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# Resisting Bodies: Power Crisis / Meaning Crisis in the Zombie Film from 1932 to Today

*Résister le corps : Crise de pouvoir / crise de sens dans le film de zombies de 1932 à nos jours*

01 December 2011.

**David Roche**

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PREO

# Resisting Bodies: Power Crisis / Meaning Crisis in the Zombie Film from 1932 to Today

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1. (Post-)Colonial Zombies: *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), and some others
  2. Romero's living dead trilogy: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985)
  3. The post-9/11 zombie movie craze

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1 Criticism of George A. Romero's living dead films has mainly produced political readings. Although the crew denied "the movie's allegorical dimension" was deliberate (Romero 2007: 27), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) has been read in the light of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war (Higashi 1990; Williams 2003: 26; Le Pajolec 2007: 159). Robin Wood has argued that the living dead in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) "represent, on the metaphorical level, the whole dead weight of patriarchal consumer capitalism" (Wood 2003: 105), and analyzed *Day of the Dead* (1985) as a critique of Reaganist politics and a parody of Reaganist action movies like *Rambo* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982) (Wood 2003: 117; Williams 2003: 130, 132, 139). Adrian Martin has suggested that the European casting of *Land of the Dead* (2005) participated in the film's critique of the Bush administration (2007: 121). All of these readings have emphasized the films' progressive politics and

taken up Wood's "basic formula for the horror movie: normality is threatened by the Monster" (2003: 71), who embodies "the return of the repressed" (2003: 171) and threatens "a repressive, ideologically constructed bourgeois normality" (2003: 175). In other words, the monster incarnates forces that resist "normality" understood as a human construct.

2 In "Rigor/Mortis: The Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema" (2007), Meghan Sutherland raised the question of what in the zombie movie enables the thematization of politics (2007: 67). For Sutherland, the zombie film is aesthetically, politically and economically based on repetition, so that "it is not just the dead bodies that are reanimated and proliferating in zombie cinema; it's the films themselves, too." (2007: 64) The proliferation of these films "accrues that [textual] meaning precisely through repetition, which is to say, through an institutional structure of re-production" (2007: 66). The films' readability is facilitated by the fact that they repeat "these motions [of the zombie and the zombie movie] from film to film" (2007: 68), so that the audience understands the premise of a film like *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2004) long before the mysterious situation has been explained at a diegetic level (2007: 73). Sutherland relates these repetitious movements to the way various "institutional assemblages" such as "consumerism, conformity, organized militarism" "haunt the movements of the living and dead alike throughout all of these films." (2007: 69) She resorts to "a structuralist account of ideological power," namely that of Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man*, in order to posit that "zombie films represent the survival of such structured movements right as the structures supporting them devolve into crisis" (2007: 71-72). The uncanniness of the zombie movie can, then, be linked to the idea that they present "the viewer with a broadly political spectacle of *power that remains*—remaking itself in body after body—indefinitely." (2007: 73) In the end, Sutherland goes against the generally received idea that zombie films are "allegorical" inasmuch as they "literally tend to *embody* rather than simply *inscribe* political discourse in their aesthetic address." (2007: 75)

3 Sutherland's thesis may be problematic in several respects. Granted, most contemporary zombie movies do play on the gap between characters confronted with a new phenomenon and viewers familiar with the codes of the genre, but similar gaps can no doubt be found in

other genres and other media. In the end, Sutherland demonstrates that the contemporary zombie movie is extremely coded, something the subsequent analysis will confirm. Moreover, Sutherland's analysis is based exclusively on contemporary zombie movies which are all modeled after Romero's living dead movies, when the zombie movie has existed since 1932. And yet I think Sutherland is definitely onto something when she argues that the zombie film is based on the repetition of the movements of bodies that reveal power: the dead go through the motions they went through when living, while the living attempt to preserve the collapsing social structure. In other words, the normative practices instituted by power lead the living and the dead to resist death, so that this resistance would originate in a subjection to a power beyond death: power would, then, resist everything which resists it, including death. What I find especially illuminating about Sutherland's thesis is that it focuses on what Foucault called normative practices when we critics tend to focus more on discourse. I would like to test and expand on Sutherland's acute argument not only by widening the focus on the genre, although I will limit myself to Anglo-American films, but also by confronting these films with a theory of the relationship between the subject, power and resistance.

- 4 In the book-version of his dissertation, *Pouvoir et résistance : Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Althusser*, Yoshiyuki Sato looks at the ways four French philosophers discussed the question of resistance through an internal critique of—and thus a resistance to—Lacanian psychoanalysis (2007: 12), which, by constituting the phallus into the transcendental master signifier (of lack) directs all the other signifiers, thus implying the subject's total subjection (2007: 52-53). He focuses, first, on the resisting subject in the writings of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, then on the possibility of change within the social structure in the writings of Derrida and Althusser, both subject and structure being produced by the devices of power (2007: 16).
- 5 In his famous 1970 article "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État," Althusser posits that "all social formation pertains to a dominant mode of production" which aims at reproducing "(1) the forces of production" and "(2) existing relations of production" (1976: 68, my translation), in other words, the subjects and the structures which make it possible to reproduce a qualified and submissive work force.

Althusser calls these structures apparatuses: on the one hand, repressive state apparatuses (the government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons) function by violence, on the other, ideological state apparatuses (religion, school, family, law, politics, culture) which function by ideology (1976: 84). Ideology constitutes the subject through interpellation, an operation which transforms individuals into subjects:

ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a manner that it 'recruits' subjects amongst individuals (it recruits all of them), or 'transforms' individuals into subjects (it transforms all of them) by way of this extremely specific operation I call *interpellation*. (1976: 113, my translation)

- 6 In Sato's reading of Althusser, the French philosopher initially conceives interpellation as perfect, and it is only in later writings, published, for instance, in *Sur la reproduction* (1995), that he attempts to consider the possibility of resistance, suggesting that, in the process of interpellation, the dominant ideology incurs a deviation due to the intervention of contingency and the multiplicity of state apparatuses (Sato 2007: 181-82).
- 7 Foucault speaks of power rather than state. He defines it as "a multiple and mobile field of force relations where far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced" (1976: 135; 1980: 102). Power is "exercized from innumerable points," highly indeterminate, and never something "acquired, seized, or shared" (1976: 123 ; 1980: 94). There is no source of power to contest, nor are there any subjects holding it; power is a structural activity. Nevertheless, Foucault's thesis is fairly similar to Althusser's: power fashions the subject who internalizes normative practices and discourses (whether institutional, scientific, ideological, etc.). According to Sato, Foucault's topographical theory in *Surveiller and punir* is faced with an aporia: subjection is so perfect that no resistance is possible on the part of the subject who "is nothing more than the object of the investment of power, and his resistance his neutralized by the effects of disciplinary power." (2007: 40, my translation) Foucault then tried to theorize resistance in the three volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité*, namely by introducing the notion of an active self to resist the docile subject, opposing subjection to subjectification.

In ontological history, the reflexive gaze functions as a power of resistance, as it extracts the effects of power inscribed in the subject and enables him to turn himself into a desubjected self. In other words, the reflexive gaze affects the very subject, impels him to subjectification and desubjection, and forms the ethical subject. (Sato 2007: 95, my translation)

- 8 The subject cannot be “completely liberated from the power relation” which “produced” him as a subject, but will nevertheless be able to criticize disciplinarity: “Foucault’s strategy of resistance can be summed up as an ongoing historical-reflexive critique,” which emphasizes the importance of “historical contingency” (Sato 2007: 98, my translation), since “the power relation is an effect” of these historical contingencies which Foucault calls “events” (Sato 2007: 93, my translation).
- 9 Sato’s study shows that, for these French thinkers, contingency (namely historical) and multiplicity (of discourses, practices, apparatuses, etc.) are what enables resistance to a homogeneous, synchronic power. A similar case could be argued for Clément Rosset and Judith Butler. Rosset has been actively promoting what he called “chance” and later called “the real” since *La Philosophie tragique* (1960). Rosset proposes an anti-essentialist, anti-naturalist philosophy where everything is a matter either of chance and matter, on the one hand, and of artifice (which would include apparatuses human discourses and practices), on the other. One of the main arguments of *L’Anti-nature* (1973) is that man must accept the tragic fact that nature is a construct (an artifice) meant to explain what is just chance:

All one knows is that nature is what remains when one has eliminated the effects of artifice and chance from all things: no one specifies what remains then, but it is enough to be assured that something does in order to constitute an idea of nature. (1973: 20, my translation)

- 10 In this sense, Rosset foreshadows the anti-essentialist writings of Butler and other contemporary thinkers, although to a different effect.

- 11 Butler takes up Foucault's main thesis that the subject is constituted by power but insists a great deal on the paradox of subjection: "[t]he power imposed upon one is the power that animates one's emergence, and there appears to be no escaping this ambivalence." (1997a: 198) If there is no escaping subjection, there remains the possibility of critique and subversion. For Butler, (sexual, social, racial, etc.) identity is a matter of discourse which constitutes the subject and his body performatively; performativity functions on the iterative mode by repeating norms (1993: 94) and constitutes a specific modality of power as discourse (1993: 187). In other words, for Butler, matter and bodies are a matter of contingency and it is power which makes them signify, endowing them with an essence or a nature. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler took as an example the drag queen whose imitation reveals that gender is a question of structural imitation and thus of contingency (1990: 137). It is the discursiveness of identity which enables subversive resignifications, namely by unloyally mimicking hegemonic forms of power (1993: 124). In *Excitable Speech*, Butler argues "that it is precisely the *expropriability* of the dominant, 'authorized' discourse that constitutes one potential site of its subversive resignification" (1997b: 157), and that "[t]he possibility for a speech act to resignify a prior context depends, in part, upon the gap between the originating context or intention by which an utterance is animated and the effects it produces." (1997b: 14) I will argue that the living dead introduces just such a gap.
- 12 The diachronic study below distinguishes three phases in the Anglo-American zombie movie, starting with the "real" zombie movies, those that take place in a colonial or post-colonial setting, because I believe that, if *Night of the Living Dead* constructs itself in opposition to these films, and if Romero has often rejected the use of the word zombie (Met 2008: 22), the politics of these films nevertheless underlie the genre to this day. I will then focus on the original trilogy of the living dead (1968-1985), before concluding on trends in the contemporary zombie movie which has become so popular and economically viable. My aim is to identify the political potential of the zombie movie, and of the zombie itself, and verify Sutherland's thesis that these movies and bodies offer the spectacle of power. My main argument is that, while the zombie represents absolute subjection, the living dead is a resisting body and that this is what makes it such a po-

tent figure: because the living dead resists meaning, it is more open to meaning. As an instance of contingency, it also introduces structural changes, even as the living attempt to resist the breakdown of order. The potentialities of resistance in the zombie movie are thus enabled by contingency and multiplicity, as in Sato's thesis. This will lead me to qualify Sutherland's statement that the zombie movies "literally tend to *embody* rather than simply *inscribe* political discourse in their aesthetic address" (2007: 75), for this literal embodiment remains symbolical, and thus metaphorical, from a structuralist and poststructuralist perspective.

## 1. (Post-)Colonial Zombies: *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), and some others

- 13 These films include: *White Zombie*, *Revolt of the Zombies* (Halperin, 1936), *King of the Zombies* (Jean Yarbrough, 1941), *I Walked with a Zombie*, *Revenge of the Zombies* (Steve Sekely, 1943), *Voodoo Man* (William Beaudine, 1944), *Zombies on Broadway* (Gordon Douglas, 1945), *Zombies of Mora Tau*, also known as *Voodoo Woman* (Edward L. Cahn, 1957), *Plague of the Zombies* (John Gilling, 1966), a Hammer Film production, and *I Eat Your Skin* (Del Tenney, 1964), released in 1970 after *Night of the Living Dead*. I have not been able to see *Voodoo Island* (Reginald Le Borg, 1957), but from what I gather, it deals only passingly with zombies. Half of the voodoo-inspired zombie movies came out in the early 1940s and all but one of these films are American. My analysis will focus exclusively on *White Zombie*, as the first feature zombie film, and *I Walked with a Zombie*, without doubt the best of these films. However, I will include comments on the other films in my conclusion, namely to point out variations and differences.
- 14 Like most American horror movies of the 1930s, *White Zombie* takes place in a foreign setting, has foreign villains, American heroes, and a classic Gothic aesthetic; most of the scenes take place at night with the final scenes set in a Gothic castle called "the house of the living



dead” over which “a cloud of vultures always hovers”; and Bela Lugosi was famous for his role as Dracula in Tod Browning’s 1931 film. For Wood, “[t]he foreignness of horror in the 30s can be interpreted [...] as a means of disavowal (horror exists, but it is un-American)” (2003: 77). There are no references to the historical background, namely to the fact that, in 1932, Haiti was “no fantastic past environment but a Caribbean island under U.S. occupation,” apart from one interesting remark which occurs in the opening dialogue when Neil describes the location as “our West Indies,” identifying himself as someone who has profited from American imperialism. Even so, Tony Williams has convincingly argued that “the very location used undermines the stereotyped functions the characters are supposed to play out on the film’s manifest level.” (Williams 1983) In so doing, the film actually offers a critique (conscious or unconscious) of American imperialism through displacement and condensation (Williams 1983), while perpetuating “the imperialist model of cultural and racial hegemony” (Bishop 2008: 141).

- 15 The “zombie” and voodoo lore in general are presented as soon as the opening scene, when a black carriage driver reveals that the people they can see walking down a hill are, in fact, “zombie—the living dead—corpses taken from their grave who are made to work in the sugar mills and fields at night.” When Charles pays a visit to Legendre’s mill later on, he observes the zombies working away. Legendre suggests Charles get some to work on his plantation, adding with quiet irony that “these men work faithfully” and “are not worried about long hours.” Legendre’s zombies thus represent a submissive and productive work force; their bodies resist death in spite of themselves because they are completely subjected to their master’s power. Although they do inspire the black driver and Beaumont with horror, they pose no threat unless their master commands them to. The zombie master, like the head vampire, must be neutralized in order to free his slaves. The film is thus structured around an opposition between possessor and possessed (Lowry and de Cordova 2004: 184), the close-ups of the eyes (Legendre’s and Madeline’s) evoking either the windows of an evil, or an absent, soul. Legendre’s power is both social and sexual: he possesses Madeline, then Beaumont whom he has “taken a fancy to.” Legendre not only “embodies the economic, the social, and the religious apparatuses” (Bishop 2008: 148), but de-

tains several state apparatuses (religion, justice, police), having turned the representatives of Haitian society into his own inner circle. It is no surprise, then, that the “native authorities” are “afraid of” the power of voodoo. Legendre introduces his inner circle to Beaumont, naming them one after the other; they are even filmed in frontal medium close-ups. They may be former enemies with high positions, but they remain subjects in Legendre’s eyes. As Williams has noted, Legendre has reproduced Haitian society, with the blacks doing “the menial work while the mulattos supervise.” His inner circle are all mulattos with the exception of the Captain of the Gendarmes who is white (Williams 1983). The black zombies work in the shadows and are mostly filmed in long shots which emphasize the repetitive aspect of their labor<sup>1</sup>; one falls out of line only to be automatically replaced by another. Legendre has thus maintained the hierarchy between the former colonists and slaves, which society has itself reproduced. Indeed, the black characters played by black actors—the driver and the four men carrying Madeleine’s casket—all have their double in zombie form—Legendre’s servants who drive Beaumont and carry Madeline’s casket out of the tomb—suggesting that a black man<sup>2</sup> is equivalent to a white or a mulatto zombie. But Williams argues that Legendre represents not only the foreign “satanic villain” (Williams 1983), as an “aspiring capitalist” (Bishop 2008: 149), he also “mirrors U.S. domination of both the privileged and revolutionary forces in Haiti,” as his inner circle suggests (Williams 1983). As such, his “mill offers a dark mirror image of U.S. colonial occupation,” with the black zombies representing “a macabre version of the forced labor system which the U.S. inflicted on the Haitian population in 1918.” (Williams 1983) The disavowal of American imperialism uncannily returns through the perfect stranger.

- 16 Moreover, the narrative seems to be a disavowal of the movie’s title which indicates that there is only *one* white zombie, presumably Madeline, whose blond hair, pale skin, and white dress contrast with her two maids who are brunettes dressed in white and black. The difference between Madeline and the other zombies has to do with her gender, ethnicity, as well as her specificity: clearly, Madeline is irreplaceable in Charles’s and Neil’s eyes. For Williams, Madeline is “the archetypal white female victim, the vulnerable feminine aspect of U.S. patriarchy” threatened by the Other (Williams 1983), so that

zombification represents the threat of miscegenation and what Kyle Bishop calls “cultural rape” (2008: 150), and “white zombie” ultimately means American zombie. The ensuing horror is expressed by Neil when he lets out in a bout of racist and imperialist superiority: “Well surely you don’t think she’s alive, in the hands of natives? Ah, no, better dead than that!” As Williams has noted, the film is again more ambiguous than it probably means to be, for “[i]n her zombie state, [Madeline] loses all will power and thus echoes Haiti’s plight deprived of government and Constitution,” embodying “Haiti itself” (Williams 1983) and representing total subjection to the colonist’s power. Nevertheless, Madeline seems, at times, capable of some resistance—for instance, when she looks out the castle window (Lowry and de Cordova 2004: 208)—the film clearly implying that love is stronger than death—and that American women are less submissive than Haitian men, whether mulatto or black. The addition of “white” in the film’s title confirms the idea that Madeline resists the darkness of zombification and that the American character remains “uncontaminated by [foreign evil] morally,” as is often the case in American horror movies of the 1930s (Wood 2003: 77). The movie’s title thus constitutes a denial of American imperialism, the Africanist presence and the black stain of slavery in American history, just as so many other films of the period constitute a denial of American imperialist power (Bouget 1999: 176).

- 17 Like *White Zombie* and *Revolt of the Zombies*, *I Walked with a Zombie* is a story of love and mystery which plays on Gothic tropes and conveys a claustrophobic atmosphere (Menegaldo 2006: 89-90); producer Val Lewton even described it as “a West Indian version of *Jane Eyre*” (Bansak 1995: 145-46). Wood has noted that the film undercuts binary oppositions “white-black, light-darkness, life-death, science-black magic, Christianity-Voodoo, conscious-unconscious, etc.—and it proceeds systematically to blur all of them.” (2003: 78) The film’s resorting to what Todorov later called the pure Fantastic, which maintains the hesitation between a rational and an irrational explanation to the end, is mainly what enables the subversion of a genre which had, up to now, drawn on the supernatural (Todorov’s Marvelous). As Gilles Menegaldo has noted, the film does not force the spectator to decide whether Jessica has been zombified or is merely ill<sup>3</sup> (2006: 93, 95). Likewise, Carrefour, who seems to obey orders given by various

characters—Mrs. Rand and the *houngan*, i.e. the voodoo priest—is never explicitly identified as a zombie by the characters, including those who believe in voodoo lore; presumably named after Papa Legba, the guardian of crossroads, he embodies an in-between state. In the end, the crosscutting in the final scenes offers two explanations for Jessica’s death: either Wesley has been possessed by the power of voodoo, or he has killed her of his own free will before committing suicide. Another consequence of the pure Fantastic, which leads to a novelty in the zombie movie that will not be taken up until *Night of the Living Dead*, is that it is by no means certain that there is a zombie master who could be either Mrs. Rand or the *houngan*. Moreover, if Mrs. Rand first tells Jessica that she uses voodoo to manipulate the black population who “disobeyed” her, her intentions are rather commendable as she aims at giving them medical attention, something Dr. Maxwell equally admits to, yet she later confesses that she was really possessed when she turned Jessica into a zombie. The film plays on another corresponding binary, the couple formed by Jessica and Carrefour, the white American female and the black Haitian male who appear to be zombies. The film appears to maintain the racist opposition of *White Zombie*, for if both the black male and the white female are lumbering, submissive bodies, the black male has globular glazed eyes whereas Jessica’s eyes are untouched, suggesting that the white American female is less a zombie than the black Haitian male. Yet Carrefour leads Betsy and Jessica to ceremony and a potential cure, while Jessica is believed to have destroyed the family in the mind of Mrs. Rand and the local population. In other words, the white zombie represents corruption and transgression of the family order—the relation between the two brothers, Paul and Wesley—that Mrs. Rand—the mother—sought to preserve. As such, it “identif[ies] [the horror located at the heart of the family] with sexual repressiveness in the cause of preserving family unity” (Wood 2003: 77), thereby revealing the corruption at the heart of the socially dominant white family. As in the previous films, the power of voodoo enables wishfulfillment, as Betsy is last shown in the arms of Paul Holland, the unhappy husband of the adulturous zombie.

- 18 I *Walked with a Zombie* also thematizes the disavowal of history of films like *White Zombie*, ending on a close shot of an icon of pain: the figurehead of a slaveship. On Betsy’s arrival, a black carriage driver

tells her about the history of his people who were brought to Haiti in chains. When she comments on how beautiful the place is, he retorts: “If you say, Miss. If you say . . .” In other words, the white character might be in denial regarding the history of slavery, but the film, via the black character, is not. Betsy is by no means racist in the ordinary sense of the term; on the contrary, the film shows her interest for the black characters to be genuine, namely in the scene where she coos Alma’s newborn nephew. In other words, the film undercuts the white subject’s racist tendency to pay more heed to what a white character says than to a black character, which was clearly the case in *White Zombie* where Neil lends more credence to Dr. Bruner’s opinion about voodoo than to the carriage driver, or in *King of the Zombies* which plays on the fact that the African American character, Jefferson Jackson, is thought to have imagined things because the color of his skin makes him essentially superstitious and associates him with the natives. Nevertheless, Betsy pays more attention to the discourse of the dominant white upper class male; she is made more sensitive to the plight of the former slaves when Paul Holland comments on the figurehead: “That’s where our people came from, from the misery and pain of slavery. [...] I told you Miss Connell, this is a sad place.” Moreover, if Paul Holland is the owner of a sugar mill, and if the Rand family probably came to Haiti during the American occupation, Paul’s use of “our people” contrasts with Neil’s use of “our West Indies” in *White Zombie*: Paul defines himself as Haitian, Neil as an American colonizer. At the same time, Paul’s use of “our” constitutes a denial of the historical, social and racial differences between his employees and himself, which would, ironically, relate him to a previous owner of a sugar mill, Legendre who calls his zombies “men.” But the end of the film will reveal that Paul and Wesley shared the voodoo beliefs of the black population as children. By murdering Jessica, Wesley keeps her out of the hands of the natives, recalling Neil’s racist remark in *White Zombie*, but this act also suggests that he still adheres to the discourse of voodoo as an adult—and the supernatural interpretation would even mean that he was literally, and not just symbolically, subjected to it. The final scenes establish a new parallel, this time between Wesley carrying Jessica’s body and Carrefour bringing her body back, a parallel which debunks the racist stereotype of the black rapist who assaulted white women that haunted films like *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935) (Young 1991). Carrefour’s open arms

even give the impression that he means to save her from her murderous lover.

- 19 In this respect, the practices and discourses of voodoo are empowered in a movie which offers a fairly realistic representation of voodoo (Menegaldo 2006: 87-88); according to Gwenda Young, it “is not reduced to ‘mumbo-jumbo’ superstition, its practitioners are not portrayed as evil or childlike. The realism with which voodoo is portayed encourages the audience to keep an open mind.” (Bishop 2010b: 65) *I Walked with a Zombie* offers two voice-overs that are quite exceptional for the time. Kaja Silverman has pointed out the quasi-absence of disembodied female voices in classic Hollywood cinema; this was even more the case for black voices, regardless of gender. The film opens with Betsy’s voice and ends on an anonymous disembodied voice belonging presumably to a black Haitian male who asserts that the white woman was punished for her evil-doing. Unlike Madeleine in *White Zombie*, then, the white zombie, here, is not the victim but the villain: she does not reveal the corruption of blackness and/or foreignness, but that of whiteness. This was already the case earlier on in the film when the Calypso singer revealed to Betsy the scandal in the Rand family through his lyrics. Again, the film questions the authority of these voices, as this interpretation corresponds to that of Mrs. Rand who has power over the native population. It seems to me, then, that the voice which enables to resist the suspicious authority of the final voice-over is Alma’s, Jessica’s black servant who likes to tend for her beautiful mistress and believes in voodoo. The pure Fantastic is, then, what allows the zombies in the film to resist absolute signification—Daniel Fischer has spoken of “the *failure of meaning*” (1997: 26, my translation)—and the minority voices and cultures to be empowered: the “I” in the title refers to Betsy whose first sentence, spoken in voice-over, suggests that she, too, adheres to the idea that Jessica and/or Carrefour were zombies.
- 20 These are my main conclusions concerning power and resistance in the (post-)colonial zombie movie.
- 21 • The American post-colonial zombie movie involves a mystery, often a love story, taps into various Gothic topoi, and takes place in an exotic setting which is usually closer to home than other classical horror movies (*Revenge of the Zombies* and *Voodoo Man* take place ex-

clusively in the U.S., *Plague of the Zombies* in the U.K.; exceptions are *Revolt of the Zombies* which has French characters and is set in Indochina, and *Zombies of Mora-Tau* set in Africa). Because the zombie master is foreign (except in the British *Plague of the Zombies*), the representation of evil denies any U.S. responsibility whether in relation to slavery or colonization, even though the films often take place in a former American colony. The zombie is a North American monster; it pre-exists diegetically and extradiegetically as an exotic, mysterious element belonging to a foreign culture. In the early films, however, “zombie” is a discursive norm that is unfamiliar to the main character, but that is an ordinary part of Haitian or Caribbean culture (by *Revenge of the Zombies*, the protagonists are more familiar with the term “zombies,” although *Zombies on Broadway* plays on the idea that they would not necessarily be able to recognize one). The zombie offers no resistance to the meaning its master and culture projects onto it.

- 22 • The zombie resists life and death but is completely subjected to the zombie master and represents “nothing more than the object of the investment of power,” like Foucault’s subject of power (Sato 2007: 40). It represents, then, the complete absence of resistance and evokes the specter of slavery and/or colonization. The zombie is a victim. Hence, it is not so much the zombie which is feared, as the state of being and especially becoming a zombie that is horrifying. Economically, zombification often represents the perfect reproduction of what Althusser calls the forces of production (for economic purposes in *White Zombie* and *Plague of the Zombies*, for military purposes in *Revolt of the Zombies*, *Revenge of the Zombies* and *I Eat Your Skin*). It also represents the threat of miscegenation, a “cultural rape” (Bishop 2008: 150); this explains why the victim is usually an American female whose moral purity will sometimes enable her to resist to some extent (in *White Zombie*, but especially in *Revenge of the Zombies* where the zombified Lila von Altermann commands the zombies to turn against their Nazi zombie master), and sometimes prove that love (for one’s country in *Revenge of the Zombies*, or friendship in *King of the Zombies* where Mac recognizes Bill’s voice and leads the zombies to turn against Dr. Sangre) is stronger than death. Zombification clearly represents the repressed returning to affect the colonist and/or slave-master, so that the emphasis on the radical otherness of the

zombie constitutes a disavowal of its own uncanny terms. Indeed, the zombie master often offers an instance of wish-fulfillment for the characters (or for himself when he is acting out of love as in *Voodoo Man* or scientific ambition as in *Zombies on Broadway*).

- 23 • The zombie master is the villain (except if he is under the villain's command as in *I Eat Your Skin*, or in *Zombies of Mora-Tau* where the zombies are cursed and there is no living master). He embodies the threat of absolute power, the enactment of desire, and the transgression of the natural order as he reanimates the dead. The (post-)colonial zombie film often taps into the myth of Faust and the modern Prometheus (*Revolt of the Zombies*), namely by resorting to a mad scientist (*Voodoo Man*, *Zombies on Broadway*). Power is personified and various discourses and practices or state apparatuses—political, economic, religious, scientific, familial—are conflated in one character. Apart from *I Walked with a Zombie*, the post-colonial zombie movie does not call into question hegemony, but sides with the “good” order of patriarchal democratic plurality where power is in the hands of several characters, as opposed to the “evil” order of tyranny. The narratives generally restore order in the end by eliminating the transgressive character. Resisting zombification is thus both resisting tyranny and restoring or maintaining the “natural” order. It is striking that most of these films were produced in the early 1940s, some of the films making the zombie master a Nazi<sup>4</sup> (*King of the Zombies*, *Revenge of the Zombies*).
- 24 It is notable that *I Walked with a Zombie* contradicts or at least qualifies most of my remarks. No doubt the filmmakers had *White Zombie* in mind, but the assumption that the genre was sufficiently coded so that they were deliberately subverting it after only three films is highly debatable; most of these differences are brought about by the hesitation produced by the Fantastic. The later films, which were clearly tapping into the success of *I Walked with a Zombie*, are increasingly self-conscious in terms of genre, with Ralph Dawson, a screenwriter, suggesting Bela Lugosi play the part of Dr. Richard Marlowe in *Voodoo Man*, and *Zombies on Broadway* making several obvious allusions to *I Walked with a Zombie*, most notably the Calypso singer who sings the same tune with different lyrics. All in all, the (post-)colonial zombie movie seems to have undergone the typical



three-stage trajectory of development, maturation and decline, ascribed to many genres by film genre theorists (Altman 1999: 30).

## **2. Romero's living dead trilogy: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985)**

- 25 *Night of the Living Dead* breaks with the (post-)colonial model by making the living dead cannibals, autonomous (they have no master) and white when Ben, the main protagonist, is black (Angelier 2007: 23); the living dead are mainly dangerous as a mass. The film mixes the zombie movie with the siege movie (Paffenroth 2006: 5)—Wood and Menegaldo see *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963) as one of its main influences (Wood 2003: 103; Menegaldo 2003: 146, 150)—with seven people holed up in a house in the country, trying to keep the living dead out until help arrives. The film focuses very little on the monsters outside and almost exclusively on the tensions among the living. Although Ben immediately tells Barbara that the only way to survive is to “get to where there’s some other people” and work “together,” each additional survivor actually represents a new threat (Paffenroth 2006: 39). Ben and Harry Cooper vie for power over the living, while Tom advocates cooperation (Paffenroth 2006: 31); the power struggle is symbolically spatialized when Ben tells Harry: “You can be boss down there [in the basement]. I’m boss up here.” In the end, the tensions inside get the better of the outside threat, with Harry attempting to take the rifle away from Ben who is struggling to keep the zombies out. Wood says that the film expresses “total negativity” vis-à-vis American society (2003: 105), metonymically represented by the survivors, especially the Coopers, a “typical American nuclear family” with a father whose authority is discredited and a mother who feels trapped in the couple; for Wood, “[t]he destruction at the hands of their zombie daughter represents the film’s judgement on them and the norm they embody.” (2003: 103)
- 26 Wood sees the living dead as embodying the return of the repressed in white American patriarchal culture: “[t]he zombies’ attacks [...]

have their origins in (are the physical projection of) psychic tensions that are the product of patriarchal male/female or familial relationships.” (2003: 103) The living resist in order to survive and safeguard the social structure, metonymically represented by the house. Ironically, they tear up the inside of the house in order to make it more resistant to the outside. The shots of the zombies’ arms reaching through the spaces in the boarded-up windows and doors symbolize the flaws in the social body which the repressed slips through; cannibalism, i.e. gnawing away at the body, thus represents the somatization of the repressed. Discord also occurs at the national level. The radio announcer describes the situation as “mayhem” and says that they “have been unable to determine that any kind of organized investigation is under way,” while the first TV news report shows the representatives of various state apparatuses (the military, the scientists and the politicians in Washington, D.C.) disagreeing over the cause of the outbreak. Critics have underlined that *Night of the Living Dead* is the most pessimistic and nihilistic of Romero’s living dead films (Wood 2003: 104; Waller 1985: 320; Paffenroth 2006: 40) in spite of, or rather because of, the final restoration of order. As the “high-angle helicopter shot” over the countryside suggests, “there is no real difference between posse and zombies who are seen above like ants.” (Paffenroth 2006: 30) For Wood,

It is the function of the posse to restore the social order that has been destroyed; the zombies represent the suppressed tensions and conflicts—the legacy of the past, of the patriarchal structuring of relationships, “dead” yet automatically continuing—which that order creates and on which it precariously rests. (2003: 103)

- 27 The film asserts its modernity by presenting a negative view of the restoration of order, and thus the return of oppression and repression, as opposed to the politics of the classic Hollywood horror movie.
- 28 *Night of the Living Dead* also asserts its modernity by parodying traditional Gothic motifs typical of the (post-)colonial zombie movies in the opening scene, with the graveyard, the use of thunder, the stereotypical Gothic heroine, the first lone zombie who resembles a caricature of the Frankenstein monster (Waller 1985: 272; Menegaldo 2003: 142; Paffenroth 2006: 28), and Johnny’s imitation of Bela Lugosi

(Williams 2003: 25), who starred in *White Zombie*, *Voodoo Man* and *Zombies on Broadway*. Whereas in the older films, the term “zombie” pre-existed the creatures presented in the diegesis, in *Night of the Living Dead*, the phenomenon is utterly new and unaccounted for. Barbra’s first question for Ben is: “What’s happening?” In *White Zombie* and *King of the Zombies*, a black Haitian character provided the answer; in *Night of the Living Dead*, the black middle-class African American (Waller 1985: 282; Williams 2003: 26) has none. Nor does the media, as it relays the authorities’ “bewilderment.” Ben calls the creatures “things,” Barbara identifies the living dead who chased her in the cemetery as “this man,” and the radio announcer describes the living dead as “ordinary-looking people in a transe,” “misshapen monsters,” “murder-happy characters” and “things that look like people but act like animals,” before wondering whether they are not “creatures from outerspace.” The audience, however, has a rough idea, because of (1) the title, the term “living dead” having been used in both zombie and vampire movies, and (2) the representation of the living dead as lumbering corpses is in keeping with the zombies of previous films—for contemporary audiences, the film is, quite simply, *the first zombie movie as we know it*. It is only two-thirds of the way into the film that the announcer informs us that “[i]t has been established that persons who have recently died have been returning to life and committing acts of murder [...] seeking human victims.” The possible rational explanation for the rise of the dead is given a few minutes later: a satellite recently sent to Venus has brought radiation back to earth, which might have reanimated their brains. *Night of the Living Dead* parodies the sci-fi horror films of the 1950s, namely radioactive big bug movies like *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954), and the score sometimes resembles that of a sci-fi film, the soprano voice even recalling the main theme of *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-1969)—hence the “creatures from outerspace” hypothesis. The elimination of the zombie master, the film’s second major novelty, annihilates causality as well as all hierarchy amongst the living dead. If the zombie master made his zombies’ bodies matter, reproducing distinctions of class, gender and race, the living dead in Romero’s films are bodies that do not matter, that do not signify. Or almost. For in *Night of the Living Dead*, it is the living who individuate the living dead and make them signify, for instance when Barbara recognizes her dead brother before being taken away by him.

- 29 *Night of the Living Dead* plays on the same fears as the post-colonial films, that of being murdered by a zombie or that of being turned into a zombie. Hence, the horror of contamination—significantly, the radio announcer describes the outbreak as an “epidemic of mass murder”—emphasizes a third aspect that was only suggested in *Revolt of the Zombies*: the zombies represent a threat because of their increasing numbers, much like the vampires in *I Am Legend* (Waller 1985: 274), the Pod People in *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), and *The Birds*. As Ben points out, he can “handle” the lone zombies. The living dead represent an increasing force with one sole drive: eating the living. In so doing, they reveal that they are bodies that resist not only death, but meaning, and thus the “natural” order as a human construct. The living dead, then, are not zombies: they are the intertextual resignification of the discursive norm “zombie,” a word present in the title of most prior films. The oxymoronic term “living dead” is more abstract, drawing attention to the in-between state it implies. The film dramatizes the construction of signification of these bodies by various discourses—those of the characters, the media, the military and the scientist—ultimately attempting to fashion one homogenous body: the “living dead.” It is thus the living dead’s absence of meaning which makes a potentially politically subversive (re)signification possible. Hence, if the racial reading of the film focuses on the final images which evoke the imagery of lynching (Paffenroth 2006: 38), one must keep in mind that the living dead were just as willing to devour the black protagonist (and make him one of them) as the white posse was quick to identify Ben as not being one of their own.
- 30 If *Night of the Living Dead* is considered to be among the first modern horror movies, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) is the movie that set the rules for the genre (Paffenroth 2006: 45). *Night of the Living Dead* did influence Romero’s own *The Crazies* (1973) as well as David Cronenberg’s first feature films, *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977), but apart from *Children Shouldn’t Play with Dead Things* (Bob Clark, 1973) in the U.S.A., *Les Raisins de la Mort* (Jean Rollin, 1978) in France, and the 1970 release of *I Eat Your Skin* (Del Tenney, 1964) which had been shelved for six years, there were very few spin-offs of the first installment, compared to the number of zombie movies which came out in the wake of the 1978 sequel, including *Zombi 2* (Lucio Fulci, 1979), *Incubo sulla città*

*contaminata* (Umberto Lenzi, 1980) and *Zombi Holocaust* (Marino Girolami, 1980) in Italy, *Le Lac des morts vivants* (Jean Rollin, 1981) in France, and *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985-2005) series in the U.S.A.

- 31 In *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), four characters, a couple who used to work for a TV station and two SWAT officers, fly away from the chaos in Philadelphia and hole up in a mall which they secure, until a gang of bikers invades the mall that is once again overrun by the living dead. The 1978 film plays on its status as a sequel by literally taking the epidemic *en cours*. The first two scenes immediately establish an atmosphere of disorder, with the TV crew violating the invisible barrier meant to separate them from the interviewee, and members of the SWAT team shooting indiscriminately at the living and the dead, committing suicide or running away. As in *Night of the Living Dead*, the survivors later rely on TV as a source of information, but it only relays the hopelessness of the situation and the discord between the media and the authorities, comprised of the military and scientists. As Wood has noted, both the zombies and the gang, which exploits the disintegration of order, “dramatize, albeit in significantly different ways, the possibility of the development of Fascism out of breakdown and chaos” (2003: 105); the movie also makes the point that the military and the bikers are the fittest to survive in this apocalyptic world<sup>5</sup> (Larsen 1979). Various state apparatuses are no longer functioning in relative unison, so that the disorder reveals the various discourses and practices (of the media, the military, the state and science) at work. Ironically, such a perfect reproduction of the forces not of production but, in this case, of consumption, was heretofore unseen.
- 32 After functioning mainly as witnesses of the chaos, the four protagonists become more active when they secure the mall in scenes which parody the action movie (Waller 1985: 314; Paffenroth 2006: 50-51), namely by resorting to stock music scores and cues. The protagonists then attempt to recreate the old order of consumer society (Bishop 2010a: 236, 243), rather than invent a new way. The narrative dramatizes the protagonists’ impulse and ultimate failure to resist change when some of the most obvious markers of power, such as the dollars they take from the bank (Humphries 2008: 89), no longer signify. Paffenroth has suggested that “[t]he plot of the movie is consistently driven by the humans’ lust to acquire and possess, which is

especially predominant in the male characters.” (2006: 57) Indeed, the narrative subverts sexist stereotypes by showing the male characters to be more infatuated with goods deemed to be typically feminine (clothes and gourmet foods) than the female character, Fran (Paffenroth 2006: 60). Steven, the character who fails to call into question his fascination with the mall, is ultimately “punished” for his greed and returns as a living dead, forcing Fran and Peter to abandon the mall (Humphries 2008: 87-88; Bishop 2010a: 245). If *Night of the Living Dead* was pessimistic because order was restored, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) ends on a more optimistic note if only because the white pregnant woman and the black man seem to have understood that they must give up the old order, suggesting a possibly utopian future (Paffenroth 2006: 65).

- 33 The 1978 sequel gives a more coherent representation of the living dead who are even blander, more zombie-like, so to speak, than in *Night of the Living Dead*: all of them are very slow-moving<sup>6</sup>, incapable of using tools, e.g. Stephen with his gun dangling on his finger, and do not react to pain but immediately drop dead. (In the 1968 film, the man in the cemetery stumbles after Barbra, the living dead smash out the headlights of Ben’s vehicle with rocks, one wields the leg of a table to besiege the house, another uses a trowel to kill someone, and yet another clutches his face after getting shot.) Wood has noted that the zombies “are no longer associated with specific characters or character tensions [...] The zombies instead are a given from the outset; they represent, on the metaphorical level, the whole dead weight of patriarchal consumer capitalism” (2003: 105). The zombies thus reflect the drive of all capitalist subjects, including the characters; the end credits show them shopping happily ever after like “ideal mallgoers” (Paffenroth 2006: 55). On their arrival, Stephen offers a hypothesis as to why the living dead congregate in and around the mall: “Some sort of instinct maybe. This was an important place in their lives.” Stephen, who will grow very attached to the mall, is clearly speaking for himself (Sutherland 2007: 70). In other words, this metaphorical meaning is projected onto the bodies of the living dead. This metaphor has been taken up by most of the critical commentary on the film, Bishop describing the living dead as “slaves to the master of consumerism” (2010: 235). Moreover, the idea that the living dead not only imitate life, but imitate their past lives, is one of the main novel-

ties of the 1978 sequel. Sutherland's thesis that "zombie films represent the survival of such structured movements right as the structures supporting them devolve into crisis" (2007: 71-72) starts, then, with *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Indeed, by repeating the movements of the living, the living dead reveal in grotesque fashion the functioning of power at the most visceral level, that of practice. The living dead as an unindividuated mass thus reflect the invisible practices the living have assimilated and the discourses they have internalized. The editing encourages this metaphorical reading of the film by cutting from shots of the living dead to shots of dimestore mannequins in time to the Muzak playing in the mall.

- 34 The tendency to project meaning also concerns the apparent individuation of some of the living dead. The mass of zombies is presented as more urban and diversified than in the first installment, with a greater variety of races and classes. As Waller has noted, the use of color and the well-lit scenes contribute to individuating the zombies when singled out, although

[w]hen the living dead are seen from a distance (as in many of Romero's long shots), these shared characteristics tend to cancel out individual distinctions and to make the creatures—inner-city blacks as well as suburban whites—all part of one homogeneous mass. (1985: 305)

- 35 The film provides "a full range of American stereotyped zombies" (Larsen 1979) by playing on physical appearance, especially clothes, in order to evoke the past identity of individual living dead. The crew, fans and critics of the movie name the zombies according to these characteristics—e.g. "a zombie Little League coach" (Paffenroth 2006: 69), the "dead nun,"<sup>7</sup> or the "Hare Krishna zombie" now available as a 5-inch action figure—thus displaying that identity is a construct based on discursive norms. The editing can also contribute to individuating the living dead, through the use of close shots and the shot/reverse-shot technique which suggests some form of communication between two subjects, most notably when Fran and "the Little League zombie" gaze at each other. The body of the living dead is then constructed through normative discourses and practices, including fashion as a social marker, language and cinematography. I have argued elsewhere that the descriptive sequence of the living

dead outside the mall reveals that the disorder brought about by the living dead at the profilmic level cannot be contained by the frame even by cutting to a wider shot (Roche 2011: 82). The living dead resist the frame because their numbers are spread out: their bodies cannot be contained by state apparatuses and the practices and discourses of power, whether diegetic, filmic or extradiegetic. The disorder they introduce in the social body involves, above all, meaning.

- 36 The 1978 sequel also grounds its political metaphor in the post-colonial zombie movie intertext. As Bishop has noted,

the movie reestablishes the zombies as pathetic metaphors for colonial native peoples: the humans have arrived to invade and plunder an existing, exotic location, securing the borders before wiping the “indigenous population” in a bloodbath of reckless violence. (2010: 241)

- 37 The tribal music and the parodic sounds of an African safari when Peter and Steven stock up on weapons certainly encourage such a reading. If Peter’s race, like Ben’s in *Night of the Living Dead*, is not an issue amongst the survivors<sup>8</sup>, he does evoke his Caribbean origins in one of the movie’s most famous lines: “When there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth.” This quote is essential because it links Peter’s personal history to the zombie movie as a genre, but also to the history of zombie imagery: it asserts that Peter is a descendant of the slaves who brought their beliefs to the Americas. By quoting his grand-father from Trinidad, Peter constructs the living dead into an enactment of African beliefs, and thus into the return of the repressed in American history. His statement draws attention to the analogy between the living dead and the colonized suggested in the preceding scenes, so that there is a shift from the filmic to the diegetic, while harking back to the scene where the SWAT team conquers a tenement building in Philadelphia. This scene, the first where we see the living dead, foreshadows the cleaning out ex-SWAT officers Peter and Roger will do in the mall as it involves the same skills. Here, a Puerto Rican priest explains to Peter and Roger that the inhabitants of the tenement building have resisted the SWAT team and refused to give up their dead because of their religious beliefs. The subsequent scene, where they execute the living dead in the basement, shows Peter explaining the community’s feelings, presumably



because he is closer to them (Williams 2003: 90), to Roger who has not understood the priest's explanation: "Because they still believe there's respect in dying." The living dead are clearly seen as human victims in the eyes of their loved ones. Systematically eliminating the living dead, as the posse does at the end of *Night of the Living Dead*, entails a dehumanization of the zombies, but even more a denial of one's own human nature. When Peter executes the living dead in the basement, the close-up emphasizes Peter's resistance to his own disgust at what he is doing, suggesting that it is his act which is abject, not the living dead. The narrative drives the point in by "punishing" Roger, who will become a living dead after having gleefully massacred the living dead like the bikers at the end of the movie. The uncanny dimension of the living dead are what makes them human in our eyes, but it also turns out to be what makes us human in our own eyes. What is at stake, then, is the possibility of losing one's humanity regardless of zombification, of becoming a zombie symbolically if not literally. If the living dead have no master, the danger for the living is to attempt to master them anyway.

- 38 This is especially clear in Romero's next installment, *Day of the Dead*, where twelve survivors, including seven soldiers, three scientists, one helicopter pilot and one radio, have taken refuge in an underground bunker, having thus ironically traded places with the dead (Thoret 2007: 12)—John calls the bunker a "tombstone." Even more than in the previous films, perhaps, "the real threat to survival [is] the class-based verbal savagery different characters exhibit towards each other rather than the zombies outside." (Williams 2003: 131) Indeed, *Day of the Dead* offers a closer look at what remains of the state apparatuses, mainly glimpsed on TV in the previous films, and confirms Wood's idea that Fascism thrives on chaos. Captain Rhodes, the new commanding officer, asserts his "tyranny" with sadistic violence (Paffenroth 2006: 74), threatening, first, to rape Sarah, then to have her executed. Wood sees the film as a

response to Reaganite cinema, the Rocky/Rambo syndrome. *Day* presents this in sexual terms (the overvaluation of the phallus, the obsession with "size") and in more general terms of aggression and domination. [...] What Romero captures, magnificently, is the *hysteria* of contemporary masculinity, the very excesses of which testify to an anxiety, a terror. In *Day*, the grossness of the characters is answered

appropriately by the grossness of their deaths; dismemberment and evisceration as the ultimate castration. (290)

39 Indeed, the bunker's complete downfall is directly caused by Private Miguel, "tormented indeed (partly under the goads of the other men) by the failure of his masculinity, and provoking disasters by his attempts to reassert it." (Wood 2003: 294) Miguel's inferiority complex, his impression of being symbolically castrated by his superior officers as well as by Sarah, his lover, leads him to let the living dead in, giving up not only his body, but the social body he was formerly trying to preserve.

40 The 1985 film also resurrects the Promethean mad scientist and the zombie slaves of the (post-)colonial zombie movies. Dr. Logan, whom Rhodes and John call "Frankenstein," is conducting experiments in order to find a way to domesticate the living dead; the survivors keep a corral for his experiments. Williams describes Logan as

a potentially dangerous figure fascinated with the very authoritarian ideology characteristic of the old society. [...] Logan's attitudes thus parallel those of other scientific establishments who ignored their responsibilities to society and eagerly worked with totalitarian regimes. (2003: 135)

41 Again, the narrative shows that the old order is clearly not worth saving; the characters are not interested in the records of "the good old U.S. of A." the bunker contains (Paffenroth 2006: 79), unlike the characters of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) who were still interested in money. The three characters who survive in the end, John, William McDermott and Sarah, are those who reject the discourses and practices both of the military and of the scientists. John and McDermott, the most marginal characters, are highly critical of the old order from the start, John pointing out that they don't "believe in what" the scientists are doing here. The narrative, then, focuses mainly on Sarah who progressively turns away from the old order. Wood has noted that,

Initially antagonistic, Sarah progressively associates herself with the two men who have opted out of the military-versus-scientist conflict; she effectively learns, in fact, to abandon any attempt to save

American civilization, which the film characterizes as a waste of time. (2003: 292)

- 42 The utopian future can only be founded by those who rejected the old order; as Paffenroth has pointed out, “because of their gender, race, or socially unacceptable behavior, [the three survivors] stand outside the power structure of the ‘normal,’ pre-zombie, prejudgement America—a woman, a black man, and a drunken (nominal) Christian.” (2006: 89)
- 43 Due to the change of locus, the living dead are no longer directly associated with rampant consumerism. Although they are shown to be in a more advanced state of decomposition, they “have the ability to learn from their experiences” (Williams 2003: 134). Dr. Logan’s behavioral experiments further reveal how blurry the frontier between living and dead has become, namely through the character of Bub. Bub is the only living dead capable of speech (Paffenroth 2006: 75). Williams suggests that “[Bub’s] advanced pupil status may owe more to his former military training where obedience was the norm” (2003: 136). Indeed, when Captain Rhodes visits him, Bub salutes him like a soldier. Yet, Bub is also capable of emotion and empathy: he is moved by Beethoven’s *9th Symphony* which celebrates brotherly love (Wood 2003: 289), and he grieves over the death of his former master. So unlike the living dead in the previous films, Bub does more than just mimic his past life: he endows his movements with meaning. By saluting Rhodes a second time after shooting him, Bub lends irony to his gesture, mocking, at a metafictional level, the hysterical male action hero of Reaganite cinema. Bub is not merely avenging his master: he had already attempted to shoot Rhodes earlier on, right after looking at himself in the mirror. The scientists are not in the room with him at this point, so that only the spectator can observe Bub’s self-awareness. The shot/reverse-shot represents an instance of what François Jost calls “secondary internal ocularization” (Gaudreault and Jost 1990: 131) which allows us to see what Bub sees (the same technique is used when Bub finds Logan’s body); the film later offers an instance of “secondary internal auricularization” (Gaudreault and Jost 1990: 134) when Bub listens to the *9th Symphony* with headphones. Both scenes clearly encourage identification with the living dead character. Bub, who has just freed himself from his chains, is no

longer a subject of power, i.e. the object of the investment of power: he has become a self capable of subversively resignifying a symbolic gesture, a sign of submission resignified as a sign of revolt. Bub even resists to his own “nature” as he does not take part in the final feast (Paffenroth 2006: 82), undermining, then, the conception of the “living dead” the three films has heretofore constructed, mainly through the discourse of science. Bub, then, does not resist meaning, passively deconstructing meaning as a living dead; he constructs meaning as a self by criticizing the same discourses of power the film attacks: military and science. The original trilogy ends, ironically, with a living dead who is not only the film’s hero, but who is more human than most of the human characters (Paffenroth 2006: 87), grieving for a scientist who espoused a “dehumanizing view of human nature” (Paffenroth 2006: 84).

- 44 I would argue that the similarities and differences between Romero’s living dead films and the (post-)colonial movies lead to the opposite conclusion: resistance is directed at the “natural” order and is enabled by contingency and multiplicity.
- 45 • The term “living dead” does not pre-exist in the diegetic world where various terms are used to refer to them. Diegetically, the “living dead” do not represent a highly specific discursive construct, so that the diegetic and extradiegetic do not overlap. Generically, however, Romero’s films are not only identified as zombie movies, but they have come to exemplify the paradigms of the genre, so that the living dead are “zombies” *par excellence*. In other words, the term “zombie,” with its cultural and generic implications, affects the films mainly at a metafictional level, with Romero’s films increasingly tapping into the imagery of the (post-)colonial zombie movie. The term “living dead,” being more generic than the term “zombie,” may have enabled the genre to export itself and diversify its meaning. Indeed, if the term has become a discursive construct generically, Romero’s films constantly debunk the “rules” his previous films established, calling into question the stability of the term “living dead.”
- 46 • The living dead embody an in-between state. The oxymoron calls into question the “natural” dichotomy between living and dead, suggesting potential ways in which the two terms can relate to, and eventually reflect, each other: the dead mimic the living, the living

mimic the dead. The ethical threat for the human survivors lies not only in literal but symbolic death, i.e. the risk of losing your humanity by denying the other's humanity (whether living or dead) and/or remaining completely subjected to a dead(ly) order. Ironically, the more the survivors resist and attempt to maintain that power, the more like the dead they become, while from film to film the living dead become increasingly human.

- 47 • It is incorrect to suggest that Romero's films only play on the fear of being killed by a zombie (Bishop 2008: 144). On the contrary, they clearly emphasize the horror of zombification which no longer evokes colonisation but more generally human mortality. In Romero's films, all the dead return to life, not just those who were contaminated. The human subject is thus a slave to the contingency of his own body experienced as a foreign body, and not to "a native, pagan authority" that can be stopped (Bishop 2008: 145). Likewise, the horror of miscegenation is more generally replaced by that of a generalized contamination which eliminates all identity differences. The subject's resistance to zombification is thus an impossible, and to some extent existentially absurd, resistance to an ineluctable death, which Hegel (1807) and Lacan (1959) call the absolute Master, and which is no longer personified by the Gothic villain.
- 48 • The living dead, who, in the first films, are absolutely subjected to the drive to consume, represent the absolute reproduction of the forces of consumption, rather than the reproduction of the forces of production: the zombie proletariat has been replaced by the gentrified living dead. The contamination of consumption is what brings about the collapse of order. This resistance to (and this structural breakdown of) capitalism is, then, "immanent" to capitalist consumer society—and may, in this respect, recall Deleuze and Guattari's thesis in *Anti-oedipe* (Sato 2007: 62). The narrative of *Day of the Dead*, however, depicts a shift from subjection to subjectification, from the docile subject of power to a self capable of actively criticizing power, thus recalling the ethical axis Foucault added in *Histoire de la sexualité* (Sato 2007: 95-96). Again, living and dead reflect each other: Sarah learns to reject the discourses of science and, generally speaking, the old order, while Bub constitutes himself as a self by resisting both the military order he was subjected to as a human subject—his salute offers an example of the resignification of a signifier of power

into one of revolt—and his artificially-constructed “nature” established diegetically by scientific discourses and metafictionally by the previous films.

- 49
- The absence of a zombie master implies that disorder and transgression are no longer produced by an absolute order which threatens to overturn the “normal” and “natural” order of things: disorder is quite simply caused by (dis)order. The absence of causality implies that the appearance of the living dead is explicitly a matter of contingency. The collapse of the “natural” order reveals the multiple discourses, practices and state apparatuses which no longer function harmoniously to reproduce productive subjects as well as the system that guarantees their reproduction, so that the state is undermined by its multiplicity. More generally, it reveals the contingency of these structures which are grounded in what Rosset calls an “idea of nature,” i.e. the statement “this is the natural order of things” is an artificial, man-made construct which replaces matter and chance by nature (= artifice). As in the writings of Foucault, the political and the ethical converge (Sato 2007: 67), for the characters must cease to resist the death of the “natural” order, recognize its artificiality and contingency, and attempt to imagine a new ethics which would recognize the contingency of human existence. The living dead thus display the workings of chance and artifice, namely the artificiality of identity as a construct determined by discourses and practices, including gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc. The living dead do not assert their identity by mimicking their past lives: their “mimicry” leads the characters, viewers and critics to *read* it as “mimicry.” What Sutherland identifies as the “literal meaning”—that the living dead “*embody* rather than simply *inscribe* political discourse in their aesthetic address”—is thus already symbolical, and thus, in Lacanian terms, metaphorical. The literal “meaning” of the living dead—which I am already making metaphorical by stating it—is that they are the real, chance, matter, in all its multiplicity. The resistance to power is thus the resistance to meaning.

### 3. The post-9/11 zombie movie craze

- 50 Apart from the color remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (Tom Savini, 1990) and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (Wes Craven, 1988) which aimed at giving a fairly realistic take on Haitian voodoo, the American zombie movies that came out in the 1980s-1990s—two of the shorts in *Creepshow* (George A. Romero, 1982), the *Return of the Living Dead* franchise (1985-2005) and *Flesh Eater* (S. William Hinzman, 1988)—tended to be parodic and even camp, while the New Zealand movie *Dead-Alive* (Peter Jackson, 1992) reveled in gory excesses. Since 2002, there has been an abundance of films with moderate to big budgets, released in the U.S.A., the U.K., Canada, Spain—the [Rec] franchise (2007-2009)—Norway—*Død Snø* (Tommy Wirkola, 2009)—and Serbia—*Zone of the Dead* (Milan Konjevic and Milan Todorovic, 2009)—as well as TV series—*Dead Set* broadcasted on E4 in 2008 and *The Walking Dead* (2010-) on cable station AMC, an adaptation from a comic book series published by Image Comics since 2003. I am going to look at individual movies one by one in order to offer a cautious conclusion on the current zombie movie trend.
- 51 *Resident Evil* (2002) is the film adaptation of one of the most successful video games created by Capcom in 1996. The film is about a super-computer (the Red Queen) who shuts down and kills all the personnel working in a giant underground laboratory (the Hive) belonging to the Umbrella Corporation. A military team sent to neutralize the computer finds three survivors whose memories seem to have been erased by the supercomputer. The first mystery reveals that the Red Queen's actions were justified as a virus was unleashed that has turned the personnel into living dead. The second mystery concerns the identity of those who unleashed the virus, one of whom (Matt Addison) confesses that he wanted to reveal to the world that the Umbrella Corporation's research was illegal. The representation of the living dead appears to be faithful to Romero's films—they are slow, dangerous in numbers, and initially mistaken for human beings—although it adds living dead animals and mutant creatures. The film associates the myth of the modern Prometheus with both artificial intelligence and biological warfare. As its name indicates, and as the

opening titles inform us, the Umbrella Corporation, which has “become the largest commercial entity in the United States,” does research in science, influences politics, and provides weaponry for the military. It represents the film’s supervillain and contributes to the paranoid atmosphere. By giving the epidemic an origin, the film further restores the master of the (post-)colonial zombie movie, adapted to globalized capitalism. The narrative would appear to be anti-dystopian and anti-capitalist, yet the end thwarts all promise of successful resistance: if the two characters who make it out alive are those who wanted to put an end to the Umbrella Corporation’s dominion, they are immediately captured by the company’s employees. The heroine (Alice) then wakes up alone in a laboratory room and walks out into a post-apocalyptic world, ready for combat. The film has already started on its sequel, *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (Alexander Witt, 2004). The end of *Resident Evil* (2002) thus reinstates an oppressive political and economic order by having the diegetic company intervene in order to safeguard the economic profitability of the franchise-to-be for the extradiegetic company who had spent \$32 million on the first installment and would spend \$42 million on the next two (Witt, 2004 and Russell Mulcahy, 2007) and \$60 million on the fourth (Paul W.S. Anderson, 2010).

- 52 The origin of the outbreak in the British *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) is also clearly identified—a man-made disease, akin to “rage,” that was being tested on some chimpanzees—but the film’s aesthetics, politics, and budget (\$8 million) are not comparable to those of *Resident Evil*. The “infected” are fast and extremely violent, recalling the crazies from Romero’s 1973 film more than Romero’s living dead. This forces the film to reinvent the zombie film aesthetics, something *Return of the Living Dead* (which also had running zombies) did not really bother with. First, the infected are far less numerous than the living dead in Romero’s films, although it is not exactly clear why. Second, the film contrasts silence and violence, emptiness and excess, namely when Jim wanders around a deserted London, and later opposes rural and urban environments. The question of speed also pertains to zombification, so that an infected character must be executed immediately (for instance when Selena kills Mark), leaving little time for pathos. *28 Days Later* makes a passing nod at the issue of consumerism when Jim, Selena, Frank and Hannah gleefully shop



for food, and revisits the idea that chaos paves the way for Fascism in the second half of the film when the danger becomes the soldiers the characters sought protection from. These scenes also renew with traditional (post-)colonial zombie imagery, as the soldiers keep one infected, a former black soldier, chained, in order to learn from him, and want to turn Selen and Hannah into reproductive sex slaves. To save them, Jim ends up teaming up with the infected, giving way to the violent animal in him, so that both Selen and Hannah mistake him for one of them, blurring the border between healthy and unhealthy in typical Romerian fashion. The “infected” appear, then, as the logical conclusion of mankind’s evolution as a civilized, yet destructive animal, driven by a rage which is “immanent” to modern civilization. The opening images show news footage of scenes of violence around the world, lending weight to Selen’s remark that when the outbreak started, people believed it was merely rioting. Unlike Romero’s films, *28 Days Later* nostalgically opposes the chaos of the urban world to the harmony of a more pastoral life. The film ends on an humorous note, for when the three characters attempt to attract the attention of fighter planes flying by, their banner reads HELLO and not HELP as might have been expected, suggesting they are quite happy living in utopian harmony with green nature. Ironically, then, the animal rights activists who unwittingly unleashed the virus in the opening scene have, in a sense, succeeded, since the ensuing epidemic has made the utopian pastoral possible. *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresndillo, 2007) then sets out to confirm the impossibility of a return to order, for the military fails to fully contain the human variable.

- 53 *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) takes up the trend of the running zombie in order to emphasize what screenwriter James Gunn calls “the danger factor,”<sup>9</sup> but attempts to conciliate it with some of the premises of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Hence, the outbreak is of undetermined origin, but the stock footage in the opening credits evokes the 1990s race riots and/or the threat of bioterrorism, so that the analogy, which had been established diegetically in *28 Days Later*, is constructed by the editing and suggests that the living dead can represent anything. The running zombies lead to similar constraints and similar imagery as in *28 Days Later*, spacing out the zombie attacks and resorting to pauses and silence, but the 2004 remake desperately tries

to maintain Romero's aesthetics by returning to imagery inspired by the 1978 film: the mass of lumbering zombies outside the mall. Apparently, the filmmakers had not realized that running zombies meant, by narrative necessity, fewer zombies, as was the case in *28 Days Later*. Moreover, emphasizing the danger factor encourages the dehumanization of the living dead and diminishes the pathos (Roche 2011: 83-84). Some of the survivors even occupy their leisure time by shooting down living dead who look like famous people, with only one of the female characters expressing her disapproval of this lack of respect for the dead. Whereas the 1978 film revealed that "[t]he surviving humans are actually responsible for their dilemmas" (Williams 2003: 95), the 2004 remake shows the characters forming a small democratic community where several characters have their say, but which is more or less led by Michael, an instance of "the modern American hero-as-amateur" like Ben in *Night of the Living Dead* (Waller 1985: 284), only flawless. Whereas the American flag in the opening scene of *Night of the Living Dead* ironically established "the metaphor of America-as-graveyard," which Robin Wood sees as being central to Romero's work (2003: 103), the flags in the opening and closing scenes of the 2004 remake are associated with Ana and Ken, thus implying that the female and the African-American heroes embody the survival of positive American values rather than the abandonment of the old order. *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) is a hopeful film about Americans sticking together through the chaos, completely at odds with the politics of Romero's living dead films.

- 54 2004 also saw the release of the British zombie comedy *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright). Much of the humor stems from deliberate parody of generic codes, so that the film remains faithful to Romero's films; *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) had already underlined the comic potential of the living dead, as had *King of the Zombies*, *Revenge of the Zombies* and *Zombies on Broadway*. *Shaun of the Dead* is about a loser (Shaun) whose girlfriend (Liz) breaks up with him the day before a zombie outbreak. The film suggests that Shaun, like other members of English society, was living a repetitive life and was thus already zombified before the outbreak (e.g. the shot in the bus when he goes to work). The zombie outbreak gives him the opportunity to become a hero and deal with his personal problems, only the return to normality shows that Shaun has not changed, and that return to normal-

ity entails a return to a symbolic state of zombification, made literal in the case of his friend (Ed). That Shaun led his band of survivors to the pub, which represented the center of his life, suggested that he was incapable of imagining a new life. When read against Romero's films, then, the return of order typical of comedy takes on a paradoxically pessimistic meaning as far as the sense of resolution is concerned: Shaun might have gotten the girl, but nothing has really changed.

- 55 The social satire is even more biting in the Canadian movie *Fido* (Andrew Currie, 2006), which maintains not only the aesthetics of Romero's films, but grounds its narrative in the premise of *Night of the Living Dead*, thus accepting the explanation that zombification was initially produced by radioactivity and that all the dead return as zombies, whether bitten or not. The film also confirms that slowness is needed to emphasize the zombies' humanity and enables both comedy and pathos. *Fido* depicts a dystopian society which has restructured itself as a sort of capitalist dictatorship, governed by a company called Zomcom whose C.E.O. is a scientist (Dr. Geiger) only seen on TV. *Fido* thus also taps into the post-colonial zombie movie—the zombies are grayish, have collars and are often chained, whereas the inhabitants of the town are all white—by way of *Day of the Dead*: Dr. Geiger has succeeded in domesticating the zombies and turning them into a containable work force. In other words, this repressive state, which fuses the political, the scientific, the media and the economic, has wildly succeeded in reproducing the forces of production. *Fido* is also the film which carries the belief in respect for the dead of Romero's films the furthest. The border between living and dead is completely blurred, as Fido, initially given a dog's name in order to mark his subordinate position in relation to his master (Timmy), comes to replace the father in the latter's eyes and the husband in Timmy's mother's (Helen). The movie is thus named after the zombie who turns out to be the hero and the surrogate father in a living family. Furthermore, if Bub and Big Daddy are presented as exceptional in *Day of the Dead* and *Land of the Dead* (2005), the Robinsons' neighbor's zombie girlfriend (Tammy), whom the Robinsons' initially believe is being exploited as a sex object, shows that *Fido* is not an exception. Moreover, *Fido* portrays characters who learn to accept the fact of zombification and thus their imminent death—both Helen and Timmy

tell Bill that they “want to go zombie.” In other words, some zombies have resisted the dehumanization entailed by zombification by becoming selves, while some of the living have resisted the dehumanization entailed by resisting zombification, and thus become selves by criticizing the power they were subjected to. The reference to video games, by way of the name Zomcom—which recalls Capcom, the creators of *Resident Evil*—underlines the tendency to dehumanization of zombie narratives and the “survival horror” genre they have produced. Indeed, the two kids who are Zomcom cadettes training to kill zombies, long so to display their shooting talents that they end up practicing on the living.

- 56 *Zombieland* (Ruben Fleischer, 2009) sets out to systematically bypass or debunk the politics of Romero’s movies and the more recent zombie movies. All four survivors survive and the obligatory scene where one has to kill one’s friend or family member is parodied early on by Wichita and Little Rock who use it as a device to trick Talahassee and Columbus. The 2009 film resorts to running zombies but follows *28 Days Later* in drastically reducing their numbers. It makes no references to historical contingencies and the authorities are nowhere to be seen. Class is not a problem, with the real Bill Murray agreeably accepting the four survivors in his mansion. Nor are the characters completely subjected to consumer society, as Talahassee merely wants to enjoy Twinkies while they last, and Wichita realizes how silly it is to take her sister to an amusement park. Race relations are not really an issue, or rather the only racial issue the film deals with is the rehabilitation of the stereotypical “white trash” survivor of Romero’s films who is good at surviving and enjoys killing zombies: the narrative deconstructs Columbus’s prejudice vis-à-vis Talahassee, a cowboy with a Southern accent and a passion for Twinkies and big cars, as the former mistakenly believes the latter’s only love was his dog and not his dead son. All the same, the film does not cater to the NRAA audience as emphasis is put on Talahassee’s grace when using guns, not on the zombie bodies exploding. The film dispels most of the gore in the opening credits and first flashback and seldom resorts to close shots in the later scenes. *Zombieland* does, in some respects, represent a utopian place, where various social tensions have been happily resolved by way of comedy, for order is not literally restored, but the characters, who, like Romero’s survivors, had previously been mar-

ginalized, go on to live in their new order, as Columbus, the ex-loner, tells us in voice-over: “They were the closest to something I’d always wanted, but never really had: a family. [...] And without other people, well, you might as well be a zombie.”

- 57 After having a lot of trouble making movies in the 1990s, Romero has taken advantage of the current zombie movie trend to make three films in five years, *Land of the Dead* (2004), *Diary of the Dead* (2007) and *Survival of the Dead* (2009). The first functions as a coda to the original trilogy, whereas the last two start over from scratch. What is especially interesting about these films is that they comment on some of the directions taken by contemporary movies. First, the films pursue the social satire and critique of the original trilogy. This is especially the case of *Land of the Dead* (2004), where the supervillain is a businessman who has reproduced a decadent version of the old capitalist order (Paffenroth 2006: 127-28). *Diary of the Dead* (2007), which starts a new epidemic in a more technological world, is more of a formal experiment on the type of horror a subjective camera, as was used in *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), can produce in a low-budget zombie movie, unabashedly underlining the artifice of such procedures (Lafond 2008: 185). *Survival of the Dead* (2009) follows on the previous installment, with two factions fighting on an island in order to prove their solution for dealing with zombies—either wipe them all out or try to teach them to eat animal meat—is the right one. As usual, the tensions among the living compromise their chances of survival: ironically, they fail to realize that biting and empathy are not antithetical for a living dead, as Jane (a living dead) bites both her twin sister Janet and her dearly beloved horse. Romero’s later films repeatedly illustrate a line from *Dawn of the Dead* (1978)—“We must stop the killing, or lose the war.”—which has been lost to those amongst the contemporary filmmakers that deal with the living dead solely as a lethal foreign body.
- 58 The post-9/11 zombie movies do not seem to mark a radical reworking of the genre. Generally speaking, they tap into various aspects of Romero’s living dead trilogy (as well as *The Crazies*, for *28 Days Later*) and evoke the post-colonial zombie movie by way of *Day of the Dead*. The conclusions below are intentionally generalizing and not always valid, if only because the films are more heterogeneous (various dir-

ectors from several countries) and the cycle has not yet run out of steam.

- 59 • The uprising of the living dead remains a contingency, explicitly associated with revolt in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*, that disrupts the “natural” order and sometimes offers glimpses of potential utopias: the pastoral end of *28 Days Later*, the matriarchy of *Planet Terror* (Robert Rodriguez, 2007) or the advent of French Canada in *Pontypool* (Bruce McDonald, 2008)! With the exception of *Fido*, *Shaun of the Dead* and *28 Weeks Later*, there is little focus on the living dead themselves, who tend to be fairly dehumanized, thereby diminishing their potential for resignification in terms of gender, race, etc., that is often the exclusive domain of the living characters.
- 60 • With the exception of *Zombieland* which taps into the road movie, all the movies maintain the idea of a siege, but can be subdivided into two subgenres: the survival horror action movie and the zombie comedy.
- 61 • The action movies tend to emphasize the threat posed by the living dead, often resorting to the running zombie in order to make it into a super-monster. This entails a different logic to zombification—they cannot be as numerous and as continuously present—and reduces the potential for pathos, as there is no time to contemplate the border between living and dead (*28 Weeks Later* manages to solve this problem thanks to a character who merely carries the disease). The films establish a paranoid atmosphere and play on fears of (1) contamination by an inner or outer force, and (2) totalitarian power with the zombie master being sometimes replaced by a multinational company. These fears are explicitly related to historical contingencies, such as bioterrorism, riots, the economic crisis and savage capitalism, so that mass zombification appears as immanent to the social body. Resistance can be directed radically against a threatening contingent with little critique of contemporary society (*Dawn of the Dead* 2004) and/or more progressively against state apparatuses, namely the military (*28 Days Later*) and the government (accused of covering a zombie outbreak in the guise of Tchernobyl in *Zone of the Dead!*). The politics of the action movies are ambiguous and often contradict their own terms, for the diegetic politics might be incompatible with the film’s industrial life.

- 62 • Zombie comedies and parodies, including *Planet Terror*, *Undead or Alive: A Zombedy* (Glasgow Phillips, 2007) and *Pontypool* (which, though interesting, is arguably not very funny), seem to be getting the upper hand. Interestingly enough, some of them are more faithful to Romero's aesthetics and politics, including slow-moving zombies (in *Planet Terror* as well), playful subversion of generic norms (*Pontypool* is set in a local radio station covering the outbreak taking place outside), social satire, criticism of consumer society and transgression of the border between living and dead. They also tend to comment on the survival horror action movies that heretofore represented the bulk of the genre, namely by emphasizing the humanity of the living dead and the inhumanity of the living, or pointing out the contradiction between an overt anti-capitalist plot and the economic life of a franchise. Resistance tends to be directed at the "natural" order which has dehumanized human beings, and is enabled namely through resignification. The contradiction is then introduced by the codes of comedy which sometimes necessitate the return of order, only, as in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), it is not necessarily represented in positive terms.

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*Day of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. With Terry Alexander, Lori Cardille, Jarlath Conroy, Anthony Dileo Jr., Richard Liberty and Joseph Pilato. Dead Films Inc., 1985.

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*Diary of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. With Joshua Close, Amy Ciupak Lalonde, Michelle Morgan and Shawn Roberts. Artfire Films, 2007.

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*Fido*. Dir. Andrew Currie. With Dylan Baker, Bill Connolly, Carrie-Anne Moss, Timmy Robinson. Lions Gate Films, 2006.

*I Eat Your Skin*. Dir. Del Tenney. With Heather Hewitt, William Joyce, Betty Hyatt Linton and Dan Stapleton. Iselin-

Tenney Productions Inc., 1964. (released in 1971)

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*King of the Zombies*. Dir. Jean Yarbrough. With Joan Archer, Dick Purcell, Mantan Moreland, Henry Victor and Joan Woodbury. Monogram Pictures, 1941.

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*Revenge of the Zombies*. Dir. Steve Seke-ly. With John Carradine, Robert Lowry, Mante Moreland and Gale Storm. Monogram Pictures, 1943.

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*Shaun of the Dead*. Dir. Edgar Wright. With Simon Pegg, Kate Ashfield and Nick Frost. Universal Pictures, 2004.

*Shock Waves*. Dir. Ken Wiederhorn. With Brook Adams and Peter Cushing. Zopix Company, 1977.

*Survival of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. With Kathleen Munroe, Alan Van Sprang and Kenneth Welsh. Blank of the Dead Productions, 2009.

*Undead or Alive: A Zombedy*. Dir. Glasgow Phillips. With James Denton and Chris Kattan. Odd Lot Entertainment, 2007.

*Voodoo Man*. Dir. William Beaudine. With Jon Carradine, Bela Lugosi, Wanda McKay and George Zucco. Banner Productions, Monogram Pictures, 1944.

*White Zombie*. Dir. Victor Halperin. With Madge Bellamy, Joseph Cawthorn, Robert Frazer, John Harron, Bela Lugosi. United Artists, 1932.

*Zombieland*. Dir. Ruben Fleischer. With Abigail Breslin, Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson and Emma Stone. Columbia Pictures, 2009.

*Zombies of Mora-Tau*. Dir. Edward L. Cahn. With Joel Ashley, Marjorie Eaton, Allison Hayes, Gregg Palmer and Autumn Russell. Clover Productions, 1957.

*Zombies on Broadway*. Dir. Gordon Douglas. With Wally Brown, Alan Carney, Anne Jeffreys and Bela Lugosi. RKO, 1945.

*Zone of the Dead*. Dir. Milan Konjevic and Milan Todorovic. With Ken Foree, Kristina Klebe and Emilio Roso. Talking Wolf Productions, 2009.

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1 Kyle Bishop compares this scene to *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) (2008: 149).

2 The only black man associated with power, Pierre, the witch doctor, is played by a white actor in black face.

3 Zombification is also compared to a disease in *White Zombie* when Legendre asks Beaumont to “describe [his] symptoms.”

4 *Shock Waves* (Ken Wiederhorn, 1977) will as well.

5 In *Survival of the Dead* (Romero, 2009), ex-soldiers have formed a gang of marauders who compete with other gangs.

6 *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) immediately establishes that the slowness of the living dead is paramount when Barbara emphasizes that the man in the cemetery “came slowly” and Ben remembers that he “plowed through” the living dead who “just stood there staring at” him.

7 Actress Gaylen Ross is quoting Romero himself in the DVD commentary to the European version in the Starz / Anchor Bay DVD (2004).

8 One of the raiders, however, calls Peter “chocolate man.”

9 In “Surviving the Dawn,” an extra in the Metropolitan DVD edition (2007).

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## English

Critics have repeatedly focused on the political subtexts of the living dead films of George A. Romero, revealing, notably, how they reflect specific social concerns. In order to determine what makes the zombie movie and the figure of the zombie so productive of political readings, this article examines, first, the classic zombie movies influenced by voodoo lore, then Romero’s initial living dead trilogy (1968–1985), and finally some of the most successful films released in the 2000s. Resorting to a post-structuralist framework including Althusser’s notions of state apparatuses, Foucault’s distinction between subjection and subjectification, and Butler’s analyses of subversive resignification, the author argues that, while the classic zombie is entirely subjected to the master, and thus to the meanings the latter imposes, Romero’s living dead resist and sometimes create meaning, revealing both the contingency of the structures they disrupt and the constructiveness of the identities projected onto them. Resistance, then, is no longer directed at an “unnatural” order, as in the classic zombie movie, but at the “natural” order and is enabled by the contingency and multiplicity associated with the outbreak. The recent trend of zombie movies, whether survival horror or zombedies, confirms the diversity of complex, sometimes contradictory meanings enabled by the figure of the zombie.

## Français

Les critiques ont énormément insisté sur la dimension politique des films de morts vivants de George A. Romero. Afin de déterminer ce qui, dans le film de zombie et la figure du zombie, permet ces lectures politiques, cet article examine, d’abord, les films de zombie classiques influencés par le vaudou, puis la trilogie initiale de Romero (1968–1985), et enfin les films les plus notables sortis dans les années 2000. En s’appuyant sur un cadre théorique post-structuraliste comprenant les notions d’appareils d’état d’Althusser, la distinction que fait Foucault entre assujettissement et subjectification, et les

analyses de Butler sur les possibilités de resignification subversive, l'auteur avance que, tandis que le zombie classique est entièrement assujéti à son maître, et donc aux sens que ce dernier lui impose, les morts vivants de Romero résistent et parfois même créent du sens, révélant à la fois la contingence des structures qu'ils ébranlent et l'artificialité des identités qui leur sont attribuées. La résistance n'est donc plus dirigée contre un ordre « non naturel », comme c'est le cas dans le film de zombie classique, mais contre l'ordre « naturel », et elle est permise par la contingence et la multiplicité associée à l'épidémie. La mode actuelle des films de zombie, qu'ils relèvent du *survival horror* ou de la comédie, confirme la variété de sens complexes, parfois contradictoires, que permet la figure du zombie.

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