UNDEAD AMERICA: ZOMBIE FILMS AS METAPHORIC DISCOURSE OF POST-9/11 ANXIETY

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By
Mark Alexander Soloff, B.F.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Master's Examination Committee:
Dr. Joy Reilly, Adviser
Dr. Alan Woods

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Graduate Program in Theatre
ABSTRACT

The terrorist attacks against the United States of America on September 11, 2001, gave rise to a new collection of social anxieties within the nation's populace. The horrifying nature of the attacks and the government's immediate encouragement of patriotism in their wake resulted in the implied prohibition of unpatriotic discourse. Rather than dealing with terrorism, war, and suspicion of the government explicitly, filmmakers opted to express their post-9/11 anxieties through metaphor. Concurrently, cinema made available therapeutic catharsis for the nation's newfound fears.

Horror films enjoyed a renewed popularity in the years following 9/11. The most notably prolific subgenre within this trend is the zombie film. The five years following 9/11 have seen the popular reception of a variety of zombie films including: 28 Days Later, Resident Evil, Dawn of the Dead, and Land of the Dead. The mindless monsters once avoided by serious horror directors seem to have captured post-9/11 America's collective imagination.

Through the metaphoric distancing device of the zombies, modern horror directors are able to safely explore America's post-9/11 anxieties. Phenomena such as
patriotism, paranoia, the fear of a terrorist Other, and the distrust of the government become open for artistic exploration when they are removed from the problematic framework of recent history.
For Megan
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VITA

July 12, 1982.........................Born – Pittsburgh, PA

2001.................................................B.F.A. Theatre Performance,
Denison University

2005.................................................Graduate Assistant,
The Ohio State University

2005-2006...........................................Graduate Teaching Associate,
The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre
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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The use of metaphor in art allows artists to safely discuss with their audiences that which is otherwise taboo. This phenomenon is evident in the literature of political dissidents, the lyrics of counter-culture musicians, and in the films of socially critical directors.\(^1\) In addition to aiding in the expression of political opinion, metaphor provides a distancing device for audiences when an artistic work explores subjects that deal with cultural anxieties or traumatic events. In short, metaphor allows us to discuss the unspeakable.

The current sociopolitical condition of America\(^2\) offers American artists sensitive but important issues to address. Topics such as war, terrorism, and governmental authority are extremely relevant in contemporary art, but certain recent historical events (such as the attacks on September 11, 2001) are still too distressing for some of the country's population to accept in popular art. In these times of emotional disquiet, when explicit discussion of national trauma through art can be difficult, audiences turn to the cinema in search of relief. At first, this impulse leads them to the palliative genres of comedy and fantasy but, with time, it also draws them towards horror. The success of the *Ring* series and the *Saw* films provides evidence of a
contemporary popularity in horror cinema not seen in America since the *Scream* films of the mid-1990’s. Of particular interest amidst the increasingly numerous horror releases are the number of zombie films being produced in America. Zombies seem to have found a position of renewed interest in contemporary America and it may prove illuminating to ask why.

Have zombies become the metaphoric vehicle for filmmakers to safely discuss contemporary anxieties? Or is it simply the zombies’ turn to rise briefly into the limelight before returning again to the relative obscurity of their cult genre? I contend that the recent influx of American zombie films is motivated by deeper cultural desires than the appetite for onscreen gore. This study will investigate recent zombie films in America and their metaphoric relationship to contemporary cultural anxieties. To fully appreciate the cultural anxieties of a contemporary American audience, however, one must first consider the changes that America has undergone in the last five years.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center Complex, the Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, ushered in a new wave of reactionary foreign policy and politically charged art within America. After 9/11, America began its prolonged and ambiguously defined “War on Terrorism,” and adopted a national color-coded alert system to remind Americans of the potential danger that surrounds them. In addition to (and perhaps in response to) the aforementioned events, post-9/11 Americans discovered a new sense of anxiety. The current social conditions of paranoia and suspicion towards the terrorist Others are reminiscent of the widespread fear of
communists in the Cold War era. In addition to a keen feeling of vulnerability, some Americans have rekindled a sense of super-patriotism, which has been relatively unpopular in America since the 1960’s. Much like a traumatized individual, post-9/11 America took measures to reaffirm its sense of self. This affirmation becomes evident through analysis of America’s military action and artistic discourse.

In order to understand the artistic reactions that America has generated towards 9/11, one must first assess the military response that America had to the attacks. The first act of America’s “War on Terrorism” was the invasion of Afghanistan in October of 2001. This military action was justified as a punishment for 9/11 and for the Taliban’s failure to meet America’s demands. On October 7, 2001, the United States, supported by Britain, began its attack on Afghanistan. The invasion of Afghanistan lasted until March 6, 2002, and resulted in the disempowerment of the Taliban. While the current count of coalition deaths is 368, the number Afghani (both military and civilian) casualties is disputed and assumed to be substantially higher.

America’s second major military action after 9/11 was its 2003 war on Iraq. This invasion was rationalized as a measure to end human rights violations in Iraq, to punish Iraq for supposed links to terrorist organizations, and to cease Saddam Hussein’s production of weapons of mass destruction. An international effort known as the “Coalition of the Willing” committed aid to America in this war. Since the capture of Saddam Hussein and the restructuring of the Iraqi government, several nations in the coalition have withdrawn their military assistance. While the “major combat” of the campaign has ended, occupational forces and Iraqis continue to lose their lives in guerilla conflicts currently referred to as “insurgency.”
Before 9/11, it was not unusual for Americans to view their country as the world’s least vulnerable nation. Once liberated from the British Empire by a relatively small number of revolutionary colonists, America has in the past two hundred years become a figure of military and economic might. The nation’s tide-turning role in World War II and its use of nuclear weapons on Japan heralded its ascension into the pantheon of the globe’s political giants. The collapse of the USSR further solidified America’s position as the world’s leading superpower. This position of power and confidence resulted in America’s involvement in offshore military actions such as the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf wars. Many of these post-WWII engagements\textsuperscript{13} led to a growing sense of distrust and cynicism towards the government. Such anger was expressed in popular art and music of the 1960’s in songs such as “The Times They Are A-Changin’”\textsuperscript{14} or “Eve of Destruction.”\textsuperscript{15} Criticism of the government and society as a whole continued as a popular component of 1980’s punk music and 1990’s rock.\textsuperscript{16} The popular entertainment immediately following 9/11, however, was remarkable in that such critical perspectives were discouraged and silenced by producers and artists alike.\textsuperscript{17}

1.3 INITIAL ARTISTIC RESPONSE TO 9/11

America’s response to 9/11 was not limited to the political and military realms. The 9/11 attacks spawned innumerable books, television specials, and radio broadcasts on the subject. Additionally, several pieces of entertainment were altered, postponed, or cancelled as a result of 9/11. The release of the terrorism-focused Arnold Schwarzenegger film \textit{Collateral Damage} (2002), for example, was postponed for four
months. The opening credits of HBO's *Sex and the City* were edited to remove images of the World Trade Center. And a scene was cut from the film *Spiderman* (2002) in which Spiderman catches a helicopter in a web strung between the twin towers. These deliberate concessions to the feelings of post-9/11 American audiences reflect the powerful influence of 9/11 on the entertainment industry.

A sense of patriotism and national encouragement inundated the mainstream media of post-9/11 America. Country musician Lee Greenwood's song "God Bless the U.S.A." for example, gained a new popularity after the attacks. Even television advertising adopted patriotism as a marketing strategy.

The automobile industry was the most aggressive in referring to September 11 in the commercials it created following the attacks. Both General Motors and Ford launched campaigns before the end of September [2001] that announced interest-free financing and equated car-buying with patriotism. The theme of the General Motors campaign was 'Keep America Rolling.' Ford's slogan: "Ford Drives America." Super-patriotism was evident off screen as well in the practice of attaching miniature American flags to automobiles. Pro-American slogans such as "United we stand" or "These colors don't run" became popular bumper stickers. While icons and totems of American strength and solidarity served to assuage feelings of immediate vulnerability, the American public still required (and would pay to see) consolatory entertainment that reaffirmed the righteousness of America and the certainty of good's inevitable triumph over evil.
1.4 PATRIOTIC METAPHOR IN POST-9/11 CINEMA

Certain metaphoric images and themes became particularly applicable and relevant to audiences after the 9/11 attacks. The notion of national solidarity regardless of racial, economic, or religious heritage (evident in saying such as “United we stand”) was popular. President Bush emphasized this concept in his statement, “This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace.”23 The idea of the average man or underdog standing up to the seemingly invincible forces of evil is another motif of special significance after 9/11. Passenger of United Airlines’ flight 93,24 Thomas E. Burnett, told his wife in their final phone conversation, “I know we’re all going to die – there’s three of us who are going to do something about it.”25 The public’s once cynical attitude towards the American military was briefly quelled in the months following 9/11. For the first time since Pearl Harbor Americans felt devastatingly attacked on their home soil.26 American soldiers became the arm of justice punishing Afghanistan for breeding and supporting the individuals that had wounded and disgraced America.

All of the aforementioned themes were easily transmittable to the medium of film. The 2002 film Spiderman, for example, depicts an underdog who gains superpowers and defends New York City from an airborne, explosive-wielding villain. Peter Parker, the film’s protagonist, learns that his inaction in the face of evil led to the death of his uncle. Later in the film, the Green Goblin’s27 assault on a New York bridge is hindered by a group of brick-throwing citizens who say, “You mess with Spidey, you mess with New York. You mess with one of us, you mess with all of us.”28 A similar scene is included in Spiderman 2 in which a train of citizens stands up to the villainous
Dr. Octopus and later acts as a team to pass the unconscious body of Spiderman to the back of the train. The final moments of Spiderman show the superhero swinging through the New York skyline, over a fleet of cabs, and finally perching on the flagpole next to a giant American flag. This film grossed $403,706,375 by August 18, 2002 in America\textsuperscript{29} and paved the way for its sequel,\textsuperscript{30} which grossed $373,377,893 by November 14, 2004.\textsuperscript{31}

Peter Jackson’s much lauded film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings novels grossed a total of approximately $1,032,282,337 at the American box office.\textsuperscript{32} These films depict individuals from disparate races and cultures joining to fight the forces of evil. This multi-racial “Fellowship of the Ring” offers a metaphorical interpretation of the unification of Americans against al-Qaeda or, to further extrapolate, the “Coalition of the Willing.” The Two Towers (2002) set its protagonists Frodo and Sam on a perilous journey towards the evil land of Mordor. These mythical average-joes are confronted with the ferocious ring-addicted Golum, armies of evil Orcs and barbarians, and kidnappers from the Spartan city of Gondor. Of particular interest in this film is the last minute addition of Sam Gamgee’s speech to Frodo\textsuperscript{33} during the attack on the city of Osgiliath:

It’s all wrong. By rights, we shouldn’t even be here. But we are. It’s like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn’t want to know the end, because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it’s only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer.\textsuperscript{34}

Sam’s speech concludes with the assertion that survivors hold on to the fact that “there’s still some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it’s worth fighting for.”\textsuperscript{35} This
speech serves to promote post-9/11 America's patriotic sensibilities in several ways. First, Sam establishes that "we," the victims of "evil acts," have been unfairly surrounded by conflict. He then equates his present situation to "great stories" of the past. The 9/11 attacks have been compared to the attacks on Pearl Harbor, and the nation's attacks on Middle Eastern countries have often been compared to the Crusades of Europe's Middle Ages. Sam then addresses a concern shared by many Americans on 9/11, "How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened?" This anxiety was addressed by President Bush in his address to a joint session of Congress. "I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat." Sam concludes his speech with the metaphoric image of sunrise. President Bush made a similar rhetorical allusion, "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining."

One may argue that as Tolkien wrote his series long before 9/11, his characters were never intended to address that particular event. This is technically true, but does not change the fact that the melodramatic portrayal of good versus evil speaks to audiences in any era of conflict. This is why Sam meta-literarily mentions the power of storytelling. In the film's DVD audio commentary Sean Astin, the actor who played Sam Gamgee, suggests that his monologue was written as a reaction to 9/11. "This line, 'there's some good left in the world Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for,' was written well after the September 11 event, and well after the first film came out." While the influence of quality filmmaking, storytelling, and a preexisting fan base must not be
overlooked, it is probably not coincidental that the epic *Lord of the Rings* films achieved tremendous box office success after 9/11.

1.5 METAPHORIC REPRESENTATION OF ANXIETY IN POST-9/11 CINEMA

The exploration and articulation of the patriotic undercurrents of post-9/11 America is merely the optimistic side of a more complex artistic phenomenon. The psychological damage inflicted on America by 9/11 was initially addressed and downplayed by the swell of patriotism encouraged by the President and American news. Assurances of America's strength and vigilance subdued immediate fears of the destruction of the nation. In the years that followed 9/11, however, the shock and pain that accompanied the attacks subsided and allowed room for contemplation of the state of the nation.

The war on Iraq, in the name of searching for weapons of mass destruction sparked controversy that the Bush administration had agendas other than America's safety in mind. This prolonged occupation, complicated by frequent guerrilla attacks on American soldiers by Anti-American "insurgents," has led to demands from home that American troops be withdrawn from Iraq. If 9/11 was America's second Pearl Harbor, then Operation Iraqi Freedom is its second Vietnam War.

In addition to anti-war sentiment, Americans are experiencing a renewed suspicion of the government due to the discovery of illegal government phone tapping, possible humiliations of detainees at Guantánamo Bay, and suspected tortures of prisoners held in secret American compounds. The newly formed Department of Homeland Security offers the public further anxieties that the government may someday
be legally permitted to restrict citizens' civil liberties. Fear of martial law and the 
formation of a totalitarian state may linger in the minds of those Americans who 
remember the internment camps of the 1940's or the anti-communist McCarthy 
hearings.

The fear of the government is accompanied by fear of both the threats from 
within the populace and from the larger world without. Terrorism knows no national 
heritage or ethnic boundaries, and because of this amorphous quality, seemingly 
patriotic Americans could be aiding terrorists. The "War on Terrorism" is as loosely 
defined and expansive as the "War on Drugs" or the "War on Poverty." Indeed, this 
war is a prolonged military campaign against an Other unrestricted by nationality or 
ethnicity. In addition to paranoia regarding the enemy from within, Americans now 
face a renewed sense of xenophobia towards and from the world's other nations. 
Spain's citizenry, for example, demanded a withdrawal from Iraq after the Madrid train 
bombings. Americans who watched the news on 9/11 may still remember "during the 
first 12 hours of coverage on CNN-Palestinians celebrating in the streets of East 
Jerusalem."42 Indeed, America's new militant approach to foreign policy has fostered 
fear and resentment from many countries.43 It is not, therefore, illogical to conclude 
that post-9/11 America feels anxiety in regard to its perception by its fellow nations.

Alongside the aforementioned worries remains the fear that the next terrorist 
attack may bring about the disintegration of law and order in America, and the total 
collapse of the nation. Anthrax scares, "dirty" bombs, and the growing nuclear 
technology of Pakistan and Iran have strengthened America's post-9/11 fear of the 
apocalypse. Distinguishing al-Qaeda's terrorists from the Cold War era's communists
is that the terrorists have clearly proven their eagerness to die for the sake of killing Americans. Exacerbating America’s apocalypse anxiety is the evidence provided by Hurricane Katrina of America’s inability to effectively deal with large-scale disasters. To live in a state without fear, in this day and age, would seem foolhardy.

Aristotle wrote in his Poetics that the purpose of theatrical tragedy is to generate a *catharsis* of the emotions of pity and fear. This ambiguous term (catharsis) has been widely considered to signify *cleansing* or *purification*. The tragedies of Aristotle’s theatre, therefore, performed an emotional and psychological service to their audience: an ancient group therapy. This notion still exists in modern cinema. Spiderman and Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers served to bolster the morale of America, but they may not have adequately explored and exorcised the nation’s new post-9/11 fears. The film genre most infamous for arousing and then exorcising fear is, of course, the genre of horror. Horror films explode the anxieties of their audiences, forcing the viewers to look upon representations of their fears. The Japanese B-film classic Godzilla (1954), for example, probed Japan’s horror of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through its metaphoric representative, Godzilla. The Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956) can be interpreted as an exploration into America’s fear of communism. Even the original King Kong (1933) can be explained as white America’s expression of fear of the potential violence and sexual power of African-American citizens. I propose that horror films have a bead on the unvoiced fears of a nation, and use metaphor to safely confront those fears.
The zombie film, as we know it today, is a particularly American invention. Unlike the famous Universal Pictures movie monsters the zombie does not originate from a European literary tradition. In the genre’s beginnings, zombies were depicted as murderous henchmen, loyal to a sorcerer of some sort. This was a western adaptation of the Voodoo faith’s zombie, which was the resurrected slave in the service of an oungan. Independent filmmaker George A. Romero revolutionized the zombie film genre in his 1968 feature, Night of the Living Dead. Romero’s film combined the Voodoo zombie’s lack of will with the flesh-eating characteristic of the fictive “ghoul.” “One of the few horror movies to make a lasting contribution outside of the genre (apart from Hitchcock), Night is deservedly revered by critics and popular audiences alike.” Night became a cult classic for its then-gratuitous depiction of gore and pessimistic worldview. It is particularly relevant to this study, however, because Night used the zombie to metaphorically confront American social and political issues. Created in a time when the Vietnam War had shaken America’s confidence in its government, “The film continually [sic] counterpoints the disintegration of the social microcosm, the patriarchal family, with the cultural disintegration of the nation, the collapse of confidence in authority on both the personal and political level.” Romero’s zombies became the embodiment of the motiveless malignity that seemed to have permeated the nation. American G.I.’s were dying in Vietnam in order to liberate a people with whom most Americans had never been in contact. The specter of communism still loomed over foreign shores and the death of the “Flower Power” movement was approaching. “This was the quintessential movie of its era. Not for nothing is one dazed character traumatized by the attack of a ghoul in an American flag-bedecked cemetery, forever
mumbling, 'What's happening?' It was the question of the hour." In this time of pessimism and disillusionment, Romero's film expressed the concerns of the nation in the guise of an innocuous horror flick.

George A. Romero did not stop his political discourse with Night. His viral outbreak film, The Crazies (1973), explored the themes of martial law, quarantine, and widespread panic with his trademarked cynicism. Dawn of the Dead (1978) further reflected on contemporary issues of concern. With the rise of the American shopping mall, it was mindless consumerism that Dawn's zombies represented. Until recently, Romero's zombie films had ended in the 1980's with Day of the Dead, a film that portrayed the American military as machismo barbarians and the adherents of society's rules as doomed sheep. Many filmmakers have followed Romero's gory example, but few have successfully woven the thread of social commentary into their splatter-flicks.

It is my belief that the rich metaphorical icon, the zombie, has been rediscovered by filmmakers of the post-9/11 era. Within the past five years, several American zombie films54 have been produced and achieved success at the box office. I propose that this "zombie renaissance" has occurred as a reaction to and an embodiment of America's post-9/11 sentiment.55 In the following study, I intend to analyze the following zombie films which were released in the years following 9/11: 28 Days Later (2002), Resident Evil (2002), Resident Evil: Apocalypse (2004), Dawn of the Dead (2004), and George A. Romero's Land of the Dead (2005). I seek to prove that the popularity of post-9/11 zombie films is due in part to the effect of 9/11 on the American
psyche, that these films include metaphors and themes that evoke post-9/11 concerns, and that they offer their audiences a perspective on the times and a message for the future.

1.6 NOTABLE EXCLUSIONS FROM MY ANALYSIS

Certain mainstream post-9/11 zombie films, namely *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Undead* (2003), are excluded from this study. Despite the cult popularity of these films with fans of the genre, I choose to omit them because both films are foreign and comedic. The British film *28 Days Later* is included in this study primarily because it sparked a resurgence in the genre and imbued it with fresh conventions. *Shaun of the Dead*, however, albeit reverent of the genre and its history, dwells less on the zombies and more on the comic interpersonal conflicts of its frightened protagonists. If any metaphoric resonance is conveyed it is that the monotonous lives of contemporary English wage-slaves have transformed them into living zombies. *Undead* is a splatter-film with exaggerated violence, physically impossible martial arts, and an abundance of gore. While not explicitly proclaiming to be a comedy, *Undead* does not take itself seriously enough to merit critical analysis alongside the films of this examination.

Both of these films are valid as works of cinema but, for the reasons listed above, they do not meet the qualifications of this study. The failed *House of the Dead* (2003), although American, was “an effort about dumb kids on a haunted island populated by zombies – that succeeded in being even less interesting to watch than the shoot-'em-up arcade game it was based on.” This clumsy film attempted to cash in on the popularity of the genre at the expense of quality and social reflection. *House of the*
Dead's absence of depth and lack of metaphoric imagery prevents it from being a worthwhile inclusion in this study. For similar reasons I choose to exclude the 2005 remake of John Carpenter's ghost/pseudo-zombie film The Fog from my investigation. The post-9/11 zombie films selected for my analysis possess the qualities of popularity and profundity (in that they intend to convey a message, not simply paint the screen with gore).

1.7 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The de-legitimization of the genre of zombie films, both in the academic community and in public sentiment, creates a challenging vacuum in the scholarly consideration of the subject. The majority of academic thought in the area has been dedicated to Night of the Living Dead (1968), Dawn of the Dead (1978), or White Zombie (1932). The fact that I choose to analyze films of this genre that have emerged within the past four years complicates the process. Despite these hindrances, a precedent for the scholarly analysis of horror cinema does exist. Oftentimes pertinent insights into zombie films are hidden in studies of larger subjects. It is from these broader works that I have endeavored to gather sections of relevant scholarship on the subgenre of zombie films. I have, of course, also mined scholarly works that focus entirely on the subject of the living dead.

Robin Wood's Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan analyzes zombies and their relation to normality, the American family, and commercialism. Wood makes a case for the metaphoric interpretation of Night's zombies as a representation of the collapsing American family unit. Further supporting the notion of zombies as a
metaphor for America is Wood’s assertion that *Dawn’s* undead represent the nation’s droves of mindless consumers. Gregory A. Waller’s *The Living and the Undead* explores parallels between the cinematic zombie and the phenomenon of human mobs. Waller’s book also prompts deeper consideration from its reader of the zombie as a metaphor for the Other. Steven Shaviro’s *The Cinematic Body* probes the existential qualities of the zombie and situates the zombie genre alongside pornography as a type of arousal cinema. All of these perspectives, while not implicitly about the specific zombie films of my study, are helpful to my analysis.

Supplementing these analytical works are the compendia and histories of zombie films. Peter Dendle’s *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* provides an excellent summary of both relevant and obscure works of zombie cinema from 1932’s *White Zombie* to the zombie films of 1998. Dendle also presents an illustrative synopsis of the various “eras” of zombie cinema. Jamie Russell’s *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* combines scholarly analysis with informative cataloguing. Russell’s book is especially relevant to my research because it is one of the few zombie texts contemporaneous enough to deal with all of the films in my study.

Despite their broader focus, certain generalist works on horror offer useful perspectives. David J. Skal’s *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, for example, touches on the cinematic use of monsters as metaphors for social anxiety. Skal confirms this precedent in his discussion of the horror films of the 1950’s. Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* offers theories on the human motivation for viewing horror. Relevant to my own study is Carroll’s notion that the examination of the repulsive unknown excites audiences. *Dreadful Pleasures:*
An Anatomy of Modern Horror by James B. Twitchell gives an overview of the historical development of horror and further delves into the idea of the monster as representative for the socially forbidden. My study will synthesize the metaphorical potential of zombie films mentioned by these works with the new concerns and metaphors that 9/11 has unleashed.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY

It is crucial in this sort of analysis to clearly define one's terminology. For the purposes of this study, post-9/11 refers to the five-year period after September 2001, but also to the state of reactionary feelings brought about by the attacks. Post-9/11 America, therefore, is both a location within an historical period and a psychologically traumatized collection of people. Sentiment will be used in conjunction with post-9/11 to describe the myriad of feelings and concerns that have surfaced in response to 9/11 and America's military actions thereafter. Included in the post-9/11 American sentiment are feelings of patriotism, vengefulness, paranoia, xenophobia, the fear of a terrorist Other, distrust of the government, fear of a cataclysmic event, the consideration of group unity, and a heightened sensitivity towards Muslims. Not all post-9/11 Americans experience every one of these emotions and concerns, however, the list does include several key anxieties and perceptions resulting from the 9/11 attacks. Anxiety will be the term designated to describe the unpleasant aspects of the larger post-9/11 sentiment.
Metaphor in my study refers to the presentation of a concept via a vehicle. Most of the metaphors in the films of my analysis are iconic and use zombies or the chaos that they cause as the vehicle for a statement about America's current sociopolitical situation. One may argue that, "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar," and that, as my metaphoric interpretations are subjective, they are invalid. From a scientific standpoint, this opinion is correct. In-depth interpretation of art, however, defies objective analysis, regardless of its allegedly impartial trappings. I hope, through this study, to expand the scholarly community's body of knowledge about zombie cinema and broaden their perceptions on the social resonance of such films.
1 Famous examples include George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit,” and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.

2 *America* hereafter refers to the United States of America unless otherwise noted. US will be used only in the context of quotation from another source.


5 9/11 refers to the events of September 11, 2001. Specifically, the term refers to the terrorist attacks upon the World Trade Center Complex, the Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93.

6 Also known as “Operation Enduring Freedom.”

7 President Bush’s demands to the Taliban were: “Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al-Qaeda who hide in your land. Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.” President George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” 20 Sept. 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.


18 Particularly America's unsuccessful involvement in the Vietnam War.

19 Written by Bob Dylan in 1964.

20 Written by P.F. Sloan in 1965.

21 Contemporary punk band NOFX, who wrote the song "Murder the Government," released War on Errorism in 2003, which includes the songs "The Idiots are Taking Over" and "I Hate Hate Haters."

22 "In the weeks following September 11 the [entertainment] industry exhibited (whether for sincere or cynical reasons) a new will toward 'tastefulness' as potentially trauma inducing films like Warner's Collateral Damage were pulled from release... In the wake of 9/11 stars had to perform the role of 'love it or leave it' citizen to remain popular (a lesson that Bill Maher learned with a vengeance when his TV show Politically Incorrect was canceled)." Lynn Spigel, "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11," American Quarterly 56.2 (June 2004): 235-270.


24 "Trivia for 'Sex and the City,'" Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0159296/trivia>.

25 Additionally, "After the terrorists attack on the USA... Sony recalled teaser posters which showed a close-up of Spiderman's face with the New York skyline (including, prominently, the World Trade Center towers) reflected in his eyes." <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0145487/trivia>, 30 Apr. 2006.


27 One could argue that due to the increase in anti-Islamic bigotry this sense of patriotic togetherness excludes Muslim Americans. Al-Qaeda's status as an extremist Muslim group, and the fact that all of the 9/11 hijackers were Muslims, has fostered a negative perception of the adherents of the Islamic faith. This rekindled bigotry is addressed by President Bush in a speech made on September 17, 2001, stating that, "America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country... Muslims are doctors, lawyers, law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads. And they need to be treated with respect. In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect." George W. Bush, "Islam is Peace," 17 Sept. 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010917-11.html>.


29 The only flight among the three hijacked on 9/11 that was able to thwart its hijackers via a violent uprising of the passengers.

“Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941.”

The Green Goblin is the name of the film’s villain.


Director Peter Jackson remarks that originally, Sam had no profound speech. “But when we came to cutting it [the film], we wanted to create a much more emotional ending and so all of what you’re hearing, Sam say [in his speech] is something that we had him go into a recording studio and record for us. It was never originally shot. It exists here only as voice-over.”


The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers Special Extended Edition, DVD.

George W. Bush’s words used to describe al-Qaeda’s terrorist attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon in his address to the nation. September 11, 2001.

“April 25 [2006]: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi praised insurgents for surviving a “crusader” war in a video that surfaced on the Internet on Tuesday [April 18, 2006].”


Sean Astin, audio commentary on The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers Special Extended Edition, DVD.
At present, a popular theory is that the Bush administration sought war with the Middle East to gain control of oil prices. Another notion is that George W. Bush wanted to finish the war with Iraq that his father President George Bush Sr. began. In opposition to those theories is the possibility that the war on Iraq is meant to be a warning to all nations harboring or supporting terrorists, and that Iraq was the chosen target due to Saddam Hussein's totalitarian rule.


"In the new documentary *How To Eat Your Watermelon in White Company (and Enjoy It)*, Melvin Van Peebles blasts Kong for its racism—whether for its depiction of savage native rituals or its perceived likening of Kong to a ravening black beast lustful after white women, he doesn't say (conceivably both)." Robert Cashill, "All Things Kong-sidered," *Cineaste* 31.2, (Spring 2006): 39-43.

*Dracula*, the Werewolf, and the Frankenstein monster.

As is the case in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *White Zombie* (1932).

This spelling is intended to differentiate the actual faith from the stereotyped western appropriation (voodoo).

*A Voodoo priest. According to Laetmee Hurbon's Voodoo: Search for the Spirit: "The most dreaded form of sorcery is the practice of creating zombies. Already "dead" and buried, the zombie is reawakened to a semiconscious life to serve as a slave. ... According to popular belief, the making of a zombie depends on the capture of one of the individual's spirits. In that state, the zombie is aware of everything happening but does not have available the means to react; he is mentally directed by the voodoo who bewitched him. It sometimes happens, it is said, that zombies regain consciousness and voluntarily return to their graves."


*Shaun of the Dead* is a British film and *Undead* is from Australia.

*Undead* depicts scenes in which the elderly are incinerated by meteorites, a rural shut-in engages in inexplicable feats of acrobatic martial arts, and that same man first fights with leaping zombie fish. This film is a modern B horror movie.


Specifically, the sexually forbidden.

This thesis was completed in May of 2006. I cannot with any certainty say that America will remain militarily active or psychologically scarred in the years following this study.

The average Muslim-American is unlikely to feel sensitivity in the form of fear or suspicion of Muslims as, perhaps, many non-Muslim Americans now do, however, with the rise of anti-Islamic and anti-Middle Eastern bigotry, a new sense of caution must certainly pervade America's Islamic communities.

To paraphrase Sigmund Freud.
CHAPTER 2

28 DAYS LATER

2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE FILM

Danny Boyle’s eighth film, 28 Days Later, released on November 1, 2002,\(^1\) heralded a new period of popularity in zombie filmmaking. A newcomer to the genre, Boyle made his reputation as a director with Trainspotting (1996) and The Beach (2000). The zombie film, traditionally championed by filmmakers of the United States and Italy, received an innovative retelling by this British director. Boyle’s 28 Days Later rekindled America’s interest in zombie invasion scenarios and helped Americans explore their post-9/11 anxieties. Additionally, Boyle’s film stimulated and identified an audience foundation for the other films of this study.

28 Days Later opens in a Cambridge laboratory where chimpanzees are being inoculated with the synthetic disease, “Rage.” This virus (according to Boyle in his commentary on the DVD version of the film) unlocks insatiable, psychotic rage in its host organism. Militant animal rights activists infiltrate the lab and confront a scientist who warns them of the virus’ lethality. True to the genre, the activists release an infected ape that immediately attacks them, spreading the psychosis-inducing virus to the humans, who proceed to murder each other.
The film breaks with genre tradition as it follows newly awakened coma patient, Jim, in his exploration of the silent, destroyed London for eight minutes of screen time. Jim discovers a church filled with corpses and is attacked by a group of infected Londoners. Survivors Mark and Selena, whose humanity is initially obscured by gas masks, rescue Jim. Their masked image is reminiscent of George A. Romero’s *The Crazies* (1973), the premise of which *28 Days Later* replicates. The survivors reconnoiter in a subway station and update Jim on the history of the Rage epidemic.

Deciding to seek out Jim’s parents, the trio journey to his familial home. Jim discovers that his parents opted to commit suicide rather than face England’s cataclysmic situation. After nightfall Jim is attacked by the infected neighbors, Mark is scratched, and Selena lops off Mark’s infected arm. Jim and Selena return to London.

The duo discovers a Christmas light beacon in an apartment tower and race ahead of their pursuers to reach it. They encounter Frank, who, before revealing his smiling face and warm demeanor, brutally dispatches the Infected and commands that Jim and Selena enter his home. There the two are introduced to Frank and his teenage daughter Hannah, who toast their good fortune with crème de menthe. Incidentally, this scene was filmed on September 11, 2001. “It was very bizarre doing a scene with green crème de menthe and salutations on the day when the world was kind of turning around really. But you just kind of carry on.” Jim and Selena discuss survival and she reveals her self-centered, Darwinian views.

The next day, the group decides to take Frank’s cab to a military outpost, which has been broadcasting that it possesses “the answer to infection.” *En route*, the cab drives over the wreckage of a traffic-jammed tunnel and blows a tire. The companions
frantically work to change the tire as the Infected clamor towards them. After a narrow escape, the film gives a nod to Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* with a post-apocalyptic shopping-spree montage.

The company camps for the night by some fifteenth century ruins, communes with nature and each other, then proceeds by the M1 motorway to the smoldering remains of Manchester. They stop to siphon gas and Jim has an encounter with an infected child. Jim kills the child and the company uneasily presses on.

Once in Manchester, they find the military blockade deserted, Frank loses his temper with Selena and then is accidentally infected by a blood droplet shed from a crow-eaten corpse. Frank attempts to distance himself from Hannah and Jim prepares to bludgeon Frank but, before that happens, hidden soldiers reveal themselves by gunning down the infected Frank. The soldiers drive the survivors back to their mansion-turned-compound.

Major Henry West, the leader of the band of uncouth soldiers, introduces himself to Jim and company. Jim and Selena have a romantic moment while the shocked Hannah sleeps. Major West recapitulates his band's isolated, self-sufficient existence to Jim. West introduces Jim to Mailer, a shackled infected soldier who is kept for observation and scientific investigation. Soon after, the soldiers hold a dinner party for their new guests, which is cut short by an assault on their compound. Excited by the slaying of his mindless adversaries, the lascivious Corporal Mitchell manhandles Selena then fights with Jim. Major West takes Jim aside and explains that the radio broadcast was set in place solely to acquire women for his soldiers. Jim and his companions
attempt to flee their captors, but are accosted and caught up in a standoff. Jim and the sympathetic Sergeant Farrell are separated from the group to await punitive execution.

Corporal Mitchell and his comic partner, Private Jones, march their prisoners to a pile of bodies in the woods. Sergeant Farrell is shot and Jim escapes over a wall. Jim notices a jet in the sky and realizes that the rest of the world has survived the Rage epidemic. Back at the compound, the women are forced to don evening gowns and Selena persuades Hannah to take Valium so that her inevitable rape will be less painful. This crisis is averted when Jim manually activates the blockade alarm, alerting the base to his survival and the Infected to the presence of fresh victims.

Major West and a soldier investigate the blockade and are assaulted by the Infected. Jim sabotages their jeep and murders West's partner. The Major flees back to the mansion. A montage ensues in which Jim liberates Mailer, impales Private Jones, evades the Infected while the soldiers are destroyed, and finally murders Corporal Mitchell by gouging out his eyes. Selena and Hannah reunite with Jim after realizing that his violence was not the symptom of infection.

As the trio flees to their getaway car, Major West reveals himself and shoots Jim. Hannah backs the car towards Mailer, who rips the terrified Major out of the vehicle and assaults him. The heroes crash into the compound's locked front gate and the film freezes in a tableau.

The original ending screened for audiences depicted a staccato montage of Jim's resuscitation followed by the title "28 days later..." Jim then awoke to find himself safe in a rural cottage. A jet scans the countryside as two of the Infected starve.
to death below. Selena and Hannah greet Jim, then the group rushes to erect a huge
cloth signal that reads “hello.” The plane swoops over them and an air of hope
completes the film.

2.2 NEW CONVENTIONS

28 Days Later aroused audience interest in zombie films by not only revisiting
some of the genre’s traditional conventions but by introducing new conventions in both
the visual treatment and the rules of behavior for zombies. One could argue that, as all
of the monsters in this film are living people, 28 Days Later is not a zombie film at all.
This assertion is technically correct, but it does not consider the plethora of similarities
between 28 Days Later and prior zombie cinema, nor does it take into account the
impact that 28 Days Later has had on subsequent zombie films.

The first, and most initially obvious, contribution that Boyle has made to the
body of zombie lore is the creation of the fast Infected. Traditionally, zombies are
portrayed as the easily evadable, slow, shuffling corpses made popular by the films of
George A. Romero. Cinematic deviations such as the sporadically jogging zombies of
Dan O’Bannon’s spoof Return of the Living Dead (1985) offer an alternative, but seem
to spring from the low budget films’ lack of attention to detail rather than from a
deliberate aesthetic choice. 28 Days Later, however, clearly and deliberately presents
its audience with a horde of monsters who sprint towards their prey. The speed of the
Infected is emphasized by the physicality of the actors that embody them. The Infected
rarely stop running in this film, and when they do their motionlessness seems
uncharacteristic. The speed is further emphasized by fast cuts and driving music.
In addition to running whenever possible, the Infected rapidly flail their arms and scan their world with staccato head jerks. Vocally, the actors portraying the Infected tend to emit quick, urgent gasps and gargles of sound. Such utterances are unique in a genre whose antagonists typically communicate through groaning, rasping, or (in the case of O'Bannon's film) crying "Brains! Brains!"

The slow zombie has become a sort of laughable movie monster stereotype, the kind seen in cartoon form on children's novelty Halloween treat bags. Boyle's monsters, however, defy traditional parody with their novel characteristics. They "cut to the chase" and, in so doing, offer little time for the philosophical and theological reflection that Romero's cloistered protagonists often experience. Boyle sacrifices anticipation for speed and, thereby, offers his audience bursts of terror rather than creeping horror.

A variety of interpretations may be drawn from this contribution to the genre. The first is that, as technology develops, death becomes swifter and less avoidable. Today satellites transmit data to soldiers who launch smart missiles, urban criminals spray their targets with automatic weapons, and terrorists use the force of jet engines to kill hundreds in the blink of an eye. In an attempt to preserve the lives of American soldiers, our country's warfare grows more impersonal and ranged with each subsequent conflict. As the speed of technology advances, so too does the magnitude of man-made disaster. Boyle's representation of rapidly approaching death stands apart from Romero's slow-but-steady danger, and the cinematic exploration of swift death may have touched a chord in post-9/11 American audiences.
Metaphoric interpretations aside, the speed of the Infected may be a symptom of the cinematic audiences' declining attention spans. The modern American television viewer is inundated daily with a rapid-fire sequences of images and sounds. The advent of the remote control allows television's audience to "channel surf" through a plethora of options in search of the desired stimulation. This luxury is not available to the cinematic audience, and that powerlessness is an implied component of the cinematic experience. The cinematic audience is confined to their seats and expected to quietly remain so for the duration of the film. A film's duty to rivet its audience is, therefore, most easily achieved nowadays by employing the exciting and fast-paced cinematography to which the modern television watching audience is accustomed. Romero, a product of an age before sound bites and "factoids," says, "I think they're much more frightening if they [zombies] just sort of lumber at you. I grew up on Frankenstein's monster and 'The Mummy,' so I don't need a fast moving monster." 

28 Days Later is unique in that it is one of the first major motion pictures filmed entirely on digital videotape (DV). Boyle reflects that the use of DV is particularly relevant to Londoners because both DV and London's ubiquitous security camera footage have "a grittiness about it [them] that's magnificent." This grittiness transcends nationality, however, and aids in the depiction of an unflattering and unpleasant reality. Assisting the creation of surrealistic undertones was DV's compatibility with digital effects programs. "We used the digital effects more to try and create an atmosphere [than for any other purpose]. Particularly the use of colors in the film."
Boyle’s DV usage allowed him to create a special effect for the depiction of the
Infected’s movement that influenced his competitors in their subsequent zombie films.

We used the Cannon XL-1 and it has this frame setting which suggests that it
shoots not just at 24 frames per second, but it’ll also shoot at 48, up to ... 1600
frames a second, though it actually isn’t doing that. ... it isn’t actually slowing
the film down when you look back at it, but it’s capturing the images in a more
obviously static way. And when you run it, the pace is slightly kind of jerky, or
is slightly not quite true in the way that you watch films in the cinema. But we
used the technique whenever anybody was infected.10

Boyle’s frame rate alteration results in the illusion that the Infected move in an
unnaturally jarring and staccato fashion. This digital effect serves to both disquiet the
audience and distinguish those who are infected by Rage from those who are not.

Similar effects are used in the zombie attacks of Zack Snyder’s Dawn of the Dead and
Paul W.S. Anderson’s Resident Evil: Apocalypse.

2.3 METAPHORS: AL-QAEDA, ISOLATION, AND THE MILITARY

Still in production during the attacks on September 11, 2001, 28 Days Later
anticipated America’s growing fear and fascination with the collapse of civilization. Its
opening images are flashes of violent television news footage, intended to look like the
coverage of the unrest in Sierra Leone in the late 1990’s. Repeated twice in these
flashes of violence is the image of a turbaned man beating a hanging body in a public
square. While this image may have possessed certain intimations to Americans before
9/11, it certainly had new connotations afterward. The turban, an image already
juxtaposed in American television news with fundamentalist Muslim terrorists, opens
this film with a level of contextual interpretation when viewed by a post-9/11 American.
The figurehead and self-proclaimed mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Osama Bin Laden,
wears a turban in his videotaped warnings to America. And while the turbans themselves are benign ornaments of religious faith, their proximity to al-Qaeda leaves many non-Muslim Americans suspicious of their wearers. Boyle's news footage montage combines the symbolically charged icon of the turban with brutal actions. I propose that regardless of Boyle's initial intent, this portion of the film encouraged American audiences to associate the Muslim world with violence. Zombie films often blame the evils of society for the plague of the undead, and one of the first images of Man's evil that the film's captive ape and captive audience are forced to watch is that of Muslim aggression.

The inciting incident of 28 Days Later is the accidental release of the Rage virus at the hands of militant animal rights activists. These characters disable a laboratory security camera, threaten a scientist, and rip a security phone from the wall. Their agenda is to liberate the chimpanzees on which the scientists have experimented. The scientist pleads, "to cure, you must first understand," but this reasoning does not coincide with the ethical beliefs of the interlopers. Here in the first five minutes of the film the audience witnesses a struggle between an institution (science) that exploits its weakest participants and an extremist faction that seeks to broadcast its message through force. Considered through the post-9/11 lens, this scene parallels the conflict between the United States and al-Qaeda. The scientist's inability to justify the unfairness of his practices leads to the unleashing of a destructive force that consumes representatives from both philosophical camps. Boyle could have foreseen neither the 9/11 attacks nor America's retaliation on Afghanistan, but his opening sequence certainly lends itself to metaphorical interpretation after the fact.
One of the themes at the forefront of 28 Days Later is that of isolation. Jim spends the first eight minutes of the film searching the barren London, hollering “hello?” In spite of the possibility that this scene may be an homage to a similar scene in the beginning of Romero’s Day of the Dead, it still powerfully conveys a feeling of apprehension and isolation. This theme is strengthened by Hannah who, when confronted with the notion that she and her middle-aged father would hinder the survival of the group, asserts, “you need us as just the same as we need you.” En route to Manchester, Jim has a nightmare that his group has abandoned him. Isolation is touched on again when Farrell muses that the island of England must have been quarantined while the surrounding world, “continues on as fucking normal.”

Perhaps as screenwriter Alex Garland wrote 28 Days Later he was more concerned with England’s contemporaneous “mad cow disease” outbreak than terrorism, but after the film’s 2002 release, the viral threat on the minds of America and its allies had shifted to Anthrax. The issue of isolation and quarantine took root among the growing list of American concerns, but they were newly coupled with the notion that such phenomena would result from a terrorist attack. Talk of “dirty bombs” and mail laced with Anthrax spurred Americans to wonder whether the government would respond to such attacks with citywide quarantines and martial law. To date, that question remains thankfully unanswered.

For the isolated protagonist Jim, every instance of encountering a new group of characters is accompanied by fear. Jim’s first contact after waking from his coma is with an infected priest who tries to kill him. This meeting shocks Jim and teaches him that he cannot trust appearances previously associated with safety. Jim’s next meeting
is a fast-paced rescue by Mark and Selena, who terrify him with their screaming and gas
masked visages. Jim’s search for the comforting presence of his parents leads him to
their corpses and an assault on his familial home by the Infected. Frank’s introduction
obscures his friendly demeanor with his riot gear and savage beating of the Infected.
Major West’s soldiers reveal themselves to Jim (after machine-gunning Frank) clad in
gas masks and camouflage. Finally, the Major himself appears clean-cut and
dependable, and yet he seeks to use
Selena and Hannah as sex slaves. *28 Days Later* places Jim and a world in which his
allies appear monstrous and his foes are comprised of former friends, neighbors, and
countrymen.13

Jim’s predicament presages the current American sentiment. The 9/11 attacks
were conducted by members of al-Qaeda, a terrorist group whose members do not make
their allegiance known through the wearing of a uniform. The 9/11 hijackers were all
Muslim men of Middle-Eastern descent, and these qualities have indeed been associated
with danger in contemporary America,14 however, terrorists are not restricted to certain
ethnicities, cultures, or economic situations. Richard Reid’s British citizenship, for
example, did not prevent him from an attempted suicide bombing on American Airlines
flight 63 on December 22, 2001. Terrorist attackers in the United States are, therefore,
visually unidentifiable until they reveal themselves through action. One’s neighbors,
co-workers, or children could be in collusion with terrorists. Such possibilities may
yield a sense of fear and suspicion in America’s citizenry, which Boyle explores
through Jim’s journey.
28 Days Later depicts the military in a particularly negative light. The soldiers' first action in the film is the execution of the friendliest member of Jim's group. Further antagonistic qualities mount when Selena glimpses the soldiers taunting their most vulnerable comrade by circling him with Frank's taxi. Only Sergeant Farrell stands apart as a reflective thinker and a defender of Jim's group. His philosophical musings and ethical actions, however, are met with punishment and ultimately death at the hands of his peers.

In opposition to Farrell is Corporal Mitchell, the figurehead of Man's barbarism. Mitchell's bullying, coarseness, and impenitent lecherousness is echoed by his fellow soldiers, creating the impression that Jim's assimilation into West's company would be more dangerous than his isolation in the world of the infected. Indeed, the soldiers present the first real view of post-outbreak society, and that society is fraught with cruelty.

Major West is an enabler of injustice in the name of the greater good. He seems to have no personal inclination to rape his female captives, but he willingly orders that they be dressed up in gowns for the visual stimulation of his soldiers. Likewise, West's decision to cease dissent by sending Jim off to execution is mixed with regret. In Major West we see a leader who recognizes the evil that he does, but rationalizes his actions as necessary steps towards a peaceful future.

West reveals his mendacity when he explains that "the answer to infection" promised in his radio broadcast is simply civilization. The civilization that West attempts to cultivate, however, reveals itself as particularly barbaric in its glorification of violence and its mandatory prostitution of women. West's internment of Mailer in
the name of science and his attempt to maintain civility through a dinner party are fruitless acts of pretense. These trappings of normality are ultimately unable to create a peaceful community in West’s compound.

The military community of 28 Days Later shares significant interpretative qualities with the armed forces of post-9/11 America. The bully-as-peacekeeper motif of Corporal Mitchell may have been realized in the alleged humiliations of Guantánamo Bay’s detainees. In his address to the nation on September 11, 2001, President Bush (our Major West) said, “Today, our nation saw evil -- the very worst of human nature -- and we responded with the best of America.” If President Bush’s definition of evil includes the destruction of civilians, then the bombings of Afghanistan which started on October 7, 2001, or the bombings of Iraq beginning on March 19, 2003, would have been acts of evil in the name of a greater good. Perhaps the evil that Bush referred to was the desire of al-Qaeda to strike fear into their enemies. One could argue that America’s retaliation on Afghanistan, while primarily intended to oust the Taliban, was designed to send a threatening message to all nations sympathetic to al-Qaeda’s cause. Indeed, “Shock and Awe,” (the term used to describe recent military strategy) are words that also describe America’s emotional response to the attacks on 9/11. In today’s world, just as in 28 Days Later, non-militant inhabitants suffer the dangers of living under the protection of a warring system.

The film’s finale presents the audience with a newly capable warrior-Jim murdering his friends’ captors. This bloodied, sprinting Jim is filmed with the Cannon XL-1’s frame rate effect because Boyle “wanted to give the impression, to give the sense that he was infected and indeed he is infected with rage, if you like, with a kind of
vengeance." Jim’s guerrilla assault includes the tactics of misdirection and the intentional induction of terror. This creates a problematic dichotomy for post-9/11 audiences because Jim is both the Byronic hero returning to save and avenge his friends and the terrorist furthering the cause of the Infected. What is an audience to make of their protagonist becoming a terrorist? To a certain extent, pre-9/11 Americans had valorized guerilla freedom fighters since the days of the American Revolution’s Minutemen. Boyle’s inclusion of the Infected camera effect also helps justify Jim’s actions. The Rage or evil dwells within all of Mankind, but, when he acquiesces to such passions, man becomes a monster.

The creators of 28 Days Later did not intend for their film to tap specifically into the emotions and imaginations of post-9/11 Americans. The success of Boyle’s film in America may have been an arbitrary quirk of history. Be that as it may, the aforementioned characteristics of the film made it especially relevant to a nation dealing with its newfound vulnerability. 28 Days Later reacquainted Americans with the impenetrable motives, the ubiquitous presence, and the civilization ending power of the zombie at just the right time in history.
1 In the UK, the first American release was January 2003 at the Sundance Film Festival, followed by May 2, 2002, at the Tribeca Film Festival, and finally on June 27, 2003 nationwide.


3 Danny Boyle, DVD commentary on 28 Days Later.

4 On July 25, 2003 Fox Searchlight began screening an alternative ending to the film in which Selena and Hannah’s attempt to revive Jim was unsuccessful. This ending was preceded by final credits and the message “What if...” See Internet Movie Database <http://www.imdb.com/news/sh/2003-07-16#film3>.

5 E.g. the transmission of the zombie sickness through bites, montages which illustrate ravaged cityscapes, a beloved member of the survivors becoming infected, and defence of a fortification against a zombie siege.


7 With the exception of the 24mm film footage shot from a jet’s perspective in the picture’s denouement. According to Boyle’s audio commentary on the film’s DVD, the employment of film was deliberately intended to establish a sense of normality.


10 Danny Boyle, “Pure Rage”.


12 Also known as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).

13 A virus feared (at the time) as one of the terrorists’ weapons.

14 After the Infected’s attack on Jim’s home, he identifies one of the assailants as “Mr. Bridges,” a neighbor.

15 While this assertion is a sweeping generalization, the new surge of racism towards Middle Easterners and bigotry towards Muslims in America is undeniable. Refer to the homicide of Balbir Singh Sodhi an Arizonaan Sikh murdered by Frank Silva Roque who claimed that his vigilantism was merely the act of a patriot. See Roopali Mukherjee, “Between Enemies and Traitors,” Media Representations of September 11, Steven Chernak ed. (Westport: Praeger, 2003): 29-46.


CHAPTER 3
THE Resident Evil films

3.1 CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE FILMS

The popularity of 28 Days Later and the videogame series Resident Evil set the stage for director-producer-screenwriter Paul W.S. Anderson’s zombie/action films, Resident Evil (2002) and Resident Evil: Apocalypse (2004).\(^1\) Targeted towards an audience primarily comprised of teenage American males, these films expand upon and pay homage to the fantasy realm of their videogame source material. Beginning with the unsuccessful 1993 feature Super Mario Brothers, American videogame-based movies\(^2\) have tended to earn a reputation for being gimmicky and hackneyed action films. Despite their videogame origins, however, the RE films are not without merit in that they add to their depiction of gore and gunplay a glimpse of America’s contemporaneous social anxieties. While 28 Days Later became a post-9/11 zombie film by the forces of circumstance, the RE films were produced with the knowledge of their influence upon and response to post-9/11 America.

Resident Evil is an action/horror film set in an underground research facility known as the Hive. The ubiquitous and malevolent Umbrella Corporation uses the Hive to create the secret bio-chemical weapons that bankroll the company. The inciting
incident of the film occurs when a saboteur deliberately exposes the workers of the Hive to the T-virus, a man-made germ that reanimates deceased life forms into flesh-eating zombies. The Hive's integrated and computerized defense system, fashioned like HAL from Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey, takes measures to quarantine the disease by drowning, dropping, or gassing the Hive's inhabitants to death. The film's protagonist, Alice, awakes to find herself in a state of gas-induced amnesia in an Umbrella-owned aboveground mansion that conceals the Hive's secret entrance. Soon after, Alice is forced to enter the Hive by a team of Umbrella's unwitting commandos who try to shut down the Hive's defense system as part of a search and rescue operation. Matt Addison and Spence Parks, an environmentalist and the saboteur (respectively), join Alice along the way. The Red Queen (the holographic representation of the Hive's defense system) kills most of the rescue team and confronts the survivors with the challenge of escaping the Hive's newly created legion of zombies and mutants. Once they have battled zombie employees, undead Dobermans, and a genetically engineered monster known to RE videogame fans as the Licker, Alice and Matt escape the Hive only to be captured by Umbrella's scientists. The film concludes with Alice waking up in Umbrella's aboveground laboratory, escaping, and discovering herself entrenched in Raccoon City, which has been destroyed by zombies.

RE's 2004 sequel follows Alice through the infested city on a rescue mission for Angela Ashford, the daughter of the T-virus' creator. Along the way, Alice meets videogame characters Jill Valentine and Carlos Olivera, as well as additional comrades who were not part of the videogame series. In addition to the zombies, Lickers, and undead Dobermans, the group faces the videogame super-villain known as the Nemesis.
Throughout the film, Alice explores the physically enhancing side effects of Umbrella’s experimentation on her. When pitted against the Nemesis, she discovers his identity as the former Matt Addison and realizes that they are both victims of Umbrella’s coercion. The heroes narrowly escape the city via helicopter as Umbrella’s nuclear missile destroys all traces of the zombie outbreak. The helicopter crashes and a news coverage montage reveals that Umbrella covered up the entire incident. Once again, Alice wakes up in an Umbrella laboratory. She fights her way out of the compound using her newfound telekinesis and is rescued by Valentine and company. The film concludes with a Terminator-like point of view shot through the newly installed computerized vision of Umbrella’s “Project Alice.”

3.2 AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS: SEX AND VIOLENCE

The formulaic nature of Anderson’s films offers insight into the expectations and appetites of their audiences. It is no coincidence that the protagonist of RE, for example, is a woman. Although the videogame series’ hero, Jill Valentine, did not make her cinematic appearance until REA, Anderson chose to eschew the option of writing a male protagonist for RE. Instead, he created a new femme fatale character and cast model/actress Mila Jovovich in the role. It is tempting to conclude that the popularization of casting women as cinematic action heroes is a step towards gender equality in America. This theory is hindered, however, by modern action films’ frequent exploitation of the female form and the cinematic emphasis on the parallel between violence and sexual excitement. In Jill Valentine’s first minutes onscreen, she storms through a police station in a miniskirt and a tube top shooting zombies with
impunity. Anderson states that even though he could not find a way to justify a policewoman being so impractically attired, the film included Valentine's costume as an homage to her outfit in the videogame. RE's Alice finds herself mostly naked and disoriented in the introduction of RE and in the both films' conclusions. These instances of nudity are not couched in sexual circumstances, but rather they give the viewer a voyeuristic glimpse of Jovovich's body. The nudity is gratuitous but not challenging on an adult level: perfectly suited for an audience of teenage boys.

Other audience expectations become evident through observation of the films' depiction of violence. RE portrays violence from a matter-of-fact perspective that suggests that it is justifiably used when communication breaks down. This insinuation is evident in RE when the commando J.D. fails to verbally cease a zombie's advance. After two warning shots are fired into the zombie's leg and arm, J.D.'s comrade Rain sends the monster across the room with machinegun fire. This same idea is emphasized in a scene in which the Red Queen tries to convince Alice to kill the infected Rain. This high-tension negotiation is ended with Alice smashing a fire axe through a computer panel. Similarly, REA presents violence with an air of cocky professionalism. The heroes of REA perform feats of acrobatics, martial arts, and unbelievable marksmanship to affect a sense of awe from viewers that is not present in RE. This film continues to depict violence as a necessary measure to achieving one's goals.

Life is cheap in the world of RE. Unsuspecting Hive workers are killed en mass by the Red Queen, commandos are unceremoniously mutilated by a laser beam, and even the commando Kaplan, whose will to survive leads him to a desperate fight with the zombies rather than suicide, is unexpectedly ripped out of the escape train by the
Licker. While such disregard for life is not unusual for either the genre of horror or action, it must not be overlooked in this study. The sanctity of life is far more present in 28 Days Later than in either of the RE films. Jim’s concern for the infected priest in the beginning of 28 Days Later, for example, is met with a frightening confrontation, whereas REA’s Terri Morales’ concern for a middle-school child is punished with death. This deficit of sentimentality could be the result of poor character development on Anderson’s part. Or perhaps Anderson’s depiction of the fragility of life and the unremarkable nature of death is simply an unavoidable convention of the action genre. Whatever the causes may be for the wanton presentation of death in the RE films, it is possible that their content satisfied a deeper need in their post-9/11 American audiences than the desire to view carnage for carnage’s sake.

3.3 THE TERRORIST AND CORPORATE OTHER

On 9/11, America witnessed a seemingly unprovoked terrorist attack on its civilians and its architectural symbols of power. Despite President Bush’s descriptions of these attacks as “cowardly” and “evil,” the fact of their success emphasized that destructive forces do exist that will not hesitate to murder Americans. It may be difficult for some Americans to accept the notion that certain individuals,7 whom they have never even met, are willing to murder them. This seemingly arbitrary dispensing of death is similar to RE’s zombies’ indiscriminate need to devour. The destructive action of one party triggering the deaths of an entire building’s occupants on 9/11 is also mirrored in the actions of RE’s saboteur, Spence. In REA, the audience is presented with an entire city quarantined and then obliterated by forces beyond its
control. This dramatizes the American fear that dirty bombs or bioterrorist attacks will render their communities isolated and at the mercy of martial law or the powers of the Department of Homeland Security. Considering the parallels between the events of the RE films and the anxieties of post-9/11 America, it is not unfeasible that the RE films allowed the nation to face the trauma of the 9/11 attacks through the distancing device of metaphor. A safe re-exposure to death and destruction through this film may have aided in the relief of its young-adult audience of the burden of post-9/11 anxiety. Indeed, an Aristotelian catharsis is achieved not through avoiding the fictive reproduction of incidents that arouse pity and fear, but by witnessing them.³

The RE films offer several embodiments of the evil Other. The most overt antagonistic Other included in these films are the zombies and monsters. Anderson embraced the conventions of Romero's zombie films by portraying his zombies as slow, mindless, disease-carrying cannibals. Like Romero's Dawn of the Dead, both RE films incorporate situations in which professional soldiers are infected and slowly lose their potency. As their transformation was the result of Spence's greed, the zombies of Anderson's films are both adversaries and victims. Their ranks are comprised of former colleagues and friends. Rain attempts to communicate with her undead rescue team members and even the Nemesis is given a moment of redemption in his defiance of his master. The monsters of RE represent a threat, but are not the most evil of the Others in Racoon City.

Spence Parks is RE's incarnation of terrorism. Admittedly, Park's infection of the Hive is not strictly terrorism in the sense of violence being used to send a message to one's opponents. Park's aims are not to promote his belief system, destabilize a
nation’s economy, or convey a symbolic message to Umbrella; his actions are simply sabotage motivated by greed. This being said, Parks’ actions are initially presented to the film’s audience as an inexplicable attack on the defenseless employees of the Hive. The images of elevators careening to their destruction and white-collared office workers expiring is similar enough to America’s memory of 9/11 that Parks’ actions are easily associated with terrorism. An audience of Americans, whose airlines and civil liberties were once misused by hijackers, can empathize with Alice, who shared a sexual relationship with Parks, the man who steers her towards destruction. The consequences of Parks’ sabotage ultimately defeat him, just as al-Qaeda’s wake-up call to America has rendered it the nation’s new primary target. This metaphorical interpretation may seem a bit lofty upon initial consideration, however, the very descriptors that President Bush used to describe terrorists can be applied to the character and actions of Spence Parks.² It is my contention that, on some level, this character’s story resonates within post-9/11 America.

Another significant antagonistic Other in the RE films is the Nemesis. This character from the videogame Resident Evil 3: Nemesis acts as a foil for the superpowered Alice. The Nemesis of REA, like Alice, is a biologically altered weapon trained and created by the Umbrella Corporation. Unlike Alice, however, the Nemesis is unable to exert his own will until the very end of the film. This lack of freedom makes the Nemesis a tragi-horrorific figure much like the child jihadis of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. While the videogame Nemesis is simply a relentless threat to Jill Valentine, REA’s interpretation makes him a tool and victim of a higher and more malevolent authority. This power dynamic mirrors the exploitation of the individuals
Osama Bin Laden drew from “Mosques, schools, and boarding houses [which] served as recruiting stations.” RE4’s Nemesis, once the anti-establishment environmentalist Matt Addison, becomes the walking antithesis of his former beliefs. Such a perversion of ideals is referred to in President Bush’s criticism of Islamic terrorists: “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don’t represent peace. They represent evil and war.”

The most important Other in the RE films and the most resonant in terms of the post-9/11 American sentiment is the Umbrella Corporation. Much like the Department of Homeland Security, this organization covertly exerts its influence over a population, regardless of their opinion. Although modeled after large American companies such as Microsoft or Proctor and Gamble, the role of Umbrella in the films is more of a governmental one. Umbrella commandos, for example, are sent into the secret Umbrella laboratories in RE. It is the officers of Umbrella, not the military or police, who quarantine Raccoon City in RE4. These scenarios seem unlikely in the commercial sector, but one can easily imagine them occurring under military jurisdiction.

While the Umbrella Corporation is a company that acts like a government, post-9/11 events have triggered national suspicions that America’s government is acting more like a profit-focused company. Vice President Dick Cheney has fallen under criticism for possible profiteering from the war in Iraq. Halliburton, the company of which Cheney was chief executive officer from 1995 until 2000, “was paid more than $2.5 billion under the sole source contract it secured to reconstruct Iraqi oil fields –
before the government decided to hold a competitive bid.”¹³ As Vice President Cheney still “continues to receive money from Halliburton ... [as] part of a deferred compensation contract that pays him for work he performed in 1999,”¹³ some members of the American public fear that his motives for the war are unethical. This being said, in that fall of 2002, a group of Pentagon advisers assessing the condition of Iraq’s oil fields saw the need for a plan to repair damage from the impending war. The effort had to be secret, because the government had not publicly committed itself to fighting, and it had to be done by trustworthy experts.¹⁴

Paul W.S. Anderson was not ignorant of such political controversies when writing the RE screenplays: “the idea of the ... corrupt corporation in league with maybe a slightly corrupt government as well is something that I think everyone’s a lot more familiar with now than they were a couple years ago.”¹⁵

3.4 THE MEDIA

REA’s representation of the news media is of interest in regards to 9/11. Camcorder in hand, reporter Terri Morales joins Valentine’s group on their journey through the perilous Raccoon City. Morales’ camcorder justifies the convention of Alice’s opening monologue, which we discover is delivered to the recording device partway through the film. When asked what she is holding, Morales replies, “My Emmy.” This compassionless attitude toward the crisis at hand allows Morales to be dispatched by zombies without a great deal of sympathetic uproar on the audience’s part. In addition, it is she, the reporter, who asserts the Umbrella will engineer a cover-up to conceal the zombie outbreak and the subsequent nuclear strike. Despite Morales’ insensitivity, she offers credibility to the premise that Umbrella could hide its mistakes
from the public. Her prophecy comes into fruition at the film’s end with the news montage that claims a power plant failure and a hoax promoted by Valentine and Olivera is to blame.

The news media in REA is depicted as either impotent in the face of danger, self-serving, or intentionally misinformative. These negative themes play on some Americans’ post-9/11 view of journalists and the state of television news after 9/11. On the morning of the 9/11 attacks, most Americans received their information from televised news coverage. This assisted the nation in informing its citizens, but the repeated, shocking footage may have also traumatized Americans.¹⁶ In the years following the attacks, the American media has been paradoxically labeled as both “liberal” and “right-wing.” This discrepancy may be due to post-9/11 America’s initial swell of patriotism and some of its citizens’ subsequent disenchantment with the administration. When “not once [in the first twelve hours of CNN’s news coverage of the 9/11 attacks] did anyone, source or journalist, suggest that an option other than supporting the president would exist,”¹⁷ it is not hard to imagine that a journalist disagreeing with the President could be considered un-American. That being said, the nation’s commitment to the President’s perpetual “war”¹⁸ has led many Americans to fear, suspect, or even loathe the current administration. Bumper stickers reading “Bush lied” have increasingly appeared on Americans’ automobiles in the years following the commencement of the “War on Terrorism.” These silent protesters may be the same disenchanted Americans who question the whereabouts of news footage of American casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan. To them, the media has become an extension of the
government: a medium for one-sided propaganda. Such problematic polarities have encouraged American news programs to adopt slogans such as “fair and balanced” coverage.\textsuperscript{19} The depiction of the news media in \textit{REA} is undeniably negative. Raccoon City’s journalists are corrupt and willing to undermine the truth to appease the authorities.

The \textit{RE} films are important to the cinematic zombie renaissance because they offer overtly anti-establishment perspectives on big business, the media, and the government. All of which were institutions that were delicately treated by the entertainment industry during the events and aftermath of 9/11. Anderson was the first American filmmaker of the post-9/11 era to use the zombie genre to send a rebellious message to his audience. In this regard, the \textit{RE} films, although not as overtly political in their content, hearken back to the socially corrective precedent established by George A. Romero.
Hereafter abbreviated as RE and REA

That is to say, movies based on an existing videogame series. These films generally depict characters, locations, or storylines from their videogame source material. Examples include Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001), Super Mario Brothers (1993), Mortal Kombat (1995), and Streetfighter (1994). I differentiate between videogame-based films and videos that explore the phenomenon of videogaming. Tron (1982), The Wizard (1989), and The Last Starfighter (1984) deal with videogaming but are not dependent upon an existing product as source material.

Some of the Hive’s employees are trapped in elevators and dropped from lethal heights.

Known to RE series fans as the setting of the videogame Resident Evil 3: Nemesis.


Notably individuals working with al-Qaeda.

See endnote # 43, Chapter I.

Bush’s descriptors of the terrorists include the words “evil” and “despicable.” According to Bush, the terrorists “plot,” “murder,” and commit “evil acts.”


O’Harrow A1.


Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barten, “‘America under Attack’: CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11,” ed. Chermak, 94.
The "War on Terrorism,"


CHAPTER 4

DAWN OF THE DEAD

Released two years after Resident Evil, Director Zack Snyder’s debut feature Dawn of the Dead presented a noteworthy divergence from the precedent established by its post-9/11 predecessors. Snyder’s 2004 “re-envisioning” of George Romero’s 1978 film depicts the struggle of a group of zombie-outbreak survivors who have entrenched themselves in a Wisconsin shopping mall. Appropriating both the filmic conventions established by 28 Days Later and the cult following of Romero’s original, Snyder’s thriller grossed $58,885,635\(^1\) by its third month of screening but garnered criticism by genre fans and film critics alike. “The remake fudges Romero’s famous point about the mall being ‘an important place’ to the consumerist zombies,” asserts reviewer Andrew Osmond.\(^2\) Indeed, Snyder’s Dawn\(^3\) deviates from several of Romero’s themes, replacing Romero’s cynical liberalism with uniquely conservative overtones. More relevant to this study than the differences between the two films is Dawn’s depiction of authority, group unity, and its representation of the Other. The following chapter will delve into Dawn’s inclusion of these elements and reflect upon their relationship to the post-9/11 sentiment in America.

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4.1 REPRESENTATIONS OF AUTHORITY

In 28 Days Later, the Resident Evil films, and Romero's Dead series, the forces of authority are portrayed as either malevolent or incompetent. These films promote the idea that those in power are neither the fittest to survive nor the most deserving of authority. Romero's Dawn of the Dead illustrated this in the defection of SWAT team members Stephen and Roger, who escape the injustice and hopelessness of their city's martial law by murdering a trigger-happy SWAT officer and then stealing a helicopter. 28 Days Later's military "protectors" seek only to molest female survivors and assimilate Jim. The Resident Evil films further dramatize this message through the rebel-victim Alice's unending struggle with Umbrella. Dawn's perspective on authority, however, is unique amongst its cinematic contemporaries. This film poses questions about authority such as: what characteristics should a leader have, and when does "might make right?" It does not, however, challenge America's current administration through the use of metaphoric discourse. Dawn may be America's first patriotic post-9/11 zombie film.

The first branch of authority, and most overtly represented in Dawn, that I will discuss is that of local authority. For the sake of this study, "local authority" includes security guards, the medical community, and the police. Crossroads Mall's security guards are introduced in Dawn as an antagonistic force. The film's trio of guards holed up in the Crossroads Mall initially refuses to offer sanctuary to Dawn's protagonists. After some persuasion, the guards decide to shelter the survivors under hostage-like conditions. C.J., the leader of the guards, suspects that his new captives will turn to "sneaking around and stealing shit." C.J.'s xenophobic rule is rationalized by his
comment, "if we start letting people in here, then we're going to let the wrong ones in. And then I'm dead." Ultimately, the "wrong ones" (zombies) infiltrate the mall and C.J. takes his life to save the fleeing members of his party.

C.J.'s dim-witted sidekick, Bart, is easily interpreted as the embodiment of the thoughtless youth of modern America. Bart's comic insensitivity towards the world's cataclysmic circumstances and his unapologetic chauvinism are reminiscent of the viewpoints of the satirical cartoon characters, Bevis and Butthead. This quality is most clearly expressed when Bart laments that the apocalypse has ruined his chances of sleeping with "that fat chick from Dairy Queen." Bart's ignobility essentially illustrates the corruption that C.J.'s leadership promotes.

The third member of the security triumvirate is Terry, the most empathetic and naïve of the three. Terry reluctantly follows C.J.'s orders, but secretly takes every opportunity to aid his captives. Alongside his love interest, Nicole, Terry is one of only four characters that manage to survive the climactic flight from the mall. As horror films conventionally dramatize the comeuppance of unlikable characters and the salvation of kind and sensible people, Terry's longevity may be a result of his sweet personality.

The moral and competent protagonists, Ana and Michael, overthrow C.J.'s authority when faced with his refusal to allow more survivors into the mall. C.J.'s final moments in power smack of dictatorial reasoning: "I'll kill each and every one of you to stay alive," he asserts. Through such instances, Dawn seems to reinforce the American
ideal that an ethical and capable administration is superior to one that is overtly based on self-preservation. Ana and Michael seek to aid the needy and move the community forward, whereas C.J. focuses solely on his own betterment.

The medical community is problematically depicted in *Dawn*. In the first scene of the film Ana, a nurse, is denied the opportunity to leave her shift at the hospital by a condescending doctor. Before dismissing Ana, Dr. Dandewar keeps her waiting while he argues over the phone about the attendance of his next golf game. As she leaves the hospital, Ana sees a sleeping EMT rise from the ambulance’s bed. The purpose of this moment is primarily to scare the audience, but on a more subtle level it may convey the message that today’s medical community is undisciplined and lazy. The beginning of the zombie outbreak offers another negative portrayal of health professionals when Ana witnesses her panicked neighbor run down by a speeding ambulance. The shock and comic irony of this moment are underscored by the implication that in the event of a real disaster, America’s medical community would choose to flee danger rather than help.

Despite the aforementioned cinematic criticism of the medical community, Ana remains an example of a courageous and responsible practitioner of medicine. When a zombie fatally wounds her husband Louis, Ana attempts to stop his bleeding herself before calling for help. She sutures her policeman-comrade’s damaged arm and later tends to the lacerations and illnesses of the mall’s wounded newcomers. The disease that the zombies spread is incurable, but this does not stop Ana from maintaining hope. In fact, she insists that an infected newcomer be allowed to live until he has definitely transformed into a zombie.
This compassionate and professional behavior from a nurse, and its conspicuous absence from the doctor, illustrates *Dawn*’s glorification of the blue-collar workingman.

*Dawn* presents the police as troubled, but ultimately respectable individuals. Romero’s former special effects partner and horror film celebrity, Tom Savini, makes a cameo in *Dawn* as a sheriff who C.J. and Bart admire. In a televised interview, Savini’s character explains to a reporter the ways in which the undead can be destroyed. In response to Savini’s manly and professional demeanor, C.J. states, “America always sorts its shit out.”

The film’s policeman character, Kenneth, is introduced to the audience through a scene in which he ambushes Ana with his shotgun and demands that she speak to prove that she is not undead. Later, Kenneth opts to remain in a safe location rather than explore the mall for potential dangers. His mission in the film’s first half is to journey to the supposed safe haven, Fort Pastor, to join his brother. When Michael entreats Kenneth, “there’s people here right now that could use your help,” Kenneth dispassionately replies, “fuck y’all.” Despite his initial selfishness, Kenneth eventually decides to remain with Crossroads’ survivors and befriends the sharpshooter trapped in a gun store across the parking lot. Kenneth’s self-serving mantra, “better them [dead] than me,” does not coincide with his actions as the film progresses. This speaks to an intrinsic morality to the man, perhaps reinforced by his former correctional vocation.

Although he does not express a desire to dictate the path of the group, Kenneth is often looked to for consent. Andre, the film’s criminal, seeks agreement and approval from Kenneth, and Michael desires that he remain a part of the group. Eventually, Kenneth leads his comrades on missions to restart the mall’s power, rescue
Nicole, and escape Crossroads to seek refuge on an island in the Great Lakes. Through Kenneth's emergence as a courageous leader, *Dawn* honors the institution of American law enforcement.

*Dawn* offers little representation of governmental and military authority. The film's opening title sequence is a musical montage of violent news footage in the same vein as the opening moments of *28 Days Later*. Included in this sequence of clips are images of National Guard forces, or perhaps riot police, beating people, marching through burning wreckage, and fighting riotous waves of humanity. *Dawn*’s footage is different from *28 Days Later* in that it is meant to represent the collapse of civilization as a result of the zombie epidemic, not the oppressive goings-on of the pre-epidemic world. In a press conference segment of the montage, a solemn presidential spokesman informs the press that the White House knows very little about the specifics of the outbreak. Later in the montage, a briefing from the White House lawn is cut short when Army machine gunners open fire on approaching off-camera zombies. This sequence expresses the notion that America's government has failed to maintain order; it does not, however, suggest that the government is responsible for the zombies' invasion. In both *28 Days Later* and the *Resident Evil* films, the zombies are the result of clandestinely engineered bio-weapons. The government is the culpable progenitor of the monsters and, from a certain point of view, these films' zombies represent the detrimental and coercive side-effects of corrupt regimes. Conversely, the appearance of *Dawn*’s zombies is inexplicable. The government seems to know as little about the undead as its public. The montage's several chaotic images interspersed with reporter commentary is reminiscent of the media's coverage of the 9/11 attacks.
This association implies a sense of governmental presence and a solemnity in response to the zombie outbreak that parallels the American government’s reaction broadcast on the afternoon of September 11, 2001.

4.2 THE IMMORAL OTHER

The lack of government representation and absence of their culpability in *Dawn* allows the zombie uprising to be blamed on social phenomena such as immorality. *Dawn* follows in Romero’s wake by never assigning a definitive cause for the zombies, but instead implying that their existence is God’s punishment of the wicked modern Man. Former *Dawn of the Dead* actor, Ken Foree, makes a cameo in *Dawn* as a televangelist who blames homosexual relations, same-sex marriages, and abortions as the cause of the zombie outbreak. *Dawn*’s screenwriter, James Gunn, even incorporates *Dawn of the Dead*’s famous line, “when there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth,” into this segment of his film. When Americans ask why radical Islamites label America as “the Great Satan,” vocal religious leaders such as Jerry Falwell have been quick to respond that the decadence of American culture has incited divine punishment. The Bush administration, proponents of pro-life legislation and the definition of marriage as a heterosexual institution, seems to support the notion that equal marital rights for homosexuals and the freedom to conduct abortions are phenomena that threaten the moral integrity of the nation. *Dawn* allocates horrific and ignoble demises to its characters that may signify immorality to conservative America. The homosexual atheist, Glen, is killed in a bus crash after accidentally chain-sawing the unapologetically promiscuous Monica. While their lifestyle choices do not directly
influence their deaths, these characters are primarily identified by their respective stereotypes. The destruction that befalls these secondary characters may promote the idea that their convictions and lifestyles make them unfit to survive in a dangerous world. It is probably no coincidence that the film’s survivors include a chaste, heterosexual couple.

4.3 DEPICTION OF GROUP UNITY

The “United we stand” mentality is dramatized more clearly in Dawn than in any of this study’s previously discussed films. Dawn casts a group of survivors from disparate backgrounds into a situation of communal living and struggling to survive against tremendous odds. In accordance with the aforementioned expectations of conservative audience members and the general principles of cinematic melodrama, Dawn punishes its morally bereft characters. The comically arrogant Steve meets his end moments after abandoning his helpless compatriot, Kenneth. The virtuous, however, are either allowed to live or granted heroic deaths. This phenomenon is evident in the difference between the death of Tucker, who chooses to be sacrificed in order to buy his comrades time to escape, and Bart, who is destroyed in a panic, crying out for help. Through Tucker’s death, the audience learns that a noble sacrifice can aid in the continued health of a community. This echoes the sacrifice of the passengers of United Airlines’ Flight 93 and the rescue workers that died attempting to save the victims of the World Trade Center attacks. Bart’s end, on the other hand, illustrates the shameful fate that may await Americans that do not consider the importance of their communities. This extrapolation may, upon first consideration, seem highly subjective.
This does not alter the fact that Tucker’s death does assist the survival of his group, with whom the audience is meant to empathize. His sacrifice allows the protagonists to continue their quest and, therefore, will most likely be met with approval from the audience. To further extrapolate, Dawn’s American audience must, on some level, consider America their group. It is not far fetched to make the connection that the heroic sacrifice of onscreen American characters may be interpreted by an American audience as a symbolic representation of the Americans who died assisting the victims of the 9/11 attacks.

4.4 THE ISLAMIC OTHER

Noël Carroll asserts that viewing disturbing and fear-inducing pieces of fiction known as horror satisfies our desire to study that which is unknown and forbidden. This drive to observe the fascinating dark side of humanity helps to explain the popularity of horror films such as The Silence of the Lambs and Psycho, however, it also sheds light on the current popularity of post-9/11 television journalism. Television specials on al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, and the orchestration of the 9/11 hijackings offer the American public insight into the motives of terrorist organizations. The desire to learn about the perpetrators of seemingly inexplicable attacks is satisfied in the fictional realm of zombie films as well. I do not mean to suggest that Americans have gained any degree of understanding about al-Qaeda through Dawn and its competitors. There is a commonality of interest between 9/11 and zombie films, however, found in the way that the films’ characters react to their dangerous circumstances. The breakdown of communication, authority, and morality is fascinating to audiences.
regardless of whether the chaos-creating Other is a terrorist or a fictive monster. In the case of *Dawn*, these two figures are easily substituted in an American audience’s subconscious mind.

Much like *28 Days Later*, Snyder’s zombie film contains a montage of violent images that a post-9/11 American audience can easily associate with news coverage of the 9/11 attacks, and by extension, terrorism in general. I refer specifically to the opening title sequence previously mentioned in this chapter. This montage begins with an ominous musical drone and displays the words “Universal Pictures presents” written in red. This text smears across the screen, as if written in blood that was pushed by a sudden breeze. The second image presented to *Dawn’s* audience is a sepia-toned shot of a mosque filled with turbaned Muslims simultaneously bowing and chanting an indistinct prayer. This shot is followed by the text “A Strike Entertainment/New Amsterdam Entertainment production” which smears in a similar fashion to its precursor. Following this text is a flash of broken glass, the black and white image of an emaciated corpse, and then the image of a male zombie’s bloody mouth, all accompanied by inhuman screams. After these initial moments, the sound of a heartbeat begins, a press conference regarding the zombie outbreak is audible, and flashes of the male zombie strapped to a gurney alternate with the text of *Dawn’s* actors’ names. The Johnny Cash song “When the Man Comes Around” begins and underscores the majority of the montage which includes footage of news reporters, riot police, explosions, panicked mobs, dead bodies, and (of course) zombies. The final moment of this montage depicts an American news reporter in Istanbul being overrun by bearded (presumably Turkish) zombies, one of which appears to be wearing a burka.
Snyder never overtly mentions terrorism or the Islamic world as a dangerous Other in *Dawn*, and yet he seems to have deliberately book ended his horror film's title sequence with images of Muslims.

One may argue that the initial mosque footage does not negatively associate Muslims with a zombie invasion, but rather portrays a community asking forgiveness, guidance, or salvation when faced with cataclysm. This interpretation is valid in some respects, but it is unlikely that Snyder intended his audience to feel compassion or pity for the Islamic community in the first moments of his horrific title sequence. The distortion of color and brevity of screen time, coupled with the jarring images and sounds that precede and follow the footage of the Muslims, aids in creating an atmosphere of disquiet rather than compassion. Snyder films the worshippers from a distance, which promotes the idea of the collective rather than the suffering individuals that congregate to create that collective. The speed and synchronicity of the Muslims' movement also has a dehumanizing effect.9 At the risk of appearing bigoted, I would venture that if Snyder, an American director, wanted to encourage a sense of religious empathy from his primarily American (or at least English-speaking) audience, he would have used Christian iconography instead of that of the Islamic faith. Despite the substantial population of English-speaking Muslims in the world, Hollywood has traditionally produced far more Christmas movies than films which celebrate Islamic holidays. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to assert that an American audience is more familiar with, and perhaps in the current political climate more empathetic with, the images of the Christian church.
The negative associations embedded in the assault on the American reporter in Istanbul are equally contestable. The images of Istanbul in the background of this sequence are so fuzzy and brief that Dawn's audience may not even deduce the reporter's precise location. If the informed audience member is quick enough to catch that the location was Turkey, that information would not necessarily suggest that Turkey is in any way responsible for the zombie outbreak, nor should Turkey (a European nation which has thus far been reported to be uninvolved in dealings with al-Qaeda) be viewed as an enemy of America. The Turkish people, in the context of Dawn's title sequence, may simply represent another nation of victims of the borderless zombie plague. While this interpretation is logically sound, it does not take into consideration the power of the post-9/11 American cultural context. In this sequence that lasts no more than six seconds, the audience sees a reporter with an American accent standing in front of a Byzantine cityscape being attacked by swarthy, bearded men. When viewed in the context of the title sequence, which begins with the image of praying Muslims and contains snippets of violent news footage, an American audience member may be inclined to equate these zombies with insurgents or terrorists. This audience member's impression is not based on deductive reasoning, but rather on the emotional associations promoted by the montage's selection of images, sounds, and America's pictorial account of its recent, violent history.

The primary Other in Dawn is, of course, the zombies. What these zombies metaphorically represent, however, is open to a certain degree of interpretation. Conspicuously absent from Snyder's "re-envisioning" is Romero's original satirical indictment of America's consumerist society. Instead, a comic sequence is included in
the film in which Crossroads Mall's survivors make a game of selecting and executing celebrity look-alike zombies. This backlash against celebrity-worship and quiet acceptance of consumerism implies a conservative sensibility in Dawn. Further supporting this theory are the depictions of the film's previously mentioned social outsiders. The inept Glen (a homosexual) and Monica (an unapologetically promiscuous woman) suggest that individuals outside of the social norms will slow down and possibly endanger the group that shelters them. Indeed, Ken Foree's televangelist character contests that the zombie invasion is due to people who have premarital sex, abortions, and same-sex marriages. Conversely, Dawn rewards its blue-collar, heterosexual warriors with survival or redemptive deaths. This fictive lesson acts as a metaphor for the conservative youth of America who are currently presented with the option to enlist in the armed forces. On some level Dawn's heroes know that their fight will not cease the zombie onslaught, just as American military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq cannot end the phenomenon of terrorism. The message that Snyder seems to communicate to these young Americans is voiced by Kenneth. "now I realize there are some things worse than death, and one of them is sitting here waiting to die." Snyder's film is unique among its competition in that the dangerous Other that Dawn asks us to avoid includes not only terrorists, but also liberals and conscientious objectors.


3 Henceforth, abbreviated as Dawn. Romero's 1978 film will remain Dawn of the Dead.

4 Conceivably Lake Superior.

5 Jerry Falwell is an American evangelist and political activist who established the secular conservative political organization Moral Majority, Inc. Moral Majority, Inc.'s mission statement states: "Our goal is to promote traditional family values and battle the liberals who would attempt to destroy those godly principles. We still hold to the four main tenets of the original Moral Majority as it was established in 1979: 1) pro-family, 2) pro-life, 3) pro-defense and, 4) pro-Israel."

6 Upon signing the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003, Bush said, "We're asked by our convictions and tradition and compassion to build a culture of life."

7 Glen's homosexuality is somewhat obscured in the theatrical release of the film. The Director's Cut DVD includes a scene in which he reminisces about his first homosexual encounter. Implications remain, however, during the "Down with the Sickness" montage in which Glen is seen trying on women's nylons and high-heeled shoes.


9 The Benny Hill Show utilizes this dehumanizing phenomenon for comic effect in its farcical chase sequences.

10 Indeed, the reporter's whereabouts are never announced in the title sequence. Snyder's commentary on the Director's Cut DVD of the film reveals the information that the reporter is supposed to be embedded in Istanbul, Turkey. Interestingly enough, Snyder mentions that the reporter originally stated that he was in "the Turkish capital," but upon realizing the Istanbul was not the capital of Turkey, Snyder cut the line and the legend that read "Istanbul." Dawn of the Dead (Unrated Director's Cut), dir. Zack Snyder, perf. Sarah Polley, Ving Rhames, and Jake Weber, 2004, DVD, Universal, 2004.

CHAPTER 5

LAND OF THE DEAD

George A. Romero’s fourth installment of his Dead films, Land of the Dead,¹ is the most overtly polemical of all of the post-9/11 zombie films in this study. Romero, professedly “disappointed that the ’60s didn’t work out,”² is known for his use of satire and metaphor in his horror films. Land channels Romero’s liberalism and current discouragement with the Bush administration into a layered piece of cinema that casts both the living and the undead in the concurrent roles of victim and monster. The only irredeemable character in Land is Mr. Kaufman,³ the Rumsfeldian symbol of governmental authority.

5.1 EXCLUSION

One of Romero’s main themes in Land is exclusion. In post-9/11 America, exclusion is the fate implicitly reserved for those who do not adhere to the “united we stand” axiom. On September 20, 2001, President Bush announced, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”⁴ Socioeconomic exclusion is the first dimension of Land’s thematic exploration. Mr. Kaufman’s city of the living (obliquely implied as the post-apocalyptic Pittsburgh) is established as a socioeconomically stratified community

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without upward mobility. This is revealed in a scene in which Cholo, Kaufman’s henchman, is denied permission to move to the aristocratic haven, Fiddler’s Green, despite his new abundance of wealth. Kaufman’s slight motivates Cholo to hijack the Dead Reckoning (a military vehicle) and hold the city ransom. Although Kaufman’s society is implicitly racist, the ultimate divide between the tenants of Fiddler’s Green and the street-dwellers seems to be culturally determined. Riley, a white man, assures the Latino Cholo that neither of them would be considered acceptable to the people of Fiddler’s Green. Romero’s dramatization of the Old Money aristocrats snubbing their nouveau riche counterparts is not a new issue for cinematic exploration, but perhaps it still resonates in an America whose president is not only a magnate but also a successor to the position once held by his father.

Exclusion further manifests itself in Land in the motif of fences and physical barriers. Those entering Fiddler’s Green, for example, must leave their weapons with a security guard. Further protecting the Green are three rivers, a system of electric fences, and a military patrol securing the city’s borders from invasion. Outside of these defenses lie the desolate, undead communities that prevent the living from escaping Kaufman’s city. The tension implicit in the lives of this film’s “have-nots” is that their city denies them both economic advancement and physical escape. Riley’s dilemma, which ultimately motivates him to thwart Cholo’s revenge, is that he has been robbed of the car with which he planned to leave town. Riley seeks his solace in a place where there are no other people: “North. Canada.” The impulse to flee to Canada for
sanctuary may be a subtle remnant of Romero’s anti-establishment, 1960’s philosophy. More relevant to Romero’s theme of exclusion, however, is Riley’s assertion, “I’m looking for a world where there’s no fences.”

The artistic discussion of exclusion is just as relevant in post-9/11 America as it was in the Vietnam War era. Xenophobia and racism, in the minds of some, are freshly justified by the 9/11 attacks. The unequal treatment of members of America’s different economic classes is also newly illuminated by the war in Iraq. Just as in the 1960’s, the monetary assistance of the G.I. bill still encourages young, lower class Americans into the armed services. Also true to the 1960’s, contemporary artists still protest this socioeconomic phenomenon, “Why don’t presidents fight the war? Why do they always send the poor,” asks American pop-musician Serj Tankian.

5.2 THE VARIABLE OTHER

The role of the dangerous Other in Land is not easily encapsulated by a single metaphoric icon. As in the previous films of this study, Land’s zombies play an antagonistic role by threatening the survival the film’s protagonists (Riley and his friends). The undead of Land are unique, however, in that they are not the mindless monsters of 28 Days Later, the Resident Evil films, or Snyder’s Dawn of the Dead. The zombies in Land possess the ability to communicate, use tools, follow a leader, and, most importantly, prioritize revenge above hunger. The zombie known by his nametag as Big Daddy is an African-American male who, as one may infer by his uniform and behavior, worked as a gas station attendant in his former life. Big Daddy becomes the self-appointed rabble-rouser, instructor, and standard-bearer of Land’s zombie uprising.
His ability to reason and elicit fear, delight, and righteous indignation set him alongside his evolved and empathetic zombie predecessor, Bub, from *Day of the Dead*. Big Daddy surpasses Bub, however, in that he uses his functionality to act on behalf of his community.

*Land*'s inciting incident occurs within a small town occupied solely by the undead. Riley and his supply gatherers quietly observe the zombies as they grotesquely go through the motions of their former lives. A zombie band numbly play their instruments in a gazebo. A zombie couple walks hand in hand, and (at the sound of a misfiring bell) Big Daddy emerges from his station to pump gas. "It's like they're pretending to be alive," observes Riley’s assistant, Mike. "Isn't that what we're doing," asks Riley, "pretending to be alive?" One must consider, at this juncture, what message Romero is trying to convey with this scene. The zombies in *Land*'s community are eerie, but not horrifying. They live vacuous, half-realized lives. The zombies’ emotions have been dulled and they seem bereft of cognizance, but they are peaceful and, in this state, somewhat likeable. Riley finds a similarity between his own existence and that of his adversaries. Neither the humans, locked in the fight to survive, nor the zombies, deprived of their prey, exist in their ideal conditions. And yet, while the humans have erected a city governed by fear and vice, the zombies seem to have achieved a return to old-fashioned, small-town living.

The scavenging party distract the zombies with fireworks (which may cynically illustrate Romero’s criticism of post-9/11 patriotism) and then proceeds to destroy many of their ranks with drive-by shootings. Accompanying the firework blasts and the gunfire is the gratuitous hollering of the Riley’s scavengers. These raiders are
reminiscent of the stupid and overzealous motorcycle gang from Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*. One of *Land*’s bikers decapitates a zombie with the golden eagle that tops his weapon, an American flag. Chojo remarks, “I thought this was going to be a battle. It’s a fucking massacre.”

The zombies in this scene are depicted as helpless victims. Big Daddy is the only one cognizant enough to attempt evading the humans. In fact, Big Daddy tries to save his fellow zombies by pushing them out of the way of gunfire. After the battle he performs a mercy killing on a decapitated member of his community. The opening of *Land* seems to indicate that Romero intends his audience to sympathize with the zombies rather than the humans. On some level, zombie fans have always rooted for the undead because they are fascinating. The opening of this film, however, casts these flesh-eating harbingers of the apocalypse as the oppressed underdogs with whom we should sympathize. If this is the case, then it is likely that *Land*’s zombie community represents the various people that have suffered by the actions of post-9/11 America.

*Land*’s metaphor of the zombie as victim of post-9/11 America works on several levels. The first interpretation is that the zombies represent post-9/11 Afghans. The humans retain a sense of justification in punishing the zombies because not only do they pursue a way of life that is incompatible with that of the zombies, but the zombies are also the reason for the humans’ current state of fear. This relationship is easily transferred to the relationship between America and the Taliban. The Taliban, which supported the al-Qaeda terrorists of 9/11, was unwilling to comply with the America’s non-negotiable demands in October of 2001. The lack of concession from either side resulted in the War in Afghanistan, which many Americans viewed as justified.
The people of Afghanistan that were neither terrorists nor supporters of the Taliban still suffered the consequences of combat in their homeland and political instability. Much like the zombie executions in Big Daddy’s community, civilian casualties of the War in Afghanistan occurred simply because they were in the wrong place at the right time.14

One may further extrapolate that the humans’ raids on the zombie communities reflect America’s War in Iraq. The humans require resources that their society is no longer capable of producing, and so they must journey into unfriendly territory to gather their supplies. America’s dependence on Middle Eastern oil makes westernization and open trade between the Middle East and America important for the continued preservation of America’s economy. The cowboy-like enthusiasm of Riley’s raiders brings to mind America’s slogans of military enthusiasm such as “let’s roll.” Additionally, the malfeasance implied by Cheney’s ties to Halliburton might be reflected in the profiteering evident in Cholo’s raid on the zombie community’s liquor store.

Another interpretation of Land’s zombies is that they represent the American public. Perhaps consumerist America, as manifested by the zombies in 1978’s Day of the Dead, has simply been cowed into submission by the government of modern America. Entranced by fireworks displays, the zombies forget their hunger and allow themselves to be destroyed by flag-waving marauders. Unlike the protesting forces of 1960’s America, which sparked fear in the authorities,15 post-9/11 dissention is tempered by the threatening presence of the Department of Homeland Security. In an era in which national security interests have resulted in the imprisonment of aliens and American citizens without trial, it is unwise to broadcast animosity towards the
Romero's zombies reflect this passive quality of contemporary America's citizens. The zombies no longer make themselves a menace by swarming the humans' stronghold; instead they exist in a docile state. A soldier guarding the city's electric fences remarks that the zombies "don't come around here much anymore. It's like they've learned they can't get in." If "getting in" means having control over one's civil liberties, then it seems that post-9/11 Americans have conceded with the quiet resignation of a zombie.

The helplessness of Land's zombies changes when Big Daddy decides to take action against his oppressors. Along the road to Fiddler's Green, the zombie rebels discover the ability to use weapons and overcome their fear of submersion in water. The zombie tambourine player ultimately makes a decision to abandon his instrument in favor of a wrench. If viewed as a metaphorical reaction to the Bush administration, this moment suggests that dissatisfied American citizens may someday discard their diversions and occupations in favor of political change. In addition to dramatizing a projection for the future of America, the zombie uprising may also reflect the empowerment of the 9/11 terrorists. It is probably not coincidental that after the initial raid on Big Daddy's community he targets the tower of Fiddler's Green as the embodiment of his enemy. Big Daddy also uses the city's own construction tools to break through the plate glass entrance of Fiddler's Green. This destructive use of an otherwise beneficial service is reminiscent of America's airplanes being lethally misused in the 9/11 attacks. Regardless of whether the zombies represent pre-9/11 jihadists, the civilian casualties of the American military, or downtrodden citizens of post-9/11 America, they play the complex role of the sympathetic antagonists.
The problematic counterparts to Big Daddy’s zombie rebels are the human marauders led by Cholo. These disaffected mercenaries follow Cholo in his plan to extort money from Kaufman, who asserts, “we don’t negotiate with terrorists.” Continuing this post-9/11 idiom, Cholo tells his partner that if their scheme goes unrewarded, he will “do a jihad on his [Kaufman’s] ass.” The proposed target of Dead Reckoning’s missiles, not surprisingly, will be the tower of Fiddler’s Green. Cholo’s mavericks are referred to as terrorists, threaten the safety of Riley and his community, and cause the deaths of neophytes. In regards to Riley and his team, Cholo’s crew are dangerous Others whose self-serving philosophy is incompatible with Riley’s principles. Despite these characteristics, which would seem to locate this group outside of the audience’s empathy, Cholo and his team possess an intrinsic likeability. This appeal may be due, in part, to charismatic celebrity John Leguizamo playing the role of Cholo. In addition to satisfying Lequizamo fans, the mavericks also fulfill the popular Romero role of blue-collar outsiders who “stick it to the man.” Following in the footsteps of his Dead series predecessors, Ben, Roger, and Sarah, Cholo provides a sounding board for rebellious, anti-establishment teenagers in the audience. In fact, it is an undead incarnation of Cholo who ultimately terrorizes Kaufman in his final moments.

Land purports that even monsters and terrorists deserve sympathy. “That’s what’s so interesting about George’s movies, because it [sic] makes you ask, ‘When is the other really the other and when is the other us?’” Absent from Romero’s rose-tinted lens, however, is the embodiment of the America’s current administration, Mr. Kaufman. Recalling a conversation between Dennis Hopper and himself, Romero
reflects, "he [Hopper] said 'I'll play him [Kaufman] like Rumsfeld.' And I said, 'That's exactly where I'm going with this. This is the Bush administration.'"23 Kaufman's oligarchic rule is held in place by the populace's fear of the undead outside the city walls. Romero clearly draws upon America's post-9/11 isolationism in this depiction of terror-dependant leadership.

*Land*'s director goes one step beyond commenting on what is currently happening in America with his dramatization of Kaufman's ignominious downfall. Despite his ability to obtain power, Kaufman proves himself to be a duplicitous coward who is unable to protect Fiddler's Green. The makeshift army deserts their posts during Big Daddy's invasion and, left unprotected, Kaufman is consumed by a gasoline explosion engineered by Big Daddy. A flaming automobile and a rain of Kaufman's burning money fill the screen moments after the explosion. This image is Romero's symbolic fantasy, and perhaps cautionary prediction, of George W. Bush's fate.

The overt politicization of Romero's 2004 installment of the Dead series drains it of much of its potential for horror. Romero includes the gore and prerequisite flesh-binging scenes demanded by his fan base, but our sympathies lie more on the side of the devourers than with Kaufman's nameless goons. The most frightening moments of the film are the rare times in which a zombie or object suddenly drops into frame accompanied by a musical sting. This absence of fright is revealing in regards to the filmmaker's purpose for *Land*. Romero seems more concerned with airing his political message and addressing the anxieties of post-9/11 America than he does with scaring his audience.
In the era of post-9/11 zombie filmmaking, Romero’s signature autograph motto “stay scared” warns us to be on our guard not from the things that go bump in the night, but from the men that control our civil liberties.
Hereafter referred to as simply Land.


Played by Dennis Hopper. Coincidentally, “Kaufmann’s” is the name of a department store, which was a prominent business in Romero’s hometown of Pittsburgh during his youth (1950’s). Although the filmmaker never mentions the franchise an influence, an unconscious association may have led to his villain’s name. For more on the final days of Kaufmann’s in 2005 see “Federated Completes Merger with May Company,” Federated Department Stores, Inc. Homepage, <http://www fds.com/ip/maymerger/template/pressrelease.asp?item_id=750420>.


Fiddler’s Green is a high-rise apartment complex/shopping center in which the wealthy conduct their carefree lives in Land of the Dead. “Fiddler’s Green is also the title of a nineteenth-century sailor’s song about a mythical realm where seafarers who die on land are destined to spend eternity. It was said to be a place of unlimited mirth, tobacco, and rum.” Jamie Russell, Book of the Dead (Surrey: FAB, 2005): 232.

While all of the tenants of Fiddler’s Green are Caucasian, Kaufman’s chauffer is African American. Members of Riley’s expedition raids, employees at Roach’s club, and people dwelling on the city streets, however, vary in ethnicities.


The government’s controversial relief efforts of Hurricane Katrina have also fueled the public notion that the authorities are classist and racist.


Day of the Dead depicts Bub as a thoughtful, trainable, and emotionally functional zombie. This unique zombie is docile and loyal to his scientist master, Dr. “Frankenstein” Logan. Upset by Logan’s murder, Bub discovers how to fire a pistol and enacts his revenge on Corporal Rhodes, the film’s antagonist.


For detailed information about the links between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, see The 9/11 Commission Report.

As is evident in the shooting of four students by national guardsmen during a Vietnam War protest at Kent State University on May 4, 1970.
16 "In its own submission to the committee [the UN’s Committee Against Torture], published late last year, Washington justified the holding of thousands of foreign terrorism suspects in prisons abroad, including Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, on the grounds that it was fighting a war that was still not over." Richard Waddington, “Torture ‘widespread’ in U.S. custody,” 3 May 2006, Reuters, <http://today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2006-05-03T050706Z_01_L01670156_RTRUKOC_0_US-RIGHTS-AMNESTY.xml&archived=False>.


18 Cholo's "hazing" of Mike in the liquor store results in Mike's accidental infection by a zombie bite. Similarly, Cholo's team selects the young man called Mouse to act as the lookout for Kaufman's ransom delivery. Left alone on a pier, Mouse is predictably devoured by zombies.

19 And situate them in the category of terrorists.

20 Lequizamo removes his shirt and does chin-ups in one of the film's dialogue-intensive scenes. This topless conversation parallels Asia Argento's similar "getting dressed scene" in gratuitous titillation. Tellingly enough of the genre and its audience's appetites, Land depicts a topless dancer in Chihuahua's club, a lesbian kiss before the final zombie attack, and Argento in various states of disrobe. Lequizamo, however, is the only male to remove his shirt in the film.

21 Principal outsider characters who stand up against social mores and conventional authority figures in Night of the Living Dead, Down of the Dead, and Day of the Dead, respectively.


CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

6.1 WHY ZOMBIES?

As *Land of the Dead* has proven, the genre of zombie film lends itself to the safe examination of America's post-9/11 anxieties through the distancing power of metaphor. Some may argue that the increase in zombie films after 9/11 has nothing to do with their allegorical capacity, but rather that their popularity reflects America's proclivity for escapism and Hollywood's deftness at reproducing a popular box office phenomenon. If this is so, then I must ask why did zombies become popular rather than some other type of monster? Vampires also feed on the living and transform their prey into monsters. Space aliens are similar to zombies in that they may manifest themselves cinematically as dangerous invaders whose philosophies are incompatible with our own. Even the giant, radioactive monsters of Godzilla's ilk share the zombies' irrational desire to destroy the world around them. Despite these similarities, zombies possess three characteristics that make them unique and well suited for a modern cinematic resurgence. Zombies are selflessly unyielding, they are comprised of members of their former communities, and they bring in their wake the collapse of social order.

Zombies traditionally operate in mobs and (not coincidentally) have little or no sense of self. The zombie-as-mob or mob-as-monster image\(^1\) illuminates the danger of organized dissidents and allows the audience to easily form metaphoric interpretations.\(^2\)
The zombies' selfless and tireless pursuit of flesh lends itself to comparison with the seemingly inhuman self-destruction of the 9/11 hijackers and Iraqi suicide bombers. One could also argue that the willingness to sacrifice both life and identity in the name of satisfying an appetite mirrors America's current military engagements.³

The second characteristic of zombies is that they are monsters comprised completely from members of their haplessly infected community. Dan O'Bannon's creature from *Alien* uses a community of human hosts to create more monsters, but it destroys its victims after a gestation phase. The vampire and werewolf are like the zombie in that they can spread their affliction by biting humans, but at the root of their epidemic is the first vampire or werewolf, who is typically a foreign presence to the story's community.⁴ Zombie hordes, however, consist of average people who have been ruined through arbitrary misfortune. This quality links the zombie to the victims of 9/11. The events of 9/11 traumatized a portion of America (particularly those who lost family members in the attacks), creating a community of shocked, suffering mourners. The victims and survivors of 9/11 suffered, not because of their own actions but simply because they existed in a nation reviled by al-Qaeda. The paranoid inversion of this metaphor is equally valid: just as any peaceful community member reserves the potential to become a zombie, so too may any American secretly become a terrorist.

The third significant feature that allows zombies to conveniently express America's post-9/11 anxieties is that their stories often dramatize the collapse of America's social order. The police and military in zombie films are notoriously unable to quell the undead epidemic.⁵ Zombie films, therefore, deal with issues above and beyond horror's prerequisite of survival, such as mankind's inability to behave
harmoniously in the absence of authority. Patriotic American sloganeers promote the idea that “united we stand,” and yet, in the deep recesses of our hearts, many Americans fear that when faced with adversity their countrymen will neither unify nor stand. I propose that zombie films are currently so popular because they successfully dramatize America’s apocalypse anxiety as well as our newly aroused fears of corruption from within and attack from without by a self-sacrificing Other. Horror films focused on other kinds of monsters meet some of these criteria, but not all.

6.2 SHIFTING ANXieties AND THE BEGINNING OF OPEN 9/11 DISCOURSE

Midway through my writing of this thesis, The New York Times published an article stating that “Most zombie zealots seem to agree that the zombie renaissance has something to do with the anxieties of life after Sept. 11.” Regardless of whether one agrees with my (and, it would seem, The New York Times’) assertion that the films of this study contain metaphoric discourse relevant to post-9/11 America, the discussion of contemporary cultural anxieties in these films is undeniable. In 28 Days Later’s DVD commentary, Danny Boyle mentions that the film’s depiction of quarantine is relevant to the “mad cow disease” outbreak in the United Kingdom. Paul W.S. Anderson similarly asserts that his treatment of the Umbrella Corporation reflects American monopolies, such as Microsoft, and the corporate malfeasance of Enron. George Romero’s wholehearted admission that his latest zombie film criticizes the Bush administration supports suspicions that the zombie comeback is due more to the sociopolitical climate than any nostalgia for B-horror films. All evidence seems to point to the notion that horror films examine that which is relevant and troubling to their
audiences: 9/11 happens to currently fulfill both of those qualities. "You could make a WWII movie right now and it would be about 9/11, just because it so defines our nation at the moment."³

What does the future hold for zombie cinema? Currently, filmmakers and novelists are capitalizing on America's desire for zombies. A third Resident Evil film is scheduled for release in 2006 and rumors of a sequel to 28 Days Later run through the internet.⁹ Even Stephen King has joined the zombie renaissance with his upcoming zombie novel, Cell. Chances are good, however, that the current popularity of the zombie as a movie monster will fade with time. The cyclical nature of monster popularity is evident in the swell and subsequent lull in vampire films and literature during and after the 1990's.¹⁰ American audiences will likely become satiated with conventional zombie film scenarios and demand innovative cinematic fare. The necessity of metaphor in discussing America's post-9/11 anxieties is also likely to dwindle with time. Indeed, the recent release of United 93 (2006)¹¹ and Flight 93 (2006)¹² indicates the beginning of cinema directly addressing America's post-9/11 trauma. Like American news coverage on the day of the 9/11 attacks, initial filmic discourse about 9/11 will probably veer towards the patriotic. With time, however, 9/11 films that criticize the American government will certainly surface just as modern films have about the Vietnam War.¹³ Despite the transience of zombie cinema as the medium for post-9/11 dialogue, it is unlikely that zombies will disappear forever. Throughout the decades they have metaphorically given a face to slavery, the proletariat, consumerism, mankind's malevolence, the oppressed, the dangers of science, America's
immorality, and even the disintegration of the American family. Just as the zombies are constructed from infected members of our society, so too will zombie films perpetually reinvent themselves out of the cultural anxieties of their day.
The image of a mob of people as a deadly, inhuman force has appeared in scenes from non-zombie post-9/11 films such as *Batman Begins* (2004) and *War of the Worlds* (2005). In both instances the cinematographic depiction of the mobs smack of zombie cinema.

The mob of nameless villagers in Universal's *Frankenstein* (1931) becomes the true monster in the eyes of the audience, while the individual undead creature gains our sympathies. This mob may be interpreted as a metaphor for racism, the unreasonable public, or perhaps intolerance in general.

In this model, the resource of oil or Western influence in the Middle East takes the place of flesh and America's soldiers stand-in for the unthinking, expendable zombies.

Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, for example, depicts Jonathan Harker journeying to Transylvania to meet the novel's antagonist. Count Dracula wishes to relocate to England (the community of Stoker's target audience).

In fact, they often become part of the undead mass.


This sequel has been referred to as *28 Weeks Later* by genre fans on the website *All Things Zombie*, <www.allthingszombie.com>.

The most noteworthy vampire fiction of this time being *Ann Rice*’s *Interview with a Vampire* series.

A film about the passengers of United Flight 93 and their struggle to regain control of their hijacked plane.

A made-for-TV film about the events on United Flight 93. This A&E channel presentation received 5.9 million viewers. A network spokeswoman said, "The ratings performance of the film had been watched for a clue to determine how ready the public might be for dramas about the 9/11 events."


*Apocalypse Now* (1979), for example.
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