aesthetic.³ Still, in terms of what other major Hollywood pictures receive in funding,⁴ this film utilizes high production values with CGI (computer generated images), recognizable actors, and superior special effects.⁵ Certainly, the zombie evolution⁶ shows that the mindless automaton now strives to break free from its own objectivity, become assertive, and, all the while, still remain in the land of the post-human.

Romero begins the film in typical fashion but with a bit of reverence for the glory days of cinema,⁷ for the opening five minutes has a distinct black-and-white color scale; this reinforces the opening cue card stating “some time ago,” coupled with the nondiegetic sounds of an antique radio⁸ being tuned for clarity. As the opening credits role, the various radio broadcasts alert the listener to the current

state of affairs and, more importantly, the methods in disposing of the undead.⁹ Nevertheless, even for all its seemingly datedness, the film shows a quick aerial shot of a suburban neighborhood, emulating the satellite image¹⁰ aspects of other zombie films released after 2001; the director shows both the birth and the evolution of technology.

Romero—in cueing the audience on timeliness—presents the counterpoint as “today” and leaves the black-and-white photography out of the rest of the film. What the director privileges in the opening shot focuses not on humans but on the interaction of zombies in their own environment outside of the city. A crane shot¹¹ slowly pushes in on a multitude of zombies walking aimlessly through a park: one carries a briefcase, another has on her cheerleader outfit, and a band attempts to play their instruments inside of a gazebo. When another zombie unintentionally steps on a sensor, the audience is introduced to Big Daddy, played by Eugene Clark;¹² he immediately goes to the gas station pumps to perform a routine task of his former life. These all show a touching sentiment on the part of the director with the appropriately named Union Town.¹³ This scene, in particular, offers a different glimpse compared to the standard chaos of other post-apocalyptic narratives.

The camera pulls back to reveal that Big Daddy is being watched through binoculars by Riley Denbo (Simon Baker¹⁴) and an unnamed Anchor, played by Tony Munch. This opening banter between Riley and the Anchor reveals much to the audience:

Anchor: “They’re trying to be us.”

Riley: “They use to be us. They’re learning to be us again.”

Anchor: "It's like they're pretending to be alive."

Riley: "Isn't that what we are doing?"

The first actual words of dialogue by a minor character show the zombie evolution, so the viewer can infer that Romero wants to suggest a new concept.¹⁵ Additionally, Riley's retort seems to indicate an almost direct address to the post-9/11 world, one still in shock and dealing with the new realities of trying to exist. Big Daddy sees that he is being observed and grunts to the others to alert them to the human presence. Riley states, "Christ, it's like he's talking to them." The viewer knows that these are not the average zombies of yesteryear.

At the same time, Cholo¹⁶ DeMora (John Leguizamo¹⁷) and his crew dispose of bodies at a dump site; these individuals are shown performing a necessary but menial task while Cholo spews forth his first words in Spanish, not English. Also, Charlie¹⁸ (Robert Joy) appears from the shadow and initially looks to be a zombie, for the right side of his face has hideous burn marks. This reveals that all of these various teams are out scavenging for supplies in the zombie-infested area outside of the city. The racial implications of this opening sequence are delicately encoded into this sequence for both the zombies and humans.

In order to distract the zombies, a vehicle called Dead Reckoning¹⁹ dispenses fireworks into the sky. Riley calls them "flowers in the graveyard,"²⁰ and Charlie—in childlike wonderment—says they are "skyflowers." The zombies stare amazed at the fireworks; moreover, the connotations of patriotism are reinforced with two American flags in this sequence: one ruffling in the wind above Big Daddy's head and another tattered flag attached to the back of a motorcycle. Thus, the evolved

zombie does not seem fazed by the displays of light in the night sky. Once the fireworks malfunction, a melee ensues with the gang of motorcyclists²¹ slaughtering the zombies with automatic weapons.²² Big Daddy attempts to save his fellow zombies by throwing them to safety and performing a “mercy killing” by stomping on the head of another in the group. As the humans evacuate the area, it is Big Daddy’s primal scream that signals the rage building inside of him. The scene ends with the leader of the zombie picking up a machine gun and placing it over his shoulder.

Riley and Cholo stand outside of Fiddler’s Green²³ (a high-rise building in the heart of Pittsburgh surrounded by the detritus of the outside world) as they discuss the future. Kyle Bishop,²⁴ in *Dead Man Still Walking*, suggests that “Pittsburgh has been set up as a city-state unto itself” (21). Ironically, Cholo wants his American dream with all the trappings of a capitalist world while Riley retorts, “[I am] looking for a world where there is no fences.” The tenants of this modern-day paradise are affluent and white, and when Cholo tells him he has enough money saved to move in, Riley states, “We’re the wrong kind.” Their conversation complements the juxtaposition between life inside the building and the fence and armed security that keeps the undesirable out, both human and zombie. In particular, the residents have an indoor shopping mall and are oblivious to the harsh realities of the outside world. First, they are reaffirmed about a new life²⁵ with the soothing voice (Robin Wood, credited as Fiddler’s Green promo announcer) emanating from the PA system. Second, the security force (dressed in paramilitary regalia²⁶) protects the fence²⁷ that extends in both directions for half a mile.

The lack of comprehension by those nestled away from the horror occurs in the next sequence. Cholo goes to find his boss but instead is greeted by a butler; the noise across the hall causes Cholo to investigate, so, once inside, he finds a hysterical lady and a man who has committed suicide by hanging. Additionally, the woman greets him with suspicion (even in her distressed state) because of his minority status: his skin color immediately arouses suspicion. The man's son attempts to cut his father down and is attacked in the process. Cholo bludgeons the father to death with a statue he procures from the front door. A (white) security guard arrives and Cholo tells him, "it's your problem." Once again, he offers the lady assistance and she does not move from the coach, implying she would have been bitten like the son, unaware of the inherent danger.

Romero introduces a third environment to the audience as the world directly outside of Fiddler's Green acts as the middle ground; in effect, these poor people are locked out of the ivory tower and just a rung above—in social standing—from the living dead. All of deadly sins are represented in this Sodom and Gomorrah-esque atmosphere: gambling, naked women on display in cages, and parlor games with chained zombies.²⁸ During the cage match, Slack (Asia Argento²⁹) has to fight off two zombies in a battle to the death. Seeing the inhumanity of it all, Riley rushes in to save her, and the authorities come to arrest him. Through the prison bars, Riley and Slack discuss their situation; the composition of the shot creates a sense of their literal imprisonment and the entrapment via the stratified division of those left alive in the reconstituted society. Slack states, "It wasn't the little man, it was the big man, Mr. K, he's got his fingers in everything. If you can drink it, fuck it, shoot it up,

gamble on it, it belongs to him.” Here, this (as of yet) unseen force acts as a facilitator of the seven deadly sins and is able to distribute opiate to the masses.³⁰

Big Daddy leads his group through the outskirts³¹ and into the heart of the fortified city. A featured zombie (Boyd Banks, credited as Butcher) carries a butcher’s knife.³² Big Daddy assists him by showing him a chopping motion to remove a boarded-up section of wall preventing them from moving forward, so the zombie utilizes his knife to hack away at the wood; the other zombies all stare at him and marvel at his achievements. To be sure, they are beginning, with the direction of a leader, to quickly adapt and use resources available to them to overcome obstacles.³³ Although the leader can only grunt, the effect makes the viewer feel that Big Daddy—in the only way he can be communicative—shows his approval to those in the group.

Only discussed on the periphery, Kaufman (Dennis Hopper³⁴) does not physically appear until nearly a third of the way through the film. When Cholo enters his penthouse suite, Kaufman stares out of window and looks over his empire with all the accoutrements: designer suit, cigar, and a glass of brandy. Visually speaking, Romero shows that Cholo will never be accepted into this society. He brings his boss champagne and more cigars. However, he does not realize the difference between a champagne glass and a brandy glass. Kaufman corrects his employees lack of refinement by pouring it into the correct glass. Additionally, Cholo stands in his blue-collar work clothes and begs to be let into Fiddler’s Green. Kaufman retorts that membership is “exclusive” with “a very long waiting list,”

meaning, minorities need not apply. Cholo resorts to speaking in Spanish because of his frustration with the situation.

Continuing their march toward the epicenter of the city, the zombies arrive at the fence. Simultaneously, Cholo and his crew steal *Dead Reckoning* as the zombies overrun the fortified position.³⁵ Big Daddy shoots a machine gun at the vehicle as it flees the scene, which forces the audience to consider the implications of the double threat of a militarized zombie nation fighting against the living. Additionally, he convinces the zombies to stop eating and continue on with the mission. Certainly, Romero creates a new aesthetic here as opposed to the original trilogy; this transposes Bud—another sympathetic character—in *Day of the Dead* to Big Daddy's ability to rouse the troops to the battlefield: ironically, Bud (a former soldier) has a military background and Big Daddy (a former gas station attendant) gains militancy. For all intents and purposes, Big Daddy symbolizes a revolutionary leader³⁶ in the vein of Che Guevara.³⁷

Romero establishes the hierarchy³⁸ (the rich in Fiddler's Green, the poor outside the gate, and the zombies as the furthest removed) early in the film. The real symbolic dichotomy exists between Kaufman, the rich overlord, and Cholo, a man after the "American dream," and is reinforced once Cholo seizes power with *Dead Reckoning*—a mobile weapon of mass destruction. Cholo extorts Kaufman by proclaiming, "I'm going to blow you out of your fucking castle." He demands to be paid for his services with interest. In his boardroom, Kaufman tells his associates, "we don't negotiate with terrorists,"³⁹ which emulates the foreign policy of George Bush and the concept of no neutrality in the "War on Terror." Kaufman utilizes Riley

to retrieve his vehicle, so for Riley, the deal offers him a chance to escape with a vehicle, weapons, and his friends. In contrast to Cholo, Riley does not ask for any money, the inference being that he assists his boss for altruistic motives.

Riley receives assistance from Kaufman with a support team, and they introduce themselves as Manolete,⁴⁰ Motel, and Pillsbury (played by Sasha Ruiz, Krista Bridges, and Pedro Miguel Arce, respectively). These three individuals represent (ironically) multicultural diversity as they all wear their heritage on their sleeves: a Hispanic, a lesbian, and a Samoan. Again, this police force works to protect Kaufman's empire while they are marginalized in a minority status—essentially the same as Cholo—and serve as a useful tool to allow the upper echelons their privileged world. The team retrieves ammunition from a supply depot. In terms of aesthetics, Romero creates a visually arresting image when Manolete is bitten by a zombie Catholic priest.

Returning back to the boardroom, Kaufman continues the tirade as he exclaims, “The responsibility is all mine. I put up the fences to make it safe. I hired the soldiers and paid for their training. We have to do what we have to do.” In terms of *mise en scène*, the composition of the shot highlights Kaufman's vast importance over the others in the room; his first-person perspective (authoritative rhetoric) serves as an aural reminder of his power,⁴¹ and he demands the others show their obsequiousness; the board members are receiving a didactic lesson about what it means to have the ultimate, and of course, self-serving responsibility. Romero dovetails this vignette with that of Cholo fuming inside of *Dead Reckoning*. Here, he sees a zombie pushing a lawnmower⁴² outside of the vehicle, yet he feels sympathy

for this zombie laborer, calling him a “poor Mexican bastard.” He shoots the zombie not out of maliciousness (like the opening sequence) but out of genuine compassion. He proclaims in his diatribe against Kaufman, “I am going to do a Jihad on his ass.”⁴³

The zombie horde, led by Big Daddy, reaches the water, which separates them from the mainland. Taking the lead, he jumps into the water, and the others follow him. In another effective CGI (computer generated imaging) shot, the zombies slowly ascend from the water line:⁴⁴ Romero uses extras in the foreground and CGI in the background to make the invasion look endless.⁴⁵ Big Daddy carries the rifle over his soldier-literally, the only zombie with a real weapon. They invade while the missiles atop Dead Reckoning point toward Fiddler’s Green. Riley stops the missiles from launching,⁴⁶ but the sounds of explosions are still heard in the city. Hearing that the zombies are still coming, Kaufman shoots one of his associates and runs off with two leather bags stuffed with cash. The significance of this shot hints at an invading contingent seeking to liberate a city from an occupying force.

Dejected, Cholo and his partner Foxy (Tony Nappo) stay behind while Riley and his crew go back into the city to try to help. Cholo lets his guard down, and a zombie bites him on the hand. Accepting his fate,⁴⁷ he decides not to let Foxy shoot him, stating, “I always wanted to see how the other half lives.” His encoded statement works as a double entendre with both the literal metamorphous into a zombie and the lack of realizing his desire to become a part of the privileged elite. Cholo still remains defiant, and not even his imminent “living death” can dissuade him from exacting revenge; he exclaims, “This is between me and the man!”⁴⁸

Big Daddy, like Cholo before him, sees a zombie on fire and uses a machine gun to perform a mercy killing. To further show their guerilla tactics, the zombies⁴⁹ pick up weapons of opportunity (common items such as a shovel, a pickaxe, and a pipe wrench, which all double as weapons⁵⁰), and in particular, Big Daddy uses an unplugged jackhammer to break into the ivory tower of Fiddler's Green. Interestingly, the public announcement emanating from the speaker system advises the citizens to remain calm: "No need to be alarmed." The mantra shows just how removed the tenants are from the evils of the outside world. Nevertheless, the humans have relished in their position, and now the zombies begin to form their own consciousness, resulting in an evolutionary benchmark which might eventually give them hegemony over humans. June Pulliam highlights this concept: "The zombies' ability to learn and work cooperatively is momentous, with implications for both the living characters in the film and viewers familiar with the genre, since the creature is more typically represented as a being whose mindlessness makes it vastly inferior to humans" (42-3). Nothing can save the residents from the invading forces outside who have irretrievably broken the hermetically sealed world, so these conscious zombies will fight for their post-human rights. To be sure, the viewer witnesses a filmic representation of a "socialist revolution" in this particular sequence.

Riley and crew arrive at Dead Reckoning to try and help. Slack asks Pretty Boy (Joanne Boland) how to work the "joystick" inside of the vehicle. Pretty Boy retorts, "It is just like a videogame".⁵¹ Slack uses a Gatling gun, controlled by the joystick, to save Riley. Here, they send up the "skyflowers" (the fireworks) to try to

save the humans who are still alive; however, the effect does not work on them, as they are only momentarily distracted by the colors in the sky; the inference underscores that these zombies want real independence and not the pomp and circumstance of symbolic freedom.

When Kaufman sees Big Daddy inside of the building, he stares at him in disbelief and lambasts, “You bastards, you have no right.” Kaufman and his butler/assist⁵² escape through a side door. Big Daddy catches up to Kaufman in the garage of the building. The getaway car, conveniently parked next to a gas pump, offers the zombie a chance to fulfill his former job; instead, in his aggravation, he slams the nozzle of the hose into the car and leaves the handle engaged. Cholo, the zombie,⁵³ returns to enact his revenge on his former oppressor. Kaufman, at his most vitriolic, utters a racial epithet: “fucking spic bastard.” The viewer knows the racial implications of the film, so this derogatory remark brings the issue out in black and white. In one fell swoop, Big Daddy rolls a light can down the ramp and Cholo and Kaufman—locked in an embrace—go up in flames. A metaphoric capitalist critique occurs when the fireball consumes Kaufman’s money: the useless money⁵⁴ burns and wafts in the air. Big Daddy seems to have a look of contentment on his face.⁵⁵ For all of Kaufman’s elitist attitudes, the irony is that he dies at the hand of two minorities.

After the destruction, they blow up a section of the bridge, fearing no one survived the incident. Riley laments, “These people are all dead.”⁵⁶ A group of survivors, led by Mulligan (Bruce Mcfee), leaves the city and ask Riley and his crew to join them. Riley tells Mulligan that they are headed to Canada.⁵⁷ Returning full

circle to the opening sequence, Riley (again) observes Big Daddy through binoculars, and he tells Pretty Boy not to shot him: “let them live.” This offers a different take on the often nihilistic endings to zombie films, for Riley’s actions⁵⁸ seem to indicate that a happy medium can be reached between human and zombie—each looking for their own separate peace: “the same as us.” Adam Lowenstein comments, “This simple but powerful statement of recognition is the closest Romero comes to believing in something resembling the healing potential” (115). As the vehicle leaves the city, they shoot off all of the useless fireworks; neither the humans nor the zombie have any use for them.

*Diary of the Dead*⁵⁹ (2007) represents the shortest span of time⁶⁰ between releases for a Romero zombie film. In terms of his six zombie films, this feature utilizes the widest number of formats to ever grace the screen: handheld⁶¹ DV (Digital Video), social networking cites, downloads, cell phone cameras, email, surveillance cameras, message boards, radio broadcast, television reportage, and video chats; moreover, the entire film remains in a subjective camera point of view,⁶² found footage,⁶³ and omniscient narration. Intentionally so, Romero creates a hyper-accelerated film emblematic of the current state of affairs with technological dependency, for the director creates his most unique film in the entire franchise; this is a director returning to form⁶⁴ and simultaneously showing the viewer an entire new aesthetic in the process. Michel Bloom⁶⁵ states, “The direct influence of both his ontological restricting of the zombie creature and emphasis of social reflection will then be noted in the preservation and progression of the undead archetype in modern reimaginings” (2). Heretofore, the consensus seems to

validate the merits of Web 2.0,⁶⁶ yet Romero undercuts these notions of digital democratization and suggests our own zombie-like dependency with technological gadgetry.

The film opens with a cameraman spraying the lens of the viewfinder, so the significance of the shot creates a double move in terms of subjective POV (point of view) with both the literal shot of the film and the implied meaning of the individual viewer actually operating the camera. A reporter at the scene of a horrific incident explains the situation to a television audience.⁶⁷ The female reporter tells the story of an immigrant father who murdered his family, and as the corpses turn into zombies, the cameraman asks her to move out of the way so he can get the shot. What is important in this opening sequence is that Romero thwarts our expectations; this seems like actual narrative in the traditional sense. However, the shot, we learn in VO (voice-over),⁶⁸ has already transpired and came from an Internet download. This omnipotent voice, not yet identified as the character of Debra Moynihan (Michelle Morgan), explains,

We downloaded this video off the Net sometime over the last three days. I can't remember exactly when. Some of this footage was never broadcast. It was secretly uploaded by the cameraman who shot it.

It was his way of trying to tell the truth about what was happening.

The voice⁶⁹ echoes the sentiments on the nature of media and the attempt to tell unbiased truths to the general public. However, at the same time, news tends to cull footage and edit in order to distill the most salient 30-second sound bite for a viewer to digest. As she continues narrating, a zombie grabs the camera, creating a

tilted angle, and we watch the news anchor being attacked as the camera lies on its side where it fell on the ground.

The voice-over continues to deliver a powerful message.⁷⁰ Here, Romero intercuts footage of New Orleans, Louisiana, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina,⁷¹ blurring the lines between art and real life. She states that information is “24/7,”⁷² and the film turns again; in fact, we are watching a “film within a film”⁷³ called *The Death of Death*. As metanarrative, she declares, “We made a film the one I am going to show you now.” Furthermore, the “you,” in this case, implies the individual and the collective. The sequence includes new title cards for this film stating that it is a film by Jason Creed,⁷⁴ played by Joshua Close. She compares his film to the uploaded footage by the cameraman: both are in attempt at showing the truth. The sequence ends with a camera-to-camera shot: the camera points at Jason and his camera points directly back, for it again shows a double move wherein we are being watched and always recorded.

Only after several minutes into the film does Romero actually “start” the film: the beginning of Jason Creed’s film serves as the actual narrative. A woman runs through the woods at night being chased by a mummy⁷⁵ as the moon serves as the only available light. The viewer quickly realizes that he/she is witnessing a film being shot on location. Jason yells “cut” but his face remains hidden from view. Symbolically, he acts as a disembodied voice, and his camera does the talking for him. Jason, not happy with his mummy, tells him, “If you run that fast your ankles are going to snap off not run shamble the script says shamble.” This serves as a thinly veiled reference to Romero’s disdain for fast zombies. Jason continues with

his domineering tone: “The camera can see, and what the camera sees, the audience sees,” [and] “There is always an audience for horror believable horror.” His first comment attests to the belief of the camera as a device that records events as they occur, and this second comment shows that the horror genre—despite its second-tier status—has an audience who takes pride in the merits of this type of film.

An inebriated professor, Andrew Maxwell (Scott Wentworth), tells the group of students that they will each receive five credits for the film project. He proclaims, “Mr. Creed has a vision.” The seemingly false praise indicates positive and negative connotations: the professor both supports his student and is just going through the motions. The narrator tells the viewer, “Jason always wanted to be a documentary filmmaker, but for his senior class project, he decided to try and make a horror film.” This particular night of shooting begins the events of the zombie apocalypse; they listen to the reports on the radio⁷⁶ about the dead returning to life. Of the entire group, Tony, played by Shawn Roberts, serves as the cynic by lambasting the report: “Christsave. We hear this sort of thing every day. You got hurricanes because the planet’s getting too hot. You got terrorists who are going to drop a dirty bomb on the Whitehouse or on your house. Somebody is going to put some germ in your water or in your mailbox.” His comments echo the climate of post-9/11 fears and anxieties. Tony’s rants reinforce the word “you” five times. In short, he addresses—with coded language—Hurricane Katrina, xenophobia, attacks on the government, and the anthrax scare.

A decision among the group causes Ridley Wilmott (Philip Riccio) and Francine Shane (Megan Park) to escape to Eliot’s house. However, Jason, Andrew,

Tony, Eliot Stone (Joe Dinicol), Gordo Thorsen (Chris Violette), and Mary Dexter (Tatiana Mastany), all following Jason's lead, head to the college dormitory to find his girlfriend, Debra. The movie set of Jason's student film serves as the first location in the actual narrative arch, so from this point forward, the film becomes framed in terms of a road movie.⁷⁷ Ironically, Jason only manages one shot of his student project yet continues to keep the camera rolling; henceforth, this student film turns into an (on-the-fly) documentary.

Jason's camera seems to float, as they all enter the college dormitory, and record the events just after the incident. In the communal area, a large American flag⁷⁸ remains half-upside down and barely hanging on the wall. Jason finds Debra hiding in her room; he decides to set the camera on the bed but leaves it on in order to record this moment. They embrace, in a canted shot,⁷⁹ and the angle partially obscures his face, showing only a side view. Only a brief respite, he seems more eager to hold his camera⁸⁰ instead of a living human being. Jason points his camera at Debra's laptop,⁸¹ recording the upload from the opening sequence, and the viewer sees his shadow on the wall. Additionally, we hear Debra's VO⁸² as her boyfriend's camera stays fixed on the computer screen.

Back in the Winnebago©, they all head off together into the night. Jason makes his intentions known to the others by proclaiming, "if this turns out to be a big thing, I just want to record it." As he explains his position, he begins interviewing the others—in a question and answer fact-finding style replicated ad nauseam by journalists—to ascertain their feelings on the events at hand. Thus, while Jason implements his faux journalism, the television informs them of the raising of the

threat level⁸³ in the wake of these attacks. Mary runs over zombies as they drive through the night, and when they stop the vehicle, she tries to commit suicide.⁸⁴

The group rushes Mary to a hospital in an endeavor to save her after the botched suicide. Here, at the abandoned hospital, they attempt to make contact by utilizing the CB radio⁸⁵ at the reception desk: they listen to the chaos of the world coming to an end⁸⁶ over the speakers. The viewer sees the low-battery signal on Jason's view finder, and the scene cuts off momentarily as he finds an electrical plug. The others leave him, as he quips, "I can't leave without the camera. The camera is the whole thing." His statement highlights what Peter Keough calls the "voyeuristic, solipsistic culture of self-devouring media" (163). In the only voice off by Jason, although not directly addressing the audience, he states, "I can't because I'm plugged in."⁸⁷ His soft whisper (picked up by the camera's microphone) acts as an affirmation for his decision not to act. Jason hears a gunshot off-screen—out of the frame of the action—yet does not leave his plugged-in camera. Debra appears in the doorway with another camera and aims it at Jason;⁸⁸ she castigates him by stating, "If it didn't happen on camera, it's like it didn't happen right." Her observations serves as a double meaning (and as a mouthpiece for Romero himself) that the media lacks in the covering of certain real-world events.

Debra does not immediately put the camera down and chooses instead to shoot footage with Jason. Nevertheless, the professor pontificates, "cruelty becomes justified don't try to speak just shoot as long as you have power." Both "shoot" and "power" carry multiple meanings: shooting film is synonymous with shooting a weapon, while power means the source as it is plugged into the wall and the actual

power it creates in the hands of the operator.⁸⁹ In VO, Debra offers, “It’s interesting how quickly we find out what we are capable of becoming.” Debra’s rumination and Andrew’s disgust come to the forefront in opposing fashion in this sequence. When Gordo is bitten, both Debra and Jason continue to shoot the footage and do not put down their cameras to help. Eliot battles the zombie and dispatches it. Still, Debra realizes her actions and places the camera on the ground.⁹⁰

Their road odyssey includes a brief pit stop in Amish country⁹¹ when they run out of gas. They meet Samuel (R. D. Reid), who speaks to them with a chalkboard that he keeps around his neck. After selflessly helping out these strangers, this deaf farmer impales himself with a sickle after being bitten by a zombie. Along the way, African American militants point weapons at the group, and they are escorted to a facility.⁹² Tony, who constantly berates Jason, picks up the camera and shoots footage as well.⁹³ At this facility, Jason asks for a connection to the Internet. Debra catches him in front of the computer screen, and he shows astonishment at his video upload to MySpace⁹⁴. His priorities should be with locating his family, yet the film supersedes all other concerns; he seemingly lacks any emotive sensibility. During this scene, Jason and Debra video-chat with Riley and Francine; they are invited again to Riley’s house as a safe haven. Jason wanders through the facility with only available lighting, and when he steps in front of a mirror,⁹⁵ it scares him. While at the facility, one of the militants goes missing, so they send out a search party to look for him; Jason comingles with the militants and holds the camera in the same manner as the others hold their rifles, reinforcing the power of gun and camera for the audience. The militants, interestingly enough, give

the students supplies and speed them on their way. In both respects, the farmer and the African Americans restore a fraction of humanity to the store.

Again, Romero utilizes various delivery methods in terms of form and content. Back in the Winnebago, the group uses a Nokia© flip-phone to look at a message board on YouTube.⁹⁶ A girl sends warning from Japan, so the others know the zombie apocalypse has gone global. Debra (in VO) pontificates,

The mainstream had vanished with all its power and money. Now, it's just us bloggers, hackers, kids. The more voices they are, the more spin there is truth becomes that much harder to find. In the end, it's all just noise a cacophony of white noise coupled with the incessant sounds of keys being typed.

These words are echoed by Romero in an interview about the dissemination of information. He tells Sean Clark of dreadcentral.com, "There use to be three lies. When there were three networks. There were three lies. Now that there are 400,000 bloggers 400,000 potential lies. You've got to dig for the truth. It's much noisier out there." It seems that the character of Debra serves as a way for the director to proselytize⁹⁷ to his audience.

Debra wants to go home,⁹⁸ and the rest of the group decides to go with her to look for her family. She tells the viewer, "I thought long and hard about whether to leave this footage in the film." In quick succession, her younger brother attempts to infect her, and she sees her mother consuming the body of her father.⁹⁹ Andrew dispatches both of them with a bow and arrow¹⁰⁰ and protects Debra from having to handle the situation. She proclaims that no one remains immune, as both the viewer

and the cameraperson¹⁰¹ are equally blameworthy in this need/desire to “see” at any cost.

They drive at night and are stopped by a military jeep. They see this as a sign of their salvation—a reinscription of hegemonic power. The colonel (played by Alan Van Sprang¹⁰²) enters the Winnebago under the pretenses of friendliness, but instead the group is fleeced of their food. Of course, Jason films as they enter, but the colonel forces him to turn the camera off: no one shall witness the event. As well, the incident remains off camera¹⁰³ to the viewer, and Jason turns the camera back on as the pilfering military personnel speed off with the supplies.

Comparatively, this sequence serves as a bookend to the last scene: both establish the military exercising power over society. Debra and Jason find more online footage uploaded from an anonymous source. The audience sees individuals in yellow biohazard suits¹⁰⁴ carrying machine guns as they attempt to clear a building. One person in the group tells the others to turn their helmet-cams¹⁰⁵ on. A family hides their infected loved ones inside the building. After getting bitten, one soldier shoots a lady and then kills himself. Debra offers, “[It’s] us against them except they are us.” This scene, along with the aforementioned scene, show that those who have the weapons can assert authority over weaker people. Ironically, the actions are equal: one group of soldiers has gone rogue and the other acts in an official capacity.

The next to last sequence shows the group arriving at Ridley’s palatial estate. Romero creates yet another dynamic view with surveillance cameras.¹⁰⁶ These monitors create the eye-in-the-sky effect similar to *28 Days Later* (the scene in the

primate laboratory) and the closed-circuit television in the whole of *28 Weeks Later*. Ridley comes out of the panic room—dressed in his mummy costume from earlier in the film—and scares the unsuspecting visitors. Jason shoots footage of two (blinking) surveillance cameras, allowing the viewer to see the reverse image of Jason holding the camera.

Roles reverse as Jason—wanting to retrieve the second camera—forces Tony to hold the camera; Tony is unwilling and states that he does not want “to be a part of this type of film.” For all intents and purposes, Tony steps into Jason’s role as the director of this bastardized documentary film. However, he immediately contradicts himself by assuming this role and cannot resist the power of the camera.¹⁰⁷ Even as Debra states that they should leave, Tony replies, “I got to see this.” Tony’s words paradoxically correspond to those of Jason.

Finally, Jason receives his wish as the resurrected Ridley attacks Tracy. Jason directs her (as she remains in real danger) and does not intervene—the image/footage is everything. To be sure, the camera creates in him a lack of moral compass. After knocking Ridley unconscious with a log, Tracy yells, “Don’t mess with Texas!” and leaves in the Winnebago rather than any longer being a part of the film. No other characters escape from Jason’s grasp, making Tracy’s actions heroic, considering what waits down the road.

Jason returns inside with the other camera. The scene includes one of the only unobstructed views of Jason’s face. As Tony shoots, the audience sees a standard shot, a counter shot usually used between two characters, which customarily conveys verisimilitude. Debra begs Jason to go into the safe room, and

the camera's microphone records him¹⁰⁸ stating, "I can't." Jason is bitten by Riley; nevertheless, the important last shot supersedes his own impending doom. He desperately grabs for the camera to record every last second. As he tells Debra, "Shoot me," he creates dual meanings-use of the camera and use of a gun. At the same time, however, the meanings are complimentary, as the gun/camera both offer an equal form of destruction. Ironically, Jason's title, *The Death of Death*, seems apropos: his death is caught on camera for all to see.

The ending sequence shows Jason in a confessional booth¹⁰⁹ as the shot remains bright, and his face stays in close-up; he smiles at the camera and seems happy, unlike his manic persona as director of *The Death of Death*. In the very last image, Debra tells the viewers about Jason's last upload. Men use zombies as target practice in the woods, and one image immediately creates thoughts of the Old South.¹¹⁰ Debra decides she must finish Jason's movie for him,¹¹¹ but when discussing this image, she argues, "Are we worth saving You tell me?"

Both *Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead* show the undisputed master of the genre (which he helped to invent) returning to form. Still, this director does not rest on his past accolades, nor does he rehash well-worn (and dead) themes; instead, the viewer sees that both form and content have changed. Romero presents fresh ideas for the twenty-first century,¹¹² which will continue to have long-lasting reverberations in the cinematic world.

Chapter 3 Notes

¹ Terence McSweeney believes that "Romero did not return to the franchise for nearly two decades, yet in his absence zombies had become even more compelling cultural icon than ever, part of the new millennial zeitgeist through a proliferation of films, books, and video games. After the attacks on 9/11

and the escalation of the “War on Terror,” it became difficult for any zombie text, be it film, book, or videogame, not to allude to 9/11 in some way” (108).

Craig Bernardini concurs, “Romero is thus a sort of saint, whose life, like his work, points to an obvious moral. In this regard, his absence from cinema throughout most of the 1990s is an artistic statement in itself” (178).

Furthermore, “each time Romero confronts “his own monstrous offspring,” it is a chance for the director to re-direct the subgenres evolution—that is, not to reward audiences “knowingness” about zombie films, but to extend, rethink, and perhaps even “correct” the tradition he helped to invent” (180-81).

Bernardini alludes to the fact that Romero did not have a prodigious output after 1985. In point of fact, he released four films during this “lull”: *Monkey Shines* (1988) *Two Evil Eyes* (A split project with Dario Argento) 1990, *The Dark Half* (1993) and *Bruiser* (2000). Of these four films, *Bruiser* (shot in Canada for \$5 Million did not even see a US theatrical release according to IMDB).

Interestingly, released just one year later, Cameron Crowe’s *Vanilla Sky* addresses many of the same themes as *Bruiser*. Crowe’s film went on to box-office gold while Romero’s film went to the ancillary market and relative obscurity.

² Simon Cooper asserts, “The other is not so easy to despise here, or even mark as different, and given the obvious references to a culture of gated communities, as well as allusions to the war on terror, this film was more subversive than anything else the mainstream film industry seemed capable of producing at the time.” Similarly, Kevin Westmore offers, “The post-zombie world is literally separated by social class. This vision for *Day* was realized in *Land*; and as a result, *Land* is Romero’s most explicit, overtly political film, even more so than *Dawn*” (202).

³ See Marian Mansi documentary on the making of *Land of the Dead*. Romero comments, “Thematically, what the film is about is a bunch of people trying to live as though nothing has changed. Or at least that’s what the administration believes. The protagonists understand that that world has completely changed. To keep the wealthy properly fed and supplied, the poor and industrious must risk their lives by venturing outside the city’s fortifications, scavenging the countryside in an ever-increasing radius. They see the grim horror of death and infection every day, much like soldiers on the front line of combat.”

Additionally, Kyle Bishop observes, “Like Americans in the years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the residents in *Land of the Dead* are asked both to continue their lives as if no real threat existed and to behave in certain ways because of the threat that does exist...Initially, zombie movies shocked audiences with their unfamiliar images: today, they are all the more shocking because of their familiarity. In fact, fans of horror films, particularly apocalypse narratives like zombie movies, may find that the movies even help prepare them for reality” (24).

See *Philosophy in Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (2003).

Echoing these sentiments, Jurgen Habermas posits, “What was new was the symbolic force of the targets struck. The attackers did not just physically cause the highest building in Manhattan to collapse; they destroyed an icon in the household imagery of the American nation. Only in the surge of patriotism that followed did one begin to recognize the central importance that the towers held in everyone’s imagination, with their irreplaceable print on the Manhattan skyline and their powerful embodiment of economic strength and protection towards the future” (111).

⁴ According to IMDB, *Land of the Dead* was shot for an estimated \$15 million. Although this is a paltry sum by current standards of filmmaking, Romero utilizes his well-proven DIY ethic to maximize the end result. This amount of money was five-fold what he received to make *Day of the Dead* (\$3 million).

⁵ See *Land of the Dead* DVD: “Unrated Directors Cut.” Many of the problems that plagued the “unrated” *Day of the Dead* at the box-office in 1985 (not being released in some markets, an X rating by others, and a short theatrical run) plagued him again in 2005. Romero’s maverick status and the fact that he has disdain for the “studio system” resulted in the (tamed down) theatrical presentation versus the visceral DVD. The director’s cut has a running time of 97 minutes, four minutes longer than the theatrical version.

⁶ See *American Zombie Gothic*: Kyle Bishop states, “This concept of the ‘evolved’ zombie might be considered antithetical to the generic protocols of the subgenre, protocols codified by Romero himself, but the film takes an important step in the presentation of the zombie in the post-millennial climate. In the world of *Land of the Dead*, the humans are not necessarily humane (admittedly no big departure from other zombie movies), but neither are the zombies necessarily monstrous” (160).

⁷ As IMDB notes, the opening of the film utilizes the Universal Pictures logo from the mid-1930s. Romero has an affinity for horror films of the golden era and thought it would be a visual homage to Universal horror films like *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *the Mummy* (1932), and *The Invisible Man* (1933).

⁸ This reinforces the broadcasts that pepper the original *Night of the Living Dead*.

⁹ In these overlapping tidbits of information, a woman’s voice prophetically announces, “If these creatures ever develop the power to think to reason even in the most primitive way.” These short elliptical statements serve as the actual premise of the film: zombie evolution.

¹⁰ An almost frame-for-frame shot of the omnipresent surveillance camera can be seen in *28 Days Later*, *28 Weeks Later*, and *Dawn of the Dead* (remake).

¹¹ Ever the practical jokester, a large restaurant sign in the shape of an arrow with only the word “Eats” flashing points the way for zombies to find a food source.

¹² The obvious parallel between Big Daddy and Ben in *Night of the Living Dead* is in having an African-American male in the lead role: Big Daddy represents a black man already turned into the post-human. Both are strong roles, and in a literal sense, Eugene Clark dwarfs the late Duncan Jones (1936-88) in terms of physical stature. In many ways, *Night of the Living Dead* reinforces nihilism where *Land of the Dead* looks at life from a restructured society: zombies and humans (tenuously) coexisting.

¹³ This zombie town resembles an Edenic setting: “Union Town seems to have been transformed subtly through the zombies’ class consciousness. Union Town has the making of a utopian socialist paradise of sorts: with its white gazebo on the town square, its gingerbread-covered Victorian house, and visible lack of litter and weeds, it is a more orderly and functioning unit than the slum outside of the Green. But most importantly the inhabitants of Union Town are not engaged in the class struggles that characterize social relations in the Green. Inhabitants peacefully co-exist while participation in activities that gave them pleasure and a sense of purpose in their lives pre-apocalypse. Big Daddy is the ‘leader’ of the zombies not because he had seized the role, but rather because he seems to be the most intelligent member of the group and the one best able to communicate, and the others gravitate to him due to his abilities,” writes June Pulliam (8).

Other connotations include the word Union (unity or togetherness) and the overt reference to the blue-collar controlled steel industry in Pittsburgh.

¹⁴ Simon Baker is most known for his role as Patrick Jane in the television series “The Mentalist” (2008-present).

¹⁵ Kim Paffenroth offers, “Romero is asking what is a smart zombie, other than a human being, a bestial slave to its appetites, that struggles to be more? Or what are we, other than slightly smart zombies, a tribe of deranged, self-destructive cannibals preying on one another? It is this overlap and crossover between zombies and humans that makes zombies different than other monster movies, and makes zombie movies more potent and deeper explorations of human nature and theological questions” (7).

¹⁶ See dictionary.reference.com/browse/cholo?s=t. Cholo carries with it a variety of meanings: (1.) “(especially among Mexican-Americans) a teenage boy who is a member of a street gang”; (2.) “a disparaging remark towards a Mexican or Mexican-American”; and (3.) “a mestizo [lower-class Mexican or Latin American] of Spanish America.” The site lists the etymology of the word to have “originated around 1850-55 and to mean ‘peasant’ (allegedly shortening of Cholollán (modern day Cholula): Possibly Nahuatl (Aztec) word xolotl: ‘dog or ‘mutt.’”

As with other minority groups, Mexican-Americans, particularly in the 1970s, appropriated this term and utilized it in a positive sense. For an extended discussion on this subject, see *Cholo Style: Homies, Homegirls, and La Raza* (2006) by Reynaldo Berrios.

¹⁷ Columbian-born actor John Leguizamo has starred in dozens of films dating back to the mid-1980s. Certainly, he continues to be a presence on the big and small screen and is among the highest paid Latino actors in Hollywood. See his autobiography: *Pimps, Hos, Playa Hatas, and All the Rest of My Hollywood Friends: My Life* (2007).

¹⁸ Charlie’s character serves as an interesting comparative to Doyle in *28 Weeks Later*; the audience does not learn his back story, only that Riley saves him from a fire. Charlie is a sniper and utilizes his expertise in several key scenes in the film. For example, he shoots right past Slack—barely missing her ear—to take out a zombie directly behind her. He seems to be freelance, as opposed to Doyle’s military background. Doyle has a high-powered scope and a state-of-the-art sniper rifle, while Charlie has an old rifle and uses a front sight scope (a more difficult method) in order to eliminate the threat.

¹⁹ *Dead Reckoning* was the original working title for *Land of the Dead*.

²⁰ The “flowers in the graveyard” phrase by Riley evokes the opening graveyard sequence of *Night of the Living Dead*. Johnny (Russell Streiner) teases his sister Barbra (Judith O’Dea) as she places flowers at the gravesite of their departed father: metaphorically speaking, humans continue to perform these ritualistic gestures that are empty in meaning but symbolically important. Similarly, the fireworks are synonymous with freedom but here used to control and ultimately destroy life.

²¹ Similar to the motorcycle gang that invades the mall in the original *Dawn of the Dead*.

²² Giulia D’Agnolo-Vallen sees this scene as follows: “The raid on Uniontown is Romero’s opening political gambit and is rather unstable, but potent, allegory of America’s self-proclaimed role as global policemen. Romero dramatizes a military power invading a much weaker opponent and overpowering them with superior force, thus relieving them of their resources under the guise of retrieving essential supplies. These aggressive actions are key, as they will trigger the zombies’ desire to retaliate against their oppressors” (110).

²³ In folklore, Fiddler’s Green represents a place of perpetual mirth in the afterlife. Although not the afterlife, the characters are living a similar type of existence; the residents of this building are happy yet unaware of the misery outside of their confines.

²⁴ Bishop feels that *Land of the Dead* is bleaker than *28 Days Later*.

²⁵ The calming voice wafts in the air: “Life goes on in at Fiddler’s Green in the heart of one of America’s oldest cities. Boarded on three sides by mighty rivers, Fiddler’s Green offers luxury living in the grand old style: dine at one of six fine restaurants, look for that perfect gift in our fully stocked shopping mall. There is a difference between our place and other places. You can appreciate the difference. Where life goes on. Isn’t it time? Isn’t your time for Fiddler’s Green?”

See Jeremy Rifkin: *The Age of Access* (2000). He discusses the marketing techniques used by Disney’s Celebration City to sell nostalgia to prospective buyers: “There used to be a place where all the neighbors said hello to each other in the calm summer evening. Where the children chased fireflies. Where the cradling in the front porch offered an escape from everyday troubles, where the cinema showed cartoons on Saturdays. Where the grocer delivered things to your home. Do you remember that place? Maybe from your childhood or just from stories. It has its own charm. That special magic of an American family town. If you build a house in Celebration, you build something much more than a house on a lot. You build a community.”

The language used in the film and the actual advertisement for Celebration City is eerily similar in tone. Romero amalgamates this selling mantra.

Zani and Meaux essay, “If, as George Romero may be suggesting, *Land of the Dead* represents contemporary America, then civilization—its value and its meaning—is illusory and sustains itself by narrating its own empty fable. In Romero’s film, this narration tames the form of television advertisements for ‘Fiddler’s Green,’ the upscale and fortified city center where the rich have retreated for supposed safety from both the poor living and the hungry dead. The commercials represent the new mythology, literally selling us on the very idea of the world itself as well as our place in it” (113).

Comparatively, Giulia D’Agnolo-Vallen reinforces that “the language is a nostalgic evocation of a return to the past, couched in dialogue reminiscent of the Old South’s melancholy toward the decline of the Confederacy. In Romero’s hands this constitutes both a desire for pre-zombie days and for a return to pre-9/11 US before ‘everything’ changed.”

The use of the second-person pronoun “you” (simultaneously singular and plural) appeals to both the individual and the collective.

²⁶ See Terrence McSweeney: “This Blackwater-esque force is financed by a group of individuals who have maintained their money and authority and now live in an exclusive and heavily fortified tower called Fiddler’s Green. With self-conscious echoes of a pre-9/11 American, those in power are under the impression that their superior military, their high-tech defenses, and their geographical placement makes them impregnable” (109).

For further reading, see Jeremy Scahill’s investigative reporting in *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (2008).

Working outside of the public’s eye, Blackwater operatives were heavily involved in providing private security inside of Iraq; the incident at Nisour square—in which 17 Iraqis were killed including women and children—brought worldwide calls for investigation of this secretive organization.

²⁷ Fences are a powerful metaphor for the continuing controversy with immigration in the United States. California Proposition 187, and the more recent Arizona SB (Senate Bill) 1070, are seen as discriminatory by many activist and watchdog groups. In fact, the Arizona measure has created the most stringent anti-immigration legislation introduced by a state in recent memory.

²⁸ This arcade atmosphere includes zombies being shot at with paintball guns and caged fighting matches similar to scenes in *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) and *Doomsday* (2008).

Also, there is a “take your picture with a zombie booth.” See *Land of the Dead* DVD Supplemental, “When Shaun met George.” Simon Pegg (writer/main lead role) and Edgar Wright (director) of *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) have a cameo appearance as the chained zombies at the photo booth. Romero invited them to the set after having been extremely impressed with their film.

Additionally, the Pegg/Wright zombies are foregrounded in the official poster for the film.

²⁹ She is the daughter of famed Italian director Dario Argento. Romero has known Asia since her birth and has maintained a close friendship with Dario Argento for many years. Romero and Argento have collaborated on several projects together including the Argento “European Cut” of *Dawn of the Dead* and the co-directed *Two Evil Eyes*.

³⁰ June Pulliam writes, “The compound operates as a hybrid of the sovereign and disciplinary action with elements of the capitalist state: Kaufman owns the means of production, while the myth of class mobility ensures that most members of the proletariat will consent to being ruled by deferring to him” (4).

³¹ See Phevos Kallitsis: “Outside the walls, the dark spots underline that the land of the dead is limitless, in opposition to the luxury cage humans live in.”

Romero reinforces this conceit throughout the film. The first time that Big Daddy stares at the building it is extreme-long shot, and as he inches closer, the building remains light while the periphery is an unending black void.

³² This distinguishes the butcher zombie’s remnants of his former life and the identification with blue collar ideals.

³³ Tyson Lewis proclaims, “The zombie gains an unprecedented level of agency to fight against the tyranny of oppression beyond the limits of liberal democracy and its internal negotiations. The zombie rebels in *Land of the Dead* usher in a post-vital, post-subjective, post-linguistic swarm politics that directly attacks the obscene foundation of the law itself” (95).

³⁴ Dennis Lee Hopper (1936-2010) was a counter-culture icon; ironically, he moved politically to the Right in his later years. In this film, Hopper, as Kaufman, plays a thinly veiled amalgamation of George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. This film stands diametrically opposed to *Easy Rider* (1969), and four decades later, *Land of the Dead* offers an “art imitating life” portrait of a convert and the death of a previously held philosophy.

Adam Lowenstein proclaims that Hopper’s role as Kaufman “speaks cynical volumes about how counterculture becomes dominant capitalist culture” (115).

See *George Romero: Interviews*, ed. Tony Williams. Romero notes, “Then 9/11 happened and I made it more political, more about what was turning into America’s ‘new normal.’ You know, a government that had felt it was protected by water. The folly being that the ‘new normal’ is not really normal at all. Is the fortified city of opportunities making money out of being surrounded by zombies an allegory for American living with terrorism and trying to keep the threat at bay? Is the Dennis Hopper character George Bush in disguise? Yes, is the simple answer” (112).

³⁵ The omnipresent American flag can be seen flying above an observation tower as the zombies invade this space. The theme could be imperialist tendencies for those “protecting” the city or as a sign of real patriotism on the part of the zombies, liberating themselves from oppression.

³⁶ Linda Badley ascertains, “With each Romero film, the living become more obviously the villains and the zombies the heroes—playing the role of the revolutionary masses overthrowing the more truly cannibalistic regime” (75-76).

³⁷ This similarity comes in Guevara’s use of guerilla warfare to overthrow superior forces. Certainly, the zombies seem related to their space, but the transition occurs when they seek to seize power by insurgency.

³⁸ K. Silem Mohammad argues, “the threat of zombie rebellion indicates what may be a permanent state of crisis for two competing ‘class’ structures: the privileged but besieged living and the disenfranchised but even-more organized Undead” (94).

I contended that the humans locked out of Fiddler’s Green act as a buffer between the rich and the undead, just a rung above zombie status.

³⁹ Here, Kaufman’s statement paraphrases those of George W. Bush.

See www.edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript. In a joint session of congress just after 9/11, Bush commented, “These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion.” Continuing, “And we will pursue nations that provide aid of safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”

⁴⁰ Like Cholo, Manolete has cultural resonances: Manuel Laureano Rodríguez Sánchez (1917-47) national hero and Spanish bullfighter, loved by the masses. See also: *A Matador’s Mistress* (2007) biopic. *Land of the Dead* addresses both ends of the heritage spectrum: those who hero-worship their culture and those who (re)appropriate it after being “othered” by society; both filmic representations offer glimpses of ethnic pride.

⁴¹ See Leah Murray, *The Undead and Philosophy* (2007): she sees Kaufman as the demigod writing, “[Kaufman] organizes a social contract that puts him at the top of a very strict hierarchy—exactly as Hobbes would predict would happen with a contract born of fear—and becomes the Leviathan” (216).

⁴² The power of the scene creates the zombie as worker motif (evoking *White Zombie*, 1932) who functions in a catatonic state while performing a task; moreover, the zombie pushes a manual-powered lawnmower, which makes the work even more arduous. Cholo, tentatively holding onto power, realizes that not much separates him from this zombie.

⁴³ See also *Team America: World Police* (2004) directed by Trey Parker of *South Park* fame. They lampooned the anti-Arab sentiment as it reached an apex in the United States. Including in the film are several references to “jihads” and white agents assuming Muslim identity.

⁴⁴ This exact image—or a facsimile—has been used by the Navy for decades in Television advertisements: the image usually includes Navy Seals rising from the water with camouflage on their faces to blend into the environment; it highlights the “excitement” of being in the moment.

Recently, this has reached a zenith with the *Act of Valor* (2012) film (originally conceived as a recruiting tool), where in the director utilizes Navy Seals with a script based off of real-world missions. The Department of Defense authorized military personnel to star in this film. The feel of the movie creates realism and allows the public an insider’s perspective of this elite group. Although Hollywood and the US military has a long tradition of working collaboratively, this remains the first film of its kind.

Comparatively, the zombies seem to be adopting these guerrilla tactics of warfare used by special operations.

⁴⁵ With respect to this exponential zombie presence, Simon Clark believes, “The number of zombies steadily increases throughout the four films, so Romero effectively portrays a dysfunctional society that is descending into unlawful chaos. It is unable to cope with the forces it has unleashed against itself. A reading of Freud allows us to state that the horror of Romero’s films is founding in the nightmarish vision of civilization that is losing its repressive grip on instinctual pleasure” (201).

⁴⁶ Riley tells Cholo, “You hit the tower square-on, and you are going to kill a lot of innocent people.”

Of course, this serves as a reference to the World Trade Center and 9/11 attacks.

⁴⁷ See Kyle Bishop: *Dead Man Still Walking*. He asserts, “[T]hose bitten by zombies are given the choice of being killed immediately, since the virus takes time to work. Like a terminally ill patient, those infected by the zombie have time to say goodbye, put some affairs in order, and determine the method of their own death, enacting a kind of poignant ‘living will’” (23).

⁴⁸ Used by comedians—especially by minorities—for decades, “the Man” usually refers to the establishment: white and affluent. In comedy skits, “the Man” works both overtly and covertly to keep his power and undermine the effort of those under him to rise above their station in life. Common slang phrases include “the Man is keeping me down” and “stick it to the Man.”

For a cinematic example, see *School of Rock* (2003), wherein “the Man” appears during the ending sequence of the film and is revealed as the person controlling everyone behind the scenes.

⁴⁹ Special effects legend Tom Savini has a cameo appearance—credited as Machete Zombie—during the zombie invasion of Fiddler’s Green. Wearing a black biker jacket, he reprises his role from *Dawn of the Dead*. Instead, he is now a zombie and no longer human; his appearance immediately evokes the image of the former biker leader riding through the mall and wreaking havoc.

⁵⁰ Kevin Westmore says, “The use of weapons by zombies indicates that this is not simply a case of the living dead attacking the living as usual, but that this is an armed insurrection of the dead” (205).

⁵¹ It is interesting to note that the “joystick” operates as the device to control characters in a videogame.

Land of the Dead: Road to Fiddler’s Green (CD-ROM, Atari) was released in October 2005. This 3-D zombie game based on the movie can facilitate up to eight players (in an online setting). Although outside the scope of this dissertation, a further comparison could be made between the film and the expansive nature of the game adaptation.

⁵² Also an African American, Kaufman’s assistant is dressed in a white tuxedo, similar to the old Hollywood tradition of showing minorities as merely functionaries.

⁵³ See “Our Zombies, Ourselves” article. June Pulliam laments, “Cholo can only develop class consciousness after he becomes a zombie when he is free from the effects of discipline [in the Foucaultian sense]. In the film’s final scenes, zombie Cholo does not hold himself apart from those who share his condition but instead seeks out his fellow undead, who by this time have breached the compound. He joins Big Daddy in killing Kaufman and dies in the ensuing struggle” (5).

⁵⁴ Other memorable moments of useless money include the opening sequence of *Day of the Dead* (money litters the streets) and *28 Days Later* (Jim picks up pound notes off of the street).

⁵⁵ In *Fearful Attractions*, Adam Lowenstein offers what he calls “cinematic deferred action” (112). He explains, “In *Night of the Living Dead*, Ben looks on in horror as two of his comrades are killed in flames; in *Land of the Dead*, Big Daddy watches Kaufman’s demise with the grim satisfaction of a mission accomplished. In both cases, the audience is meant to identify with the affective position of the black character—a daring venture in 1968, and still daring in 2005” (114). He concludes, “Romero retranscribes Ben as Big Daddy in order to re-remember *Night of the Living Dead*, to revisit the original film’s vision of historical trauma with the benefit of experience gained in the interim-experience that includes the Iraq War” (115).

⁵⁶ William S. Larkin proclaims, “It’s clear in contrast that Riley means to include both zombies and humans under the heading ‘people.’ So here the most sympathetic character in the most mature treatment by the undisputed master of the genre refers to zombies as people. And it feels right. We are relieved that Riley chooses not to fire into the crowd at the security fence or pursue the Undead who are slowly escaping across a bridge out of the city in search of a place to call their own. We are relieved because we too think those zombies are people” (26).

⁵⁷ See ending credits: Although the film is set in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the film was shot on location in Ontario, Canada. Romero lived for decades in Pennsylvania but for the last several years has lived and worked in Canada.

The other reference recalls Romero’s own anti-war sentiment, particularly with the Vietnam War and the exodus of American’s seeking refuge in Canada.

⁵⁸ Leah Murray feels, “Riley is rewarded for these choices in this movie when he is able to leave the corrupt city successfully. Note that his community is not formed out of fear but the mutual bond to make the world a better place. The message is that a contract based on the survivalist mode of fear cannot sustain itself and will eventually collapse under the weight of its own individualist contradictions” (217).

⁵⁹ I was fortunate enough to see this film at the Veteran’s AMC 24 Theater in Tampa, Florida, during a late night screening. Released as a “limited engagement” film, *Diary of the Dead* was only screened in 42 theaters, according to IMDB. This is in stark contrast to films that see “wide release” and are screened in hundreds of locations.

After viewing this film, an altercation occurred between a man and police in the lobby of the theater. Hordes of people watched this event as it unfolded. The man was violent and had to be physically restrained. The irony was not lost on me after having just finished Romero’s film about the public’s need to “see” violence.

The movie industry has returned to form somewhat with the “roadshow” picture, which came to an end in the 1970s. Instead of releasing in key markets with intentions to platform (wide release), films are seeing limited release (with hopes of recouping the initial investment) before going to the ancillary markets: DVD, streaming, VOD (Video on Demand), and television options.

Catering to the film enthusiasts, other recent features released in this style include *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), *The Road* (2009), and *The Tree of Life* (2011).

See Joe Kane: he records that the film was shot in Toronto, Canada, on a budget of \$2 million dollars.

⁶⁰ *Diary of the Dead* was released into theaters—as “limited engagement” only—just two years after *Land of the Dead*. Previously, the shortest span was between *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* at seven years apart: 1978 and 1985 respectively.

This shows a sense of urgency on the part of the director if one were to look at the time spans between the first three films in the series as opposed to the last three films: 17 years for the original trilogy and less the five years for the more recent releases.

⁶¹ Robin Wood, in "Fresh Meat," suggests that "the handheld camera work continuously underlines the sense of instability of a world in which nothing is reliable, anyone may turn out to be a zombie."

⁶² The horror genre uses subjective point of view frequently but usually to illicit fear: i.e., the killer always hides outside the reach of the camera's lens. In scenes without killer/victim interaction, standard shots are generally applied to the film.

More than just a stylistic choice, the subjective camerawork permits the audience to see through Jason Creed's eyes, allowing the viewer to experience all of the events in the narrative. Romero, through visual metaphor, paints a picture that all Americans are willing participants in technoculture.

Michel Bloom notes the importance of this camera technique: "By contextualizing the subjective camera within the narrative, Romero opens the medium to both self-reflexive criticism, as well as a sense of immediacy imparted through the medium's proximity to reality, and not the zombie threat's proximity to the characters" (19-20).

⁶³ In "Cinema Revisited: 9/11 and the Evolution of the Frightening Image," Bennett O'Brian writes, "With the advent of new digital technologies such as cellphone cameras, 'found footage' was bound to be creatively appropriated by filmmakers as it assist in establishing some level of believability. However, for a culture that has its imagination recently traumatized by 9/11, grainy digital footage taken during a chaotic event will inevitably conjure up subconscious memories of destruction and death from New York ten years ago. Perhaps we have reached a point when frightening images achieved with conventional camera tricks are too easily dismissible and 'found footage has become more mentally acceptable because, over the last decade, the eye has been trained that real life's truly horrific images (the one we wish we could unsee) are the blurry, pixelated amateur footage taken by eyewitnesses."

⁶⁴ Romero returns to the original premise of *Night of the Living Dead*, just after the initial zombie attacks. However, this is not a reworking or remake in any sense of the word. Certainly, *Diary of the Dead* critiques current American society and multifaceted tenants of technoculture.

⁶⁵ Additionally, Bloom writes, "Romero has purged the zombie genre of its culturally phobic roots and redefined it as a means of reflexive social commentary, subverting conventions with the genre both preceding and following his immense influence" (2). *Diary of the Dead* serves "as both a return to form an alternative subversion of the 21st century zombie standard, defining the perennial quality of the author's enduring vision and adaptability to transform social currents" (3).

⁶⁶ See Tim O' Reilly: O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference. In 2004, a conference was held with respect to this topic. O'Reilly is generally considered to have coined this term. Web 2.0 emphasizes the individual and the ways in which wikis, blogs, and social networking (and other tools) can be utilized in an effective and collaborative manner.

⁶⁷ This looks no different from local news programming wherein the most sensational stories receive "top of the hour" coverage.

⁶⁸ Romero has never used VO (voice-over). *Diary of the Dead* has VO throughout the narrative, in which the omniscient voice (the internal voice of the character) renders a didactic lesson for the listening audience.

⁶⁹ See Bloom: “The dual subjectivity of the narrative voice facilitates Romero’s use of the distancing inherent in *Dawn* and the immediate reality favored by more recent zombie movies” (20).

⁷⁰ “We downloaded a lot of what we found on Television, on the Net, and off of blogs: images and commentary off those first three days. Most of it was bullshit. None of it was useful. This is what we were getting from the new networks.” Though not specifically stated here, one can infer the allusion to the events surrounding New Orleans, Louisiana, in the 48-to-72 hour window after Hurricane Katrina had passed over the city.

⁷¹ Occurring just two months after *Land of the Dead* was released into theaters, Romero was able to show a powerful (real) image of the citizens of New Orleans walking around and actually appearing to be zombie-like in their movements. Possibly, this could be the most effective visual statement Romero has ever made with a camera. The stock footage works in perfect symmetry with his message.

Kyle Bishop, in “Dead Man Still Walking,” notes, “Although the genre is forty years old, these concepts resonate more strongly with present-day Americans than ever before, where events like the September 11 attacks, the war in Iraq, and Hurricane Katrina provide comparable forms of shocking ideas and imagery” (22).

Additionally, Kim Paffenroth accurately predicted, “It is surely just a matter of time before a movie depicts zombies as the result of a terrorist attack gone horribly awry, or even a movie with zombies rising from the flood waters or the tsunami or Hurricane Katrina, and this is to be expected. Just as Romero updated the earlier nuclear and voodoo zombies, which had played on the fears of an earlier generation, the genre has adapted to new rationalizations for zombies that fit the changing situations of their audiences” (134).

⁷² The aforementioned “CNN Effect” highlights the nature of the “news” cycle, which never sleeps in the 21st century. In essence, the public demands to be informed of events at all times.

⁷³ See Fellini’s *8 and ½* (1961) (*Otto e mezzo*), considered to be the finest example of a “film within a film.”

To play on the meta-aspects, she even gives the viewer the film equipment: “[We used an] HPX 900 and an HBX 200. I did the final cut on Jason’s laptop. I’ve added music occasionally for effect.” See IMDB: *Diary of the Dead*. Technical specifications show that the film was shot using Panasonic HDCAM Cameras.

Romero, like Fellini before him, toys with the audience. For all intents and purposes, she channels Romero: “You see, in addition, to trying to tell you the truth, I am hoping to scare you. So that maybe your will wake up. Maybe your will not make some of the same mistakes we made.” Fellini’s playfulness is supplanted with Romero’s seriousness.

⁷⁴ Although not revealed until the ending sequence, it is Debra who edits Jason’s film after his death. Here, however, she offers, “Actually Jason was the one who wanted to make it.” She resists at every turn during the course of the film to not hold a camera, yet she becomes (ironically) the ultimate creator.

⁷⁵ One cannot help but think that this scene is a deliberate perversion of the Universal Horror films.

⁷⁶ The radio helps those in the original *Night of the Dead* learn about the events transpiring around them; it is interesting that the radio acts as the first (of many types of delivery systems) method of communication.

⁷⁷ Robin Wood, reviewing *Diary of the Dead*, sees the structure of the film as a “road movie with five stops.” Continuing, “[I]t’s essential progress (a journey with constantly diminishing returns) is from the open road to Debra’s final descent into the mansion’s panic room, from which we know she will never emerge.”

⁷⁸ The American flag figures prominently in the “of the Dead” series. Although not completely inverted in this scene, the image classically stands as a signal of distress: it recapitulates the omnipresent American flag in *Land of the Dead*.

See Also: *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), dir. Paul Haggis. During the ending sequence, Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) hoists a flag up a pole and duct-tapes the string to the post. The upside down flag blows in the breeze for all to see.

⁷⁹ Here, cinematographer Adam Swica uses an interesting canted shot; seemingly, Jason’s camera is placed haphazardly on Debra’s bed. This is not a typical two-shot (two characters shot at medium range). Certainly, these type of shots “show” the viewer the emotional relationship between two characters.

⁸⁰ Jason’s cold austerity seems to suture him to the camera: the camera serves as an extension of his body, which prevents him from physical separation.

⁸¹ One of many the camera-to-camera (or camera-to-screen) shots indicative of mirroring, double moves, and trying to separate reality from fiction.

⁸² She states, “It was all over that news all over the web but no one knew what was really happening. I think that’s what started the panic not knowing the truth as soon as the shit hit’s the fan the only place you want to go is home.”

Many describe a sense of panic in trying to reach their loved ones directly after the attack on American. See the following website for in-depth discussions on the topic:
911research.wtc7.net/interviews/index/html.

⁸³ The television reporter in this scene announces, “The department of homeland security raised its alert level to orange even though there are no indicators of a terrorist attack.”

See www.foxnews.com, February 07 2003: “terror threat level raised to orange.” The report states, “The Bush administration raised the national terror threat level from yellow to orange Friday, meaning the country is at ‘high risk’ of a terrorist attack.”

Romero seems to be directly paraphrasing wording from the news and adding his own bit of editorializing in the process.

⁸⁴ She kneels down in an open field and shoots herself in the face; the group finds a handgun lying next to her. The gun was never shown on screen, and no explanation is ever uncovered: the viewer has to assume that she had this gun on her person the entire time.

⁸⁵ Citizens ban radio: presumably, this would be the dispatch for the hospital to communicate with the local authorities and with the ambulance drivers on duty.

⁸⁶ Nathan Lee mentions that the voices over the radio during this sequence were sourced directly from archival 9/11 tapes; this creates an authentic experience for the viewing audience.

⁸⁷ Seemingly emblematic of the digital age, users report anxiety when they are away from electronic devices or disconnected from the Internet. Jason hesitates when he should be more concerned about

helping his friends. Many articles continue to be written that discuss the links between electronic hand devices and addiction: users even affectionately renamed the Blackberry® a “Crackberry” and amalgamating technology as a literal drug.

Romero offers this visually by showing Jason aim his camera at the electrical socket (where he is plugged in) and pan to the entry to the doorway where his friends are in need of his assistance. The decision to move should be an easy one but he cannot make the correct (and moral) decision.

⁸⁸ Kevin Westmore suggests, “What *Diary* does new is camera-to-camera shots: Jason and Debra filming each other reporting the story can become the story, and more and more often partisan media begin showing clips from other media in order to raise questions. The twenty-four news cycle is as much about the media as it is about the actual news. Behind *Diary* is the fear of the media and the fear of medization of our lives” (213).

⁸⁹ Westmore exclaims, “This is not citizen media as public service; it is citizen media as self-aggrandizement.”

⁹⁰ Debra places the camera on the ground. In VO, she states, “We don’t stop to help. We stop to look.” Her statement underscores the premise of Americans as voyeurs.

⁹¹ Here, Romero pays respect to the state he cherishes, Pennsylvania. Although not a major scene, Samuel’s brief introduction is important to the narrative. He utilizes the most low-tech means of communication in order to survive: technology does not influence his life in any way. He shows Christian ethics to his fellow human beings. In juxtaposition to Mary shooting herself, the sickle is a primitive means to dispatch oneself. The scene offers comedic relief coupled with touching sincerity.

⁹² After being taken hostage by these African Americans, they are escorted to a large warehouse. On the radio, a voice discusses the current state of affairs with Mexico and immigration.

See *Diary of the Dead* DVD Supplemental: Guillermo del Toro’s (of *Pan’s Labyrinth* [2006] and *Hellboy* [2004] fame) voice is used in this sequence. Other similar scenes in the film with newsreaders include the voices of Wes Craven, Stephen King, Simon Pegg, Tom Savini, and Quentin Tarantino—all personal friends or admirers of Romero.

⁹³ Jason and Tony argue in the beginning of the film; they are both directors, yet Tony acts as an assistant to Jason. When he picks up the camera to film, he either asserts his autonomy, or the pull of the camera is too much to avoid.

⁹⁴ He marvels that 72,000 hits have occurred in only eight minutes.

These “hits” show the number of times a video has been viewed. The number of views corresponds to the popularity with the general public. Popular videos on YouTube frequently have numbers in the 30-40 million range—and higher. Recently, corporations are realizing the power of these videos, and as a result, there continues to be increasing marketing of “viral campaigns.”

⁹⁵ The mirror reflects back reality. Jason seems to be genuinely scared of his reflection.

⁹⁶ Ironically, *Diary of the Dead* (the movie itself) was downloaded to YouTube by the Weinstein Company—the movie’s backers—and is available (video on demand) in HD (High Definition) for a \$2.99 fee. Even Romero is not immune from the fact that his film remains a commodity.

⁹⁷ David Flints does not see this filtering of Romero’s voice through Debra as a positive element; he demurs, “All the progress made during *Land of the Dead* is discarded as the director once again opts to indulge himself. No longer content to allow his message to simply filter through the story or be

bellowed at the audience by his main characters, Romero this time uses a narration by Debra (Michelle Morgan) to sledgehammer the point home. And by now, it begins to feel like the bitter rantings of an old man” (96).

⁹⁸ Similar to the children in *28 Weeks Later*: the pull of home serves as a powerful force and a place where the characters feel most human.

⁹⁹ This inverts the famous basement in *Night of the Living Dead* where the mother falls as a hapless victim to her zombie-daughter.

¹⁰⁰ Just like the sickle of the Amish farmer, the bow and arrow serve as a primitive weapons system as opposed to a rifle or a hand gun.

¹⁰¹ Debra’s voice over: “By now, we have become part of it. Part of the 24/7. It’s strange how looking at things seeing things through a lens a glass rose colored or shaded black you become immune. You are supposed to be affected but you are not. I use to think that it was just you out there the viewers but it’s not. It’s us as well the shooters. We’ve become immune too—inoculated. So that whatever happens around us no matter how horrible it is we just wind up taking it all in stride: just another day, just another death.”

The power of these words is palpable because she makes this statement after just seeing her immediate family exterminated.

Westmore articulates, “*Diary* is a critique of not just the media, but of a society that values viral videos over genuine information, and of a generation that lives a life so mediated it is incapable of genuine empathy” (219).

¹⁰² The Canadian actor Alan Van Sprang is the only person to appear in three Romero films—credited. He has roles in the last three Romero zombie films: a minor role as Brubaker in *Land of the Dead*, this brief scene as the colonel in *Diary of the Dead*, and a lead role as Sarge Nicotine Crockett in *Survival of the Dead*. In all three films, he plays the role of an Army soldier of varying ranks.

¹⁰³ Directors use “off camera” in a variety of ways: through editing, hearing only a character(s) voice and not seeing the action taking place, or cutting to the next sequence “after the fact,” leaving the audience to infer meaning. This sequence literally has a camera that is off—not filming.

¹⁰⁴ This scene recalls Romero’s *The Crazies* and the 2010 remake as well. These exact suits are used in these two films.

In the military, the suits are known as MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) suits or as an NBC (Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical) suit.

¹⁰⁵ Helmet-cams are used by special operations groups in the military: Navy Seals, Delta Force, and other covert forces. These cameras allow the Department of Defense a “real time” transmission and the ability to direct a mission. Most recently, this technological was used when Seal Team Six assassinated Osama Bin Laden while key personnel watched from the situation room.

¹⁰⁶ See *Time Code* (2000), dir. Mike Figgis: He creates the first film of this time by creating four distinct “real time” quadrants for the film: the viewer must (simultaneously) watch four narratives unfold, yet the eye forces (directs) the viewer’s eye to only one of the quarter panels. The director utilizes surveillance footage to create these overlapping and distinct narratives.

¹⁰⁷ See Mark Rahner: “Dad of the Dead.” Romero comments, “[I]n the old days it was the console TV, now it’s on your computer, it’s on your cellphone, whatever—it has power, it has a magnetism. And it

seems a lot of people—and I blame the media for this—that they don't do any homework. They're not willing to find out what they think. They'd rather look up from their beer and see somebody saying something, and they say, 'Oh yeah, I'm with that.' [T]he other side of the coin is that people are all of a sudden being invited to become part of this. Everybody's a reporter now. Everybody's got a camera. Everybody's being invited to send in I-reports [to CNN or other news outlets requesting footage] of whatever they see. And it's a new kind of identity, it's maybe the new graffiti."

¹⁰⁸ This is the second instance of Jason whispering to himself, and the camera's microphone picks it up. His intimacy and attachment remain with the camera until the very end, as opposed to real human contact.

¹⁰⁹ The "confessional booth" has been used as a staple of reality television for years. A man or woman faces the camera and utilizes direct address to help propel the storyline. Popularized by MTV's *The Real World* (1992-present), it has also been used in shows like *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. Now in its' 27th season, *The Real World* is considered to have started the "reality Television" phenomenon.

¹¹⁰ A zombie woman remains suspended by her hair from a tree; they shoot her, leaving only the top half of her face exposed. One cannot help but recall the images of lynching. Romero utilizes computer-generated imaging to create this effect.

Adam Lowenstein, in "Fearful Attractions," juxtaposes the images of Ben's being tossed into the funeral pyre by the redneck posse to the woman being hung and shot by another group of rednecks. He argues that "the visual iconography or lynching overwhelms the images" (119).

Romero (using Debra's voice as a proxy) may be stating that we have not progressed as humans at all.

¹¹¹ In "Fresh Meat," Robin Wood writes, "Romero never idealizes his young people. Jason's motivation, for example, is repeatedly called into question, notably by Debra (Michelle Morgan): is his determination to continue filming through all the horrors callously self-serving, or justified by an authentic desire to establish truth? Both seem present, but Debra's final acceptance of him, and her desire to continue his work after his death, acknowledge a degree of integrity."

¹¹² *Survival of the Dead* (2010) was the third release in five years from Romero. For further study, it would be an interesting comparison between the original trilogy and the other "of the Dead" films released between 2005 and 2010.

Chapter 4: Simulacra: Non-Zombie Cinema Appropriates the Zombie Narrative

“[T]he zombie continues to satisfy a role for which it has been well suited since its inception: to serve as an abstract thought experiment—projected at first into religion, folklore, and then eventually into film, fiction, visual art, and electronic media—for meditation on what it means to be ‘human.’”

—Pete Dendle, “Zombie Movies and the Millennial Generation”

Kurt Wimmer’s¹ *Equilibrium*² (2002) offers a view of the world where the citizenry loses all sense of the emotive—that which makes the individual, in fact, human—and allows for a repressive governmental force to exact a stringent way of living. What the director presents to the audience is a film that carries the characteristics of a zombie film without an actual zombie narrative, a term I loosely call “zombie appropriation.”³ Wimmer’s cinematic narrative epitomizes part of the larger canon of films released after 9/11 that reshapes the zombie into a new configuration; this ever-increasing (sub)subgenre⁴ of films is not part of the horror genre at all and shows the figure of the zombie as a creature with malleability. The zombie, in essence, becomes part of the internalized self while the human exoskeleton remains. Additionally, Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra⁵ carries reverberations through this chapter as well, for, as he envisions it, individuals have lost all ability to make sense of the distinction between nature and artifice.

The film begins with the title in white letters and a black background, for there are no opening credits.⁶ In the only voice-off⁷ in the film, the audience learns

about the creation of the Grammaton Cleric and their mission to eliminate an individual's ability to feel; the voice becomes reinforced with superimposed images of Joseph Stalin and Saddam Hussein, penultimate examples of "the cult of personality."⁸ Their two images automatically bring to mind the oppressive rule of totalitarian dictators bent on keeping control⁹ at all costs. As the voice-off ends, a single Grammaton Cleric can be seen exercising a series of precise moves known as *katas*¹⁰ with a pair of pistols.

The first action sequence shows several men trapped inside a building; one unnamed resistance fighter¹¹ stares pensively at a work of art as the camera pulls back to show his reaction shot. A SWAT team arrives as these individuals hide the various works of art. Here, the police (in riot gear)¹² storm the building. John Preston (Christian Bale)¹³ and Partridge (Sean Bean) arrive in a white car after the rest of the police have secured a perimeter around the building. Preston, in particular, moves with machine-like precision into the interior space of this structure. Although Preston has a partner, he passes like a one-man army into the location¹⁴ where the enemy hides.

Preston and Partridge march through the entire area searching for contraband; the camera's lens scans the room in a slow fashion, replicating the movements of the characters' eyes probing the space. The works of art are hidden in a compartment in the floorboard, so a low angle depicts Preston's blank expression as he looks down at Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*;¹⁵ he declaratively states, "Burn it."¹⁶ The two arrive back at their white car. Preston spots his partner with a copy of William Butler Yeats's poetry¹⁷ in his pocket; Partridge simply offers that the

evidentiary committee (those responsible for cataloging and storing contraband) sometimes overlooks items. The sequence ends with the white car juxtaposed against a monochromatic, burned-out cityscape in the background. Symbolically, then, this super-soldier carries his zombie mannerisms into the room to relentlessly devour, notwithstanding with a pistol, all those who stand in his path; Preston's metaphorical drive becomes to the ways in which a typical zombie would consume body parts.

A certain cold austerity is felt by the viewer when the characters enter the futuristic cityscape of "Libra."¹⁸ This visual image becomes amplified with an auditory component as loud speakers¹⁹ announce "its disease is human emotion." Additionally, a secondary image—with a larger-than-life pill—is seen on a billboard; the image is striking because of the lack of other types of advertising.²⁰ In this scene, the entire citizenry stops in unison at a prescribed time to inject (by self-administering) Prozium²¹ into their necks. The loudspeaker announces to the public, "You have embraced this cure." The director creates the image of these brainwashed individuals as automatons, and indeed "zombies,"²² who live a mechanical existence. Also, the voice on the loudspeaker explains to the passing commuters a list of banned items, labeled "EC 10" (emotional content); these items (music,²³ literature) ensure another level of erasing the emotive and denying humanity to the individual.

A small but important scene occurs when Preston confronts his superior for the first time. Vice Counsel Dupont,²⁴ played by Angus Macfadyen, has one lone gunman standing next to him and an imposing cross-like mirror directly behind his desk. Known by his commanding reputation, Preston states that the vice counsel

represents “father’s voice.” While looking at a report, Dupont describes Preston as a “prodigal student” who has an uncanny ability to know when an individual is feeling. When asked about his family, Preston tells his boss that his wife was incinerated four years prior for “sense offense.” Catching him off guard, Dupont asks how he feels about this incident and why he did not discover her crime; this scene, in particular, demonstrates the omnipotence of the superior and the cleric’s ability to show obsequiousness. Furthermore, their interaction reinforces the notion of Preston as a zombie, unable to feel even for his departed wife.

Preston returns to the “Nethers”²⁵ after passing through a security gate controlled by guards. One of the guards informs Preston that Partridge has been passing through every evening, so he manages to find his partner inside the building. Partridge continues to read the book of Yeats’s poetry and ignores Preston’s entrance into the space. Preston tells him, “I’m sorry,” to which, Partridge retorts, “[It is] a vestigial²⁶ word for a feeling you have never felt.” In this powerful scene, Partridge proclaims, “everything that make us what we are traded away.” He slowly covers his face with the book as he is shot point blank by his former partner. The importance of this scene shows that Partridge²⁷ makes a conscious choice to be human rather than take on a “living death” existence in a world without emotion.

The image shifts to the view of a “nuclear family” inside a home. Preston enters his residence and sees his son, Robbie, played by Matthew Harbour, staring at a big-screen television: the son sits directly in front of the screen watching “Father” deliver his message to the masses.²⁸ In contrast, the daughter, Lisa (Emily Siewert), smiles but does not speak. The apartment remains completely devoid of any of

decorations, and the set design powerfully suggests the lack of the individual—even against the “privacy” of the domestic sphere. There are no warm embraces, and the son refers to his father as “John.” While sleeping in his empty bedroom, Preston has a dream²⁹ about his departed wife, and in this dream sequence, the audience learns of her demise: “processed” is a coded term for being executed for the crime of “sense offense.”³⁰ As if calling him from the grave, she states, “Remember me,” as he awakens from his slumber. This extended scene in the apartment of the Prestons’ ends with him inadvertently knocking his morning interval (the premeasured dose set by the government) off of the bathroom counter while his son looks on.³¹

Preston must replace, as the law mandates, his missing dose of Proziom. As per the previous scene, his son authoritatively tells him to exchange his prescribed amount in order to be in compliance. He arrives at Equilibrium, a monolithic building with the letters chiseled directly into the façade in an oversized font. The loudspeakers—which broadcast the city’s unending public service announcements—tell him that the site is closed because of “terrorist activity.”³² This closure causes a further increase in the lapse in time between his last injection and allows for a period of clarity. By contrast, the injections ensure the continued zombification of the individual.

Search-and-destroy missions continue as Preston assists the police force³³ in administering the rules, eliminating items deemed emotional content. While in Mary O’Brian’s (played by Emily Watson) house, Preston discovers her hidden room filled with various trinkets and keepsakes while the camera pans/scans the room. These mementos are nothing more than the little accoutrements (which usually have

backstories) that add to an individual's humanity. This quick scene merges with Preston and Mary in an interrogation room.³⁴ Nevertheless, the significance of the scene proves that she has not become one of the unthinking masses, for she derides her persecutor by using an interrogative, "Why are you alive?" comparing life in this world (relegated to a continual drugged state of being) where "breath is just a clock ticking."³⁵ Preston appears to win this battle by discussing Mary's "processing," yet Mary quickly responds by transliterating his word into "execution." To be sure, Mary stands in diametrical opposition to Preston's zombified state of being—conscious living as opposed to living death.

Preston awakens³⁶ from a nightmare and stares out his window. However, the window remains covered by a film that obscures his view of the outside world, reinforcing the hermetically sealed metaphor of the family's apartment. Preston must peel away the tinting on the window³⁷ to see the rain pouring down from the sky. The camera shows a nice counterpoint when a slow pan captures him walking through the city in the next corresponding scene; the citizens walk like zombies³⁸ as Preston makes a deliberate move dropping his dose on the ground, and continues on. He cunningly grabs the handrail as the others around do not notice life.³⁹

The scenes of "search and destroy" continue to morph: the police force eradicates all emotive people in its sight, and, simultaneously, a Grammaton Cleric, learns to feel. In another secret room, Preston finds a vintage record player, which begins to emit a Beethoven⁴⁰ symphony from its archaic horn speaker. Another stellar bit of cinematography occurs during this sequence. Wimmer focuses on an extreme close-up of his eye, so the camera continues to close the distance until the

black of his iris is visible. Here, he becomes overwhelmed, and tears pour onto his face. Although the action is a simplistic human emotion, Bale convinces the audience that the character he portrays has never felt this simple human sentiment.

Soon, the police force finds a cache of dogs in the back of this building, and they mercilessly shoot the dogs. Preston, however, manages to save one puppy who escapes from this barrage of gunfire.⁴¹ These two tender images (emoting during the music and altruistically saving the dog) illuminate the process of Preston's breaking the yoke of the zombie way of life. Of all the events, the puppy incident creates the greatest change in this trained super-soldier. Upon releasing the puppy into the Nethers, Preston is caught by a patrolling unit. He decides to turn on his colleagues and dispatches them post haste; consequently, this deed cements the fact that he cannot undo his action and must deal with these consequences of becoming human, abandoning his emblematic zombie consciousness.

It becomes evident to the viewer that John Preston changes as these raids—the cleansing of undesirables—continue unabated and at an accelerated pace.⁴² While doing another raid, Preston watches from an elevated platform⁴³ as “resistant fighters” are slaughtered. This works in stark contrast to the opening sequence of the film; he was once an unfeeling machine for the government and is now an emoting human greatly affected by what he sees transpiring. Instead of his previous self, he now attempts to save some of these people from inevitable death by trying to help them escape. Although he secretly assassinates some of the police, the resistance fighters are still caught by Brandt (Taye Diggs), Partridge's replacement, and executed by an awaiting firing squad.

Returning to the interrogation room allows Preston the opportunity to question Mary again. He shows her a picture of Partridge with the word “freedom”⁴⁴ on the back; this sparks an image of freedom above one of the education rooms in the city. It is here that Preston meets Jürgen (play by William Fichtner) and locates the literal underground resistance.⁴⁵ Jürgen believes that Preston should kill Father as a way of leading the humans out of enslavement with their current state of self-induced captivity via medication and into reintegration of humanity. Interestingly, Preston, when summoned to meet with his supervisor, now plays the part of the mindless zombie but with full consciousness of his emotive sensibility. Preston, by default, becomes the sleeper agent to safeguard the masses.

Sensations continue to be felt by both father and son. As Preston checks his son’s medication, the child begins to interrogate his father. On the one hand, it seems that the son will report his father; still, Wimmer thwarts that notion when John Preston is called “Dad” for the first time. This weirdly corresponds to Preston’s relationship with Mary as the ad hoc mother figure. Just as his son expresses familial ties, Preston returns to see Mary inside the interrogation room; he emotes as they tenderly—and ever so slightly—brush their fingers against each other’s.⁴⁶ When one emotes, certainly, the action connotes feelings of humanness at a fundamental level.

Moreover, the corresponding scene shows Preston at his desk viewing file footage of his wife’s execution, for the old Preston—the dutiful soldier on the dose—shows zero emotion as he meets her fate at the hands of the engulfing flames; this viewing causes him to immediately run full speed into the city to try to save the

doomed Mary from certain death. Instead of witnessing gratuitous violence, Mary's death can be seen in an iris shot: Preston's eye captures the image, yet he cannot prevent this second woman he cares about from dying. Once outside "the palace of justice," Preston can no longer hide his feeling from the public, so he falls to the ground and lies in a fetal position.⁴⁷ These three complementary images evoke the image of the "nuclear family" in microcosm but with macrocosmic implications for the viewer: humanity is at its essential core—the family unit.

Brandt, who lurks off-screen at every step, stands over his near infantile partner lying on the ground. Here, to put John Preston on display for all to see, Brandt mercilessly beats him in the foyer of the place of justice. Taking his prized possession to the vice counsel's office, he believes he has the evidence to prove Preston's guilt. However, in another off-screen maneuver, Preston switches pistols showing his partner to be "guilty" of the crime of sense offences. Preston, in fact, brings the guilty party to his supervisor in a game of one-upmanship over the crafty Brandt. Of course, in order to prove Preston's innocence, his apartment must be searched as the law⁴⁸ dictates. Preston rushes into his apartment to find his cache of hidden capsules of Prozium. Ironically, Robbie stows the hidden drugs in his pockets and shows them to his father. The children—unbeknownst to the father—have been acting as zombies for the entirety of the plot; the mother's death caused them to take on the persona of good little citizens.

During the ending sequence, Preston arrives in a white outfit⁴⁹ and carries a samurai sword in a scabbard. Handing the sword off to a guard, he sits down next to a polygraph machine; he learns that it is all a set up. The image of father appears on

the wall to talk to Preston. In this exchange, the audience learns that the vice counsel is Father and Preston learns his part in the scheme, a pawn with “the capacity to feel but didn’t yet know it,” as Father/Dupont proclaims. Preston brings out his hidden pistols and continues to his one-man-army tactics. In this spectacular battle, he proceeds to dispense with elite guards, cut off the face of Brandt,⁵⁰ and execute the vice counsel in a gun kata fight. Finally, he shoots out the monitors that pipe out the message to the citizens in the streets below. The camera lingers in extreme close-up on his face as the screen cuts to black.

Religious images aside, Preston’s actions function as the ultimate form of salvation, for the citizens of Liberia have their humanity restored by one lone savior. Awakening from their collective slumber, the metaphorical zombies are again returned to the land of the living. To be sure, the viewer witnesses a classic science fiction/dystopia narrative. However, *Equilibrium* serves as a fine example of a film that has arrogated the zombie metaphor and offers a rich analysis for this complex tapestry of meanings. Other films, as well, have annexed this master trope into a continuing grand narrative.

Comparatively, M. Night Shyamalan (Manoj Nellyattu Shyamalan) augments the non-zombie narrative with his 2008 film, *The Happening*.⁵¹ The aforementioned living-dead existence of the characters of *Equilibrium* juxtaposes with the people in this film. Billed as an “apocalyptic thriller,”⁵² the characters in *The Happening* lose the rudimentary human instinct for survival, becoming “zombies,” lacking any sense of conscious awareness with the unfathomable “happening.”⁵³ More specifically, released seven years after 9/11,⁵⁴ Shyamalan infuses his film with the anxieties of

the transformed world, so the viewing audiences' collective consciousness becomes understood in terms of the characters' inability to retain humanness.

The director skillfully pulls the audience into the plot with an intricate opening shot, for rather than relying on an establishing shot, he uses a series of three separate vignettes to begin the narrative. After the opening credits, the first sequence includes a bustling morning in a park.⁵⁵ Here, the wind blows ominously as two (as of yet) unidentified women sit on a park bench reading together. The first line of dialogue emerges as the woman states, "I forgot where I am."⁵⁶ In the distance, off-camera, the diegetic sound of screaming can be heard. Furthermore, the camera's gaze stays focused on the other woman's face as she looks over her shoulder and states, "Those people look like they are clawing at themselves," and "Is that blood?"⁵⁷ When the camera finally allows our gaze to scan the park, everyone stays frozen in time, in a state of suspended animation. The second woman seemingly remains the only who has consciousness as she laments, "Are you seeing this? Claire?" Claire, in turn, has a frozen expression and mimics a state of catatonia, and, in a canted, overhead shot,⁵⁸ she pulls a metal hair pin out of her hair and proceeds to calmly insert it directly into her neck.

Advancing the narrative forward 26 minutes,⁵⁹ the second vignette shows a group of construction workers standing around in a circle telling jokes. In the background of the frame, one of the workers falls to his death. Scarcely having time to absorb this trauma, the characters and the viewers hear the thumps⁶⁰ of four more bodies as each one hits the ground in quick succession. A low-angle shot shows the horror as one worker looks up and sees five more individuals jumping to

their deaths.⁶¹ The overall thematic concern of this scene cannot be understated, for it illustrates a blending of art imitating life, a cinematic (re)interpretation of the events on the morning of 9/11 in Manhattan.⁶²

During the third vignette, the narrative moves to another state, Philadelphia.⁶³ Elliot Moore, played by Mark Wahlberg, explains to his science class about the recent disappearance of honey bees.⁶⁴ Trying to entice his students to respond, he picks Jake to come up with a hypothesis about this issue. A telling exchange occurs between the teacher and student:

Jake: “[The disappearance is] an act of nature and we will never fully understand it.”

Elliot: “We fail to acknowledge that there are forces at work beyond our understanding.”

Although brief, these two succinct statements act as part of a larger narrative on the part of the director, so the post-9/11 world must come to terms with trauma; thus, this quick exchange follows another when the principal of Philadelphia High School assembles all the teachers in the gymnasium. He cries out, “There appears to be an event happening. Central Park was hit with what seems to be a terrorist attack. They’re not clear on the scale yet.” The principal’s statement,⁶⁵ coupled with the exchange between Mr. Moore and his student, both serve to amalgamate environmental forces with terrorist activity. The scene at the school ends with the principal telling his employees to dismiss the students and a brief introduction of Julian (John Leguizamo), the mathematics teacher.⁶⁶

Shyamalan creates these individualized sequences to establish a timeline for the viewer as the events unfold in the narrative; nonetheless, the real focus of the feature occurs with the introduction of Eliot's wife, Alma Moore (Zoey Deschanel). The story centers on the troubled marriage between Eliot and Alma, while the growing contagion/pandemic occurs around them. The audience's first image of Alma occurs in extreme close-up.⁶⁷ Eliot enters his house as Alma ignores a phone call from another man and watches a news report⁶⁸ about the event. They pack quickly to escape the confines of the city.

Eliot and Alma, accompanied by Julian and his daughter, Jess (Ashlyn Sanchez), arrive at the train station, or, to look at it from another viewpoint, the survivors begin the "road" narrative part of the story, perpetual movement as metaphor. The sequence shows the last image of a cityscape for the duration of the film; the viewer sees Philadelphia in the background as the train makes its way out of the terminal station. In short, the visual cue alerts the viewer to the fact that the event has migrated, affecting the entire Northeast. The last action sequence of the city demonstrates a similar situation⁶⁹ to the one that had just occurred two hours prior in Central Park.

The movement away from the city, and the seeming safety of the train, however, are immediately destabilized when the four find themselves stranded in Filbert, Pennsylvania.⁷⁰ This band of survivors, trapped in the middle of nowhere, decide to walk to a local diner. During this sequence, an unidentified woman in the group shows the others a download from the Internet,⁷¹ whereby a man has his arms ripped off by lions at the Philadelphia Zoo. The stranded individuals watch the

news on a television and learn that the event remains isolated in the Northeast only, a makeshift area of containment. In a panic, everyone flees the restaurant in an attempt to stay away from the contagion.

Choosing two divergent paths, Eliot and Alma become the caretakers for Jess while Julian decides to ride with a group of strangers to Princeton, New Jersey, to look for his wife. Conversely, the Moores head in the opposite direction, as a local couple, credited as Nursery Owner and Nursery Owner's Wife (played by Frank Collison and Victoria Clark), assists them in a time of distress. A powerful scene occurs when Julian and three unidentified strangers arrive in Princeton, a brief retreat back to an urban space; several landscapers hang from trees, and garden hoses serve as their makeshift nooses.⁷² Noticing an infinitesimal tear in the roof, Julian knows that his death is imminent. The Jeep[©] accelerates and throws two of the victims out of the window when it collides with a tree. Staggering out of the crashed vehicle, Julian sits down and cuts his wrist⁷³ with a piece of glass lying on the ground. In the span of less than 30 seconds, Julian and the others take leave of their humanness, trading it in for an instantaneous death drive. Julian, for all intents and purposes, becomes a zombie with only the motor skills left intact and no rationale.

Several small groups (seemingly fleeing away from the event) all converge in the middle of a road.⁷⁴ A military Humvee[©] arrives, driven by Private Auster (Jeremy Strong), as the people cry a sigh of relief, "It's the Army. We are safe." The audience infers the director's irony when the characters display a sense of a relief at one lone soldier⁷⁵ who will single-handedly save the masses from this unknown

killer. Nonetheless, the beleaguered soldier seeks to corral the civilians and offer his assistance. As this group meanders in the road, one unidentified woman speaks to her daughter on the phone and the others gather around to listen in on this conversation.⁷⁶

However, the crowd quickly disburses and no sense of unity remains. Half of the group leaves in one direction, and Eliot leaves with his wife, Jess, and two teenaged boys, who identify themselves as Josh (Spencer Breslin) and Jared (Robert Bailey Jr.). As Eliot's group heads off, the sound of gunshots can be heard off screen from the other side of a small, grassy hill. This diegetic sound remains disturbing, for Eliot attempts to formulate a plan as each progressive gunshot frays his nerves. Having a conversation with himself, he offers possible reasons for this chain of events: "terrorist," "nuclear plants," and "plants."⁷⁷ The sequence inverts itself as Private Auster's sidearm actually causes the death of these individuals as opposed to protecting them from a phantom menace.

Two quick stops occur in a small span of time. In the first, Eliot's group arrives at a model home. The residence, with its fake food and wine, seems to elicit a sense of calm, that death has somehow alluded this group, yet the director only allows enough room to let the audience catch its collective breathe. The group decides to leave, as the dwelling will not serve a functioning purpose. Once outside, Eliot and the others, and by extension, the viewing public, watch⁷⁸ as a new group arrives at this same home. An unidentified man starts an industrial lawnmower, lies down in the grass, and allows it to run over him.⁷⁹

The horror does not abate Eliot's new quasi-family unit as they escape and head toward their second stop, another home. This house has boards over all the windows, and Eliot knocks on the door. From the other side of the door, one male voice states with a paranoid utterance, "You ain't from around here."⁸⁰ The tension escalates as Josh and Jared become angry once they know people are hiding inside, locking out the infected world.⁸¹ Josh begins to kick in the door in anger as Eliot tries to stop him, and Jared stands by an adjacent window. Heretofore, the violence has been mediated to a certain extent, particularly with camera shots⁸² or editing; this intentionality on the part of Shyamalan culminates when both boys are executed point-blank range by two rifles, and, of all the moving images, none are more graphic than the lingering close-ups of the view-finder.

Shyamalan, known for his turns in plot narrative,⁸³ creates a separate storyline⁸⁴ in the last 30 minutes of the film; this occurs when the viewing audience is introduced to Mrs. Jones, played by the character actor Betty Buckley. Throughout the narrative, the characters continue to move away from the urban space to more remote locations with each successive stop, so, of course, this last setting includes a recluse who lives on an unpaved road and resides in a dilapidated house.⁸⁵ In an awkward exchange on the front porch, Mrs. Jones invites the group in for dinner. The situation continues to be uncomfortable at the dinner table. Mrs. Jones, the audience learns, has no electricity and, therefore, no connection to the outside world.⁸⁶

Here, the next morning, the audience briefly sees Eliot by himself as he negotiates the space inside Mrs. Jones's house; moreover, this sequence serves to

approximate the zombie invasion trope,⁸⁷ albeit by a force of one. Alma and Jess are nowhere to be seen. Eliot knocks on Mrs. Jones's bedroom door and enters, finding a life-size doll on her bed and other strange oddities, which make him cry out, "Crazy lady." Sneaking up behind Eliot, Mrs. Jones accosts him and screams with vitriolic intensity, "Get out!" He watches her as she goes outside, stops by a garden, and begins to walk backward.⁸⁸ To elicit this feeling, Shyamalan generates intensity with eerie non-diegetic music as Mrs. Jones methodically stalks the exterior of the house and rams her head through multiple windows.⁸⁹ The violence ends as the lasting image of her face shows glass protruded in a grotesque fashion.

After Mrs. Jones vanishes from the screen, Eliot is left alone in her house, separated from Alma and Jess who are located in an outbuilding. Eliot is isolated from Alma and Jess but close enough to hear Alma through a speaking tube.⁹⁰ On the whole, the director carefully suggests this one couple struggling to come to terms with both the changed world and their questionable relationship, through the realization of the short metaphorical distance separating them. Eliot states that he wants to be with Alma, so staring down what seems to be certain death, they all decide to go outside instead of waiting in the perceived safety of the interiorized space.⁹¹ In its place, the terror passes⁹² as the three, after their brief reunification outside, collectively huddle in the basement together. This de facto family unit makes the conscious choice to embrace death, after seeing numerous examples of the other characters conversion to the suicidal zombie.

Serving as an epilogue, the narrative advances,⁹³ as it reads, "three months later" on the screen. This brief sequence seems to reestablish societal norms as

Eliot, Alma, Jess (their adopted daughter), and a child on the way signal the restorative properties of human existence. They all leave the room, and the television becomes the character. Through this diegetic sound, a scientist proclaims this event to be “a prelude,” the shape of things yet to come, and though not explicitly stated, the comment addresses governmental skullduggery. The screen fades to black, seemingly to designate a regular film ending. As an implied epilogue, or second ending, the lens returns to life and the viewer sees an image of Paris, France⁹⁴; this creates a carbon copy of the original establishing shot, relocated halfway around the globe. The vignette quickly fades out to signal the real ending⁹⁵ of the film.

Through repeated examples, the evidence indicates that *The Happening* impresses upon the viewer a film masking itself as an apocalyptic thriller while Shyamalan’s eighth work uses precision in encoding “horror” into the narrative arch. Furthermore, the director integrates several genre conventions of various types: road narrative, natural disaster, psychological drama, a secretly encoded post-9/11 awareness, melodrama, and even a family film. On the other hand, the director (perhaps working on a subconscious level) continually revisits themes directly associated with the basic—and formulaic—expectations of the zombie narrative, while amalgamating other types of narratives. Paralleling Wimmer and Shyamalan’s films together offers rich textual unity with respect to this sub(subgenre), justly presenting the zombie film leaving its horror roots. This theme will continue with chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Notes

¹ *Equilibrium* is Kurt Wimmer's directorial debut. Released after the phenomenal success of *The Matrix*, his film did not receive the same critical attention as the directing team of Andy and Lana (formerly Laurence) Wachowski. In fact, these two films share similar philosophical tenets about what it means to be "human." IMDB notes that *Equilibrium* "was not given a wide release because it had already run into profit as a result of overseas sales, and Miramax [the films' distributor] didn't want to risk turning a money maker into a loss." Wimmer also wrote the screenplay for *Equilibrium*. He continues to have a career in film, having since directed two other features; however, he is mainly known for screenwriting: *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009), *Salt* (2010), and *Total Recall* (2012).

² This film pays homage to George Orwell's *1984*. In many respects, Orwellian themes are omnipresent in the film: reprogramming the mind, doublespeak, Big Brother type (figure head) leader, and a Gestapo-style police force. The term "equilibrium" connotes a paradoxical sense of balance. In the book within the book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* by Emmanuel Goldstein, Orwell espouses, "Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle, and the Low. They have been subdivided in many ways, they have borne countless different names, and their relative numbers, as well as their attitude toward one another, have varied from age to age; but the essential structure of society has never altered. Even after enormous and seemingly irrevocable changes, the same pattern has always reasserted itself, just as a gyroscope will always return to *equilibrium*, however far it is pushed one way or the other" (188-89, emphasis added).

³ The genesis of this chapter (with respect to *Equilibrium* only) comes from a panel I chaired at the annual Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association Conference on April 20-23, 2011, at the Marriot Riverwalk Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. The panel was titled "The Aesthetics of Post-Apocalyptic Cinema and Television," and the title of my presentation was "Post-Apocalyptic Appropriation: 'Zombies' in Non-Zombie Cinema."

⁴ Genre conventions are nebulous, at best. However, there are expected standards of what constitutes a zombie film, usually predicated on the tropes of the Romero model. Zombie films, of course, fall under the jurisdiction of the much larger horror genre. I loosely have applied the term (sub)subgenre to apply to narrative utilizing zombie conventions without a zombie narrative. In short, this body of films has the look and feel of a zombie narrative. Other recent examples include *Pontypool* (2008) and *Contagion* (2012).

⁵ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, for an extended discussion of "hyper-reality" and the ways in which individuals are dragged into past models yet can grasp no achievable reality as in the present moment.

⁶ Wimmer utilizes a stylistic approach similar to both Boyle's and Fresnadillo's, and by forgoing traditional credit sequences, the viewer immediately confronts the narrative of the story.

⁷ The voice of Dupont announces, "In the first years of the twenty-first century, a third-world war broke out. Those of us who survived knew mankind could never survive a fourth [and] that our own volatile natures could no longer be risked. So we have created a new arm of the law: The Grammaton Cleric whose sole task it is to seek out and eradicate the true source of man's inhumanity to man, his ability to feel."

⁸ This phrase refers to a particular type of charismatic leadership wherein the central figure becomes a demigod.

Max Weber, in *The Sociology of Religion*, explains this concept as "charismatic authority."

Karl Marx continues to be frequently cited with his similarly phrased “cult of the individual.” For further reading, his personal letters elucidate this concept.

⁹ Arguably, these dictatorial leaders controlled the masses through intimidation and mind control. They created a society kept in a real perpetual state of fear, allowing people to become zombies in the process.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion on “katas,” see Michael Rosenbaum’s *Kata and the Transmission of Knowledge in Traditional Martial Arts*. Rosenbaum takes an erudite approach to this standard practice in a wide array of martial arts. Katas were techniques used to pass on successful combat methods to the next generation; these choreographed patterns privilege the system (patterns of fighting) rather than the individual.

This carries applicability to *Equilibrium* in the fact that a system (as such) does not allow for the individual to have a particular belief; rather, one must follow along with the technique, whether alone or in a group. The movie shows both of these methods: the individual (in this open sequence) and later the collective (in multiple scenes) practicing the precise moves of the gun katas, sublimating them to the perfection of the technique.

¹¹ The theme of terrorism seems to remain on the periphery of this film. As this film plays with wording, it is interesting that individuals are labeled as enemies of the state.

¹² The image of the police is evocative; they are all clad in black and have masks on their faces: they are the powerful nameless/faceless arm of the law. The police force dispenses punishment without mercy. They trade their human side for the will of the Father. And like the zombie, they devour all those in their path; they operate on the pure instinct, driven by the sole need/desire to satisfy the insatiable appetite of the omnipotent boss.

¹³ Having become one of the finest actors of his generation, Christian Bale embodies the role by utilizing several gears (in the method acting tradition) as opposed to the standard performance of dialogue memorization. Our first image of Preston shows him mimicking movements similar to Arnold Schwarzenegger’s in *The Terminator*. Although not a robot, Preston, for all intents and purposes, is, in fact, more machine than human. Bale subtly creates the image of a character who lacks complete emotion. Wimmer comments in the DVD supplement that he was enamored with Bale’s tour de force performance in *American Psycho* and that he wanted Bale as his lead. Although not initially available, Bale’s schedule changed which permitted him the time to commit to the role of John Preston. Although outside of the scope of this dissertation, Bale stars in two other films that bare comparatives to *Equilibrium*: the aforementioned *American Psycho* (2000) and *The Machinist* (2004). Both roles represent a “type” of zombie. In *American Psycho*, Patrick Bates, in a fantasy state, acts as a consumerist zombie with humanity only being determined by material possessions. Trevor Reznik, in *The Machinist*, does not sleep for one year and lives in a zombie state of half-consciousness: a psychological zombie consumed by guilt and literally eroding away to nothing; it is worth noting that Christian Bale lost a staggering 63 pounds for his role as Reznik, appearing completely emaciated on the screen. Although human, Reznik looks like a zombie starving for actual human flesh to consume.

For an extended discussion on *American Psycho*, see Linda Kauffman’s “Masked Passions: Meese, Mercy, and American Psycho.” She notes, “Patrick Bateman is a market oriented monster, a psychotic incarnation of zombie desire, waging sadism on a society that thinks of itself ‘as a market rather than a public, as consumers rather than a citizen’ (244).

¹⁴ This is the first of many spectacular action sequences in the film. John Preston enters the room after the riot police blow the lights. The scene remains shrouded in darkness for a staggering 22

seconds: again, forcefully pulling the viewer into the narrative and into an uncomfortable space for an extended period of time. In a “Matrix style” sequence, the director uses a strobe light effect to light the darkness—which doubles as the muzzle flash of Preston’s pistols. In short order, he dispatches everyone in the room, leaving the floor littered with bodies. The screen turns black again; this time the available light comes from the spotlights of the riot police as they enter the room after the fact.

The film manages to achieve “high production values” using inventive camera techniques and lightening at a fraction of the cost of producing a film like *The Matrix*: with equally impressive results.

¹⁵ Here, Wimmer purposefully uses one of the most iconic paintings ever produced by an artist; the signification of the work itself serves as a synecdoche for arts absolute power for humanity, writ large.

¹⁶ The scene echoes the firemen who burn down houses which have caches of books in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Famously named because he felt that this was the degree at which books would be incinerated.

¹⁷ Upon closer inspection, this is a trade-paperback copy Yeats’ poetry, which fits into the front pocket of his jacket. When he is executed later in the film, he holds a much larger hardcover book in his hands, able to cover the whole of his face as Preston shoots him.

¹⁸ The namesake of the city echoes Orwellian “double speak” by implying a diminutive form of liberty in a world without any liberties at all.

¹⁹ This use of loudspeakers attest to the concept of “herd poisoning” alluded to by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World Revisited* (1958). In the “Propaganda Under a Dictatorship” chapter, he writes, “Through technical devices like the radio and loud-speaker, eighty million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man” (31). Huxley continues, “To make them more masslike, more homogeneously subhuman, he [Hitler] assembled them, by the thousands and the tens of thousands, in vast halls and arenas, where individuals could lose their personal identity, even their elementary humanity, and be merged with the crowd. A man or woman makes direct contact with society in two ways: as a member of some familial, professional or religious group, or as a member of a crowd. Groups are capable of being as moral and intelligent as the individuals who form them; a crowd is chaotic, has no purpose of its own, and is capable of anything except intelligent action and realistic thinking. Assembled in a crowd, people lost their powers of reasoning and their capacity for moral choice. Their suggestibility is increased to the point where they cease to have any judgment or will of their own. They become very excitable, they lose all sense of individual or collective responsibility, they are subject to sudden accesses of rage, enthusiasm, and panic. In a word, a man in a crowd behaves as though he had swallowed a large dose of some powerful intoxicant. He is a victim of what I have called ‘herd-poisoning.’ Like alcohol, herd-poison is an active, extraverted drug. The crowd-intoxicated individual escapes from responsibility, intelligence and morality into a kind of frantic, animal mindlessness” (34-35).

Wimmer, with good use of camera, channels the spirit of this power passage. “Herd poisoning,” as coined by Huxley, changes from a literary supposition into a visual manifestation in celluloid form. Instead of religious fervor of said ideology, the loudspeakers continually reinforce the status quo.

²⁰ Here, the advertisement has no competition, as all facets of society are controlled by the government. The usual protocols for advertisers include ways to subtly suggest to the viewer the “message” (or target of a particular image) to effect maximum outcomes, often done on a subliminal level. Nevertheless, the reverse is true in the case of the large pills on the sign that doubles as God dispensing absolute objective truth from on high. To be sure, the biotech industry, in particular, continues to inject viewing audiences (and print as well) drugs that offer a magic cure for all of society’s ills.

²¹ The pun here with Proziium sounds like a bastardization of Prozac®; this widely popular drug (used to treat depression) belongs to the SSRI family of drugs: selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. The comparative, of course, is a drug that “inhibits” or alters standard behaviors as a means of coping with life. The use of Proziium induces a different reaction to the characters in this film, as opposed to those is a novel like Aldous Huxley’s classic dystopia novel, *Brave New World*. “Soma” creates a feeling of euphoria when ingested by those individual characters which populate his novel. “Proziium” inhibits emotions for the citizens of Libra. Ironically, the end result of both drugs, although radically different in the chemical reaction to the human body, creates the same effect: mind control and behavior modification; Proziium replicating a depressant and Soma more aligned with a stimulant.

²² This sequence includes an image of individuals self-administering a drug to regulate their inability to think. In the zombie genre, this appropriates the zombie films of the golden era, prior to 1968 and *Night of the Living Dead*. Instead, the victim is culpable in not having control of his/her faculties, as opposed to the broker (witch doctor) who secretly drugs the unwitting victim.

The word “zombie” is never mentioned in *Equilibrium*. However, in the DVD supplemental, Wimmer does reference this concept when discussing the difficulty in making a film where the characters are not allowed to feel. He states, “I knew I could obviously say you are all zombies,” and continues, “they [the audience] can demand that they be zombies and have to sit through it or they accept the fact that what this drug really does is cut off the extreme highs and extreme lows and the essential person is still left behind.”

Again, like so many zombie narratives in which the fear of contagion controls character actions, here instead, the disease can be eradicated and contagion kept at bay with corrective behavior. The mantra reinforces that the disease remains perpetually active so individuals must be on guard at all times, to keep from becoming one of the infected. Ironically, the disease only exists in the mind of the individual because of physiological conditioning. In these two cases, the zombie film and this non-zombie driven plot, the fear of the “other” keeps the characters in a state of hyper-vigilance—controlled by a self-induced fog.

Jen Webb and Sam Byrnannd, in “Some Kind of Virus,” discuss various classifications of zombies as identified by David Chalmers; he “has identified a number of ‘turns’—or categories—of zombie, the better known being the Hollywood form, or reanimated flesh-eating corpse; the Haitian form, or living people deprived through magic or medicine or soul and freewill; and the philosophical or p-zombies, which look like humans, but lack consciousness” (84).

The characters of *Equilibrium* could be classified as “philosophical zombies,” or as Chalmers astutely notes, they are “‘all dark inside,’ lacking ethical or affective judgment” (84).

²³ This banning of “emotional content” finds real-world applicability, notably in the formation of the PMRC (Parents Music Resource Center, formed in 1985 and spearheaded by Tipper Gore) and the labeling of music deemed as indecent in the United States. Still in use today, Compact Discs are “labeled” with a black “Parental Advisory, Explicit Content” sticker, and consumers must be at least 18 to purchase this material. Large retail chains like Wal-Mart, in an effort to uphold “family values,” refuse to carry these titles in their stores. The largest “offenders” are heavy metal and rap/hip-hop artists.

²⁴ Not identified in the opening sequence, it is the voice of Dupont that the audience hears in voice-off.

²⁵ Although never specifically explained in the film, the “Nethers” seems to indicate the other world: neither here nor there or no such place. Aesthetically, the viewer witnesses the minimalist, clean city

of *Libra* juxtaposed against the barren wasteland of the “Nethers.” This contrasting image shares striking similarity to *Land of the Dead’s* Fiddler’s Green (a single building functioning as a city/state) and those locked out in Zombietown. This is also the location of the opening sequence; this ghetto represents the urban space’s desire to eradicate “undesirables” from their ranks.

²⁶ Sean Bean only has a few scenes in the entire film; however, his role cannot be overstated. Speaking in Shakespearian poetics, his use of the word “vestigial” connotes the uselessness of words in this future world. In effect, he becomes a “reality instructor” dispensing truth to the listener, as a warning that humanity should be protected at all costs, lest everyone should become part of a zombie collective.

²⁷ To show that all are replaceable, even the well-trained Grammaton Clerics, Partridge—after being summarily executed by his partner—is immediately replaced with Brandt (Taye Diggs). Additionally, it is interesting to note that Diggs’s character, Brandt, remains the only African American in the entire picture; this would make for an interesting study with respect to racial implications.

²⁸ The image shows the power of the dictatorial government: the small child becomes engulfed by the larger image emanating from the screen. Preston’s son looks up at the screen as “Father” looks down while delivering propagandist rhetoric. The individual has no collective identity against this omnipotent figurehead. This suggests the ultimate hegemonic power when church and state have equal playing field and control over the individual subject.

²⁹ In Orwell’s *1984*, no one is safe, even from their dreams. This is evident when one character is reported to the authorities by his child for making inflammatory comments while sleeping.

³⁰ In the film, “sense offense” carries grave consequences for the individuals who populate the world of *Libra*. Any form of feeling (the showing of human emotion) carries an automatic death sentence.

³¹ This scene does not exactly replicate the infamous images in *Night of the Living Dead*, where the daughter consumes part of her father’s body and stabs her mother to death with a spade in the basement; nevertheless, the inference in this scene proposes the end of familial bonds. By way of suggestion, the son, in *Equilibrium*, acts as a spy in his own house. His father could be “consumed” by the method of being “processed” for any infractions against the state. Both are indicative of patricide.

³² This “terrorism” threat level works on a complimentary psychological platform to *1984*. In both instances, this seems to indicate that there are threats yet to be eliminated: more people to be processed or put on the life-saving dose of Proziium. In *1984*, the unending war between the three states causes unending fear in the public and a need for Big Brother’s guidance.

Also, recall the hysteria surrounding the aftermath of 9/11 when “terrorist threats” were continually cast on the major news networks.

³³ Shot mainly on location in Berlin, Germany, the images of the police force are meant to be representative of Gestapo under Hitler’s reign: towing the party line, these individuals follow the dictates of their leader without question. Wimmer utilizes this metaphor to serve as a visual history lesson for the viewer.

³⁴ This nondescript room, presumably located at “the palace of justice,” seems indicative of “room 101” in *1984*. More than just an interrogation, this isolation—in the film and in Orwell’s novel—causes one to literally lose his/her identity inside of the confines and away from the prying eyes of the general public. It is here that one can become an “unperson.”

³⁵ These two statements by Mary both highlight a zombie narrative. First, “Why are you alive?” is a simple statement at the heart of the plot of zombie narratives. As part and parcel of this long

tradition, the characters in these films must continually ascertain whether those they come in contact with are, in fact, alive or part of the undead. Being alive becomes a perpetual necessity in order to stave off certain living death. Second, when she states, "breathe is just a clock ticking," her sentiment reinforces the mechanical aspects once one becomes part of the other: a zombie driven by motor functions only, no longer able to reason.

³⁶ Seemingly, Preston has been in a "coma" for the first half of film, like the other citizens. In comparison to the key dream sequence before it, the subconscious has a way of powerfully emoting suppressed memories. This deliberate acting by Bale indicates that the character has a double awakening: one from the actual, just recalled dream, and a second awakening into reality.

This scene with Preston echoes Jim's awakening in *28 Days Later* where he finds a new reality in the zombie world and must develop a radically different consciousness.

³⁷ This process of peeling away layers works on a simple level. He becomes tactile and feels the world around him in the most elementary ways. The process allows him to "see" outside of his world as opposed to his obscured view with the outside closed off from his line of sight.

³⁸ The men and women in this scene (in their gray suits/uniforms) all walk in unison while their heads remain pointed toward the ground. Although vastly different in context, these "zombies" share similarities with the mindless automatons of *White Zombie* who fall to their deaths because they cannot reason.

³⁹ There are recent examples of this in zombie films where the human integrates into a zombie-controlled space.

In *Shaun of the Dead*, a group of characters hilariously shambles and moans around a group of the infected until their bad acting reveals them to be human.

28 Days Later contains a deleted scene, meant for the ending sequence, where Jim remains covered in blood and "passes" unnoticed among those infected with the rage virus. For all intents and purposes, he is a zombie and embraces his baser instincts.

On the small screen, the first season of the *Walking Dead* includes characters trying to escape from downtown Atlanta by mimicking the actions of the undead.

⁴⁰ Wimmer complements this scene by using one of the movements from Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Preston emotes as the music rises to a crescendo.

⁴¹ He pulls this careful maneuver by suggesting that the puppy be tested for diseases so as to have a more secure society.

⁴² Though not specifically referenced, one cannot help but think about Nazi Germany and Hitler's plan for "The Final Solution." Using euphemistic language, it was a systematic method to eliminate European Jews during the Holocaust.

⁴³ This literally changes Preston's perspective. From this raised position, he can now watch (and absorb) the effects of seeing the violence occurring below him.

⁴⁴ Freedom connotes multiple meanings: the actual word on the back of the Polaroid© shows a type of liberation in and of itself: the courage to write down the word. Freedom also shows up frequently in *1984* with the infamous "Freedom is Slavery" mantra that the citizens commit to memory.

⁴⁵ The underground operates secretly below the city.

⁴⁶ The camera directs the viewer's attention downward toward their small gesture of intimacy. Considering that John Preston assassinates her lover, Mary gives a tender (and unspoken) gesture of love. In essence, she comforts him while simultaneously knowing that she will soon be executed by the government.

⁴⁷ The fetal position metaphorically connotes a return to innocence, a state of pre-consciousness before the emotive sensibility gives the individual an autonomous self. This shows John Preston in his most vulnerable state as the citizen's pass by him, oblivious to the image they are seeing.

⁴⁸ Normal protocols do not apply in terms of the law, due process, and search warrants. Having been accused of a crime, one must prove his/her innocence to the powers that be in the totalitarian state. Preston does not receive a search warrant, and upon arrival at this residence, the inspection team is already inside methodically searching for evidence.

⁴⁹ The white outfit stands in stark contrast to the monochromatic look of the entire film. What Wimmer creates, in visual metaphor, is the savior arriving to actually liberate the citizens of Libra, as white represents truth, purity, and becoming whole.

⁵⁰ Although the film does not utilize violent images, per se, this CGI image, in close-up, shows a portion of Brandt's face slide off and fall to the floor.

⁵¹ To date, there are 10 films in Shyamalan's oeuvre. Early on, *Praying with Anger* (1992) and *Wide Awake* (1998) went widely unnoticed by the public. It was his third film, *The Sixth Sense* (1999), that propelled him into the "A-list" category of directors. *Unbreakable* (2000), *Signs* (2002), *The Village* (2004), and *Lady in the Water* (2006) were all rated PG-13 by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America). *The Happening*, his eighth film, remains to date the only film of his to receive an "R" rating. Several of his previous films flirt with violence and ways to represent that verisimilitude on the screen, while carefully keeping within the parameters of a PG-13 movie; nevertheless, he ratchets up the tension in *The Happening* by not cutting away, through editing techniques, and forcing the viewing audience to absorb the horror of the cinematic image.

⁵² The DVD blurb on the back slip-cover identifies Shyamalan's film in this manner.

⁵³ Shyamalan creates ambiguity in the film, as "the happening" is never explained. In numerous sequences, Elliot Moore acts as "reality instructor" and quasi-scientific expert, along with other attempts to explain or rationalize the inexplicable. This carries a residue of meaning by substituting real and perceived pandemics in the last decade including SARS, the West Nile Virus, Avian Bird Flu, Anthrax, Mad Cow Disease, and multiple terrorists attacks around the globe.

⁵⁴ The 9/11 motifs remain carefully glossed in the narrative of the film, hanging as a specter over the plot. *The Happening* differs vastly from films like *United 93* (2006), *World Trade Center* (2006), *Life During Wartime* (2010), and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011).

⁵⁵ In superscript, the screen shows "Central Park New York City, 8:33am," enforcing a kairotic moment and simultaneously creating linear time.

⁵⁶ At the very least, her statement indicates a double entendre: she forgot the line she was reading in the novel and forgot her actual physical presence. Suggestive in the metaphoric statement, she inverts the famous "Never Forgive, Never Forget" mantra of the post-9/11 world. For the United States citizenry, but especially for New Yorkers, the day carries a particular residue of meaning, which will never be forgotten.

⁵⁷ The subjective camera is part and parcel of the cinematic experience of the horror genre; this technique builds tension in the sequence, and by not allowing the viewing audience to be privy to these events, it forces us to visualize the horrific event(s) being witnessed by this character.

⁵⁸ This sequence shows effective use of camera. On the one hand, the off-camera elements create suspension, while, on the other hand, the viewer sees the violence up close with this unusual extreme close-up shot. By the same token, this shot pays homage to Hitchcock as the camera looms on the unnamed woman's hair, identified in the credits as "woman on bench with hair pin," played by Alison Folland. In particular, the sequence almost frame-for-frame revisits *Vertigo* (1958) with the character of Madeleine Elster/Judy Barton (Kim Novak) and the emphasis on her tightly woven (spiral) hair.

⁵⁹ The text on the screen reads, "Three blocks from Central Park, New York City, 8:59am."

⁶⁰ The diegetic sound of the bodies striking the ground creates a nauseating effect for the viewer. To mimic the horror of the real tragedy of 9/11, this scene cinematically recreates the effect of those who actually were present the morning of 9/11 and saw this traumatic falling of bodies' first-hand.

⁶¹ In both horror films and zombie films, body counts are usually high. The viewer literally loses count, as more characters die in these films. However, this scene shocks the audience, as we see a larger number of deaths in just one minute of screen time.

⁶² The first series of events occurs at 8:33 a.m. in the park and then moves to 8:59 a.m. with the construction workers. Shyamalan, perhaps exercising some sensitivity, does not list the time as 8:46 a.m., the accepted time that Flight 11 struck the north face of the World Trade Center. However, the timeline of the narrative arch of the film suggests in unquestionable parallel in cinematic form, seven years after the traumatic morning of 9/11. Accounts vary as to how many people jumped to their deaths, and the news networks did show some of these images before wisely pulling them from the airwaves. See the aforementioned *Falling Man* documentary as a comparative.

⁶³ Staying in the Northeast, this moves the narrative one state over; the superscript reads, "Philadelphia High School, Philadelphia, 9:45 a.m." In quick fashion, the storyline has been advanced forward another 46 minutes.

⁶⁴ See news.nationalgeographic.com: Stefan Lovgren, on February 23, 2007, reported about this alarming incident in an article titled, "Mystery Bee Disappearances Sweeping U.S."

⁶⁵ He further explains "the happening" as a type of "airborne chemical toxin" and cautions the teachers to be on the lookout for warning signs in progressive stages: confused speech, then physical disorientation and loss of direction, and the last stage being fatal.

⁶⁶ John Leguizamo shows versatility as a actor, but unlike in *Land of the Dead*, where he lives to the last moments in the film, his role remains minor in *The Happening*.

⁶⁷ This camera technique seems out of place as opposed to the standard (ordinary) two-shot. Alma (Zoey Deschanel) gazes directly into the lens of the camera and mimics a state of catatonia, for even the method of delivering the dialogue is odd. The importance of this cannot be overstated, so as she watches the television, we see that this person completely lacks the ability of communicative discourse. Critics have derided Shyamalan for this method of actors delivering their lines in a monotone fashion, and yet, it facilitates an interesting parallel in a human/zombie dichotomy.

⁶⁸ The news report includes a representative from the CDC (Center for Disease Control) commenting about the event. At the bottom of the television screen, the teletype scrolls and reveals the channel as

WNN, World News Network; Shyamalan's pun is an overt connection to CNN and their far-reaching, global viewing audience. The talking head tells viewers that the toxin "blocks neurotransmitters."

See dictionary.reference.com: Neurotransmitters are "any of several chemical substances, as epinephrine or acetylcholine, that transmit nerve impulses across a synapse to a postsynaptic element, as another nerve, muscle, or gland."

Commenting on this commonly used shot in cinema, Murray Pomerance notes that "[a]side from the utterly typical (and hopeless) inserts of apparently all-knowing, coldly informative TV news broadcasters, who purport smarmily to be in the know, it is clear that there exists as well, somewhere, an utterly significant, higher 'level of knowledge' at once conceivable and unavailable, and thus that absent some access to this 'holy' repository, no explanation can be given adequate to the strangeness and geographical spread of the event. Where is this supreme knowledge? It is not on the surface of the story—Elliot as he thinks about the world now or the concatenation of analyses and projections we received from the media brain; it is not *here*; so it must be *there*: outside the precincts of the present experience, or else deep in Elliot's mind, located where at least at present he cannot find it" (39).

⁶⁹ When this band of survivors flees the city, the camera cuts to a brief sequence in a city park: "Rittenhouse Park, Philadelphia, PA, 11:31 a.m." The wind blows (distributing the toxin?) through the park. In one of two horrific scenes in the film, a cop (directing traffic) shoots himself in the head, and his revolver falls to the ground. Then, a cab driver (who the police officer was just speaking with) picks up the revolver and does the same. Lastly, a woman methodically walks over from a nearby sidewalk and follows the lead of the previous two victims. Tak Fujimoto (director of photograph) utilizes two low-angle shots during this sequence, directly placing the camera on the ground and confronting the viewer with the stark reality of this changed world. The third gunshot cuts away before the unidentified woman's body hits the ground, leaving only the diegetic sound of the pistol.

⁷⁰ See *The Happening*, DVD supplemental. The production team intentionally chooses less and less populated areas in Pennsylvania, and as the films progress, the viewer witnesses the landscape change from urban to agrarian. Additionally, the director shoots his motion picture features in Pennsylvania, similar to John Waters using Baltimore, Maryland, or Martin Scorsese filming in New York City. In particular, these naturalistic settings create verisimilitude for the viewing audience, for, like Waters and Scorsese, the shooting environments themselves become part of a supplementary characterization. Shyamalan, as the Internet Movie Database lists, was raised in suburban Philadelphia. Although born in India, his films have a distinctive American and particularly Northeastern feel to them.

⁷¹ Here, the survivors all gather around the woman's phone to watch the horror of this scene from the zoo. To be sure, it suggests a similarity to *Diary of the Dead* and the insatiable desires of a hyper-aware download culture. Moreover, one person quips, "For the love of God, what kind of terrorists are these?" The statement codifies a 9/11 sensibility of the cultural fear and paranoia that terrorists are omnipresent and ready to strike. Both films address that the download culture can view images, interpret them, and have instantaneous "facts" as they reach the Internet.

⁷² This recalls the scene in *Land of the Dead* where Cholo discusses the plight of the Hispanic worker/zombie. Similarly, these workers use the implements of their livelihoods as a way to facilitate death.

⁷³ The violence of this intentional car crash is horrific, yet to curb the disturbing image that follows, the director utilizes a quick cutback to the Elliot/Alma/Jess storyline as soon as Julian begins to cut his wrist with the glass.

⁷⁴ The composition of the shot creates a literal and metaphorical “crossroads” as the surviving members meet where the road comes to a four-way stop. These four points all represent possible outcomes depending on hypothetical directionality. This shot has been used endlessly throughout cinema (either on foot or by some mode of transportation) to symbolize a turning point, a decision, or a path that creates a continuation of the plot.

⁷⁵ Typically, in a zombie-narrative driven plot, the military (whatever remnants remain) seeks to hold onto hegemonic power or to acquisition power on its own in the absence of superior officers, forming paramilitary group without adhering to the UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice). This film, ironically, has no military presence except for this low-ranking enlisted man. The film only mentions one tangential reference that the military has set up a containment zone in a semicircle around the Northeastern states.

⁷⁶ This replicates the early sequence in the café, where those around the woman stare at her screen and watch the man get mauled by the lions. The daughter commits suicide because of the event, while the mother listens in horror on the phone.

⁷⁷ These are all educated guesses from the science teacher, yet throughout the film’s 90-minute running time, the viewer never learns causality. Eliot’s assertions are all plausible scenarios, hypothesizing plausible cause and effects to unravel the mystery.

⁷⁸ To be sure, the audience always and already creates a corresponding relationship with the viewing image. Here, I mean to imply that the audience serves as the spectator or the voyeur. We watch their perspective as they look down at the horror occurring below; this is not strategic editing where the camera cuts away, nor like the previous scenes of violence happening off-camera via diegetic sound. No catharsis exists in this sequence, nor does the viewer become expiated from the sequence unfolding on the screen.

⁷⁹ During the promotional blitz for this film, the studio executives used this sequence for a 30-second television spot as the teaser trailer.

⁸⁰ This unidentified male voice succinctly identifies the post-9/11 hysteria and “othering,” which took place following the “code red” (terrorist attacks are imminent) heightened state of awareness. Numerous cases arose in which individuals were profiled for looking different, hence “not from around here.”

⁸¹ *The Happening* appropriates the standard trope of the horror genre by utilizing the physical barrier of the interior space versus the infected, outside world. It recalls Ben’s attempt to reenter the house in *Night of the Living Dead*, as Mr. Cooper does not want to let him inside the protection of the interior space.

⁸² Here, the camera shot stays in extreme close-up as opposed to long-shots or extreme long-shots. As for editing, there is not a quick cut, like the previous scenes of violence.

⁸³ Audiences are divided by this tendency on the part of the director to diverge his films into a separate direction. Similarly, this occurs in *The Sixth Sense*, when we learn that Dr. Malcolm Crow (Bruce Willis) has been dead for the entirety of the film. Another example occurs in *The Village*, where there is no “real” danger, only the collective fear of those inside of this cloistered community.

⁸⁴ See DVD supplemental. In the “behind the scenes” documentary, both the producer and the director discuss this deliberate move to create a vignette, almost a mini-film during the last third of the narrative.

⁸⁵ In the horror genre, this image of the dilapidated house remains a constant image for the viewer: *Psycho* (1960), *Last House on the Left* (1972), *The Amityville Horror* (1979), and *Cabin Fever* (2002), to name a few.

⁸⁶ In her hermetically sealed world, and mimicking the “gothic enclosure,” Mrs. Jones, for all intents and purposes, replicates the mannerisms of a zombie in her own self-imposed living dead existence. Arguably, human interaction with others helps to inform our own humanness. The reclusive old woman archetype has literary roots in *Great Expectations* with Miss Havisham, and, more recently in filmic form, with Roberta Sparrow in the cult film, *Donnie Darko* (2001). During this sequence, Eliot attempts to inform Mrs. Jones about the events transpiring in the outside world, yet she has no desire to know and cuts him off before he can finish explaining.

⁸⁷ The standard image would consist of an unrelenting horde of zombies attacking survivors as they attempt to keep this force at bay.

⁸⁸ For the first and only time in the film, all prior hypotheses by Eliot have now been thwarted, so, as a scientist, he sees evidence through Mrs. Jones’s conversion that “the happening” has an irreducibility factor down to one individual. The proof of this sequence disorients the viewer, as we feel there can be no possibility to escape this suicidal, zombie state.

⁸⁹ Coincidentally, both *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Happening* were shot in Pennsylvania. The viewer sees the original farm-house of 1968 transcribed into 2008. Mrs. Jones’s actions, after the effects turn her into a suicidal zombie, can be overlaid with the graveyard zombie (S. William Heinzman) in Romero’s first zombie film. It is also worth noting that, in *Night*, the graveyard zombie arrives at the farmhouse first and unaccompanied; the other zombies continue to increase as the narrative unfolds.

⁹⁰ Earlier, during dinner with Mrs. Jones the previous evening, she informs Eliot, Alma, and Jess that her house use to harbor slaves, so the speaking tubes act as a way to communicate between the two buildings without being detected.

⁹¹ The use of the “safe house” wherein the individuals barricade themselves from the external threat is a staple trope of both the horror and zombie genres, realized in *The Birds*, perfected in *Night of the Living Dead*, and used continually since then.

⁹² In superscript, the text reads “Ardell County, 9:58 a.m.” Unbeknownst to the protagonists, the terror had already abated. The viewer learns in the next sequence that the event inexplicably ended at 9:27 a.m.

⁹³ Although billed as an “apocalyptic thriller,” this is a stock-in-trade move of the horror genre. However, the epilogue typically only advances one day as opposed to three months. Almost without exception, the viewer believes that he/she has seen the last of the terror, only to see the killer miraculously return from the dead.

⁹⁴ This is the identical epilogue to that in *28 Days Later*, where the infected/zombies arrive at the Eifel Tower. Both films suggest, by way of implication, global pandemics.

⁹⁵ Viewers want to see the protagonist survive against seemingly impossible odds, yet the plot only fades into black, offering speculation and certainly no cathartic release.

Chapter 5: Non-Zombie Cinema Part 2/Conclusion

“Turn and turnabout in these shadows from whence a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombie.”

—Jean Paul Sartre, introduction to Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*

Robin Campillo’s¹ 2004 film, *They Came Back (Les Revenants)*, continues the non-zombie narrative, arrogating the master tropes such as *Equilibrium* and *The Happening*. The tagline² for this film proclaims, “Why have the dead suddenly returned . . .” Working on two levels, the statement seems interrogative, but the ellipsis indicates a further speculative trailing of thought; likewise, this promotional blurb remains part and parcel of the zombie narrative. Campillo’s film, to be sure, focuses on European-style production methods: use of master shots, slow pacing,³ and a totalizing, postmodern⁴ vent. However, unlike Wimmer or Shyamalan, Campillo directly inscribes his film with the thematic zombie continually at the forefront of the narrative arch. His melodramatic film (with atmospheric horror elements) leaves more questions than answers as it investigates the dead returned to life while never offering explanations for the viewer. This film provocatively cross-examines what it means to be human and proposes philosophical suppositions on the boundaries between life and death, while constructing the zombie into a non-zombie narrative.

The establishing shot, as the opening credits concurrently roll, shows people leaving the gates⁵ of the Cimetiere Saint-Louis en masse; they walk from the cemetery with a deliberate slowness. Their movements mimic a type of shambling gesture connoting the actions of a zombie. The camera moves into several close-up shots and pans the faces of these seemingly listless people. What is noticeable about their appearance is the lack of decomposition normally associated with the undead, yet the makeup artist assigned to the film created a portentous hue on the individual faces. Next, the camera cuts to the back of the crowd as it exits and files out in an orderly fashion into the street. In no way does this feel similar to the menacing presence of a zombie horde, yet, for all intents and purposes, this amalgamates the quintessential sense of impending doom associated with an invading force.

In counterpoint, the next sequence offers a nondescript city council meeting being led by The Mayor (Le maire, played by Victor Garrivier), who is mulling over the bureaucratic details of dealing with this immeasurable situation. Also, the meeting has other central characters to the storyline in attendance: Rachel (Géraldine Palihas), Isham (Djemel Barek), and The Psychologist (Le psychologue, Catherine Salvini). The mayor attempts to explain the series of events stating that 70 million⁶ people have returned to the land of the living, with 13,000 citizens from their one provincial French town.⁷ They are referred to as “the returnees,”⁸ which are people who have died recently and to as far back as ten years ago. Laying out a plan of action, the mayor proposes that all returnees will be grouped together in facilities around the city and that the Red Cross will assist in this crisis,⁹ aided by the Army and the police. During the meeting, the psychologist adds, “These people died

recently. Their memory is still present.” Her statement, although pithy, carries large resonances to zombie narratives; she refers to them as people as opposed to “others,” and her reference to memory suggests humanity, contrasted with the instinctual drive of the zombie that has no ability to reason. As the sequence ends, the mayor looks out the window as his departed wife, Martha (Catherine Samie), looks up and waves to him.

Campillo forces the viewer to confront the issue of presence/absence with a quick series of family reunifications. Isham and his wife, Véronique (Marie Matheron), arrive outside one of the returnee holding facilities. They show identification papers of their son Sylvain (Saady Delas) and are escorted inside. As they walk through, an eerie scene occurs in which the camera peers into three canvas tents, showing various family members coddling their returned loved ones; these returnees do not react to the affection and seem lifeless in their statue-like appearances. In particular, one worker holds a small infant as the mother stares, unable to believe the reality of the situation. Isham and Véronique nervously wait in one of the tents at the far end of this row. The camera begins out of focus and zooms in as Sylvain appears in front of his parents; the viewer sees a reaction shot of the parents’ faces, but the camera quickly cuts away.¹⁰ Correspondingly, the mayor has a reunion with Martha in their garden; she touches his face—a gesture that seemingly shows these dead people can carry a sense of the emotive.

Rachel rests in her bed as she attempts to absorb the gravity of this situation. She turns on her side and stares at the other half of the bed; the looming camera shot offers a suggestive glance at her own loss, the heaviness of presence/absence of

a ghost from the past. The camera reinforces this feeling by cutting to a juxtaposing image of Mathieu (Jonathan Zaccai), her former beau¹¹ not yet identified, sitting on the edge of his bed in the returnee facility; he seems lost in thought as if trying to recall scenes from his own memory.¹² Both actors, in this sequence, convincingly articulate this mood with expressive facial gestures. The next morning is when the viewer discovers Mathieu's relationship to Rachel, as she and Isham discuss both Sylvain and Mathieu and why Rachel has not inquired about her former lover.

The action returns to the council meeting, where having this astonishing number of dead returned to the living creates logistical nightmares. This dialogue focuses heavily on zombie metaphors, as one member bellows, "They're slow," and "They don't communicate well." Of course, zombies are slow and lack communicative proficiencies. The psychologist retorts, "[They] have symptoms that resemble forms of aphasia.¹³ For some strange reason, the motor functions are unharmed. We observe a sluggishness in their speech and lapses of awareness. They seem to be in a latent period,¹⁴ a waking phase in a way." Filmic zombies operate on motor functions driven only by the desire to feed/infect the living. The psychologist continues her report¹⁵ as the camera shot leaves the room and shows Mathieu return to his old workplace. The viewer sees the "subject" in his natural environment, as we have a visual for these explained mannerisms. As the psychologist speaks, Mathieu stares down from his elevated position and sees Rachel pass by on a walking trail; he looks away as if trying to recollect his memory.¹⁶

After the psychologist makes her remarks, the focus shifts to another medical expert (Serge Biavan, credited as Le représentant médecin DDASS) as he espouses the merits of the drug “Axadrolyne.” He haughtily quips, “This neuroregulator acts like a chemical straightjacket on returnees.” The chemical compound allows the subjects to sleep and echoes the omnipresent hypnotic drug-induced coma of zombie narratives. This representative discusses the need to push the narcotic beyond the R&D (research and development) phase to be expedited to the public, marketed as “Lithanol”¹⁷ in convenient liquid form. A distraught family member can now spike¹⁸ the food or drink of the unsuspecting loved one in order to control/modify behavior.

A small but powerful scene occurs between Gardet¹⁹ (Frédéric Pierrot) and an Army soldier (Le soldat, Dan Herzberg) at the holding facility. As the two discuss this epidemic, the soldier loads a glass cartridge of Lithanol into a tranquilizer gun. He directs his aim at Mathieu as the camera’s lens changes to a green filter and night-vision point of view.²⁰ The soldier seems malicious as he states, “They are pretending to sleep. They are active all the time.”²¹ Gardet asks the soldier about his own returned loved ones, and the soldier replies that he has not asked about them.²² The scene ends as the camera continues to track Mathieu’s movements as he leaves the facility.

Rachel walks through the downtown area and passes by shop windows; the shot, although simple, becomes enhanced with the addition of non-diegetic dirge-sounding music, creating a threatening atmospheric mood. She senses Mathieu walking behind her but does not stop or immediately turn around to greet him.

Rachel sees his afterimage²³ in a shop window at the extreme edge of the frame of the shot. As she finally stops and methodically turns to face him, the viewer senses her fear and his calm.²⁴ Similar to Isham and Véronique's reunion with Sylvain, there is no tearful and joyous embrace.²⁵ Mathieu follows behind Rachel closely as she walks home, giving the sense of stalking as opposed to escorting. Emblematically, he physically occupies the space behind her but continues as an absent specter.

This former couple return to the space they shared together prior to Mathieu's death. Mathieu casually asks if they should go out for dinner or stay in for the evening; his question indicates a repeated pattern, an interrogative that had been posed to Rachel many times. He continues to walk straight into the living room as she goes upstairs and sits on the bed for an indeterminate amount of time.²⁶ After time has passed, she goes downstairs and he touches her facing, asking her, "Are you OK?" The gesture offers, on the face of it, a caring position on his part. Rachel briefly walks away but quickly returns to him; the viewer witnesses a sex scene²⁷ between the two lovers. The scene ends with Gardet observing the two with the night vision scope of the tranquilizer gun.

Campillo continues the theme of othering, coupled with surveillance culture, in this sequence; the camera uses a blue filter to represent the returnees and a red filter to represent the living. The viewer sees these diametrical images as the returnee (as test subject) remains unaware of how the thermal camera distinguishes his or her differentness. Showing this footage to council members, an unidentified researcher explains this "visual differentiation" as being caused by the

four-to-five-degree difference in body temperature. A shift from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic occurs when the image shifts to aerial footage, showing these same blue/red dissimilarities in crowded areas. These images, from a bird's-eye-view shot, are captured by white balloons, with the thermal imaging cameras attached to them, hovering²⁸ over the citizenry. As the cameras scan the activity below, one picks up Rachel and Mathieu as they enjoy a day at the beach.²⁹

The zombie appropriation continues as Mathieu is demoted from his engineering/planning position down to a blue-collar factory worker.³⁰ He stays with the same company but moves from his desk to a machine. A foreman introduces Mathieu to fellow workers, stating, "They are on the same team like you," and, "I will show you your machine." His first comment labels Mathieu as "other" (that which is not me), and the second remark reduces Mathieu to the automaton/zombie relegated to the status of a menial factory worker. While he works at his station, the researcher, in voice-over, explains the precepts of Dwight's Theory of "echo and memory" and the reintegration of the returnees to society. She notes,

He suggests that their linguistic system is an illusion. Either they imitate the expression of the living to create a pattern that he calls "echo" or they remember expressions they once used in certain everyday situations—he calls that "memory." Combined, they create an illusion at normal behavior.

The use of bureaucratic justification continues as debates rage on between those at the council meeting. The members banter, "The incapacity of the dead³¹ to innovate excludes them from all positions of responsibility." They see the returnees as being "inactive" and "on the margins of society" if they do not "find them a true place in

society.” What these comments allude to is the attempt in zombie narrative to rationalize the inexplicable.³²

Véronique awakens during the next sequence as she hears the sound of Sylvain knocking on the wall; he stands in a corner and does not acknowledge his mother when she turns the lights on in the hallway. She rouses Isham, who is oblivious to the repeated knocks of his son. Véronique forcefully removes Sylvain from the corner and hands him over to Isham. The father looks quizzically at this son and states, “What’s going through your mind?” Although simplistic, his statement underscores the living’s exhaustion at trying to gauge the incomprehensibility of this situation. The humanistic side, and importance of this sequence, highlights the strain on this couple’s relationship. She sadly tells her husband, “All he wants to do is run away. It is like he never came back.” Ironically, the reunited family has no joy as a nuclear family.³³

Mathieu works at his station and, standing next the machine, he lacks any awareness of the task at hand; his actions are similar to zombies in the golden era of the genre—helpless victims caught as part of the cog in the machine. However, the viewer sees him flashback³⁴ to his former self, remembering a past life with Rachel. The shot serves as a vignette. He snaps out of his dream state when his supervisor tells him it is time to eat. The image of Mathieu in this in-between state of consciousness visually cues the audience to what the psychologist referred to earlier as “the waking phase.” He violates the limitations of present/absent by occupying both realms of reality.

Rachel has thwarted all attempts by Gardet for help throughout the film. However, she goes to see him at the holding facility. While in a room, he shows her an interview tape between himself and Mathieu; this footage comes from the initial contact with other living people after Mathieu's return from the grave. After seeking Gardet's advice, Rachel is told that "his reality will never be [hers]" because his "thoughts and memories keep crowding into darkness." Again, the viewer sees an attempt by a character to try to understand this baffling reality. Rachel runs away after watching the tape.³⁵ Mathieu is nowhere to be found when she returns home.

Mathieu and his returnee cohorts are at the factory. The security guard threatens them as they walk off, yet as the flashlights shine in their faces, the returnees all have facial expressions of defiance. Aesthetically, the *mise-en-scène* imitates the image of zombies from *Night of the Living Dead*.³⁶ There are explosions in the sky as the returnees leave the area and retreat into the tunnels. Interestingly, this seems like the first sign of violence,³⁷ but, in actuality, the detonations are acts of sabotage, and no deaths are reported. This gives the impression of random acts of violence; still, the effect points out that the returnees do not wish to injure the living.

The mayor discovers that his wife has disappeared, so he ventures out to look for her. While driving at night, he finds Martha, along with other returnees, walking across a parking lot. As he drags her off, the other returnees surround his car. This is not a fast-moving attack, nor do the movements seem predominantly threatening; they methodically turn and surround the car³⁸ but do not initiate any aggressive gestures. The mayor has a heart attack as Martha asks him to "just let go."

Although not explained, the revelation of this scene suggests that she has returned precisely to bring her husband with her into another world/space.

Isham and his family are waiting it out in their apartment as the news report³⁹ tells them to stay inside. He asks his wife to turn the radio off. As they talk, Sylvain stays on the balcony, gripping the railing as he looks out into the distance. He goes over and grabs a chair and brings it back, and his mother makes no attempt to stop him. He jumps, without hesitation, off of the balcony. Isham cries in disbelief while his more emotionless wife sits on the couch. The sequence ends with Sylvain rising from the ground without any sign of damage. He looks up at his residence and walks off with an older, awaiting returnee. It is Véronique, who sees her son as still absent, not reconstituted in the present; she defers her own sense of the emotive, acting as a zombie of sorts, as a technique to deal with the unresponsive child.

The differentiation between the returnees and the real humans occurs once the military is mobilized to eliminate the threat; the soldiers all carry fully automatic weapons and wear gas masks as the camera focuses on a crate of grenades. Over the vehicle's speakers, the viewer hears, "The aggressiveness of the dead forces us to fight back." They are going to use a concentrated form of Lithanol to "neutralize all individuals."⁴⁰ As the returnees attempt to evade detection, they cross a highway after the military convoy passes, yet they are gassed as thermal imaging marks them as targets. These are unarmed civilians, running away, who are not being confrontational.⁴¹

Mathieu returns⁴² to Rachel's home as she lies sleeping in bed; he tells his story about his last day on Earth, and she knows this speech from Gardet's taped

interview—his words are verbatim. He apologizes about his anger, and she places her head on his lap, as a sign of comfort. Rachel receives, regardless of the content, a conclusive explanation about the events that forever changed her life; it does not tidy up the narrative but allows her a much-needed solace. Their reunion does not last, as Gardet arrives at the residence; they manage to escape prior to his appearance.

Rachel follows Mathieu on his journey. As he descends into the tunnel, she follows closely behind him.⁴³ This scene is lit with available lighting, as the two are in a dark, cavernous tunnel.⁴⁴ The couple shares one last embrace, as Rachel knows that Mathieu will leave again and that she cannot follow him. As she desperately grabs onto him and cries, he turns without any explanation⁴⁵ or emotion and leaves her standing in the dark. The audience never learns where Mathieu and the other escaping returnees are headed, as the screen cuts to black.⁴⁶

Rachel ascends and returns to the land of the living; the landscape is scattered with returnee bodies along the countryside. As the dead are loaded back onto the buses, the soldiers do not use body bags, for the inference suggests that they are still sleeping. Nevertheless, the returnees now look like the dead, as their bodies do not look animate, showing the onset of rigor mortis. Campillo creates cinematic abstruseness with this carefully crafted shot. The Red Cross workers identify the bodies, which are returned to the cemetery from the opening sequence. While this seems accurate, the graves are not exhumed, and the returnees' bodies are set on top of the grave; the camera slowly elapses until the bodies become completely transparent and disappear.⁴⁷

The ending sequence shows a quick shot of the council meeting room; it is devoid of any human presence, as the space itself submits to a type of absence. Congruently, the last image shows Rachel as she stands in front of a bathroom mirror. She wipes the fogged mirror, and the camera focuses on her eyes. Isolated in her space, only the viewer senses her presence, trapped by frame of the image. These two brief images have a dreamlike quality as the film again cuts to black. Is this an epilogue? The best directors leave the viewer perplexed and thinking long after the narrative has ended; she wipes the mirror, but there is no clear picture. To compare the endings to the three non-zombie-themed films, *Equilibrium* has an optimistic outlook with zombies regaining their psychological independence, *The Happening* suggests a resurgence of the zombie-inducing airborne contagion, and *They Came Back* offers a nihilistic, black void.

To sum up, the method of dissertating, by its very nature, must contain selectively filtered points of the departure, and, while terms like “paradigm shift” are copiously employed in the academic arena, one can argue that the zombie, in fact, looms large in the new millennium. *28 Days Later* is an important film for several reasons: it is the rebirth of a serious horror/zombie film,⁴⁸ guerilla-style filmmaking at its finest, and a completely new aesthetic, heretofore unseen in cinema with effective use of digital video.

28 Days Later, and its Everyman character, Jim, offers a complex look at a changed world—the traumatized, post-9/11 climate. On the one hand, Jim attempts to survive in this post-apocalyptic landscape, while, on the other hand, his actions point toward a philosophical inscape. Although filmed in the United Kingdom, the

United States market, directly affected by national trauma, clung to this movie in a meaningful way. Certainly, the affection for the fast-moving zombie (a decade after its first appearance on film) continues to be part of the status quo.⁴⁹

The upsurge of zombie cinema in mainstream culture is precipitated by the climate of the times as art imitates life. Studying the work of this particular cinema remains crucial to understanding the larger context at work. Admittedly, the *Resident Evil* series (2002 to present, with five films produced to date)⁵⁰ concomitantly launches the zombie into the public consciousness as well. Released approximately at the same time, *28 Days Later* has spawned only one sequel.⁵¹ However, *Resident Evil* garners slight attention in academic circles. The films are seen as adaptations of the popular game, and the thinly developed plots of the film follow that visual; moreover, the series banks on formulaic conventions of the action genre, as opposed to any real horror, lacking substantive textual significance for the scholar.

By their very nature, sequels come with a built-in audience. No genre compares to horror with the number of sequels,⁵² with the notable exception of science fiction coming in a distant second place. *28 Weeks Later*, all the same, works well as both a compendium piece and a stand-alone film. First, Danny Boyle still kept some creative control by serving in an executive capacity. The film overtly tackles issues with more directness than in the leading story. Second, no characters from the original film populate the sequel.⁵³

Doyle, unlike Jim, does not live to the end of the narrative; they both sacrifice themselves in different ways: Doyle by fire and Jim by gunshot. They are both

adapting to their surroundings: while Doyle is prepared for this scenario through his specialized military training, Jim must learn to channel his survivalist tendencies. Ironically, Jim survives the film until the ending sequence, while Doyle expires during the halfway mark. *28 Weeks Later* offers the idea of a restructured society after the pandemic has abated. This worthy sequel deals with the fear of contagion, militarization, and a surveillance existence, beyond running from the hordes of determined carriers.

In pragmatic terms, any serious study of zombies, especially in the film sense, would be diminished without the incalculable significance of George A. Romero. His name is mentioned in the same breath as other important auteurs⁵⁴ such as David Lynch and David Cronenberg. The question to ask is whether Romero breaks new ground with *Land of the Dead*. Is there a deviation from the formula he established more than four decades ago? While nihilism⁵⁵ overrides his cannon, *Land of the Dead*, as his fourth zombie film, moves beyond just showing the depravity of humanity, that we are a lost cause. Even if the characters continually fight against becoming the undead, Romero provides a slight glimmer of hope⁵⁶ for the future. Also, *Land of the Dead*—the same as in *28 Weeks Later*—deals with a restructured society and conceivable renewal in the aftermath of the post-apocalypse.

Land of the Dead is an essential film for studying the post-9/11 aesthetic. The themes present in this ongoing narrative illustrate to the viewer the stratified world of the gated-community mentality, as a demarcation between “the haves and the have-nots.” I have attempted to place the film in the context of the tenor of the times. The racial/class issues alone carry enough weight for a chapter in their own right,

exemplified by Big Daddy and Cholo's marginalization, the lower-class Caucasians locked out of Fiddler's Green, and a feminist critique⁵⁷ with strong characters such as Slack, Pretty Boy, and Motel.

Diary of the Dead confirms a master—at his most self-reflexive—willing to take risks and returning to his DIY (do it yourself) roots. In terms of cinematic sophistication through functioning use of camera, *Diary* outperforms *Land* hand-over-fist and leaves behind other “found footage” narratives as vacuous endeavors. In short, Romero maintains his slow zombies, refusing to capitulate to the standard of the day. Thus, he reflects back to the world our own need/desire for the download culture of a hyper-accelerated lifestyle. We see speed articulated in other ways, as the zombie/human dichotomy is continually blurred into a rich interpretive combination.

Candidly, I would like to have broadened the context further with the inclusion of *Survival of the Dead*—Romero's third zombie film inside of a five-year period. Because of spatial restrictions, no research project can be all-encompassing, and as a strategic decision, the film was omitted. I hope to develop more discussion of this film in a later project. As *Survival of the Dead* is a relatively recent film, it offers a wide-open area of interpretative research that currently lacks scholarship.

Equilibrium, like *The Matrix*, serves as a visually arresting film. The zombie informs the whole of this film; this occurs through metaphor and subtext. While the viewer witnesses an overt science-fiction narrative, the zombie figuratively shambles with reckless abandon over the dialogue, setting, and action of the plot. Much like zombie films, *Equilibrium* did not receive the same deserving critical

attention as *The Matrix*. The purpose of including this particular film is to highlight a sidelined work of art.

The Happening approaches a thriller against the backdrop of an apocalyptic scenario. However, Shyamalan's film differs from other narratives that utilize the contagion framework. He localizes the suicide-inducing, unknown (viral?) killer that instantaneously turns cognitive human to an impassive zombie. These characters are not "turned" in a conventional sense, in that the bite of the infected transmits the virus to the new host; the air they breathe, the essential element of life, causes the hapless victims to suspend the instinct to survive by instantaneously embracing the death drive. On the whole, this film successfully participates in the non-zombie narrative.

They Came Back intersects with the other two films I have coined as "zombie appropriation." Campillo's film directly exploits the zombie with varying levels of abstraction. In no uncertain terms is this a horror film, yet the backdrop mimics dreadfulness with effective atmospheric strategies. The unspecified threat of these returnees, who are not hostile, positions rich suppositions of which I hopefully articulated in chapter 5. Positively, this film, of the motion pictures surveyed, leaves the viewer speculating because of its postmodern framework.

An expanded study of non-zombie cinema would include the 2008 film *Pontypool*. In relationship to *They Came Back*, to be sure, this film substantially applies the precepts of the zombie to the narrative arc and leaves innumerable points of abstraction. By combining elements of the horror, science-fiction, and thriller genres, this hybrid film incorporates the non-zombie narrative into a

linguistic exposition. A deadly virus attacks a small Canadian town, Pontypool, and a radio station stays on the air to communicate the information to the public. The employees, trapped in the radio station as the virus rages outside, discover that the virus is transmitted through the English language. This exemplary film uses the zombie tropes effectively by applying a renewed standpoint with semiotic predilections. The film conceptually engages language as mutually a vehicle of salvation and destruction.

The Walking Dead, after three increasingly successful seasons, offers yet another avenue for studying post-9/11 zombie cinema. For the first time, zombies roam the living room screens of America, all at once, building additional grounds for interpretation. The sophistication of the overlapping and episodic nature of the series would be a mammoth enterprise for a researcher, easily filling the pages of a dissertation in and of itself. If one considers the dozens of issues under the comic book umbrella, a persuasive comparative examination⁵⁸ could be rendered between the printed page and the image conceptualized for the small screen.

Both *Zombieland* and *Shaun of the Dead* have been mentioned tangentially in this dissertation. *Fido* and *Cost of the Living: A Zom Rom Com* would fit suitably as part of a developing corpus of films. Exemplifying the punk-rock aesthetic spirit of *Return of the Living Dead*, these films blend romance, comedy, and the zombie into the integrated recently coined “zom-rom-com.” *Zombieland*, a mega-successful, big-budget picture, incorporates the rules of the zombie world and the viewers who understand the ways in which to survive. *Shaun of the Dead* (a film that could simply be relabeled a Romero love-fest and the first zom-rom-com) functions as a comedy

on the surface but concentrates on a world in which human have already become zombies, even before the outbreak; *Shaun* (purposefully rhyming with *Dawn*) focuses on the tropes established by the Romero paradigm. The lesser-known *Fido* and *Cost of the Living* complement the propensity to blend genres. In *Fido*, the fictive world consents to zombies by exploiting them as domesticated pets. Correspondingly, in *Cost*, the undead are tamed and live peacefully with humans as “free range zombies.” These films were all produced after 9/11 and broaden the importance of discussing the zombie as a scholarly endeavor.

Much has been written about zombies in popular culture, and, currently, the academy is taking some notice, as evidenced by the increased production in horror studies, particularly the zombie, released through university presses. Others have written about the zombie in context to post-human conditions (Lauro), religious implications (Pathenroth), and the zombie in popular culture (Bishop).⁵⁹ I am suggesting a divergent path from these various approaches. My own original contribution is in the ways in which the zombie metaphor manifests itself completely outside of the horror genre, consuming non-zombie storylines. As indicated throughout the first four chapters, and in the first half of chapter 5, along with the endnotes, these films share characteristics that make them distinct zombie films,⁶⁰ revised for a post-9/11 world. Certainly, a common thread runs through *28 Days Later*, and its follow-up, *28 Weeks Later*, analogous to themes articulated in Romero’s *Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead*. I have attempted to essay through this dissertation that these zombie appropriations are amalgamated into the disparate films *Equilibrium*, *The Happening*, and *They Came Back*.

Romero's name will live on long after his death. Zombies, at various times, and sometimes concurrently, exhibit both the horrific and comedic relief; they show the public an accurate reflection of ugly truths and the possibility of what the world could turn into, from the literal surface level down to a philosophical self-examination. Perhaps, to varying degrees, these seven films hint at a solipsistic world bent on self-destruction. The cathartic release will repetitively be postponed while the zombie will roam on throughout time, until the apocalypse arrives to destroy humanity.

Chapter 5 Notes

¹ *Les Revenants* is Robin Campillo's directorial debut.

² Campillo's film successfully uses the statement seen in the majority of zombie films released since *Night of the Living Dead*. This paraphrased sentiment usually finds itself printed on posters and DVD covers. Also, many films typically have a figurehead (scientist) "explaining" this phenomenon or have it broadcast in news reports heard on the radio through diegetic sound.

³ The running time of this film is 103 minutes but seems longer. Campillo accomplishes this by utilizing more master shots than an average film and less editing (cuts), which work in tandem to lengthen the pacing; this creates an overall philosophical tone in relation to the viewer's identification with these characters—somehow time is suspended, a surreal environment is created, and the viewer becomes absorbed into the slow-moving narrative.

⁴ Film textbook definitions vary on characterizing a postmodern film. Applying my own definition, postmodern films evade narrative closure, lack ethical certainty, have unknowable characters, and are disjunctive. This film does not have the typical ultra-violence associated with the postmodernist school of thought; the violence is mitigated for the most part. By implication, Campillo purposely crafts an omnipresent, menacing presence of inherent danger.

⁵ Many zombie films use this exact image of showing the dead rising from the grave to invade an unsuspecting public. One excellent example is Michael Jackson's campy "Thriller" video. In the opening scene of his extended music video, the dead bust out of their graves in various states of decomposition to attack the citizenry with precise, choreographed dance moves. A second, more serious example occurs in Lucio Fulci's *Zombie*, wherein the dead rise out of their graves and the viewer confronts the abject, including the image of worms falling out of the dead's eye sockets.

⁶ By offering these figures to the viewer, Campillo uses pandemic-sized numbers to relate to a global phenomenon. Zombie narratives almost exclusively deal with global pandemics in which the disease/contagion/virus has spread everywhere and no one can escape to find a safe place to "wait it out." Campillo isolates this one setting as a synecdoche for larger concerns.

⁷ The town name is never mentioned in the film, lending to a nondescript feel.

⁸ An interesting comparative can be drawn to an earlier film titled *The Cemetery Man*. In this film, a graveyard keeper must deal with a type of returnees as they leave their graves. Although leaning toward the humorous, this dark comedy also has philosophical merit on the rumination of humanity.

⁹ An unidentified man at the council meeting decries, “The situation resembles that of refugee assistance.”

NATO and other NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in real-world scenarios would refer to this as “displaced persons.” Ironically, the “dead” here have literal homes to return to in the wake of family members moving forward with their individual lives, and this de facto displacement occurs because these returnees have already shuffled off of this mortal coil.

¹⁰ This is good use of camera by Campillo. The viewer does not see the tender embrace or joyous reunion between the parents and their child. The camera’s movement from distortion to clarity approximates the human eye bringing unreal site into clarity.

A literary consideration of the returned-from-the-grave family member includes Stephen King’s novel *Pet Semetary* and his short story “Sometimes They Come Back.” In the first example, a couple loses their young son to a car accident, and he is brought back to life through conjuration. In the second example, a brother has his sibling brought back to life to seek revenge on his transgressors after being murdered.

¹¹ The audience does not learn the status of their relationship; we do not know if they were husband and wife, only that they were a couple and cohabitated.

¹² In the “making of” feature, Zaccāi discusses the difficulty of this type of acting. He states, “We’re not pantomimes. We’re not zombies. We are between the two—between fiction and reality.”

¹³ The medical dictionary lists aphasia as a “condition characterized by either partial or total loss of the ability to communicate verbally or use written words.” This usually occurs through brain trauma.

¹⁴ The medical dictionary defines a latent period as “a seemingly inactive period, as that between exposure to an infection and subsequent illness, or that between the instant of stimulation and the beginning of response.”

¹⁵ The psychologist’s extended discussion leaves the frame of the narrative and transposes into voice-over. She continues her zombie-heavy (encoded) speech, stating, “[The] subjects display a lack of synchronism with reality.” Again, she mentions “post-traumatic aphasia.” “They tend to wander night and day. They may be looking for familiar places,” and “The subjects under observation seem to have a high resistance to infection,” says the psychologist.

¹⁶ This frame-for-frame inverts an earlier brief image of Rachel walking to her house and passing by his workplace. She looks up to an empty image behind the large pane of glass—the inference being that she repeatedly did this in the past while her lover looked down at her with an affectionate gesture. Moreover, this metaphorically works on the level of presence/absence.

¹⁷ As in *Equilibrium* where Prozac© becomes Proziium, here Lithium becomes the bastardized “Lithanol.” This continues to occur in the biotech industry to render alliterative/calming names to miracle drugs for a needy public. Lithium has a long history as a mood stabilizer, particularly with maniac depressives.

¹⁸ This evokes the golden era of zombie films, when the zombie master would drug the unwitting victim into an altered state of consciousness.

¹⁹ Gardet is a caseworker/doctor at the holding facility; he has more than a healthy obsession with Rachel. Though never explained in the narrative, the inference is that she has been in a relationship with him and possibly with Isham as well. Both of these men seem to care about her. This thought is never articulated through actual dialogue but in gestures and action.

²⁰ This POV shot replicates the sniper sequences of *28 Weeks Later*.

²¹ Here, the green lens/POV scans the room; the omnipresent gaze looms over these dead/undead individuals. This is reinforced in the film once the “observation” security camera balloons are released over the town.

²² The soldier refuses to accept this event. In short, the dead cannot return to life. For him, the deceased family members remain in the land of the dead, not miraculously raised from the grave. He consciously chooses to leave them as absent and not reconstituted as present.

²³ The afterimage is a construct, and by focusing on this image first, it facilitates the metaphorical notions of simultaneous presence and absence.

²⁴ Jonathan Zaccai discusses this scene in the “making of” featurette. This reunion represents the dichotomy between the emotionless and those who are animate. He explains that the audience witnesses her fear, not joy, of seeing her loved one returned, while his character Mathieu has a sense of ease about him.

²⁵ A small scene occurs between Rachel and Mathieu’s initial reunion and their evening together in the house. Concurrently, Martha, the mayor’s wife, has a dinner party in her honor with her family members. During the dinner, she tells her husband, “I have no appetite in the evening,” and she walks off while everyone is seated at the table.

²⁶ In terms of literal time, the viewer senses that many hours have elapsed since the couple’s arrival. This scene, like the film in its entirety, uses space effectively to uphold this atmospheric impression of suspended time.

²⁷ Sex scenes, a gratuitous staple of the slasher genre, do not have a presence in zombie cinema. This notion of zombie(dead)/human copulation has been toyed with in pornography films but not in serious cinema. Symbolically, this sex scene carries the subtext of necrophilia. For a discussion on adult-themed zombie movies, see David Flint, *Zombie Holocaust*, pp. 192–95. For the sake of decency, I shall refrain from listing the titles here.

²⁸ This shot replicates the satellite and GPS (Global Positioning System) images in *28 Days Later*, *Dawn of the Dead* (Snyder version), and *Diary of the Dead*.

²⁹ This little vignette shows Rachel and Mathieu lying on a beach towel, seeming oblivious to the world around them. She lovingly touches his face and tells him to stop going to work. Mathieu goes into the water and she follows behind him. Gardet is in the water as well. The audience does not receive direct confirmation of a previous relationship between Rachel and Gardet, as it remains obscured through tense gazes. Later that same evening, Gardet comes to Rachel’s house, and she finds him outside on her lawn. He explains the he is worried about her and the situation with Mathieu.

³⁰ Mathieu’s outfit changes from slacks and a dress shirt to blue overalls.

³¹ In this dialogue, they are referred to as “dead.” This labeling rarely occurs in the film, as opposed to the more favorable “returnees.” The entire film only has one mention of the returnees referring to

themselves as “dead.” Later in the film, Martha, while hovering over her husband in the bed, proclaims, “I look terrible. I am dead.”

³² In one small sequence, the viewer sees Mathieu’s demotion and subsequent relocation to the factory. The dialogue indicates their automaton status, yet Mathieu goes back to work dressed back in his white-collar outfit. This indicates that they repeat learned behavior and remain helpless, or that they are, in fact, outsmarting the living, who cannot comprehend the logic of the returnees. Additionally, in the end of this sequence, Gardet spies on Mathieu as he discusses the situation with a security guard at the facility. Mathieu and other returnees are all around a conference table looking over schematics of the city; the viewer does not hear their conversation, only a cacophony of indecipherable dialogue.

³³ Like the aforementioned *Pet Sematary*, the family (mother and father) long for the return of the lost child. When that child returns, in the case of this film and of King’s novel, the two children are forever changed—alive, but a facsimile of a human being.

³⁴ This is the only flashback sequence in the entire film. The returnees live only in the resurrected moment, for the audience does not receive any backstories of the central characters. Mathieu’s flashback indicates that the returnees are possibly capable of recollection. Campillo creates ambiguity by using this one single, strategic flashback.

³⁵ During the interview, Mathieu discusses a conversation he had with Rachel; he thinks this conversation occurred two weeks prior, as opposed to the reality—two years of elapsed time.

³⁶ There are eleven returnees in this shot. They are scattered throughout the frame and stand transfixed at the security guard. In *Night of the Living Dead*, this same shot is seen as the zombies stand on the hillside, preparing for their invasion on the farmhouse. Both shots indicate a meaningful presence of the strength-in-numbers mentality of the horde.

³⁷ The “violence” does not transpire until 1 hour and 22 minutes into a film with a running total of 1 hour and 43 minutes. This does not occur in the same manner as a zombie narrative, wherein the threat is felt almost immediately in an establishing shot and does not abate throughout the plot. Campillo effectively uses this last 20 minutes to ratchet up the tension between the living and the returnees.

³⁸ The headlights of the mayor’s car serve as available lighting. This stylistically imitates the shambling hordes of the undead that attack the living. In the horror genre, the stock image shows a protagonist trying to escape by locking the doors and attempting to flee from death. More times than not, the car will not start or has no gas in it. In this sequence, the mayor fumbles with the ignition as he is in a panic to leave the parking lot.

³⁹ The diegetic news report states, “After a series of sabotage attacks in city centers, the dead have set off in groups towards destinations that remain unknown. People are advised to stay in and not look for their relatives and to let the police do their job.” This similarly echoes the diegetic news elements that pepper *Night of the Living Dead*.

⁴⁰ This euphemistic language underscores militaristic terms that strip the subjective, replaced with encoded terminology to handle the threat.

⁴¹ The power of this scene rests in real-world applicability as government labels individuals as “enemy combatants.”

⁴² The theme of returning is recapitulated repeatedly in the narrative. Symbolically, this comes to represent the habitual behaviors of the returnees, carrying heavy Freudian “returned of the repressed” implications, and other rich symbolic considerations.

⁴³ Rachel is the only non-returnee in the film to go down into the tunnels.

⁴⁴ His actions indicate a retreat into the underworld. In the horror genre proper, this scene focuses on an obsession with all subterranean spaces: basements, cellars, caves, and Hell.

⁴⁵ As no narrative closure occurs here, Mathieu’s lack of explanation focuses on the film’s postmodern elements—life cannot be understood.

⁴⁶ Campillo uses an effective editing technique. By cutting to black, Rachel is left in the dark in the same manner as the viewing audience.

⁴⁷ Campillo states in the “making of” that “perhaps the dead did not really return. The return of the dead is simply their reluctance to disappear completely—simply a residual effect that the living have trouble shaking loose.”

⁴⁸ The citizenry are “infected” with the transmutable and fast-acting rage virus. The word “zombie” is never used in the film, and aficionados argue whether this is a zombie film at all.

⁴⁹ In the official trailer for *World War Z*, the zombie’s move in a swarm-like manner. These are, perhaps, the fastest zombies ever!

⁵⁰ The most recent film, *Resident Evil: Retribution*, was released in 2012.

⁵¹ The speculation is that Danny Boyle will helm the next installment, *28 Months Later*. He continues to express a desire to return to the series.

⁵² To be sure, the most egregious offender is the *Friday the 13th* series, with films up to part X, in addition to *Freddy vs. Jason* and the recent *Friday the 13th* (reboot), bringing the total to twelve films. Jason has been everywhere: Camp Crystal Lake, a copycat Jason in Roy, the ambulance driver (part V), Manhattan, Hell, 3D, the telekinetic world, and outer space.

⁵³ Horror sequels frequently have characters that carry over into the next film. This is an interesting strategy to move the narrative into a different direction.

⁵⁴ Coined by the French, auteurs have complete artistic control of their film, including “final cut.” Watching a Romero film, just as watching one by Lynch and Cronenberg, encodes the picture with a stamped trademark. This is similar to watching a film by Stanley Kubrick. Additionally, Lynch and Cronenberg both have films in the horror genre. Cronenberg has a near obsession with horror and the body, with films such as *Shivers*. Lynch always has dark elements running through his films. *Eraserhead*, although not violent in the traditional sense of the genre, carries the trademark of an effective horror film.

⁵⁵ Of the six “of the Dead” films, *Day of the Dead* remains the bleakest, with an emphasis on claustrophobia and no hope for the redemption of humanity.

⁵⁶ Romero subverts the horror genre’s overwhelming tendency to repudiate narrative closure. In fact, the film ends with the sun coming up and the possibility of a new day, as opposed to a bleak outlook.

⁵⁷ Much has been made with respect to Romero as a feminist; this archetype is present in all of zombie films. Arguably, Barbra is stronger in Savini’s remake of *Night of the Living Dead*.

⁵⁸ See Wayne Yuen's edited collection of essays culled in *The Walking Dead and Philosophy: Zombie Apocalypse Now*.

⁵⁹ I have met Kyle William Bishop and Sarah Juliet Lauro on separate occasions. Both are like-minded zombie aficionados and have made names for themselves in the field of horror studies, particularly with respect to the placement of the zombie in society, writ large.

⁶⁰ These films are distinct with respect to post-9/11 concerns. Whereas the *28 Days/Weeks Later* films exercise the fast-paced, hyper-accelerated, and contagion/zombie/carrier hybrid, Romero, with his slow zombies, manages to indict the contemporary world in the same method.

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