

## Cedar Crest College

### CST 245/HON 245 Topics in Popular Culture

#### *Zombies—From the Undead to the Posthuman*

Spring 2010

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The debate over the “public option” in health care has been dismaying in many ways. Perhaps the most depressing aspect for progressives, however, has been the extent to which the opponents of greater choice in health care have gained traction—in Congress, if not with the broader public—simply by repeating, over and over again, that the public option would be, horrors, a government program....It’s much the same on other fronts. So why don’t these zombie ideas die?

Paul Krugman, “All the President’s Zombies,” *The New York Times*  
August 24, 2009.

#### Course Description

Zombies are everywhere and more than ever appear on the verge of taking over the world. Experts warn us to protect ourselves from zombie computers and zombie programs. Social critic Henry Giroux has called the collusion of government and big business—think Wall Street bail-outs and takeovers of the automobile industry—a form of “zombie politics” that promotes a culture of fear, cannibalizes the economy, and invades every aspect of our daily lives. Zombie companies are kept alive so that the corporations that control them can conceal assets. Legal experts worry that zombie litigation threatens to undercut statutes of limitation and complicate product liability suits. In the realm of political theory, Ulrich Beck has questioned if the nation-state belongs in the zombie category, since it has died but doesn’t know it. As Paul Krugman notes, “zombie ideas” that should long ago have been put to rest have haunted the national debate on health care reform. Zombie agents and zombie behaviors are part of the study of human consciousness, and neuroscientists publish papers on zombie topics. Philosophers speculate whether zombies exist and, if they do, whether they speak their own form of English, or “Zombish.” There are zombie walks and zombie raves, just as there are zombie hunters and zombie squads, the latter doing everything they can to prepare the public for an imminent zombie attack. In Canada, a group of mathematicians have devised a model that predicts the speed at which a widescale outbreak of zombieism would result in the total collapse of civilization (unless humans and zombies somehow learn to “co-exist”). Video games, graphic novels, and comic books are populated by growing numbers of zombies. Anyone with a camcorder can document “real-life” zombie outbreaks. “Zombie alerts” have been posted on electronic traffic warning signs in Texas, Illinois, Indiana, and even in Bucks County. English majors may be appalled that Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice has been hijacked by zombies.

Yet the zombie's most familiar manifestation remains what it has been from the start—a cinematic monster, a walking, stalking, sometimes even squawking cadaver; a ghoul, a cannibal, a relentless predator who wants to eat us or at the very least tear us apart limb by limb and organ by organ. This course will examine a dozen or so films that have established the zombie as a mainstay of the horror genre, elaborated on or expanded its monstrous qualities and behaviors, and in one way or another kept it alive when, after all, it isn't. We will look at three or four "classic" zombie films, two or three considerably more obscure films that contributed a new or unusual element to the zombie paradigm, and a few of the most successful (i.e., profitable) and influential recent zombie movies, ones that have given the genre not only a new lease on life, but also a new set of associations with the historical, social, and cultural circumstances we currently inhabit.

Unlike the vampire, the zombie is primarily a product of the movies. While there is a growing body of zombie literature, it is of recent origin and can not match the rich literary tradition from which the vampire first emerged as a cultural icon. And while myth plays a significant part in explaining the popularity zombies have long enjoyed, there is no legend comparable to that Bram Stoker drew upon to invent Dracula, the most famous undead being ever to appear on the movie screen. Vampires, however, are still (relatively) few in number. Zombies are everywhere.

Good zombie movies show us how messed up we are, they make us question our station in society...and our society's station in the world...To me zombie movies are thought provoking, dramatic fiction, on par with any Oscar-winning garbage that's rolled out year after year. Movies that make you question the fabric of our very society are what I like. And in good zombie movies...you get that by the truckload.

Robert Kirkland, *The Walking Dead*, vol. 1: *Days Gone Bye*  
(Image Comics, 2006), Introduction.

## Course Objectives

By taking this course, students will acquire or accomplish the following:



a better understanding of the conventions of the horror film as a genre of filmmaking and of zombie films as a distinctive sub-genre, one that has evolved through several forms or stages since its initial appearance in the 1930s and 1940s;



an appreciation of the zombie as a plastic object, susceptible to multiple interpretations and applicable as a symbol or metaphor to a variety of different historical settings, political and social conditions, and biological, medical, and philosophical phenomena;



a recognition that zombies are the subject of serious scholarly analysis and not just figments of our collective imagination or money-making devices for film studios, independent and amateur filmmakers, and vendors of "exploitation" cinema, e.g., the kind who give us *Zombie Holocaust* and *Zombie Strippers*;



additional experience in pursuing an independent research project, working collaboratively, and organizing the results in a tightly-structured, time constraint-sensitive, and response-generating classroom presentation;



in intellectual terms, a greater ability to think across disciplinary lines, employ multiple modes of analysis and interpretation, and consider counterfactual, counterintuitive, and subversive scenarios in viewing a film as a text, as a cultural artifact, and as a historical document;



through the medium of film, a better appreciation of what it means to (potentially) have to face living in "post-apocalyptic" times, something that has acquired urgency in an age of "failed" states, a "global war on terror," "sleeper cells," and a swarm of other threats to the assumptions on which our civilization rests.

## Assessment

Grades in this course will be determined through the following assessment measures:

- ◆ two exams, a Mid-Term and a Final, each counting for 25 percent of the course grade, together 50 percent;
- ◆ an independent film research project, prepared with another student, presented together in class at a preassigned date, counting for 25 percent;
- ◆ attendance, participation in and contribution to class discussion (reflecting mastery of assigned readings), and demonstration of serious interest in and involvement with this course, all for the remaining 25 percent.

## Attendance

Given our ambitious syllabus and the fact that the course is cumulative, i.e., each week's film and discussion build upon what has preceded, consistent attendance is imperative. If a class meeting is unavoidably missed, the relevant work should be made up at once. In the latter instance, an explanation for the absence must be submitted within 48 hours, preferably by e-mail. It is at my discretion if the explanation is found to be adequate. Unjustified absences will be deducted from the 25 percent of your course grade that includes attendance and participation, at 10 points each. In other words, should you miss two class meetings without any legitimate reason, your grade for the course is already down to a "B" and can only sink further depending on the rest of your performance.

## Readings

As there is no text for this course, readings are assigned for most weeks of the semester from the growing theoretical and critical literature on zombie films. These readings, mostly articles and essays, can be directly accessed online—URLs are provided—or through the E-Companion site that accompanies this course. Links marked with an asterisk (\*) must be accessed using an on-campus connection. Others can be accessed with any Internet connection. One or two more readings may be added as the semester progresses, depending on what appears in the literature.

## Ratings

By the very nature of the subject, several of the films in this course include graphic depictions of violence, in some cases extreme violence. While sex is rarely an issue in zombie films—consider the possibilities—it too may raise red flags. If viewing such images in a public setting could be uncomfortable, you may wish to reconsider taking this course. Remaining in the course after reading the syllabus will represent an implicit agreement to see all of the films we are using, i.e., all of each film.

## Research Project

Working in pairs, students will obtain and watch a zombie film from the list appended to this syllabus. These films are available as DVD rentals, as purchases from Amazon (usually at bargain basement prices), or from other online sources that specialize in horror films and the like. Any number of the latter that can be found with a simple Google search. After viewing the film, the students will present a joint critique in class organized around the following questions:

- ◆ can the film in question be measured by the template we are using in this course, i.e., it is susceptible to the lines of criticism and interpretation we are using for the films listed on the syllabus?
- ◆ how, if at all, does the film refract issues that are being raised in the scholarly and popular discussion of zombie films, as we are reading the latter for our weekly class sessions?
- ◆ does the film contribute anything to the evolving image of the zombie from an insentient labor slave to a semi-conscious, goal-directed, “posthuman” being; in other words, however cheesy or ludicrous the film, does it have “redeeming social value”?

Because of time constraints, your presentation should be no longer than 10 to 15 minutes, with time left for class reaction. If you use film excerpts or if you post film clips in a PowerPoint presentation, take these time limits into consideration. I will explore with Info Tech whether, to accommodate longer and richer presentations in digital format, we can have these posted on the E-Companion site. Stay tuned.

### Schedule of Class Meetings

Week I            Introduction/Organization  
20.01

Week II            Zombies Don't Run! Recent Developments in Zombie Theory  
25.01/27.01

Reading:            Peter Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety,” in Niall Scott, ed., Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2007), 45-57, access on E-Companion

Frann Michel, “Life and Death and Something in Between: Reviewing Recent Horror Cinema,” Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society, 12/4 (December 2007), 390-97, access on E-Companion

Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism,” boundary 2, 35/1 (2008), 85-108, access at <http://boundary2.dukejournals.org/cgi/reprint/35/1/85> \*

Week III            The First Movie Zombie? The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari, dir. Robert Wiene (1920)  
01.02/03.02

Reading:            S. S. Prawer, Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), chap. 6, access on E-Companion

Week IV            Caribbean Origins I, Colonialism and Exploitation: White Zombie, dir. Victor Halperin (1932)  
08.02/10.02

Reading:            Kyle Bishop, “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie,” The Journal of American Culture, 31/2 (2008), 141-52, access on E-Companion

Jennifer Fay, “Dead Subjectivity: White Zombie, Black Baghdad,” The New Centennial Review, 8/1 (2008), access at [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new\\_centennial\\_review/v008/8.1.fay.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new_centennial_review/v008/8.1.fay.pdf) \*

The word “zombie” derives from “jumbie,” one of the most common words for “spirit” in the Caribbean, appearing frequently in ghost stories, folktales, and documentary accounts of the archipelago throughout the last century... Since then, the word “zombie” has dramatically and significantly fallen from grace. If it first acquired its new, abject, and terrifying meaning within the context of slavery as an image of the uttermost condition of cancelled selfhood, zombification increasingly now threatens well outside the circuits of voodoo cults and the supernatural: it has become an existential term, about mental and physical enslavement. For children, to be called a zombie is an insult, traded in the playground; for adults, zombies offer the chance for a rueful, gallows-humour joke about ourselves.

Marina Warner, Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century (Oxford University Press, 2006), 357-59.

Week V  
15.02/17.02 Caribbean Origins II, Literary (Trans)Plantations: I Walked with a Zombie, dir. Jacques Tourneur (1943)

Reading: Mark A. Viera, “Darkness, Darkness: The Films of Val Lewton,” Bright Lights Film Journal, no. 50 (2005), access at <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/50/lewton.htm>

Martha P. Nochminson, “I Walked with a Zombie,” Senses of Cinema, no. 44 (July/September 2007), access at <http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/cteq/07/44/i-walked-zombie.html>

Week VI  
22.02/24.02 Zombies, Voodoo Masters, Dictators: The Serpent and the Rainbow, dir. Wes Craven (1988)

Reading: Costas J. Efthimou and Sohang Ghandi, “Cinema Fiction vs. Physics Reality: Ghosts, Vampires, and Zombies,” Skeptical Inquirer, 31/4 (2007), access at [http://arxiv.org/PS\\_cache/physics/pdf/0608/0608059v2.pdf](http://arxiv.org/PS_cache/physics/pdf/0608/0608059v2.pdf)

Week VII  
01.03/03.03 Mid-Term Exam

### Spring Break

Week VIII  
15.03/17.03 Threat to Humanity I, What Would You Do? The Last Man on Earth, dir. Sidney Salkow (1964)

Reading: Rikk Mulligan, “Zombie Apocalypse: Plague and the End of Popular Culture,” in Carolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan, eds., End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2009), 349-68, access on E-Companion

In the twenty-first century, the word “zombie” conjures up a familiar figure of a decaying corpse shuffling in a somnambulist state, eyes glazed and arms held stiffly forward, in the mindless pursuit of human flesh. We owe this iconographic image to filmmaker George A. Romero’s 1968 low-budget black-and-white movie *Night of the Living Dead*, which transformed the zombie in much the same way that James Whale’s 1931 film *Frankenstein* altered Mary Shelley’s creature or Todd Browning’s 1931 film *Dracula* changed Bram Stoker’s count. Today writers and filmmakers who take zombies as their subject must acknowledge Romero’s interpretation of the

creature, if only to argue within their own fictional universes that his portrayal was inaccurate.

June Pulliam, "The Zombie," in Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares, ed. S. T. Joshi, vol. 2 (Greenwood Press, 2007), 723-24.

Week IX  
22.03/24.03      Threat to Humanity II, What Would We Do? Night of the Living Dead, dir. George A. Romero (1968)

Reading:            Stephen Harper, "Night of the Living Dead: Reappraising an Undead Classic," Bright Lights Film Journal, no. 50 (November 2005), access at <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/50/night.htm>

Richard Harland Smith, "The Battle Inside: Infection and the Modern Horror Film," Cineaste 35/1 (Winter 2009), 42-45, access at <http://www.cineaste.com/articles/the-battle-inside-infection-and-the-modern-horror-film>

Week X  
29.03/31.03      Nazi Zombies, and Underwater Ones at That: Shock Waves, dir. Ken Wiederhorn (1977)

Many films depict the fiendish plots of *Nazi* scientists either to kill vast amounts of people...or to conduct evil experiments...Modern-day *Nazi* plots hypothesize what might happen if *Nazis* survived in our contemporary world and we were, once again, forced to confront them...On deeper levels, the films represent a persistent fear not only that the *Nazis* have survived but that, under the right circumstances, it could all happen again. Representing more than mere elderly figures who escaped the destruction of the Third Reich, characters in these films personify the endurance of the *Nazi* philosophy in our own time.

Lester Friedman, "Darkness Visible: Images of *Nazis* in American films," in Bad: Infamy, Darkness, Evil, and Slime on the Screen, ed. Murray Pomerance (State University of New York Press, 2007), 267-68.

Week XI  
06.04/07.04      Viruses and Plagues I, Corporate Evil and Social Contagion: Resident Evil, dir. Paul W. S. Anderson (2002)

Reading:            Cecilia Petretto, "Attack of the Living Dead Virus: The Metaphor of Contagious Disease in *Zombie* Movies," Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, 17/1 (2006), 21-32, access on E-Companion

Jen Webb and Sam Byrnan, "Some Kind of Virus: The *Zombie* as Body and as Trope," Body and Society, 14/2 (2008), 83-98, access at <http://bod.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/14/2/83> \*

Week XII  
12.04/14.04      Viruses and Plagues II, Quarantine, Control, and the Fortress State: 28 Days Later, dir. Danny Boyle (2002)

Reading:            Jennifer Cooke, Legacies of Plague in Literature, Theory, and Film (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), chap 7, access on E-Companion

Christopher Zealand, "The National Strategy for Zombie Containment: Myth Meets Activism in Post-9/11 America," unpublished paper (2008), access on E-Companion

What might zombies have to do with the implosion of neoliberal capitalism at the end of the twentieth century? What might they have to do with postcolonial, postrevolutionary nationalism? With labor history? With the crisis of the modern nation-state?...And why have immigrants—those wanderers in pursuit of work, whose proper place is always elsewhere—become pariah citizens of a global order in which, paradoxically, old borders are said everywhere to be dissolving? What, if anything, do they have to do with the living dead?

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 101/4 (2002), 779-80.

Week XIII  
19.04/21.04 A Zombie Revolution? Land of the Dead, dir. George A. Romero (2005)

Reading: Brian Wilson, "Edifying Horror: Brief Notes on Land of the Dead," The Film Journal, no. 13, (January 2006), access at <http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue13/landofthedead.html>

R. Colin Tait, "(Zombie) Revolution at the Gates: The Dead, the 'Multitude,' and George A. Romero," Cinephile, 3/1 (Spring/Summer 2007), 61-70, access at <http://cinephile.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/zombierevolution.pdf>

Week XIV  
26.04/28.04 Zombies in the "War on Terror"—Are We Fighting Them or Are We Making Them?

Reading: Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (London: Verso, 2006), chap. 3, access on E-Companion

Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib," Small Axe, 13/1 (March 2009), 50-71, access at [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/small\\_axe/v013/13.1.mcclintock.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/small_axe/v013/13.1.mcclintock.pdf) \*

Final Exam  
03.05

### College-Wide Policies

**Classroom Protocol:** Each student has the right to a learning environment free of interruptions, distractions, and inconsiderate or uncivil behavior. Accordingly, cell phones and all other electronic communication/entertainment sources are to be turned off during class.

**Honor Philosophy:** This course is conducted in accord with the College Honor Philosophy, as detailed in the Student's Guide for 2009-10. All work you submit in this course must be original, including answers and essays on tests and exams. Any instance of academic dishonesty may result in an "F" for the course.

**Documented Learning Disability:** Please refer to the Student's Guide for 2009-10 for the resources the College makes available to assist students. If special accommodations are needed in class, you should discuss these with me in the first two weeks of the semester. I will be happy to cooperate in ensuring the best possible arrangements for a positive learning experience in this course.



Zombies Are Everywhere

### *Films for Class Presentations*

As with the films we are seeing in class, films on the list for student reports are confined to American, English, or at least English-language product. To open the gates to, for example, Italian, Japanese, or South American zombie films would expand the parameters of the course exponentially, as well as at the same time diluting the reading that these films serve—what do they tell us about our cultural consciousness and the political and social circumstances by which it is shaped, or at least influenced. Not every film on this list will necessarily be presented in class—it is entirely a function of enrollment numbers—and that’s okay. Choices are on a first come/first served basis, so after you’ve reviewed the list, picked or found a partner, don’t waste any time in reporting your selection to me. Finding individual films is your responsibility, although I am more than ready to help. If nothing else, this assignment may take you into hitherto unexplored regions of the Internet.

Revolt of the Zombies, dir. Victor Halperin (1936), b/w, 63 minutes.

**Due: Week IV**

The second of Halperin’s zombie films, but lacking the originality and style that characterized White Zombie. The opening scenes, set on the French front lines during World War I, may have been inspired by famed director Abel Gance’s image of dead soldiers returning from their graves in J’Accuse (1919), a powerful anti-war drama. Using sorcery to turn native Cambodian troops into “super soldiers” the Germans cannot destroy, the French General Staff hopes to break the stalemate on the Western Front. The majority of the film is set in Cambodia after the war, as a French expedition seeks to discover the secret of the zombie soldiers before it falls into the hands of others. A typical period love story complicates the effort, along with treachery and deception, and the whole thing climaxes with a rather tame zombie rebellion. Many scenes were shot against background footage of the ruins of Angkor Wat, reminding us that Cambodia was a French colony when the film was made. The last time I looked, Revolt of the Zombies could be viewed online. A Google search should turn it up.



King of the Zombies, dir. Jean Yarbrough (1941), b/w, 67 minutes.

**Due: Week V**

A cheaply made (Monogram Pictures, one of the Poverty Row companies) horror comedy whose most horrible attributes today are the blatant racism and neo-colonialism that run from beginning to end. The zombies in question are the products of hypnotism and sorcery, and their near-robotic state renders them largely ineffectual even in doing their master's bidding. However, this is the first film to insinuate a Nazi theme, as the zombie master is in fact an Austrian expatriate who is working for German military intelligence to obtain information about American defenses of the Panama Canal, this well before the US had entered the Second World War. Also available for online viewing.

Revenge of the Zombies, dir. Steve Sekely (1943), b/w, 61 minutes.

**Due: Week VI**

The first real "Nazi zombie" movie, with John Carradine as a German scientist hiding in the Louisiana bayous, where he carries out experiments to create invincible soldiers for the Nazi war effort. His test subjects include his wife, which proves to be a mistake when, unhappy at her transformation, she instigates a zombie rebellion that leads to Carradine's death in a quicksand pool. As a Monogram production, the effects are cheap and laughable, but many of the plot devices—mad Nazi scientists, zombie soldiers, quicksand pits—were to turn up in lots of other films.

Zombies of Mora Tau, dir. Edward L. Cahn (1957), b/w, 70 minutes.

**Due: Week VII**

According to some, one of the worst zombie movie ever made, and that's a very low standard. In fact, there's little to differentiate this film from dozens of cheaply made, poorly scripted horror movies turned out in the 1950s and 1960s for theatrical double-features or for drive-in audiences. It does have the distinction of relocating its zombies from their natural haunts in the Caribbean to the coast of Africa and, more importantly, of placing them below the surface of the ocean, making it the first of the underwater zombie movies.

Carnival of Souls, dir. Herk Harvey (1962), b/w, 78 minutes.

**Due: Week IX**

Another made-on-the-cheap, and genuinely strange, film that has acquired a cult reputation and fortunately—thanks to the Criterion Collection—is available in both the original theatrical release and in a restored "director's cut" version. There are no zombies in Carnival of Souls, but the "ghosts" who appear in some scenes are generally seen as precursors to George Romero's archetypal monsters in Night of the Living Dead (Romero has acknowledged the influence). The film is also memorable for having been shot, in part, on location at a derelict Mormon entertainment complex—no, that's not a contradiction in terms—on the Great Salt Lake in Utah. The abandoned playground contributes the carnivalesque look and style that is echoed in the title and would have been difficult to create on a studio set. In several ways reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho (1960), Carnival of Souls has been referenced in later films by directors as diverse as Francis Ford Coppola and Stanley Kubrick. If you choose this film, make sure you find the 1962 version, as there have been at least two remakes, neither of them having much to do with the original. (Thanks to Sharon Himmenan for this suggestion.)

Plague of the Zombies, dir. John Gilling (1966), color, 91 minutes.

**Due: Week VIII**

The only foray into the zombie genre by England's Hammer Studios, which almost singlehandedly resuscitated horror films in the late 1950s and early 1960s with lurid, blood-saturated, technicolor remakes of such classics as Frankenstein, Dracula, and The Mummy. Despite the title, the film has little to do with infection or contagion. Instead, it perpetuates the image of the zombie as an enslaved laborer, here working in a tin mine in the Cornwall district of southern England. Again, hypnosis and voodoo are the means of zombification, and the film can be read as a critique of the capitalist system of production, of British imperialism, and of the class structure that was still firmly rooted in the English countryside. It also benefits from Hammer's trademark atmospheric cinematography, convincing sets and locations, and first-rate performances by the principal players.

Psychomania, also released as The Death Wheelers, dir. Don Sharp (1972), color, 95 minutes. **Due: Week VII**

The first and probably the best of the “zombie biker” films, marrying two distinct film genres to produce a distinctive hybrid which eventually ran downhill and crashed. See, e.g., Chopper Chicks in Zombie Town (1989) or Hot Wax Zombies on Wheels (1999). As this is a British production, the bikers—the gang is named “The Living Dead—are not out of the Hollywood Hells Angels mould but instead perpetuate the 1960s tradition of “rockers” and “leather boys,” young motorcycle enthusiasts who expressed their rebellion against the conformism of the times by riding fast, crashing in accidents, and hanging out at truck stops and roadside cafés. Nor are the bikers zombies from the start. Rather, after their leader’s suicide—on his bike, of course—and resurrection as one of the genuine living dead, the example proves infectious and the rest of the gang live (?) up to their name. After that, the standard biker film plot takes over, with the zombie gang harassing the citizens of a small town until finally law and order are restored. An interesting experiment in zombie- (or genre-) cross-breeding, this one may be hard to find. Netflix lists it, but be careful elsewhere as there’s at least one non-zombie movie with the same title.

Dawn of the Dead, dir. George A. Romero (1978), color, 126-139 minutes depending on the cut. **Due: Week XIII**

The second film in Romero’s zombie trilogy (now tetraology) and in the opinion of many the best of the lot, not to be confused with the 2004 remake under the same title. Subject to multiple interpretations, most commonly as a savage diatribe against capitalist consumerism; most of the film takes place inside a mall. But other readings are possible. This film has generated considerable critical commentary, certainly as much as did Night of the Living Dead, some of which can be found online for anyone interested. Even more gore than in its predecessor, and now in vivid technicolor, and a good bit of campy humor (satire) as well. The zombie outbreak, its causes still largely unexplained, has reached epidemic proportions, with the cities overrun and the tide of combat between zombies and humans definitely turning against the latter. In contrast to Night, where ultimately the zombie-killers appear to be getting the upper hand, Dawn gives us a far more bleak prospect for the human race, whose days appear to be numbered. A civilization at the end of its tether is one way of putting it. One of the most important films in the zombie genre, even if many of its elements have become overly familiar.

Re-Animator, dir. Stuart Gordon (1985), color, 85 minutes. **Due: Week VII**

Director Gordon’s take-off from an H. P. Lovecraft story starts out as a latter-day Frankenstein and ends up awash in zombie mayhem reminiscent of Night of the Living Dead. Even by the standards of the 1980s, Re-Animator pushes the limits and for that reason has only been available in an edited (censored) version. In 2007, Anchor Bay released the original (unrated) version. Even with the edits, a full mix of violence, sex, and gross-out humor guarantees a strong response from anyone who sees it. The title character, disgraced medical student Herbert West, is portrayed by future horror movie stalwart Jeffrey Combs in his film debut, with a characteristically psychotic (“My work! My work!”) performance. The score either pays homage to, or rips off, Bernard Hermann’s famous soundtrack for Psycho. Worth noting as one of the first films to place zombies on a university campus, a theme that was duplicated in Night of the Creeps (1986) and, more recently, in House of the Dead II (2005).

Homecoming, dir. Joe Dante (2005), color, approx. 60 minutes. **Due: Week XIV**

Noted horror director (The Howling, 1981; Gremlins, 1984) Dante’s explicitly anti-Iraq War adaptation of a Dale Bailey short story, “Death and Suffrage,” originally published in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction in 2002. Bailey’s story was a play on the notorious Chicago political tradition where the names of voters who had died remained on the registration books, so that their “votes” could be counted in the elections of aldermen, mayors, congressmen and senators, and even presidents. In Dante’s updated version, soldiers killed in the Iraq War return to claim their due from the politicians who had sent them to their deaths. First shown in the Showtime network’s “Masters of Horror” series, Homecoming quickly attracted attention for its obvious rejection of the efforts by the Bush Administration to “control” the news coming out of Iraq. In Dante’s film, we see the corpses breaking out of their coffins so that they can demand the right to vote, presumably to reverse the results of the 2000 presidential election. Halfway between a political commentary and a horror spoof (the gore is minimal), Homecoming may be the most topical zombie film made to date. For horror film buffs, lots of “in-jokes.”

The Zombie Diaries, dir. Michael Bartlett and Kevin Gates (2006), color, 86 minutes.

**Due: Week XIV**

One of several recent entries in the sub-(sub)-genre of zombie faux documentaries, this film purports to show the camcorderd experiences of three groups of people who have to contend with the gruesome results of a viral outbreak in the English countryside. Making the most of a limited budget and borrowing freely from the standard FX inventory of gore and bloodshed, the film fits into the growing category of “zombie infection” or “zombie plague” movies that was spawned by 28 Days Later. In viewing this film, your focus should be on the representation of the zombies—is there anything here that extends the usual “walking dead” formula—and on the reactions of human survivors who find themselves living in a zombie-infested environment. Another approach to consider, in films of this sort, is whether their obvious phoneyness subverts the fundamental premise that these are “real” records of a zombie assault.

I Am Legend, dir. Francis Lawrence (2007), color, 100 minutes.

**Due: Week XII**

The third film adaptation of Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel of the same name (preceded by The Last Man on Earth, 1964 and The Omega Man, 1971), this Will Smith vehicle has been disputed as qualifying for the zombie movie genre in that the monsters who have taken over Manhattan are technically biomedical mutants rather than the “living dead.” Nonetheless, their behavior is certainly zombie-like—although of the hyperkinetic variety—and the social and political implications of their existence fit the bill of the contemporary zombie-virus/plague film. If you select this film for your report, try to stay away from talking about Will Smith as an action hero and concentrate instead on the framing themes that are relevant to this course.

Outpost, dir. Steve Parker (2008), color, 90 minutes.

**Due: Week X**

One of the better made of a recent spate of Nazi zombie movies, set in a geographically vague section of post-Cold War eastern Europe (although filmed in Scotland) and providing a relatively sophisticated, if still unlikely, scientific explanation for the existence of undead SS warriors. Starring George Clooney lookalike Ray Stevenson as the leader of a squad of mercenaries contracted to locate a Nazi bunker left over from the Second World War, the film provides a lesson in unified field theory, or some variation thereof, to demonstrate how zombie super-soldiers could be made to dematerialize and rematerialize at will, rendering them invisible to enemy forces. Lots of contemporary references, including a Balkan civil war, UN peacekeepers, and big-time corporate malevolence, along with the persistent myth of the Nazi quest for miracle weapons that might have won the war. Some might view the products of the SS’s experiments as ghosts rather than zombies, along the lines of The Bunker (2001), but the distinction gets lost when the inevitable killing spree commences.

Quarantine, dir. John Erick Dowdle (2008), color, 90 mins.

**Due: Week XIV**

A remake of the 2007 Spanish film Rec, Quarantine traffics in the same virus/infection/incarceration material that directors of zombie films have found irresistible in the last few years. As with certain other of these films, it is arguable whether the victims have in fact become zombies—they haven’t died and come back to life—but many of their symptoms are certainly zombie-like. Authority, in this case the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the military, is shown as brutal, ruthless, and all-powerful, with even the usually heroic figures of police and firefighters sacrificed in order to prevent an epidemic. The limited budget shows and the gore effects are pretty standard. But the film does have the advantages of a strong female lead—an intrepid Los Angeles television reporter (though she ultimately dissolves into hysteria)—and a quasi-documentary look that has become increasingly popular in movies populated by zombies.