

# Dead Ends:

## The Spectre of Elitism in the Zombie Film

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The zombie film appears to be a relatively simple genre, but it is burdened by a cumbersome ideological imperative: it is almost uniformly interpreted as a critique of the practices and assumptions of contemporary bourgeois society. In the wake of George A. Romero's extremely influential zombie film *Dawn of the Dead*,<sup>1</sup> the genre became irrevocably associated with a critique of consumer culture. As I will demonstrate, this close association between the zombie film and the counter-culture has had a largely detrimental effect on the genre's political efficacy.

Romero's model of social critique in *Dawn of the Dead* is essentially identical to Adorno and Horkheimer's in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>2</sup> In this text, which became one of the founding documents of Cultural Studies, the authors argue that modern society, despite (or because of) its high level of convenience, has reduced man to a near-catatonic state in which creativity has been crushed by consumer choice. The authors see consumer culture (which they term the "culture industry")<sup>3</sup> as an especially pernicious force, because it is imposed on *willing* subjects. For them, consumer capitalism corrupts the rhetoric of freedom itself, replacing the noble ideal of human freedom with 'freedom of choice'. Under late capitalism, "something is provided for all so that none may escape"<sup>4</sup> – that is, individuals have become so corrupted by the temptations of the market that they no longer *wish* to be freed from its grasp. Mass culture under late capitalism is therefore redefined as an agent of power. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the primary function of American cultural products is to homogenise and subjugate rebellious individuals. The cornucopia of choice that consumer culture appears to offer is ultimately illusory, as "[a]musement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work".<sup>5</sup> The uniformity of culture also has a detrimental effect on the souls of its willing subjects, because "[n]o independent thinking must be expected from the audience" of modern popular art.<sup>6</sup> The culture industry, then, is simply an extension of state power under a different guise.

Adorno and Horkheimer were not alone in their pessimistic attitude towards mass culture. The idea of the incapacitated consumer has become a rhetorical

staple among many twentieth-century cultural theorists. Georg Lukacs, also condemning mass culture, lamented that “[a] totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art”.<sup>7</sup> Herbert Marcuse, another Marxist cultural critic, similarly claimed that “[t]he people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment.”<sup>8</sup> This cynicism was taken ever further by others: R. D. Laing asserted that modern society had distorted human desires to the extent that mental illness becomes a symptom of existing within it: schizophrenia was a *cure* for mass culture, “a successful attempt not to adapt to pseudo social realities”.<sup>9</sup> Here, Laing explicitly aligns consumerism with mental illness. Ironically, radical critiques of mass culture as a lifeless or deadening force have now become part of mass culture: two recent articulations of the connection between psychopathology and consumerism are Brett Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho*,<sup>10</sup> and Sam Mendes’ film *American Beauty*.<sup>11</sup> These and many other popular works articulate the belief that mass culture reduces humanity to the status of a zombie.

The association between the consumer and the zombie can be traced back to the Marxist idea of ‘false consciousness’ (a term actually coined by Engels):

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker. Consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces.<sup>12</sup>

Zombie films draw upon this central idea that the consumer “imagines false or seeming motive forces” for her own behaviour, and thus cannot be said to be fully in control of her own mind. The films of George A. Romero, in particular, are usually interpreted as coded attacks on consumer-based society. His most famous film, *Dawn of the Dead*, is set in a suburban shopping mall; it blurs and ultimately erases the distinction between zombie and consumer.<sup>13</sup> While this convergence is an undeniably effective form of social critique, Romero’s influential conflation of consumer and zombie must be critically reappraised if the zombie film is to retain its political relevance as a genre. The genre’s uniformly nihilistic assumptions about the inability of the human subject to cope with the onslaughts of modern life are worth re-examining, in order to determine if this bleak view effectively serves its intended political end.

I would like to expose a central contradiction in the zombie film’s generic structure, and suggest a few ways in which this contradiction might be rectified.

This contradiction is relatively simple: the zombie film's potentially productive critique of society is often negated by its contemptuous attitude towards human beings. The genre can actually *reduce* the possibility of democratic social change by stripping individuals of the capacity to alter their mental lives. The misanthropy inherent in many zombie films, rather than offering a constructive critique of living practices under capitalism, encourages the viewer to lapse into indifference about the possibility of realistic social change. This attitude often contributes to the political apathy that the genre purports to remedy. This essay, then, is an attempt to redress this imbalance, and to tentatively suggest some more effective methods of harnessing the genre's potential.

### **Generic Conventions**

There are only three essential ingredients of the zombie film: firstly, an epidemic; secondly, a series of zombie-victims; and thirdly, a core group of zombie-fighting protagonists that remains uninfected for much of the film. However, even this basic plot structure enforces certain limitations on what can and cannot be effectively expressed within the genre, making it far better at expressing certain views than others.

The general similarity between the cultural critiques offered by different zombie films is, I believe, dictated by the genre's use of *infection* as its central plot device. All zombie films begin with an outbreak of disease (usually physiological, but occasionally mental). This disease, nearly always of unknown or unexplained origin, spreads exponentially throughout the population, creating zombies at the point of contact. To weave this disaster into a coherent plot, there must be a group of individuals that resist the spread of the disease by whatever means necessary: this 'core group' of heroes and heroines forms the emotional centre of the film. By the end of the film, this group has either managed to survive the zombie attacks, or else has become absorbed into the zombie population via infection. Either way, the audience has been encouraged to identify with a small band of rebels for a large span of the film. The genre's reliance on infection as the main catalyst for action reduces the independence of the human characters, as any one of them could become infected at any moment. This recurrent motif of infection is one of the reasons that the zombie film is so often contemptuous towards 'the masses'. The threat of infection converts all relationships into liabilities, as even interpersonal communication is tainted with the threat of infection. The core group's trust of one

another is greatly reduced by this collective anxiety about dehumanisation via disease. The plot's requirement to isolate the core group from the infected, then, partially predetermines the genre's pessimistic view of humanity.

The use of infection as a plot element has effects that extend beyond this pessimistic view of individuals. The genre's suspense depends upon an ambiguous division between infected and non-infected groups. The impact of a zombie film depends on the number of times that the infected and the non-infected cross paths, and the circumstances of these intersections. The suspense generated by intersections is most obvious during moments where an uninfected character is confronted by someone whose status is unknown. In response to external threats, the core group gradually learns to 'read' zombie behaviour, and either eliminate or befriend suspect individuals as required. This method of zombie-human confrontation clearly separates 'good' (uninfected) from the 'bad' (infected) characters, thus consolidating the purity of the core group, but it also serves as a reminder of the group's vulnerability to infection. During brief moments of narrative suspension, the inability of the uninfected characters to decide whether the entity that they are facing is a human or a zombie implicitly suggests that the two groups are uncomfortably proximate. The scenes of human/zombie confrontation expose the fragility of the core group's human solidarity.

This pessimistic attitude towards human nature mirrors that of post-structuralist theorists who claim that the concept of a coherent 'human identity' is an illusion. This attitude has been criticised on the grounds that it represents a slander against human nature: Raymond Tallis, for example, claims that these theories "downplay the role of conscious decision-making, deliberation, and indeed consciousness itself".<sup>14</sup> Kenan Malik, in his aptly titled *Man, Beast and Zombie*, similarly laments that the modern preoccupation for unmasking the idea of human subjectivity as a false construct has led to a mad rush to "knock man off his anthropocentric perch" at all costs.<sup>15</sup> Malik claims that anti-enlightenment theories of subjectivity obscure the fact that "what makes us human is our collective ability to free ourselves from nature, not our individual desires to wallow in it".<sup>16</sup> These criticisms are intensely relevant to the zombie film, as no other genre attempts to knock humans off their perch with more gusto.

It might be objected that the above criticisms cannot be usefully applied to the zombie film because the genre's protagonists are clearly complex human beings. It is true that the core group often displays positive qualities such as altruism,

compassion and respect. Furthermore, juxtaposing these upstanding figures with unthinking monsters makes the core group's human characteristics more salient. Zombie films often appear to counterbalance their anti-humanism with an appreciation of individual human acts. Even the weaponry used by the core group is often conspicuously 'human': many of these films place a peculiar emphasis on the manufacture and deployment of this weaponry, often lingering on scenes involving the construction of ingenious defences by the mechanically gifted. In the recent remake of *Dawn of the Dead*,<sup>17</sup> for example, Andy (owner and proprietor of 'Andy's Gun World') is trapped on his shop's rooftop by marauding zombies downstairs. He keeps himself sane by playing long-distance chess with one of the protagonists, who is holed up across the street. This scene juxtaposes the complexities of chess with the mindless activity of the zombie gang, thus fetishizing this activity as a display of human uniqueness. The zombie spoof *Shaun of the Dead*<sup>18</sup> links the humans' complexity with their defensive capability in a scene where Sean and his best friend dispatch a group of zombies by flinging their record collection at them. Their desperate efforts at self-defence are impeded by their all-too-human bickering over exactly *which* records to fling at the zombies (New Order and The Stone Roses are deemed too precious, while Sade and Dire Straits are duly employed as lethal projectiles). This scene associates human qualities such as musical appreciation with 'good', and sees culture as an antidote for the zombies' conformist mentality (they presumably are fans of Dire Straits).

Again, this fetishizing of high-level human activity can be traced back to Romero's films. In the first entry in the *Dead* series, *Night of the Living Dead*,<sup>19</sup> the main character Ben is distinguished from the others trapped inside the house by his intelligence and dexterity. The film can be interpreted as a celebration of humanity, instead of an attempt to reduce it to an animalistic level. However, while human ingenuity is dwelt upon in this and other zombie films, it does not always save the protagonists, who are ultimately implicated in the same ideology of conformity that has enslaved the zombie population. In Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, for example, the two protagonists attempt to secure a deserted department store against zombie invasion. However, they become distracted when they realise that they effectively have unlimited spending power in the empty store. They proceed to go on a manic 'shopping spree', forgetting to secure the area. This scene is clearly demarcated from the rest of the film by its scene of human communion: the two men laugh, stack their trolleys high, and shoot baskets in the sports

section, forgetting the danger outside. While their hyperactive movements are physically antithetical to the zombies', Romero conflates the two groups by depicting the spree as a dereliction of duty. By finding succour through consumerism, the protagonists demonstrate that their individuality has been destroyed by capitalism. As their spree is interrupted by the zombies, they finally come to their senses; but their corruption has already been expressed.

The fragility of human solidarity in the *Dead* films is further weakened by the genre's structure. The infection, for example, can be interpreted as a metaphor for cultural malaise. For the core group, moral infection is as much of a threat as physical infection. They are not only threatened by a contagious disease, but also by apathy, selfishness, negligence, and greed. Again, *Night of the Living Dead* exemplifies this tendency. In this film, selfish individuals in the core group frequently sacrifice the group's safety, often supplanting the central goal of defending the house from zombies. Internecine warfare is often a greater danger to the group than external attack: even as it manages to repel zombies, it can barely avoid implosion. The trivial concerns and conflicts of the core group are derived from the concerns of their corrupt society, which has made all uninfected characters into potential zombies.

The specific nature of the activities that are valued as 'human' in the zombie film provides some clues as to its anti-democratic sensibilities. The exclusive nature of 'human' activity in the genre conflicts with its democratic aims, as remaining 'human' requires immense skill and fortitude. Because the humans need to be exceptional to survive, the genre's plot weeds out 'unfit' human subjects and preserves 'fit' ones. By deeming only a small section of society capable of resistance – an idea embodied in the notion of a 'crack team' – these films provoke identification with a small number of skilled individuals, while damning other less gifted individuals to extinction.

What distinguishes the zombie film's narrative from any other that pits a small group of people against a mass of enemies? Although the action film, the Western, and the crime film all employ a core group of vigilantes, the zombie film differs from these genres in several important respects. In these other genres, the criminals also outnumber the core group – but they are in turn outnumbered by a vast unseen public. The stock Western plot of the lone individual or brigade hired to defend a township (featured in *High Noon*,<sup>20</sup> *The Magnificent Seven*,<sup>21</sup> and *Shane*,<sup>22</sup> along with scores of others) relies on the fact that the townspeople are on the right

side of the good/bad divide. Even if the townspeople *are* cowardly, their allegiance to the core group is rarely questioned. In the zombie film, however, the public is part of the problem. The core group of the zombie film, then, no longer acts as a proxy for the public; it is the *zombies* who perform that function. The members of this group only protect themselves, because the public body has degenerated into an object of fear and loathing. This suggests that the genre is deeply hostile towards all notions of 'the people' as a coherent class.

### **The Tyranny of the Majority**

In his book on Hollywood in the 1950s, *Seeing is Believing*,<sup>23</sup> Peter Biskind systematically interprets the political sympathies of that decade's Hollywood films by identifying which particular institutions control power; and secondly, deciphering these films' attitudes towards these custodians of power. Biskind claims that right-wing films place their trust in the vigilante who directs his anger against a misguided public; while in left-wing films, foes are often "destroyed by the resourceful citizens of Smallville".<sup>24</sup> In a right-wing film such as *Dirty Harry*,<sup>25</sup> the protagonist correctly judges the demands of the public as misguided, and acts alone without compunction. However, even right-wing films such as *Dirty Harry* work for the common good: Harry Calhoun's brutal enforcement tactics ultimately make the streets safe for the (undeserving) public. The zombie film complicates this division by combining left-wing hostility towards localised authority with right-wing scepticism towards the public. Furthermore, it melds these opposing views together in a way that damages the aims that it appears to endorse. Rather than positioning itself in the centre of the liberal/conservative debate, the zombie genre rejects individual *and* institutional authority as equally illegitimate.

While the zombie genre complicates its political allegiances by rejecting almost all configurations of power, the army and the police are often depicted as especially corrupt. In *28 Days Later*,<sup>26</sup> for example, the army is used to illustrate the problems of centralised power. The core group take shelter from the epidemic in an army base, initially implying that this institution can be trusted. However, the army soon begins to abuse its power: it assaults the two female members of the core group, imprisons and tortures a black man, and ultimately presents a worse threat than the zombies themselves. In both *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*,<sup>27</sup> the army is a corrupt or even psychotic institution that kills zombies for pleasure, not for public safety. But the genre's radical hostility towards government power is

diluted by its hostility towards the public. Stephen Spielberg's recent film *War of the Worlds*<sup>28</sup> – which is similar to a zombie film in many respects – contains a scene in which 'the public' turns against the core group. When the group drive through a ravaged town, several panic-stricken individuals attempt to force their way in through their car's broken windshield, and one man compulsively lacerates his arms against the glass. The scene suggests that a large group of individuals can quickly degenerate into a hostile mass under desperate conditions. The idea of a 'collective intelligence', unlike in true left-wing films, is portrayed as a menacing force.

The zombie film contains an additional layer of hostility towards the public that even right-wing vigilante films lack: it encourages the spectator to *revel* in the spectacle of violence against the public body. Because evil is not localised in a single entity, as it is in most other horror genres, the viewer is asked to take pleasure in witnessing the destruction of the public. The genre, in contrast to horror films that centre on a single 'monster', distributes the threat among a large mass, and frustrates the desire to punish single individuals. Because the zombie film usually keeps the source of the infection a mystery, the zombies themselves become the only visible 'villains'. Unlike the cycle of science fiction films of the 1950s, the threat to society in the zombie film is not generally traceable to governmental abuse of power. Instead, the apocalypse is unleashed on humanity for unclear reasons. This lack of explanation shifts the 'blame' for evil onto the zombies themselves, even though they are actually its victims. The genre's implication that the victims are indirectly responsible for their own deaths has dire consequences for its politics. While countercultural rhetoric runs strongly through these films, this is balanced by a scathing condescension towards the masses.<sup>29</sup>

The genre further amplifies this indifference to human suffering by making the physical act of destruction into a central part of the action. Zombie films are unusually fixated on representing individual acts of violence: the sheer variety of zombie deaths contrasts markedly with the more clinical murders committed in the 'slasher' film.<sup>30</sup> But while the pleasure of watching the slasher film is tempered by our sympathy for the victims, emotional investment with the victim is difficult in the zombie film. The genre places great emphasis on the act of killing, but unlike the slasher film it distances the viewer from its moral consequences. When the zombie film attempts to tackle a more complex issue, such as racial violence, the limitations of this lack of compassion become apparent.

### Case Study: *Land of the Dead* as a Failed Racial Allegory

*Land of the Dead*<sup>31</sup> is a clear example of how the structural dictates of a generic form can impede its positive intentions. Romero, although he did convert the potentially tragic zombie figure into a figure of humour, uses the first three parts of his *Dead* series to gradually increase the audience's sympathy for these figures. The zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* are anonymous and inhuman, while those in later films are more recognisably human. *Land of the Dead* at first seems to erase the difference between zombies and human: the zombies are initially *more* sympathetic figures than the humans in the core group. This sympathy is bolstered by the parallels Romero draws between zombies and racial minorities. The film's first group of zombies are former members of a jazz band, seen together in a band shelter. The infection has reduced them to making comical, grotesque noises on their instruments, which they can no longer play. Romero compares the idea of the zombie brass band with the racist 'minstrel' image: the disease converts accomplished jazz musicians into grotesque, undisciplined bodies.

The second appearance of the zombies in *Land of the Dead* helps to explain the first scene. The head zombie is a petrol-station owner, who manages to rouse the other zombies by signalling to them in grunts and gestures. This scene depicts a revolution: the oppressed masses (the zombies) are encouraged by their charismatic leader to attack their oppressors. This model of zombie society is considerably more developed than that in the other Romero films. The zombies, instead of mindlessly killing people, form a coherent resistance group. This allegory is intensified by the unequivocal badness of the zombies' wealthy oppressors, who are ensconced in a luxury building that is isolated from the outside world. Furthermore, the dehumanisation of the zombies is challenged by their verbal development, a skill that threatens the film's hierarchal power structure.

This allegory begins to dissolve when the core group – housed in a hotted-up zombie extermination van nicknamed *Dead Reckoning* – springs into action. Compared to the zombies that they are fighting, this group is racially homogenous.<sup>32</sup> But once this opposition between the white overlord (played by Dennis Hopper) and his black slaves are established, the political intent clashes with the limitations of the narrative form. The zombie group's humanity is quickly eroded, and its members become props to be destroyed for our amusement. This is Romero's most expensive film, and the eviscerations are undeniably spectacular (a

backlit scene in which a zombie is blown to bits with a shotgun is a particular standout). However, it is disturbing that the incipient representation of the zombies' humanity quickly gives way to graphic scenes of their destruction. While the zombies' social dispossession is periodically alluded to, they meet the same fate as their predecessors. The moral failures of this film are due to generic limitation rather than technique, because the demands of the audience are unsympathetic to political engagement.

The opposition between the lust for violence and the need for social expression in these films is a particularly clear example of the denigration of the proletariat. These films share the problems of all counter-enlightenment narratives: when the public are seen as dupes of a vast, subtle and oppressive system of ideology – Foucault's "power without the king"<sup>33</sup> – the masses become dehumanised. By and large, the zombie film shares these sympathies. The possibility of revolution is barred by the monstrous nature of the proletariat representatives. The 'core group' is always firmly bourgeois, independently wealthy, and separated from the masses. Characters that do not conform to the image of the intelligentsia – like Cholo, the Latino character played by John Leguizamo in *Day of the Dead* – are doomed. Cholo identifies his own aims too closely with those of the zombie underclass. The most important transformation enacted in the zombie film is that of the idea of the mob, which is gradually redefined from a politically productive force to an imminent threat.

This negative idea of the crowd is derived from the work of many other influential theorists, including Sigmund Freud, who harboured a distinctly misanthropic ideal of group action. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud makes the case that social psychology can be seen as merely an expanded, debased version of individual psychology.<sup>34</sup> This preference for individuals over groups was previously explored by Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, where the prophet declares, "to lure people away from the herd – that is why I have come".<sup>35</sup> The herd, in other words, is the dead space from which the vigorous and assertive hero must flee to retain his identity. Charles Mackay, whose book *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* critiques the follies of collective 'intelligence': "Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one."<sup>36</sup> This type of healthy scepticism about the wisdom of the 'collective mind' can easily degenerate into misanthropy. The belief in the individual as the ultimate

source of wisdom, the lone genius, derives from Plato's proposal in *The Republic* to keep the masses in check with a group of 'guardian' figures who must be isolated from the degradations of mass culture.<sup>37</sup> This is, of course, a recipe for dictatorship, and Plato unapologetically embraced the idea of a hierarchal system of power. The elite brigade at the centre of the zombie film is a modern incarnation of Plato's dedicated band of Guardians.

One more characteristic separates the core group from the zombie periphery. In Romero's *Dead* films especially, the central group is a desexualised structure. When members of the core group do engage in sexual relations or disputes with one another, they usually come to grief. It is important to recognize that the punishment for sexual transgression in the zombie film does not occur for the same reasons as it does in other horror subgenres: the zombie film contains none of the slasher film's prudishness or paranoia about sexuality. In the slasher film, the villain has sublimated his unsatisfied sexual desire into violence. The denial of sexuality by the protagonist in this genre is merely a ruse for his obsession with it – perhaps the clearest example is the character of Norman Bates in *Psycho*.<sup>38</sup> In the zombie film, while the zombies themselves do not experience sexual desire, they are motivated by a *literal* hunger for flesh that forms a substitute for the metaphorical hunger of sex. The zombies are comical because they are 'simply flesh', without the animating forces of attraction and empathy that makes humans into subjects worthy of empathy. When the subjectivity of the human group at the centre of the film is amplified at the expense of the wider public, and this core group is stripped of all 'debased' human impulses such as lust, the group inevitably becomes superior to the public.

### **A Way Forward for the Zombie Film**

Given that I have criticised the generic qualities of the zombie film for colluding with the ideology that it attempts to overthrow, I will offer some brief suggestions for how such a generic transformation might be established.

Most importantly, the avenues that were briefly opened up in Romero's *Land of the Dead* must be explored further. The drama of the monster gaining its own sense of subjectivity has already been explored in the paradigmatic narrative of the oppressed, *Bride of Frankenstein*.<sup>39</sup> This film, and its source-text, deserves consideration as possible models for the way forward for the zombie film. It too features a blameless central character, thrown into a hostile world by

circumstances beyond his control. But unlike most zombie films, *Bride of Frankenstein* does not hold the monster to account for his exclusion from society. In fact, the main reason that *Bride of Frankenstein* is a more effective film than the original *Frankenstein* is that the first film suffered from many of the same flaws that I have identified in the modern zombie film: the monster is represented as an inhuman lump of 'meat', virtually identical to the modern zombie.<sup>40</sup> This negative interpretation of Shelly's book is most apparent in the film's attribution of the monster's destructive behaviour to the fact that he accidentally received a 'criminal brain', rather than the planned 'genius brain' allocated to him.<sup>41</sup> The monster thus becomes an effect of a scientific mistake, instead of a victim of prejudice as he is in Shelley's novel. The first *Frankenstein* film's labelling of the monster as 'evil' stymies the resonances of Shelley's book, in which the monster character can be interpreted as a representation of his oppressor's own anxieties. It is in the second film that this becomes clear, as the monster learns the language of his oppressors and attempts to interact with them, becoming a character worthy of compassion.

Romero seems to be learning the same lessons as Whale, by gradually transferring the viewer's compassion onto the zombies themselves. But his use of these figures as objects of humour rather than of pathos dilutes these positive intentions. To offer a more subversive message, the director must be willing to sacrifice the conventional sense of attraction exerted by the core group, and their differentiation from the infected. This problem is particularly acute in *Land of the Dead*, as Romero abandons his practice of hiring unknowns, and employs alluring stars such as Simon Baker and Asia Argento as members of the core group. This may be an effect of a larger budget, but this casting decision blunts the film's message. One can only hope that, in a fifth instalment of his saga, Romero will move further away from the 'group versus the masses' structure in favour of a more equal one. When it comes, this shift will revitalise the genre, just as the revisionist Western breathed new life into an exhausted narrative form.

*Horror films have attracted Timothy Roberts since his mother forbade him to watch them as a child. He aims to direct a zombie film one day, and hopes that this article is the first step in this process. He was awarded a PhD in English at UNSW in 2006. He recently moved to the USA to teach Rhetoric and Composition at the University of West Chester, Pennsylvania.*

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- <sup>1</sup> George A. Romero, *Dawn of the Dead* (USA: Laurel Group, 1978), DVD.
- <sup>2</sup> Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "From Dialectic of Enlightenment", in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 1223-39.
- <sup>3</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, 1224.
- <sup>4</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, 1225.
- <sup>5</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, 1229.
- <sup>6</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, 1229.
- <sup>7</sup> Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 39.
- <sup>8</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 9.
- <sup>9</sup> R. D. Laing, "The Schizophrenic Experience", in *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (London: Penguin, 1970), 57.
- <sup>10</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Vintage, 2000). DVD
- <sup>11</sup> Sam Mendes, *American Beauty* (USA: DreamWorks SKG, 1997), DVD.
- <sup>12</sup> Frederick Engels, "Letter to Mehring", in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 766.
- <sup>13</sup> In an interview about his 2004 film *Land of the Dead*, Romero is quite explicit about its social dimension, stating that "[t]he administration is dealing in big, big bucks and doling out little bits, as he says, to keep people off the streets. But the operative of it, the sort of service personnel, are relegated to a very different lifestyle." The Horror Channel, "Interview with George A. Romero" [accessed 2 February 2006]. Available from <http://www.ugo.com/channels/dvd/features/zombieweek/romero.asp>
- <sup>14</sup> Raymond Tallis, "Recovering the Conscious Agent", in *The Raymond Tallis Reader*, ed. Michael Grant (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 145.
- <sup>15</sup> Kenan Malik, *Man, Beast, and Zombie: What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us About Human Nature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 237.
- <sup>16</sup> Malik, 363.
- <sup>17</sup> Jack Snyder, *Dawn of the Dead* (USA: Universal, 2004), DVD.
- <sup>18</sup> Edgar Wright, *Shaun of the Dead* (UK: Studio Canal/Working Title Films, 2004), DVD.
- <sup>19</sup> George A. Romero, *Night of the Living Dead* (USA: Walter Reade Organization, 1968). Copyright has since lapsed into the public domain and as of 2006, the *Internet Movie Database* lists 23 copies retailing on DVD. Information available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night\\_of\\_the\\_Living\\_Dead](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_of_the_Living_Dead) [accessed 1 December 2006].
- <sup>20</sup> Fred Zimmerman, *High Noon* (USA: United Artists, 1952), DVD. This film is a more ambiguous example than the other Westerns mentioned, as it represents the public as an entity that is not worth defending.
- <sup>21</sup> John Sturges, *The Magnificent Seven* (USA: United Artists, 1960), DVD.
- <sup>22</sup> George Stevens, *Shane* (USA: Paramount, 1953), DVD.
- <sup>23</sup> Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001).
- <sup>24</sup> Biskind, 117.
- <sup>25</sup> Don Siegel, *Dirty Harry* (USA: Warner Bros., 1971), videotape.
- <sup>26</sup> Danny Boyle, *28 Days Later* (UK: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2002), DVD.
- <sup>27</sup> George A. Romero, *Day of the Dead* (USA: Laurel Group, 1985), DVD.
- <sup>28</sup> Stephen Spielberg, *War of the Worlds* (USA: DreamWorks SKG, 2005), DVD.
- <sup>29</sup> *28 Days Later* is unusual among zombie films because it provides a distinct cause for the epidemic: an infection from an animal research laboratory in London escapes, and spreads rapidly among the human population. But this apparently straightforward explanation for the epidemic is ambiguous. One of the scientists claims that the monkeys are suffering from a 'rage' virus, suggesting that the infection actually stems from humankind's destructive impulses.
- <sup>30</sup> In fact, this is perhaps unfair to the slasher genre, because it occasionally leaves space for a sense of subjectivity that the zombie film does not. In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, Vortex, 1973), for example, we are given access to a moment of self-contemplation on behalf of Leatherface, who buries his head in his hands at one point in an apparent expression of remorse and self-loathing.
- <sup>31</sup> George A. Romero, *Land of the Dead* (USA: Universal, 2004), DVD.

- <sup>32</sup> The presence of the Iraq war is also allowed to penetrate the allegory of the film. Romero's message is clear: *don't piss off the guys who have the oil, or they will retaliate*. (With thanks to my friend John Attridge for this observation.)
- <sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: an Introduction* (London: Vintage, 1990), 91.
- <sup>34</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 626-7.
- <sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (London: Penguin, 1969), 51.
- <sup>36</sup> Charles Mackay, *Selections From 'Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds'* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), ii.
- <sup>37</sup> Plato, *The Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1975).
- <sup>38</sup> Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (USA: Universal, 1960), videotape.
- <sup>39</sup> James Whale, *Bride of Frankenstein* (USA: Universal, 1933), DVD.
- <sup>40</sup> James Whale, *Frankenstein* (USA: Universal, 1931), videotape.
- <sup>41</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin, 1995).