The Dreaming Dead: Cinematic Revelations in Apocalypse

by

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 3

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 4

Chapter 1 ........................................................................................................................................... 18

Chapter 2 ......................................................................................................................................... 42

Chapter 3 ......................................................................................................................................... 73

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 92

Works Cited ...................................................................................................................................... 97
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**Introduction**

What is a zombie? Hollywood would have us believe the zombie is a brain-dead corpse, staggering forward with its arms outstretched, moaning and slobbering in its hunger for innocent flesh. The origins of this Hollywood zombie can be traced to Haiti, however, where today the zombie represents the postcolonial laborer and is often portrayed as a member of the community, rather than a monster.

In the semiautobiographical novel, *Pays Sans Chapeau* (1996), by Haitian-Canadian author Dany Laferrière, Laferrière explores the roles of the zombie and Vodou in Haiti. Through his portrayal of the (un)dead as a central part of Haitian society, religion, and resistance against the oppressive postcolonial U.S. occupation, Laferrière paints a complex portrait of the zombie that stands in stark contrast to the monster that is familiar to U.S. Americans.

While the Hollywood zombie is portrayed as a threat to the traditional family structure, killing or separating members of the family in its rampage across the country, the zombie in Haitian lore is seen as part of the family, and dealing with the dead does not carry the same sinister connotations. For example, in *Pays Sans Chapeau*, Laferrière describes the Haitian tradition of pouring out coffee for dead ancestors before drinking; the dead are respected, and continue to hold meaning in the structure and rituals of family life, even in death.¹ In another anecdote, American soldiers attempt to conduct a census of the Haitian people, but when they approach the families, the mothers count their dead children as well as their living children, as

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¹ Laferrière, *Pays*, 36.
they still consider them to be part of the family. Thus, in Haitian literature, the dead are not seen as frightening, but rather familiar.

Moreover, in *Pays Sans Chapeau*, the reanimation of the dead is linked to the resurrection of Christ, as well as to rituals of resurrection in the Vodou religion, situating zombies as an epistemological bridge between the religions of the colonizer and the colonized, and as an embodiment of the *mélange* of religions in the postcolonial state. Laferrière utilizes the phrases “coming back” and “waking up” to call to mind both Christ and zombies coming back from the dead. Faith, too, comes into play when Laferrière’s mother speaks about believing that an army of zombies is resisting the colonizing force of the American soldiers. Like most things in which people have faith, the zombies are said to be “invisible,” and they do not occupy space in the same way that a normal army does. Instead, they occupy time; the American soldiers occupy the day, and the zombies occupy the night. Thus, in Haitian literature, the zombie is an invisible force, rather than a grotesque decaying body, and is more tied to temporality than spatiality, further emphasizing its ethereal nature.

Because of the Haitian zombie’s inability to be understood by the secularized epistemology of the American soldiers, it becomes a vital component of the Haitian resistance against colonization, and holds the potential to be an empowering figure. Laferrière’s mother remarks that the Americans have a hard time understanding who is dead and who is alive, and it is due to this fundamental and intentioned

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2 Ibid, 94.
3 Ibid, 65.
4 Ibid, 94.
misunderstanding that the Haitians have the upper hand; by day, the zombies appear
to be weak, badly-armed black men, but at night, they band together into an army of
resistance.\(^5\) The zombie’s powers include the ability to resist hunger and live forever,
two powers that represent the ideal resistance force: one without biological obstacles.\(^6\)
In this way, Laferrière’s portrayal of the zombie as a righteous force of resistance
falls in stark contrast with our anticipation of the destructive, unsympathetic
Hollywood zombie who lurks on the horizon.

One of the first translations of the zombie narrative into American media was
Orson Welles’ production of “Voodoo” Macbeth in Harlem in 1936. The production
was seen as ground breaking, as it strove—and succeeded—to promote black theater
in a time when there were virtually no popular all-black companies, and the most
recognized form of “black” entertainment was minstrelsy. However, Welles’
treatment of race and religion in his revision of the play is highly suspect, insofar as
he warps Vodou practices, amalgamating stereotypes of different black cultures to
create a spectacle of lurid blackness that titillated white audiences.

Welles’ play, set in a tropical location meant to loosely mimic the landscape
of Haiti, capitalized on its exotic, non-specific setting populated with black characters
of non-specific ethnicities. The theater in which the play was performed was a
historically black space, but it drew a mixed audience. Although it was popular with
some white critics, their praise was almost as racist in its fetishizing tone as the
outright racism of the negative reviews; while black audience members came to see
black actors performing popular theater, white audience members and critics were

\(^5\) Ibid, 64.
\(^6\) Ibid, 74.
more interested in the “rhythmic pounding of jungle drums” and “the bodies of the black male players.”\textsuperscript{7} Not all white folks enjoyed Welles’ untraditional rendering of Shakespeare; one New York Times review by Brooks Atkinson entitled “‘Macbeth,’ or Harlem Boy Goes Wrong, Under Auspices of Federal Theatre Project,” refuses to acknowledge that Welles’ Macbeth is Shakespeare at all, but rather dubs it “a voodoo show suggested by the Macbeth legend.”\textsuperscript{8} The review comments on the “weird, varicolored raree-show,” highlighting the actors’ race and linking it to the “animalism” and “weirdness” of the play’s setting.\textsuperscript{9} The review continues to critique the play’s tropical backdrop, describing the “fever-stricken jungles of Haiti” which are “luxuriant and savage and ominous with shadows.”\textsuperscript{10} With regard to the people in the play, Atkinson conflates the actors with their characters, noting the “sensuous, black-blooded vitality” with which the actors act their parts, and uncomfortably fetishizing the “anatomy” of the “gleaming naked witch doctor.”\textsuperscript{11} The reviewer seems to believe that it is the “ferocity of Negro acting” that allows for the verisimilitude of this “experiment in Afro-American showmanship.”\textsuperscript{12}

Atkinson’s reading of the “Negro acting” as somehow essentially more authentic because of the actors’ race is even echoed in reviews that critique the exotification of the Haiti-esque landscape. One such critique is that of reviewer Charles Collins, who expresses his wish that Welles “had handled the Haitian aspects

\textsuperscript{7} Scott Newstok, Weyward Macbeth, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
of his production without going on a mumbo-jumbo rampage.”\textsuperscript{13} He laments the inclusion of “fraudulent fantastics which suggest a Congo village of an exposition carnival street” in lieu of “authentic voodoo effects.”\textsuperscript{14} Collins’ focus on the “authenticity” of the play as a meter of its validity or worth is worrisome, however, as it speaks to the fundamental problem with Welles’ production and its reception: namely, the desire to essentialize the black experience into images and text that read, to white U.S. Americans, as “authentic,” and yet come from the warped fantasy of a white man living in a colonizer nation. In her essay entitled “Black Cast Conjures White Genius: Unraveling the Mystique of Orson Welles’s ‘Voodoo’ Macbeth,” Marguerite Rippy dissects the “layers of white fantasy” through which the “Voodoo” in Welles’ production is “ciphered”\textsuperscript{15}, noting that Welles makes a spectacle of his cast’s blackness—so much so, that “it is not, in fact, Macbeth that is remembered, […] [but the] fantasy of a black primitive culture that […] subsumes the play.”\textsuperscript{16}

Welles’ and reviewers’ quest for “authenticity” illuminates another layer of white fantasy: that of play-goers’ desire to see “authentic” black performance that it is both titillating and safe for their consumption in its exaggerated otherness.

Furthermore, though Welles did not have the black actors sing, dance, or perform comedy in the strictest sense, it is difficult to look at images from the performance without recalling blackface minstrel shows of postbellum America. In the years after the Civil War, black actors became wildly popular as minstrel performers, and would sometimes even don black makeup like their white minstrel

\textsuperscript{13} Newstock, \textit{Weyward}, 89.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 109.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
predecessors. Black minstrels were seen as inherently more suited to perform these roles, as the black presence on stage lent “authenticity” to the minstrel shows. As was the case with “Voodoo” Macbeth, these minstrel shows were made up of black actors performing plays written by white men, so “authentic blackness” was always necessarily code for “white fantasy of blackness.”

While Welles did not instruct his actors to literally paint another layer of blackness over their skin as was done in black minstrel shows, his performance shared many of the same heavy-handed claims of “authenticity” by also having its roots in white fantasy. Indeed, in his essay entitled “On Producing the (American) Exotic,” Peter Mason notes that exoticism is not so different from blackface, defining the American exotic as “a kind of cosmetic, to be applied as thickly or thinly as the artist chooses. It is not a quality of the person represented, but an instrument in the hands of the portrayer, capable of maximizing or minimizing the distance between the observer and her or her object, between self and other.”17 The exoticism in “Voodoo” Macbeth, then, functions similarly to the black makeup donned by minstrel performers, via Welles’ metaphorical painting over of the identities of the actors and the imposition of his own fantasy onto them; while Welles’ representation of “Voodoo” and the zombie figure was, on the surface, a “black” production, the extent of this imposed and constructed blackness is entirely superficial. Thus, even Welles’ early U.S. American representation of “Voodoo” anticipates a zombie that is pulled

away from its Haitian roots, migrating back towards a reflection of the fantasies and anxieties of the imperial center.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1932, a few years before the opening of Welles’ play, \textit{White Zombie} was released in theaters. Directed by Victor Halperin, \textit{White Zombie} is retrospectively recognized as the first Hollywood zombie film. As the name suggests, the cast is mostly white, marking a divergence from Welles’ attempt to harness “authenticity” through the employment of black actors; indeed, the film is not much concerned with authenticity, but instead seems to embrace white/U.S. fantasy wholeheartedly in everything from its filming on Hollywood sets rather than in Haiti, to its recycling of Hollywood tropes and actors, to its whitewashing of the cast.

While the film ostensibly takes place in Haiti, much of it was filmed on set in Hollywood, as is made evident by the scarcity of exterior shots. Much of the film is set in a luxurious mansion, which was recycled from a mix of the \textit{Dracula} (1931) and \textit{Frankenstein} (1931) sets. Other aspects of the film, too, seem to have been borrowed from other emerging films in the U.S. horror genre, as U.S. zombie-specific tropes had not yet been created. The film shares the trope of an exotic locale and an “evil” foreign religion with \textit{The Mummy} (1932), as well as sharing the actor who plays the villain, Bela Lugosi, with \textit{Dracula} (1931) and \textit{Murders in the Rue Morgue} (1932), and having a gothic “haunted house” aesthetic that resembles that of \textit{The Old Dark House} (1932).

Furthermore, the film is so white-centric that not only are the main characters white, but even the villain, meant to represent all the “evil” powers of “Voodoo,” is

\textsuperscript{18} I take this concept from Stephen Shaviro’s “Capitalist Monsters” (2002), which I will discuss further in Chapter 1.
played by a white actor. A white couple’s plan to live happily ever after is almost foiled by the intrusion of a practitioner of “black” magic, Murder Legendre, played by Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi. Lugosi appears foreign, but decidedly white-foreign; the fact that Lugosi also played Dracula and was thereafter typecast as the villain in many pre-code horror films indicates the distinct U.S. American quality to his representation of “Voodoo” magic. Lugosi’s “Voodoo” master has been ciphered through several layers of U.S. American conceptions of “evil” and “horror,” mimicking Dracula more closely than any character in Haitian zombie narratives.

In addition, the film associates white, colonial traditions—such as marriage—with life, and Haitian traditions—such as the burial of the dead in the first scene of the film—with (un)death, instilling a xenophobic sentiment in its U.S. American viewers who sympathize with the main characters. The main story revolves around the marriage plot between Madeleine Short and Neil Parker, who have come to Haiti for an exotic destination wedding. While Madeleine is turned into a zombie midway through the film, love wins in the end, and she is brought back from zombie-hood by the heroic acts of her husband. A character returning to humanity after being infected—or, in this case, poisoned—does not appear in another zombie movie until Warm Bodies (2013), directed by Jonathan Levine, which is, notably, more of a quirky romantic comedy than a zombie film. The concept of being “cured” or “purified” by white, institutional love, however, returns in both of the films I will be discussing in the following chapters, Dawn of the Dead and 28 Days Later; in the former, a black cop is made acceptable by being part of the institution of the police,
and in the latter, the black, female love interest is cured of her feminist radicalism when she falls for the white male protagonist.

Thus, while *White Zombie* importantly gestures towards Haiti through its purported setting and its use of “Voodoo” and zombies, the film represents another turn in the genre, away from a straight exotification of Haiti and blackness and towards a white-centric, exotic destination fantasy that has even less to do with Haiti than Welles’ production.

With one of the first canonical zombie films, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), directed by Don Siegel, the zombie is finally brought onto U.S. soil in earnest, completing the genre’s turn away from Haiti and towards the U.S.’s own national anxieties. Through the film’s analogy of zombification with the perceived threat of Communism and its setting in suburban California, *Invasion* provides the zombie genre with its first true Hollywood zombie. However, traces of the zombie’s exotified roots reemerge in the film’s use of nature imagery as a metaphor for various aspects of the zombie takeover.

*Invasion* is markedly “American” as it captures the zeitgeist of the 1950s, when McCarthyist paranoia was at its height. The zombies in *Invasion* are not crippled followers of a black Haitian priest, nor are they white tourists in Haiti under the thrall of a “Voodoo master;” in fact, *Invasion* zombies are nearly indistinguishable from the neighbors and friends of the film’s protagonists, mirroring the U.S. anxiety during the Red Scare that anyone could be “infected” by Communism.
While on the outside, these zombies appear to be “civilized,” they initially grow out of enormous seedpods, suggesting that underneath their human facades lies an inhuman wildness that is associated both with Communism, and hearkens back to the white fantasy of Haitian wildness. Mrs. Grimaldi, a small business owner who has closed down her shop because of a loss of desire to work, is the first “pod person” to appear in the film.

The laziness and loss of passion for business represented by her dilapidated shop front signals the beginning of the invasion of “un-American” values into the world of the film. The disrepair of the building is haunted by the orderliness of other buildings in the film, making the vacant, boarded up building stand out as having been “infected” by the invasion of Others. Furthermore, the building appears to be undergoing a “return to nature,” indicated by its being thatched with tree branches; it is an anachronistic shack that belongs in the primitive jungle, rather than in suburban California in the 1950s. Thus, the Grimaldis’ shop represents the first symbolic invasion in the film.
In one of the final scenes, the protagonists are nearly eclipsed by the expansive of nature they are running away from, and into; they flee from the plant-born zombies into a treacherous terrain that offers them little in the way of safety. The overgrown nature of this shot combined with the jungle-esque plants shown just seconds before also echoes with the Grimaldis’ shop’s “return to nature,” and the unnatural invasion of Otherness into America.

Thus it becomes clear that our modern conception of the Hollywood zombie was not born fully-formed from the minds of U.S. American filmmakers, but rather developed over time from a purely exotified fantasy of black culture to a creature onto which we could displace our national anxieties. This complicated origin story is apparent in the zombie’s ever-changing nationality, which, even in films such as Zombieland (2009) that are explicitly U.S.-centric, is always a point of some confusion. Surely the Hollywood zombie can no longer be said to be Haitian; however, there is something intrinsically foreign about the figure of the zombie that
requires zombies to be slain in the name of preserving the fantasy of an impermeable Nation.

In the following chapters, I trace the representation of zombies through the films *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *28 Days Later* (2002), as well as in the television show *The Walking Dead* (2010). In the first chapter, I explore the zombie’s position as both Other and Self in *Dawn of the Dead*, which uses the zombie narrative as a metaphor for an internal enemy of the U.S.: rampant consumerism. In the next chapter, I examine *28 Days Later*’s plot trajectory as it moves stiltedly towards an imagined safe haven within an infected State, and how this search for safety becomes a search for normalcy, and requires the elimination of undesirable bodies. In the final chapter, I address the narratives of epidemic that are present in these films as well as *The Walking Dead*, comparing their representations of epidemic to those of artists living with AIDS in the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s. In this final chapter, I push back against the reactionary iterations of the Hollywood zombie, looking at alternative artistic representations of illness and death to seek out reparative flickers within the overwhelmingly pessimistic U.S. American zeitgeist.

Thus, the majority of this thesis will discuss how the power of contagion and of the zombie to infiltrate bodies plays off the U.S. fear of bodily and national porousness, imbuing the zombie with the terrifying ability to exist as both a neighbor and a Communist, a shopper and a monster, a father and a feral animal, a remembrance of dying bodies and a fantasy of decay.
I end here with an image by Jean-Michel Basquiat, a Haitian American artist. His painting, “Riding With Death” (1988), exemplifies the position I move towards in my final chapter and conclusion.

Over the course of my thesis, I become more and more invested in finding queerness in the zombie figure. This requires pushing back against the Hollywood zombie, however, because while the Hollywood zombie stands in for many U.S. American zeitgeists, it is never imbued with enough agency to be representative of a queer positionality towards death. The Hollywood zombie is driven by death—to kill, to eat, to infect—but what if death were driven by the zombie? In Basquiat’s image, he depicts a black body riding death, driving death wherever he sees fit. The
idea of riding with death conveys both Basquiat’s reclaiming and repositioning of the death of black bodies, and a sense of communion with death; if the painting were called “Riding On Death,” it would lack the allusion to the familiar Haitian relationship with death. It is with a mind to this ciphering of death through the eyes of the young, queer, black, American artist that I will eventually reach my own conception of the zombie: not an assimilative, exotified, appropriative, or traditionally monstrous zombie, but rather a zombie that remembers, reclams, and dreams in death.
The Call is Coming From Inside the House:
Internal Threats of Capitalism and Blackness in *Dawn of the Dead*

“Sometimes we think of monsters as archaic beings, oozing out of our primordial imaginings, resistant to the valorisations of capital and the rationalisations of modern science and technology. At other times we see them as uncontrollable byproducts of technology run amok, like Frankenstein’s monster or Godzilla. But both of these approaches ignore the ways that monsters are intrinsic to the ordinary, everyday reality of Capitalism itself. [...] [The] reanimated dead are ‘wired into cold reality, in a way that the living could never be’. The indeadted are immanent to social reality, rather than invading it from outside.”

Steve Shaviro, “Capitalist Monsters”

Released in 1978, *Dawn of the Dead* is the second film in director George Romero’s famed zombie trilogy. *Dawn*’s zombie builds off of a palimpsest of Haitian and early U.S. American zombie figures, once again re-forming the zombie as a figure that is legible to and reflective of U.S. Americans. Following in the footsteps of Welles’ “Voodoo” *Macbeth* and the Halperin brothers’ *White Zombie*, Romero’s film begins with the covering over and recoding of black bodies; in the opening scene of *Dawn*, we see an apartment building in the projects that is being occupied by black American and Puerto Rican “thug” figures toting guns. Two of the main characters are introduced here as members of a (predominantly white) police force that is trying to “clear out” the black occupation of the building. In their effort to restore the equilibrium of a State-sanctioned order, they shoot and harass both the black inhabitants and invading occupiers. As with Welles’ muddled representation of blackness, lines between black racial identities in the projects scene are blurred,
especially as the zombie plague begins to spread in the building, resulting in all
“suspicious” bodies becoming targets for the policemen.

This scene demonstrates how contagion in the zombie apocalypse necessitates
split-second profiling, as determining whether someone is a “threat” could be the
difference between life and (un)death. One policeman begins to spout racist
language, declaring all the projects’ inhabitants degenerate, and advocating that the
police should kill them all. Indeed, the quickly spreading infection causes such chaos
in the projects that everyone who is not white or wearing a uniform is immediately
recoded as infected and deemed deserving of death, whether they are actually
zombies or not.

Both the successful escape to the mall and the continued existence of the
“innocent” bodies in the film require a swift and violent declaration of who is an
Other within the society and therefore a threat. This desire to locate an internal threat
to desired impermeable Nation is written onto the black immigrant bodies in the first
scene, who are immediately deemed unworthy of continued existence, and haunts the
rest of the film. The notion of distinguishing between the black (or blackened) body
and the white (or whitened) body, and equating this distinction to the difference
between the zombie and human body is Dawn’s first foray into locating internal
“threats” to the normative U.S. Nation, and justifies the characters’ continued
privileging of State apparatuses that maintain a certain kind of National purity. The
elimination of this “threatening” population paves the way for the protection of the
female protagonist’s pregnancy, which represents the potential for a new race of ethically “pure” U.S. citizens.¹⁹

This elimination of undesirable bodies to allow for the proliferation of a purified race resonates with Walter Benjamin’s anxiety over the seeping of Fascist, eugenic goals into the act of reproduction. In his essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Benjamin expounds on Fascism’s particular mode of reproducing humans as minions to labor for violent nationalisms. This mode of Fascist reproduction plays a significant role in Dawn, as the female character’s pregnancy serves to sustain a race of normative, uninfected bodies, and drives the escapees towards the normative State institution of the mall as a possible safe haven.

When the threat is coming from inside a society, as it is in Dawn, the main characters’ primary concern is not to defend against outside threats, but rather to regulate who can and cannot survive and reproduce within the heterogeneous society. Any reproduction outside of the privileged sphere—such as the infectious reproduction of the zombie plague, or the potential rapacious reproduction of the bikers who later invade the mall—must be eliminated in order to maintain the Fascist purity of the escaping faction of the population.

The uncontrollable reproducibility of contagion not only necessitates the split-second recoding of bodies as “worthy” and “unworthy” of life, but it is also echoed in

¹⁹ Among the four main characters, two of them are police officers, Roger, who is white, and Peter, who is African American, and the other two, lovers, both of whom are white, consist of a newscaster, Fran, the one female character who takes on an important narrative role, and a pilot, Stephen, who also worked for the local TV station. I emphasize their social roles not only because they belong to the same part of the middle-class, more or less, above managerial but below any sort of leisure, but also because they are all employed directly by the state and the normative apparatuses thereof.
the rapid (re)production of films in the zombie genre. The zombie genre lends itself to sequels, remakes, and parodies, its epidemic popularity resonating eerily with the zombie’s post-biological need to multiply. As alluded to earlier, *Dawn of the Dead* is the second film in a series of three; Romero’s *Dead* trilogy was one of the first to popularize the trend of serialized zombie films. The reproducibility of the zombie film has become one of its defining characteristics, establishing the zombie film as a living document, and allowing for the figure of the zombie to be constantly redrawn on top of the palimpsest of signification created by previous zombie representations.

But why do we as U.S. Americans choose this figure, plucked from Haiti and replanted in American soil, to reproduce again and again? The zombie genre’s popularity and longevity as part of the U.S. imagination is due at least in part to the useful metaphorical power of contagion to create unequivocal Others within one’s own society. For (white, normative) U.S. Americans who may harbor post-colonial guilt or question their “right” to assert their bodily superiority against those who they have deemed Others within the constructed Nation, the zombie figure steps in as a unilaterally evil Other who *deserves* to be slain. The identification of contagious Others within a society justifies the recoding of all errant bodies as dangerous, absolving viewers of their moral qualms. The zombie film is highly reproducible, then, because it is full of the pleasurable, guilt-free slaying of those people who appear to pose a threat to the Nation’s normality. While the Haitian zombie occupies a reparative space in folklore, literature, and religion, the Hollywood zombie resides primarily in film, a medium which provides both the representational distance and the
mechanical reproducibility to sustain the zombie as an imagined foil to U.S. values throughout the ages.

The Hollywood zombie is an Other haunted by the Self, or perhaps a Self haunted by the Other; if the zombie does not directly represent normative U.S. Americans or a Haitian Other, from whence does its strange combination of similarity and difference originate? To answer this question, I return to Benjamin, and his concept of “aura.” After the preface on Fascism, Benjamin argues that mechanical reproducibility alters the “aura” of an art object, changing the meaning and purpose of that object as it is moved out its original context in time and tradition. Before the invention of mechanical reproduction, the aura remained intact, as art pieces were ceremonial rather than what modern conceptions of art would call purely aesthetic, and were usually unique. Benjamin does not read this shift as negative; he later argues that mechanical reproduction, such as in film, allows the artist to become closer to the object and manipulate it in ways that were impossible with purely ceremonial art. I read the first iterations of the Haitian zombie as a sort of ceremonial art, in that they played an integral part in the practices of Vodou; even in Haiti, though, the zombie has undergone a process of fictionalization through its deployment in literature such as Pays Sans Chapeau, which engages with the religious aspects of the zombie, but also addresses its metaphorical status as part of the narrative of the postcolonial worker. Thus, the aura of the zombie has decayed as the zombie becomes further and further displaced from its “original” context,

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rendering the first appearance of the zombie merely one iteration in a series, rather than a unique original.

The zombie’s loss of aura, induced by its repeated cinematic reproduction, complicates the notion of any sort of origin. The narrative of the Haitian zombie is not forgotten or completely covered over, but it is stripped of its “original” status, and re-framed as one in a series of uneven zombie narratives. In addition, with each mechanical reproduction of the Hollywood zombie figure, it distances itself from the idea of the original, opening up space for the zombie to be both “us” and “them” in its muddying of context and position in space and time. The way in which the zombie cannot be definitively, exclusively, traced back to either the U.S. or Haiti as origin (as African notions of the living dead, for that matter, would have to come into play here, also) and yet seems to echo both is tied up in its loss of aura; this loss is not a negative one, necessarily, but explains the convoluted nationalities and political loyalties of the zombie figure.

Stephen Shaviro addresses the question of the Hollywood zombie’s origins in his essay entitled “Capitalist Monsters” (2002). While he likens zombies to laborers in the “Third World,” who are “invisible” and “imagined as an occult force” (289), marking them as Others, he also points out that Hollywood zombie cinema, rather than being merely an exotic distortion of the Haitian zombie narrative, has come to be a form “of reverse exoticism, as [filmmakers appropriate] the mythologies of the imperial center.”\footnote{Ibid.} That is to say, the Hollywood zombie comes to reflect aspects of
U.S. American culture in addition to projecting xenophobic anxieties in its hearkening to the black (Haitian) zombie.

Thus, the zombie in *Dawn* bridges the gap between an imagined, abhorrent Other and an uncomfortable reflection of the U.S. American Self by creating zombies that are at once utterly unsympathetic and eerily familiar. The projects’ zombies are decidedly Othered, and establish the protagonists’ moral right to kill zombies. The mall zombies, however, are visually recognizable as humans, and even mime out actions that are familiar and “normal” to the film’s protagonists. These zombies are still dissimilar enough from the humans to justify their extermination, but their echoing of human behaviors allows for a reflective critique of U.S. American mall culture. When we apply a Marxist lens to the film, analyzing the zombie-like fetishism with which the humans interact with commodities in the mall, the film’s collapsing of the space between zombie and U.S. American human becomes especially evident, as the film reads as a critique of consumer culture and the harms of normative, capitalistic State institutions. Both zombies and humans in the film share an insatiable hunger; the former hungers for flesh, while the latter hungers for commodities, but the film asks us to question whether the two are really so different.

This first scene in the projects is fast-paced and short-lived, and as a result, viewers attempting to recount the plot of the film often leave it out entirely. It is as if the film must get this scene out of the way, hurriedly establishing zombies as Others before proceeding to the “real” plot, which takes place entirely within the mall. The frantic pace of the projects scene stands in stark contrast to the rest of the film, which focuses on a single, static location. Unlike the rapid reproducing of the zombies in
the projects scene, commodities and people in the mall lose all momentum and flow, their reproducibility threatened by the degradation inherent in a capitalist economy. Romero plays with the identity of the mall as the city’s former nexus of exchange, leaving the space behind like a vestigial organ of the capitalist machine. It is unclear, at first, how the mall will function, removed from its normal context as a site of the circulation of goods and capital, but it soon becomes clear that it is no longer a place of reproduction or circulation. Like the zombie, the space of the mall is not totally unrecognizable, still retaining markers of its former life, but is drained of vitality and production, having become a place of stagnation and slow decay. Similarly, while zombies in later films become increasingly fast-moving, Dawn’s mall-dwelling zombies are decidedly slow; their dangerousness lies not in speed, but in the inevitability and deliberateness of their approach. The speed of the zombie depends on what they are signifying; in a film that is meant to critique the slow but inevitable deterioration of the U.S. capitalist system, slow-moving zombies are most effective. The sluggish movement of the zombies and humans within the mall also resonates with the mall’s status as a destination, rather than part of a drawn-out escape. The typical first scene of a post-Romero zombie film consists of characters fleeing from the home or workplace, followed by travel to several different safe havens that are quickly proven to be unsafe, and then a final escape scene, usually involving a vehicle with an indeterminate amount of fuel. This trajectory zig-zags and is open ended, beginning and ending with escape, and seems to imply that escape can never be a linear or singular occurrence: a safe enclosure is not an achievable destination. This trajectory requires relentless fleeing towards an imagined safe enclosure, despite the
fact that the failure of all enclosures is predestined in the blueprint of the escape trajectory.

As more and more filmic replications of this same trajectory are produced, the fact that characters continue to pursue an imagined safe destination in the face of certain failure is both ingrained as the norm and also critiqued, especially in parodies and horror-comedies. In the 2009 film *Zombieland*, directed by Ruben Fleischer, the validity of searching for a safe place to settle down in is explicitly questioned as the characters make their drawn out escape to “Pacific Playland” in Los Angeles, only to find that the amusement park has been overrun by zombies (hence its nickname, “Zombieland”) and is not the idyllic utopia they imagined. This film places the familiar emphasis on the journey towards this imagined destination, but makes the failure of said destination as safe haven concrete rather than merely suggested by a continued narrative of escape. The choice of imagined safe space is important, as the amusement park symbolizes a utopian departure from reality, but also a sense of temporariness and inevitable disappointment; you can’t stay forever in the “happiest place on earth,” and furthermore, when you return to the park as an adult, it doesn’t seem as superlative as it did when you were a child. *Zombieland* critiques transitive escape, while remaining uncritical of the here and now, demonstrating that you will ultimately be disappointed in what you find on the horizon when that horizon is uncritical of the present.

It is the sense of moving towards a horizon at all, though, that is missing from *Dawn*. The mall in *Dawn* at first seems as if it could be a viable space in which to settle down, not only because it is packed with commodities, but also because nearly
all former State institutions are present within the mall, in the name of convenience and “one-stop shopping.” In contrast to the destination of an amusement park, whose value lies only in the imagination of a future utopia, the mall’s lure as an escape destination lies in its status as a staple of U.S. culture and a miniature replica of a familiar State. Thus, through the self-contained nature of the mall, as well as the characters’ enacting of various modes of “capture” as defined by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Dawn’s mall and its inhabitants recreate violently normative State apparatuses and machinery, contributing to the film’s propensity to linger in the familiar rather than move forward into the unknown. By trapping the characters within the iconic space of the mall, *Dawn* locates its problems squarely within the U.S.; the threat is coming from inside the State machinery, and yet, the Otherness of the zombies is crucial in establishing a clear-cut definition of which citizens should be slain and which should be preserved.

Until they are attacked by a gang of bikers (who presumably roam from here to there and poach what they can carry, until it occurs to them to also use the mall as a squat), the characters feel that they never need to leave the mall because it represents one of the last vestiges of “Stateness” as they knew it. Unlike a town, which is defined by its members’ exits and entrances to and from other towns, a State is defined by its “intraconsistency” and its ability to make points within itself “resonate” with one another to create a single sovereign entity.22 Throughout the film, many of the characters remark on the mall’s intraconsistency and sustainability as a miniature State; when they first enter the mall, Peter grabs the keys to the various doors of the

stores and calls them the “keys to the kingdom,” remarking that it has “everything [they] need.” Stephen tells Fran, “We’ve really got it made here,” implying that there is no reason to leave.

Another way in which the mall resembles a self-contained State is its appropriation of the war machine as a means of capture. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the machinery of the State is separate from the war machine, but appropriates the war machine to achieve its ends. When the survivors come to the mall, it is already inhabited by zombies, but through waging war first on the zombies and later on the bikers, they attempt to capture the space. One of the first things the group does when they arrive at the mall is stock up on guns, as well as play shooting video games. They then clear the mall of zombies, and move in. When the bikers arrive, it is the second time the main characters’ presumed ownership over the mall is threatened. Stephen articulates the group’s claim to the mall, saying, “It’s ours. We took it. It’s ours.” Peter notes that the invaders are interested in taking over the space of the mall, rather than the people inside it, saying, “they’re after the place, they don’t care about us!” When he sees the bikers, he calls them “a professional army” and when Stephen attacks the bikers, Peter says, “now we’ve got a war.” The characters’ use of war rhetoric and implements indicates their appropriation of the war machine as a means of capturing and retaining the mall territory. It is

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24 Ibid, 1:00:50.
26 Ibid, 1:33:00.
27 Ibid, 1:59:06.
28 Ibid, 1:59:45.
30 Ibid, 2:00:00.
significant that this appropriation of what Deleuze and Guattari call the war machine happens only because of the ownership paradigm that the mall’s inhabitants immediately transfer onto the space. That is, they cannot think beyond a proprietary notion of space, and their gross seduction of the accumulated things in the mall will lead to most of their deaths.

The next way in which the mall contains all the aspects of a State is the control it exerts over the land and nature upon which the mall was built. Nature in the mall is neutered and purely aesthetic, strategically placed in squares along the hallways.

The sterilization of nature illustrated in the mall’s planters completes the mall’s status as part of a normative State machinery, allowing the mall’s denizens to symbolically “capture” the land of the mall by occupying its controlled natural spaces. The space of the mall precludes any need for “actual” nature, or any nature/land outside of its confines, as it provides its own, self-contained version.
Roger links the idea of having everything they need to the concept of immobility when he describes the mall as “one stop shopping; everything you need, right at your fingertips.” This phrasing is important because of the singularity of “one,” implying that they don’t need to go anywhere else, and “stop,” which highlights the fact that they’re not moving or circulating. The expression “right at your fingertips” is also interesting, considering the grabbing imagery of the shopping spree scene, and of the zombies tearing human bodies apart. The “one stop shopping” experience also hearkens back to the idea of all of the components of the State machinery collapsed into one space; the mall functions as a home, an arcade, a battlefield, a supermarket, and presumably a toilet, all rolled into one.

Fran, though, as the sole reproducer by biological default and thus the only advocate for outward, rhizomatic movement, disagrees about staying in the mall, saying that the others are “hypnotized by this place.” Instead of being comforted by the self-contained nature of the space, she’s suspicious that “it’s so right and neat and wrapped,” arguing that the others “don’t see that it’s a prison, too.” She recognizes that the group is stagnating in the mall, and advocates that they “take what [they] need and keep going”—but, alas, she is in the minority. Indeed, the characters’ enthusiasm about staying in the mall seems disproportionate to the mall’s utility; it is almost as if the humans, like the zombies, are drawn to the mall because “they just

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32 Ibid, 1:00:50.
33 Ibid, 1:00:50.
34 Ibid, 1:00:50.
remember [...] that they want to be in here,”\textsuperscript{35} and they are following “some kind of instinct memory of what they used to do.”\textsuperscript{36}

The bulk of \textit{Dawn} is centered around proving Fran right, and demonstrating the stagnant space of the mall to be a failed safe haven, despite its familiarity as a miniature State. Rather than following a traditional escape trajectory, \textit{Dawn}’s plot suggests that if you reach an escape destination that is also reminiscent of the former State, not only will it prove to be unsafe, but you will also become mired in the space. \textit{Dawn}’s use of the static space of the mall warns against the cessation of movement that comes along with unbridled consumerism without production. The anxiety over the mall’s clogged consumerism is best explored through the lens of \textit{Capital, Volume One} (1867) by Karl Marx, whose text speaks to the “deadened” nature of the commodities in the mall, and the humans’ desire to stockpile these commodities, staving off the ever-approaching “last” commodity.

The mall is inert because it is primarily characterized by the surplus goods and luxuries that are now “frozen,” taken out of circulation by the zombies’ disruption of State apparatuses and the economy’s “normal” functioning. The mall is arranged to facilitate consumption, but in a time where production is no longer possible, the surplus of commodities seems at once excessive and ominously finite. The survivors are trapped in a state of continuous consumption that is clearly unsustainable, and eerily reminiscent of the zombies’ limitless and ravenous consumption of human flesh. While the zombies are reproducing manically and uncontrollably, the humans’ chance of reproducing their labor lies only in the tenuous pregnancy of the one

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 1:35:00.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 34:40.
remaining female character. It is important to note the way Romero deals with temporality in the Dead trilogy; while the film begins at dawn the day after Night of the Living Dead (1968), time does not seem to progress in the mall, except as measured by the pregnant Fran and the dying Roger, who has been bitten by a zombie. This suspension of time is tied to the suspension of the working-day and, thus, of production.

Marx argues that the unbridled Capitalism would extend the working-day indefinitely, despite the desire of the laborer to keep his working hours within his physical limitations. Marx defines the working-day as a “variable quantity” that depends not only on “the working-time required for the reproduction of the labour-power of the labourer” but also on the “duration of the surplus-labour.”37 The Capitalist wants to extend the working-day to be twenty-four hours, but the worker resists because “what [the Capitalist] gain[s] in labour, [the labourer] lose[s] in substance.”38 Through Marx’s portrait of the Capitalist as a vampire that “only lives by sucking living labour,”39 he determines that the Capitalist is ‘undead’ because he possesses only capital, which is frozen or “dead labor;”40 he cannot actually produce anything of worth himself, so he must live off the labor of others. Marx describes the Capitalist’s “vampire thirst for the living blood of labour”41 and his “were-wolf hunger for surplus-labour,”42 anticipating the figure of the zombie, who feeds off the

37 Karl Marx, Capital, Volume One (in Marx and Engels Reader, 1978), 362.
38 Ibid, 363.
40 Ibid, 362.
41 Ibid, 372.
42 Ibid, 373.
flesh of former laborers, as well as the mid-apocalyptic citizen, who feeds off the surpluses of former laborers.

The denizens of the mall in *Dawn* are characterized by a pointed absence of labor; in the beginning of the film, all of the characters abandon their jobs. This collective relinquishing of the responsibility of production is announced by two unnamed newscasters who declare, respectively, that “[their] responsibility is finished,” and their “post abandoned.” While the main characters used to be a newscaster, a pilot, and policemen, they are now all reduced to scavengers who do not possess the skills to subsist on the fruits of their own labor, and who instead must seek out surpluses—remainders—just as the zombies seek out warm flesh. The zombie, then, comes as an interruption to the production of the normal working-day, and heralds in an age of extreme consumption. Thus, Romero’s zombies draw attention to the fact that participating in Capitalism accompanies a process of deadening, the end point of which is not death, but an excessive and destructive afterlife enacted by survivors and zombies alike.

The space of the mall provides the perfect backdrop for consumption without production, as, even in our world, it acts both as a warehouse for the storage of commodities and as a place for consumption, but obscures the production behind the goods to make them more attractive to the consumer. When the survivors first arrive at the mall, the camera, acting something like a security camera, shows us the parking lot, empty except for one car in the deep, left side of the frame.

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43 Romero, 6:05.
The single car is parked within the lines off in the corner and serves as a reminder of what is supposed to be there: humans: customers. The good parking job comes off as comical compared to the rest of the empty spots and the aimlessly wandering zombies, retracing for the eye a reminder of what was always already wrong with the mall. The emptiness of the parking lot, reduced down to its straight, yellow lines, foreshadows the peculiar space of the mall – emptied of the flow of consumers, and yet still full of commodities, remainders. Indeed, the living characters’ interaction with these commodities further illuminates the strange quality of a commodity removed from its usual flow of exchange; in the mall, the mobility of the commodity is hindered, just like the mobility of the humans who settle there and are hesitant to leave because they are attracted to the idea of having access to surplus commodities.

What is it about the commodity, even in its normal capitalist exchange flow, that is so hypnotizing and attractive to humans? According to Marx, while
commodities appear simple, there is actually something “transcendent” about them that makes them “mysterious” as a concept.45 While a commodity is in some sense a physical thing, it also operates on a “social” level and therefore has “qualities [that] are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible.”46 The commodity, then, moves past the concept of use-value and becomes the object of conspicuous consumption; people accumulate commodities for reasons other than to use them in the traditional sense. This mysterious value to commodities obscures the labor behind them, turning the commodity into a “social hieroglyphic[;]”47 the commodity operates on a social level rather than a utilitarian one. Marx’s ideas about fetishism anticipate the space of the mall in Dawn, and are reflected in the characters’ stockpiling of useless commodities, when they should ideally only be using what they need to survive and restart the reproduction of their labor.

45 Marx, Capital Volume One, 320.
46 Ibid.
Dawn is one of the first zombie films to introduce the trope of what I am calling the mid-apocalypse shopping spree, an idea that further reflects and amplifies Marx’s theory of fetishism. When the four survivors have finally made a temporary safe space for themselves in the mall, they start going around to different stores, trying on clothes and gorging themselves on food. Returning to the shopping spree montage, this scene enables the survivors to take control of the mall’s static economy by amassing stacks, piles, boxes and bags full of objects, which they store amongst the pre-existent, ambiguous boxes in their warehouse-like living space. When Roger asks a logistical question about movement in the mall, Peter responds with, “Who the hell cares? Let’s go shopping first!” Later on, Stephen recounts the spoils of his spree, exclaiming, “You should see all the great stuff we got. All kinds of stuff. This place is terrific. It’s perfect.” In the subsequent scene, Fran tries on clothes in front of a three-part mirror, and the camera shifts to show us the mirrors on the ceiling, all of which are reflecting the seemingly endless racks of clothes in the store.

48 Romero, 43:20.
49 Romero, 57:50.
Roger is sitting in a wheelbarrow because he is wounded, and so his mobility is reduced to his grabbing hands. He grabs a hat and sends the whole stack tumbling down. Later, he tries the same thing with boxes of candy, and sends another stack tumbling over. This tumbling of commodities creates a negative feeling of excess; he only wanted one hat, but he got four or five because he did not have the coordination to control his consumption.

At the end of the scene, the four emerge from their respective stores wearing lavish fur coats: the ultimate indicator of conspicuous consumption divorced from use-value; in the temperature-controlled, sheltered mall, fur coats are superfluous, and yet the characters act on their desire to possess them regardless of their uselessness. The grabbing motion in these scenes is mirrored in a subsequent scene in which zombies are grabbing at the organs of one of their victims.\(^50\) There seems to be the same uncontrollable hunger to possess and consume, whether it is oriented toward

\(^{50}\) Romero, 2:07:03.
literal human flesh, or commodities, which Marx describes as human muscle and bone in congealed and abstracted form.

The characters stockpile paper money, too, though it is reduced to just another useless *thing*, as it has no value taken out of circulation. Two of the survivors go to a bank and take out stacks and stacks of money because “You never know,” but the only instance in which they end up using said money is in a poker game.

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51 Romero, 1:31:00.
During the poker game, they use money instead of chips, but the difference between bills and chips in the moment is practically nonexistent; the money will only regain its meaning if it is taken outside of the space of the mall and entered back into circulation. The men’s statement that “you never know” implies that they believe money might be useful again someday, and that such belief marks the limit of their social and economic imaginaries, reproduction of the exact same, yet they recognize that, at the moment, its meaning is only symbolic. Coins and bills are prevalent images in *Dawn*, as in the below image where a zombie has fallen into the mall’s fountain, but they are made to seem strange and empty, taken out of circulation.

According to Marx, not only does unrestrained Capitalism deaden its subjects mentally by degrading their productivity and encouraging the stockpiling of commodities, but it also takes a physical toll on its subjects, instigating a process of bodily decay. Marx argues that while the Capitalist is entitled to as much “day” as he can squeeze out of the laborer, the laborer is also entitled to trying to reduce the day

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52 Romero, 40:52.
to a “normal duration” so that he is minimally able to reproduce his labor.\textsuperscript{53} Marx notes the value of his labor power “is determined…by the labour-time necessary for the production, and…the reproduction”\textsuperscript{54} of his labor. For the laborer to be able to reproduce his own labor, he needs to be able to perform at the same level of quality each day, and for this he needs sustenance and enough time to rest. He also needs to be able to reproduce and support his children so they can one day take his place.

Thus, “the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the labourer.”\textsuperscript{55} Over-worked laborers work beyond their physical capacity, and, according to Marx, “their limbs [wear] away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stone-like torpor, utterly horrible to contemplate.”\textsuperscript{56} If the minimum limit of the value of Marx’s worker’s labor power is not met, the man falls into a “crippled state”\textsuperscript{57} and his value depreciates as he loses the capacity to reproduce it with the same quality as before. Thus, Marx argues that “capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working-day…seiz[ing] the vital power of the people by the very root.”\textsuperscript{58} Marx’s description of the “crippling” process of Capitalism reflects the zombification process in Romero’s film.

Zombies seem to be the limit case of Marx’s “cripples,” unable to work or function in a capitalist society that requires production and reproduction of its participants. While they are not able to work, they are able to destroy in a way that is

\textsuperscript{53} Marx, \textit{Capital Volume One}, 364.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 339.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 367.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 341.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 375.
reminiscent of human consumption. *Dawn* draws zombies as errant consumers in the first glimpse of the mall, where the film renders a montage of zombies wandering the halls and riding the escalators up and down, all set to eerily cheerful, if placid, mall music. Peter says that zombies flock to the mall because of some “instinct memory of what they used to do.” The zombies are not able to buy or sell anything, but their plodding up and down the halls is eerily reminiscent of the way humans interact with the space of a mall.

Thus, the world of *Dawn* represents the threat of U.S. American capitalistic fetishism taken to its limit; while flesh-eating zombies are roaming the earth, the characters in the film are content to play dress-up and engage in other social practices that revolve around fetishized commodities, blurring the lines between them and the zombies they are sworn to fight. The film uses the shopping spree scene to draw attention to the human desire to amass objects for reasons independent of their use-value, and to collapse the space between the human and the zombie in the iconic U.S. American space of the mall. Because of the humans’ obsession with seizing and consuming objects, Romero implies that the zombification process begins well before the “bite;” rather than portraying the apocalypse as surprising, Romero poses it as the logical end to the deadening process of Capitalism. *Dawn’s* zombie, like the surviving humans, is stuck in the circular logic of unbridled Capitalism, and thus *Dawn* locates the potential for apocalypse within structures that already exist in the U.S.

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59 Romero, 34:40.
Slouching Towards Salvation:
Blood, Sex, and Science as Failed Modes of Revolution
in 28 Days Later

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert.

W.B. Yeats, “The Second Coming (Slouching towards Bethlehem)”

“Of course there’s a government. There’s always a government! They’re in a bunker, or a plane, or—”

Jim, 28 Days Later

In 1978, Dawn of the Dead proved the mall to be a failed safe haven. 24 years later, characters in zombie films are still slouching towards salvation with just as much slack-jawed gusto, undeterred by the trampled corpses of their predecessors.

Danny Boyle’s film, 28 Days Later, released in 2002 in the wake of 9/11, reanimates the trope of the mid-apocalypse shopping spree, but only in the form of one short scene; the film’s focus is less on the ironical utopian destination-potential of the mall and more on the many pushes forward towards an undefined, imagined salvation.
While the main plot of *28 Days Later* begins *in medias res* just as with *Dawn*, this film grants viewers a prologue as well as an epilogue to the apocalypse, expanding the film’s temporality beyond the sluggish, inexorable time of the mall. The mall provided us with a static space of densely accumulated objects of value to examine the pitfalls of consumerism and the fatal dangers of sociality overdetermined by Capitalism; however, the constant movement and disruption in *28 Days Later* provides us with the opportunity to examine the meaning of mid-apocalypse escape(s), and the “Second Coming” of the normative State surveillance and re-capture that is always lurking on the horizon.

For my analysis of *28 Days Later*, I turn primarily to *Cruising Utopia* (2009) by José Muñoz, *The Human Condition* (1958) by Hannah Arendt, part five of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) by Michel Foucault and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) by Judith Butler. I first position *Cruising Utopia* to redefine the idea of utopia that I touched upon in my first chapter. Utopia is relevant to the zombie genre as the plot trajectory of most zombie films is one of the characters searching for a zombie-free,
utopian space. However, the promise of utopia is never realized, as the reactionary, violent politics assumed by humans post-apocalypse does not allow for true utopian imaginings. While Muñoz’s utopia, built on his readings of Ernst Bloch, Giorgio Agamben, and queer performance art, does not (and cannot) explicitly make an appearance in the film, it is possible to read for glimmers of utopian thought in the clearing of State apparatuses as a result of the apocalypse. Throughout the chapter, I push back against the inevitable, reactionary return to a normative Nation, highlighting openings—however transient—for what Muñoz calls “queer futurity.” Here, I also delve deeper into the idea of escape itself, interacting with *Cruising Utopia* to determine what a true escape from zombie plague would look like, if escape can ever be singular, and where State apparatuses are located in this escape trajectory. Next, I use Arendt’s idea of the modern human as a tool-maker and user, and his convergent relationship with the machine to explore the role of science and always-advancing technology in the film. I argue that just as the film’s portrayal of zombies and people of color is exaggeratedly primal and animalistic, its portrayal of the white everyman is exaggeratedly mechanical and sanitized. The movement of science in the film, while construed as “advancement,” betrays a desire to return to State institutions of control, and thus strays from the trajectory of queer futurity. Next, I use Foucault’s argument that the State enforces its power through the regulation of blood and sex to investigate the implications of blood and sex in the film. I argue that while blood and sex hold the potential for queer interpretation post-apocalypse, they are here used as tools of the newly emergent post-hegemonic State to normalize interaction and quash all potential for a new interpretation of society and
markets. Finally, I use Butler to further examine the (in)validity of the zombie figure as an agent of escape from normative State control of an imagined impervious Nation; I argue that the concept of a zombie plague emerges out of a reactionary and historically grounded politics of hegemony that constructs unreadable, abject bodies to circumscribe and reinforce the validity of the white, normative body, and, in turn, supports the existence of a State that polices bodies.

Through these lenses, I examine the possibilities of queer futurity and utopia that haunt the motifs of science, blood, and sex in 28 Days Later, while demonstrating the impossibility of a Stateless utopia post-zombie apocalypse. I demonstrate how blood, sex, and science are re-appropriated as tools of normative State reinforcement, even (or especially) after the imagined fall of the present day global north State. I illustrate how the film employs science as the most visible vestigial organ of the State, blood as an agent both of traditional family relations and of the threat of contagion, and sex as a means of normalizing relationships and violently enforcing a certain notion of the survival of the species. While the film teases us with the potential for a new society rising out of the destroyed State, the various acts of revolutionary imagination in the film fail, are shown to be falsely radical, or are quashed by an anti-utopian State pragmatism. My interpretation hinges on two scenes: the first comes when the black female character, Selena, rejects the normativity of her predestined narrative as love interest, but then is subsumed into that same narrative later in the film, and the second takes place at the military base where soldiers prepare to rape the two main female characters in the name of continuation of the species. Indeed, characters both good and bad repeatedly mime
out State institutions throughout the film, attempting to return to an (often violent) approximation of pre-apocalypse normalcy rather than imagining something new.

While in the last chapter I discussed the space of the mall as an unsuccessful utopia that mires the characters in commodities, confining their movement to one that goes *around* existing State institutions, I begin here by focusing on the movement *towards* and the notion of escape in *28 Days Later*, analyzing the film’s many unrealized openings for queer futurity. To define these concepts in clearer terms, I turn to *Cruising Utopia*. Muñoz defines queer futurity spatially as a “horizon,” an “opening,” and a “wish-landscape,” as well as temporally as a “forward-dawning futurity.” This multifaceted definition allows for a queer futurity that moves forward both in space and time without a determined end in sight. This is where Muñoz’s conception of utopia differs from the failed utopia in *Dawn*, but is deceptively similar in its trajectory to the plot of *28 Days Later*. While the mall in *Dawn* is a destination, the salvation towards which *28 Days Later* is always moving is far less tangible, and so throws the idea of destination into perilous play. Though we know the “salvation” in *28 Days Later* will be rooted in depressingly and violently heteronormative regulation of desire, rape of the female body, and her need for a white male savior from that scenario, the possibility of queerness remains, specter-like, in the openings created by the clearing of State apparatuses.

Without a concrete destination, it becomes more complicated to call upon the term “escape” in the singular to describe the trajectory of *28 Days Later*. Singular, 

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60 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.
61 Ibid, 9.
63 Ibid, 7.
transitive escape usually implies a place one is escaping to, but as demonstrated by
the fleeting nature of the shopping spree scene, and, as I will discuss later, the
immediate failure of the military base as safe haven, every pause in the characters’
movement functions merely as a brief reprieve from escape, and can eventually only
lead to more escapes. The repetition of escape here resonates with Muñoz’s queer
futurity, as it is indicative of a process of becoming: a way of being that is constantly
evolving and re-capitulating. Escapes, when plural, echo Muñoz’s rejection of “the
stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present,”64 favoring a non-linear, infinite
temporality over the linear time progression of singular escape. Muñoz does suggest
a destination, glowing on the horizon, but it is the repeated act of escape from the
“prison house” of the “here and now”65 that characterizes queer futurity. While 28
Days Later’s characters’ repeated escapes from zombies do reflect a non-linear
progression similar to that of queer futurity, the film falls short of escaping the
normative confines, both spatial and temporal, of State machinery, escaping always
backwards in the direction of the State itself. Thus, I argue that it is possible to read a
series of “openings” in 28 Days Later, possibilities for queer futurity—and yet the
film fails to realize or act upon these openings. The openings do not reach beyond
the Capitalist logic as mediated by fascistic State control, which ensnares its
population in a form of dependency on said State’s policing and privatizing of desire
so as to perpetuate a specific relation to markets—a specific logic of State and
market. The Nation as population is both imperative and expendable in this model.
Thus, 28 Days Later’s failed trajectory of escape(s) embodies a limping, zombified

64 Ibid, 12.
65 Ibid, 1.
version of Muñoz’s futurity that drags itself back towards a normative conception of Nation instead of forward towards anything new.

The first foreclosed opening in 28 Days Later plays out in the narrative of scientific experimentation that runs throughout the film. The word “experimentation” implies imagination, and enacting imaginative acts in an effort to approach the not-yet-discovered. Experimentation, then, could be seen as a form of escape from the known, and even an escape from the present, as it is constituted by a series of efforts towards a future outcome that is different from what came before. Indeed, science and technology have been claimed as agents of a queer futurity by feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” (1991). In this manifesto, Haraway defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.”66 Rather than letting science remain in the domain of “racist, male-dominant Capitalism,”67 Haraway reclaims the cyborg as queer and radical, constructing “an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries [between human and machine] and for responsibility in their construction.”68 She sees the cyborg as a rejection of our tendency to conflate “natural” with “good” and “unnatural” with “bad,” as the cyborg “skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense,”69 representing a way of being that is wholly outside the realm of naturalness. She

67 Ibid, 2.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
revels in this unnaturalness, noting that, in the late twentieth century, the distinction between “natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed” has become “thoroughly ambiguous”—so to hold on to the ideal of naturalness is, at best, naïve. The cyborg subverts traditional ideas about gender and ways of being human, and therein lies its political power. Rather than seeing science as a normalizing force, Haraway sees experimentation with or on the human body as being full of “dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.”

Director Danny Boyle, however, does not appear to be one of the “progressive people” envisioned by Haraway. Experimentation in 28 Days Later, represented by the institutions of the lab and the hospital, fails to embrace any imaginative “potentiality.” In the not too distant future of the film, science lurches forward, at once getting ahead of itself and remaining mired in a conservative ethos. Rather than

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70 Ibid, 3.
71 Ibid, 5.
72 I borrow this term from Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1995).
imagining a radical form of experimentation, the lab and the hospital churn out further iterations of State control in the form of their two, polarized subjects: the ideal everyman, Jim, who will reify State structures, and the abhorrent Other, the infected monkey, who screams out to be caged. Jim’s reliance on machines and his bodily purity are contrasted with the dirty, animalistic figure of the infected monkey of the film’s opening scene, who was infected by and for the normative Nation, and yet resists the control of the State apparatuses that function to protect this specific kind of Nation. This juxtaposition (of the “good” and “bad” subjects) is made especially clear in one of the first scenes of the film, where we see Jim waking up on a hospital bed, surrounded by medical appliances.

Jim, in contrast to his dark monkey double, is shown to be pure, tool-reliant, and emotionally and physically drained in this scene. His resurrection into the post-apocalyptic world is repeated twice over the course of the film, demonstrating his robot-esque inability to die; indeed, the fact that Jim’s life is so often dependent on science and machines resonates with Arendt’s claim in *The Human Condition* that the “mechanical process has replaced the rhythm of the human body.”

Despite being medically “alive,” Jim’s body appears drained of almost all markers of life in this scene, contrasting sharply with the violent, virulent, oozing body of the infected monkey. Visually, Jim is noticeably white and hairless, colorless except for a shock of dark pubic hair partially concealing his genitals. The pubic hair, far from being a

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74 Recall my analysis of Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) as it relates to the reproducing of post-apocalyptic subjects as minions to labor for violent nationalisms, and the loss of aura that takes place when subjects, like art objects, are mechanically reproduced/reiterated.
marker of Jim’s sensuality, serves to interrupt the marble white landscape of his skin as an unsettling focal point, reminding the viewer of the dregs of Jim’s dirty humanity, which science has failed to scrub from him. The pubic hair is the only markedly “natural” thing in the room, however; while the apocalypse has reduced much of London to a mess of refuse, overgrown plants, and dead bodies, Jim’s hospital room remains devoid of any sort of human waste. The jumbled medical machines that surround his bed appear messy, but this mess is a mechanical rendering of the mess outside: boxes, tubes, and sealed bags litter the floor, rather than splattered blood and mauled corpses. Even the blood in this scene is contained in a bag, maintaining the consistency of Jim’s body’s impermeability and unnatural cleanliness.

Another view of the regulated and modified body argues that the concept of the impermeable human being is a construct of modern aesthetic preferences. These preferences are violently enforced by State structures, but are very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve without much man-made intervention. In “Touching Gender” (2013), Sheila Cavanagh writes, “Bodies, like pipes and genitals, leak,” which explains the prevalent narratives of “imaginary boundaries and physically invested fantasies about impermeability” when in reality, the fluids that flow through and emanate from the human body “are unfaithful and promiscuous.”

Thus, Jim’s artificial, improbable, State-given life seems to represent not a radical, post-human way of being, but rather a return to traditional modes of State

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75 Sheila Cavanagh, “Touching Gender” in Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination, 433.
control, resonating with Foucault’s assertion that “since the classical age,”⁷⁶ the State has reversed its power from one of doling out death to one of “ensur[ing], maintain[ing], or develop[ing]” life.⁷⁷ Foucault does not pose the State’s shift from arbiter of death to giver of life as altogether positive, however, nor does he imply that the State’s reliance on death disappears completely. While the State “now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life,”⁷⁸ this insistence on the life-giving intentions of the State merely masks the continued bloodiness of State-sanctioned violence. Cavanagh, then, has elaborated on Foucault’s depiction of fluids, especially blood and semen, noting that the State strives to control and regulate them under the guise of “ensur[ing], maintain[ing], or develop[ing]” life. Foucault demonstrates that the promise of continued life through normative reproduction is even more powerful than the threat of death—an idea that is later echoed in the soldiers’ fevered drive to procreate, choosing rape over execution as a means of controlling the interlopers in their camp. The State’s life-giving ability is contingent on its ability to control and police life-giving fluids, painting Jim’s sanitized post-coma reanimation as an affirmation of State power rather than an individual victory or recovery. This demonstrates Arendt’s claim that in the ideal “world of the experiment,”⁷⁹ the human being is “as purified of […] sensuality and mortality as of material perishability[;]”⁸⁰ Jim doesn’t die or become infected, but neither does he participate in any sort of “natural” survival for the first

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 136.
⁷⁷ Ibid.
⁷⁸ Ibid, 137.
⁸⁰ Ibid, 266.
28 days of the zombie plague: he was kept alive by the institution of the hospital, and carries the ghost of his State-sanctioned resurrection with him throughout the film.

However, the subjects of scientific experimentation do not always react as expected. In the film, scientists create the zombie disease (aptly named “the rage”) in the lab while attempting to study the effects of violent imagery on monkeys, but their experimentation gets away from them when they lose control over the animal’s flow of blood. The scientifically modified animal rises up against its makers in a Frankenstein’s monster-esque rejection of the scientist as father/master, vomiting up the blood the scientists tried desperately to regulate, and infecting everyone in its wake.

The infected monkey’s rebellion against his scientist fathers, too, is deceptively suggestive of an opening towards queer futurity. In Susan Stryker’s essay “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” (1994), we read a reclamation of the idea of monstrosity, redefined as a radical rejection of normativity and naturalness. She recalls the doctor’s creation of his “own dark, romantic double, the alien Other” in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818), and, like the monster in the novel, “lay[s] claim to the dark power of [her] monstrous identity.” She takes pride in her “assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts[.]” using her status as a “created being, a made thing” with independent will and desires to pose a threat to normative, cisgendered

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81 Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” 238.
82 Ibid, 240.
society’s “status as ‘lords of creation.’” In addition, she notes that the word “monster” is derived “from the Latin noun *monstrum*,” meaning “divine portent.” Monsters, she writes, can be seen as “a sign of some impending supernatural event. Monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary. They served to announce impending revelation.” Thus, we read here the potential for a radical queer reading of monstrosity as indicative of revelation, or revolution. Scientifically-created monsters are agents of change, rather than being purely destructive.

The scientifically-created monsters in the film, however, do not live up to this potential; the entire narrative surrounding their creation, release, and subsequent rampage constructs the modified monkey as chaos embodied, without any redeeming features. This failure to be radical is first hinted at with the introduction of the animal rights activists who invade the lab and “liberate” the monkeys. The activists, while vaguely suggestive of an anti-systemic force, are portrayed as naïve and shortsighted. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz’s critique of present-based activism, such as gay activism that promotes gay marriage as the most important issue of queer rights, is that it fails to be imaginative; much like the scientists who invented the zombie plague, the activists fail to be anticipatory of the future, embodying Muñoz’s idea of being tethered to the “hollow nature of the present.” While it is often positioned against violent iterations of State control, queer activism does not encompass any and all anti-

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
State action; Muñoz tells us that “the here and now is a prison house”\textsuperscript{87} and that to be queer, we need to “see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present[,]”\textsuperscript{88} and so any activism that is queer in the way Muñoz is defining the word must be looking forward towards a queer futurity, rather than simply reacting to the injustices of the present. The activists, rather symptomatically, do not look to the future, unleashing a destructive force unto the world as an ill-planned act of rebellion. The infected monkey is the flawed agent of this failed rebellion, and serves to do nothing but destroy, failing to contribute to a queer future.

Not only is the infected monkey unable to produce any sort of positive future, but its narrative as an irregular experimental subject is portrayed as the evil shadow of Jim’s conventional medical narrative, betraying the film’s favoring of compliant, normative bodies over bodies that resist State control. This is best exemplified in the scene with the activists when the monkeys are released from their cages and go wild, echoing scenes from \textit{King Kong} (1933) inasmuch as the monkey in both films is allegorical of black (African) captivity in the Americas. While in monster narratives that directly echo \textit{Frankenstein}, there is room for sympathy for the non-consensually animated monster, the enraged monkey, and the subsequent zombie, are painted overwhelmingly negatively, and are unequivocally the villains of the film, indicating the film’s disinterest in the reclamation of monstrosity as a revolutionary force.

Not only is the monkey’s portrayal two-dimensionally destructive, but also uncomfortably mirrors the rioting black bodies on the screens that it is being forced to

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
When we first see the monkey, it is strapped down to a table in a position similar to that of Jim on his hospital bed.

In contrast to the pure, drained, white body of Jim, however, the body of the monkey is shown to be hairy, violent, bloody, and drooling, representing the film’s reification of the uncontrollable, infectious, black subject. Besides the pre-existing association of monkeys with the imagined place of the “jungle” and the (black) people who live therein, the darkness of the people on the screens is inscribed onto the body and consciousness of the monkey as he is forced to watch the violent footage, ala Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and in caged conditions that invoke *King Kong* (1933). Rather than watching the violence as a form of aversion therapy, however, the monkey is being “infected” with the rage of the ambiguous but implicitly “Middle Eastern” people of color on the screen, so that when he goes forth into the world, he is not only a visual analog to the black body,
but also a carrier of black-coded\(^{89}\) contagion, taken in visually and manifested in bodily fluids.

The idea of contagion being linked to undesirable bodies is not new; Cavanagh notes that, historically, “worries about contamination were projected onto the body of the leper, the criminal (often thought to hide out underground), the prostitute (culturally aligned with raw sewage, disease, and contaminating fluids), the destitute (who searches for sellable items buried in septic sludge), the vagrant (who slept in the city sewers), the scourer (who cleans drains and sewers), and those racialized as degenerate.”\(^{90}\) The infected body is characterized by its modes of spreading infection through fluids that “resist mapping[;]”\(^{91}\) it either bites, infecting with saliva, or drips into an open orifice, infecting with blood. Whereas the ideal experimental subject is easily contained within his own body and only deploys his fluids to further the goals of the normative Nation (via State apparatuses), the infected body, whether monkey or zombie, is a veritable font of fluids waiting to spew out in different directions. The zombie’s salivating and dripping of fluids independent of any State regulation is the State-employed scientist’s worst nightmare. Thus, the infected monkey, who deals in shit, blood, and death,\(^{92}\) represents the unconventional,

\(^{89}\) The rioting subjects on the screens in this scene are ambiguously, phenotypically “colored,” signifying blackness as threat to whiteness and auguring that queer world-making must be accompanied by black life.

\(^{90}\) Cavanagh, “Touching,” 427.

\(^{91}\) Ibid, 433.

\(^{92}\) I will later argue that the representation of the infected monkey as a lethal weapon that needs to be contained and exterminated by the State mirrors the representation of the made-deviant body of the male homosexual, and the constructed narrative of bodies with AIDS as “loaded guns.”
undesirable body that yields unpredictable “mess and spillage”\textsuperscript{93} and is therefore categorically marginalized by normative State institutions.

Uncontrollable blood as a signifier of the infected, black, or otherwise foreign body is the defining characteristic of all of Jim’s dark doubles: not only the monkey, but also Jim’s romantic interest, Selena, and the black zombie who is chained up at the military base. While machines reanimate Jim, propelling him toward a pragmatic, mechanical existence, his dark doubles receive their vitality from unpredictable, wild blood: blood that resists sanitation. While Jim is characterized by his vision and visual purity (the camera often zooms in on his piercing blue eyes), his foils are characterized by touch, taste, and smell: all of the “baser” senses associated with immorality, non-normative sex and animalism. Their association with baser senses is linked to their relationship with blood, as both are seen as threats to the truth-making of sight. “Fluids, like odours,” says Cavanagh, “threaten to overtake the primacy of sight in the modern optical arena, thereby obscuring body coordinates that are consolidated by the eye’s exacting dissections. The ‘flows’ confuse body boundaries, and the disorientations are met with disgust.”\textsuperscript{94} Thus, while Jim is characterized by whiteness, pure sight, impermeability, and restrained passion, his doubles are characterized by blackness, heightened baser senses, and unrestrained passion, as visually suggested in this bloody, dark, and punk image of Selena below.

For Foucault, blood signifies the State’s power as the arbiter of life and death, control who dies and who normatively procreates, Power, for Foucault’s sovereign, is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[93] Ibid, 431.
\item[94] Ibid, 433.
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“a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself[;]”\textsuperscript{95} he derives his power from doling out both death and life, and blood plays an “instrumental role”\textsuperscript{96} in this enactment of power, signifying State-sanctioned mortality, vitality, and lineage.

Blood plays a more complicated role in the film, however, marking both agents of State control as well as characters that deviate from this control and need to be reigned in by the State. In a Foucauldian sense, blood in \textit{28 Days Later} functions to represent the disappearing (and yet, desperately clung to) importance of blood relations. While the fact remains that in the mid-apocalyptic world of the film, most traditional families are destroyed and unrelated individuals must join together out of necessity, blood ties still hold a lot of power, and even the post-apocalyptic, non-blood-related family units mimic the pre-apocalyptic, nuclear family.

The first indication of the lasting normative influence of blood ties is Jim’s desire to return to his childhood home and find his parents. This nostalgia for a—literally and figuratively—dead type of family is indicative of the film’s rear-facing

\textsuperscript{95} Foucault, \textit{History}, 136.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid, 147.
imagination; rather than queering the family, characters in the film long for the way things were before. Jim is not the only character who clings to the structure of blood-family; Frank and Hannah, the father and daughter who join the group, maintain the blood-bonds of familial love until Frank is infected and must be killed. The normative family is not destroyed with Frank’s demise, however, because Jim and Selena take over as Hannah’s “parents,” performing as a nuclear family unit despite their unconventional relations to one another. Thus, Jim, Selena, Frank, and Hannah all do their happy ending, normative multicultural\(^7\) part to nullify the potential queer family that could have been born out of the post-apocalyptic chaos, preferring instead to return to the normalcy of the State in all its iterations.

In addition to perpetuating the nuclear family, blood in 28 Days Later also marks the characters who are exterminated, marginalized, or forcibly contained by State machinery, signifying infection (via the infected monkey), racialized vitality (via Selena), and the imprisoned threat of blackness (via the chained zombie). Blood’s association with marginalized characters in the film that all, at some point, enact violence upon State structures, might, at first glance, appear to be a sign of the evasion of State control. However, from the monkey’s ineffectuality as a radical agent of change, to Selena’s subsumption into Jim’s heteronormative romantic plot, to the way in which Jim uses the chained zombie as a tool for his own ends, none of the bloodied, blackened characters effect any lasting or productive acts of revolution upon State modes of control. Thus, these characters fail to construct a new narrative, falling in line with Foucault’s definition of blood as an agent of State control.

\(^7\) Sara Ahmed speaks to this forced multiculturalism in The Promise of Happiness (2010).
With a narrative trajectory similar to that of the infected monkey who takes down State machinery but is incapable of contributing to the production of a radically new society, Selena at first appears to be a potential revolutionary, subverting gender and racial norms as a strong, intelligent, independent black woman. However, she conforms to the film’s pattern of failed revolutionaries as her radical potentiality disappears over the course of the film and her character is subsumed into Jim’s as his romantic interest. Initially, she is resistant of the “marriage plot,” recognizing it as cliché and overly predictable; “Do you want to find a cure and save the world or just fall in love and fuck?” she asks Jim sarcastically shortly after meeting him. The construction of this question is interesting; she poses two possibilities for her own narrative: the first option being that they will “find a cure and save the world” and the second, seemingly mutually exclusive option being that they will “just fall in love and fuck.” The second option is unilaterally normative; we sense her rejection of this narrative, as it ignores the context of their relationship as poised on the brink of something new, reverting back to a tired heteronormative romantic plot. To “just fall in love and fuck” when the world has literally crumbled around you seems, to Selena, to be a missed opportunity for something more. This something more, however, is not a reimagining of relationships that subverts a tired narrative, but rather the possibility to “find a cure and save the world.” This option is ambitious, and retains her status as independent black female heroine, and so is rightly posed as the more radical of the two. However, the dubious concept of “saving the world,” rather than making the world anew, destroys the radicalism of this option. Even in her rejection

98 Danny Boyle, 28 Days Later.
99 Ibid.
of a normative plot, Selena longs for a re-creation of what was, and so adds to the growing list of foreclosed openings towards a queer futurity.

The potentiality for a queer relationship between members of their group, wherein the characters find camaraderie outside of a disjunctive, violently exclusive and proprietary heterosexual romance, is shattered once and for all when Selena falls into the exact role she ridiculed in the beginning of the film, killing the potential for all other viable socialities. This assimilationist shift in Selena’s character is not portrayed as negative, however, but is rather cast as a step on the road to the story’s unabashedly forced “happy” ending. Thus, it seems that her initial rejection of the typical female love-interest narrative is simply decorative, and not foreshadowing of a truly radical character arc. Selena is ultimately characterized not by her independence or intelligence, but by the deployment of her black-coded sexuality to revitalize the drained Jim, who, after engaging in a passionate kiss with Selena, becomes wild in his determination to save her life.

After the scene in which we are prepared to see the rape of Selena and Hannah, which I will return to, Selena’s roles as damsel in distress and wielder of black sexual energy are brought full circle when a black-love-struck Jim returns from the dead (again) to rescue the women. Jim, who has previously shown himself to be restrained and hesitant, steps into a white fantasy of the (black) savage, bursting into the soldiers’ compound covered in dirt and blood and performing several alarming acts of violence that exaggeratedly mimic Selena’s ruthless manner of slicing down zombies. He kills soldiers left and right with his bare hands, even gouging out the eyes of the general whilst letting forth an inhuman growl. Despite his temporary
display of black-coded violence, which he has ostensibly “caught” from Selena’s kiss, Jim’s rescue, in which he rides in valiantly to save the female subjects, is the act of a white savior figure, further nullifying Selena’s role as anything but an object to be saved.

The power dynamic of Jim as the white savior figure is exacerbated by his deployment of the black, chained zombie that the soldiers had been performing experiments on. Jim sends the black zombie, still trailing its chain, into the compound to kill the soldiers while he snatches up the women and makes off with them in a car. Again, we could read the releasing of the imprisoned zombie as a liberation of one of the blackened characters, but this would be overlooking the fact that not only is the zombie still symbolically and literally in chains, but he is acting as an agent of Jim’s white power.

Returning to the scene in which Selena and Hannah prepare to be raped, as in are costumed in red and touched by shadowy light, we see that sex, too, rather than realizing its queer potential, acts as a violent normalizing force in the film. This is consistent with Foucault’s argument that rather than playing on our fear of death, as the feudal, early modern sovereign does, the modern State plays on our biological imperative, centering itself around the control and deployment of sexuality as a means of “guarantee[ing] an individual’s continued existence”¹⁰⁰—an existence that comes with the price of continued subordination to the sovereign. Here, Foucault’s reading of the imagined sex act as a way for the State to renew an individual’s vitality for its own ends resonates with Marx’s idea of the laborer’s imperative to renew his

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, History, 137.
labor through procreation so that his progeny, too, can labor; both are readings of sex as a means to a specific biological end, glossing over pleasure and any sort of queer and non-reproductive sexual activity in favor of a goal-oriented, penetrative, strictly teleological heterosexual interpretation, and both assume and anticipate the existence of a normative State.

The heterosexual, penetrative act of sex, which, according to Foucault, is historically bound to regulatory, legal, disciplinarian acts, is implied twice in the film: first, in the clichéd, normative romance between Jim and Selena, and second in the viewer-anticipated rape of Selena and Hannah. As I’ve discussed, the implied sex between Jim and Selena does nothing to subvert State control, instead serving to mute Selena’s role as an independent woman, subsuming her into the role of love interest. Thus, while the sexuality between Jim and Selena is consensual, it is representative of a more subtle form of normalized, gendered violence, as he becomes the dominant one in the relationship and she fades into a subservient role. The inscribing of this phallocentric narrative onto her body prepares the viewer to view Selena as an object of sexual desire, and aligns her body with the black female body that is tied to slavery. In entering into this role, Selena becomes the body that is subjected and produces subjects, and so her rape by the soldiers is not entirely unanticipated.

The scene positioned as the pre-rape scene possesses a strange, anticipatory and romantic aesthetic, muddying the film’s representation of sexual violence. Benjamin becomes useful here in exploring the editorial and analytic choices that inform the scene’s aesthetic. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin defines “process reproduction” as a process by which latent
aspects of a film are revealed by the slowing down or zooming in of the camera; the editor can expose and manipulate the scene in this form of reproduction, even rendering the familiar unfamiliar if he so wishes. The ability of the camera to zoom in or slow down the experience of the moving film also allows the viewer to access a type of analysis that is not visible in other kinds of art, increasing the viewer’s agency in the meaning-making of the film. Benjamin declares these editorial and analytical techniques as creators of the “unconscious optics”\textsuperscript{101} of the film.

My reading of the “unconscious optics” of this particular scene is based both in an analysis of the methods described Benjamin, and in an exploration of the themes defined by Roland Barthes in his essay, “The Third Meaning” (1970), from the collection, \textit{Image Music Text}. Throughout the essay, Barthes’ stills are made specifically from several of Sergei Eisenstein’s films, on which he focuses, in part, for the high symbolism and intentionality of Eisenstein’s oeuvre. Barthes indicates three levels of analysis that are possible when reading a film still. The first level is informational, and involves reading the scene at a surface level. The second is symbolic, and involves looking for the intentional symbols that the director has placed in the shot. The third, the focus of his essay and of this portion of my analysis, requires the viewer to look at the indicators of a more elusive meaning, perhaps one that the director did not consciously intend to materialize.

As an example of third meaning, Barthes gives the case of an actor’s costume and makeup signifying something that possibly exceeds the intended meaning delineated by the costumer/director simply in its transmission, and even more, in its

\textsuperscript{101} Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 236.
becoming a moving image made still by the theorist’s hand. While the symbolic meaning “seek[s] [him] out”, the third meaning must be sought out by him. He calls this meaning “obtuse” because he sees it as a “blunting” of the clearness of the symbolic meaning, making it less clear-cut. He gives a further example of a shot of a woman with a scarf on her head, from Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), arguing that the curves of the scarf contrasted with the curve of her mouth and eyebrows leave him with an impression of a “pitiful disguise,” and reveal the “artful[lness]” of the actress’ emotion/appearance.

Furthermore, Barthes notes that another aspect of the obtuse meaning is that it is “indifferent to the story and to the obvious meaning.” It is a “counternarrative” in that it exists in its own temporality and does not necessarily correspond to the main narrative at all. It does not subvert the main story line, though, but rather adds another layer to it. The still, he argues, is constitutive of this kind of analysis, as it allows the analyst to go deeper and better read the lines and images of one particular shot that was perhaps never intended to be paused on.

Guided by Benjamin and Barthes, my reading of the pre-rape scene’s third meaning strives to take into account both Boyle’s editorial influence and my own power as a reader supplanting the authorial control of the *auteur*.

While we as viewers are clearly supposed to be made uncomfortable by the suggestion of rape, we are also presented with a series of moral and visual “excuses”

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103 Ibid, 55.
104 Ibid, 57.
105 Ibid, 61.
106 Ibid, 63.
107 Ibid, 64.
and “teasers,” lessening the monstrosity of the would-be rapists and inducing a sense of anticipation in the viewer towards the rape that is never actualized.

The uncomfortable aesthetic flair is mainly influenced by the setting and costuming of the scene; it takes place in an abandoned mansion, and the soldiers romanticize the rape by dressing the women up in fancy red dresses. While we have seen Jim naked, we have not yet seen Selena naked, and the withholding of her undressing looms in this scene, adding to its anticipatory air. In addition, while the rapists are ultimately slain by Jim, via the chained zombie, they do not possess the same monstrosity as the zombies, begging the question: who qualifies as a monster, and who can be killed justifiably?

According to Foucault, the State’s power of life relies on the assumption that “one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living.”¹⁰⁸ In a State that purports to be a champion of life, however, applying the death penalty is complicated; it becomes necessary for the State to invoke “less the enormity of the crime itself than

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, History, 137.
the monstrosity of the criminal, his incorrigibility, and the safeguard of society”\textsuperscript{109} in order to justify the killing. While Foucault applies this justification to the continued existence of the death penalty and war, it is also in the forefront of zombie film protagonists’ minds as they slice and dice their way through masses of bodies in the name of survival as recreation of the same.

While zombies in 28 Days Later are so utterly dehumanized that even when a familiar character turns, there is no question of whether or not he should be immediately slain, the soldiers’ monstrosity is less clearly defined. In this scene, we are presented with an excuse for rape framed as a moral quandary: the soldiers are going to rape Selena and Hannah under the guise of “needing” to continue the human race. This justification is explained by the general, who presents it as a legitimate reason for rape rather than a thinly veiled excuse for his soldiers to exercise the violent power of their State-sanctioned phalluses. The film does not suggest any other solution to this perceived moral quandary, and the only soldier who hesitates to participate in the rape is almost immediately killed off. Thus, while the soldiers’ logic is twisted and “bad,” the fact remains that they have the ability to reason, making them seem more human than the unilaterally monstrous zombie.

Thus, Boyle participates in the strange pageantry\textsuperscript{110} of the scene by inserting these complications to the moral and aesthetic portrayal of rape, marking it as a dark and disturbing aspect of post-apocalyptic society, but not as utterly unexpected.

While the zombie’s bite is abhorred and the zombie is mercilessly slain because of his

\textsuperscript{109} Foucault, History, 138.

\textsuperscript{110} This excessive pageantry gives over to the “third meaning” of the scene: i.e., the more elusive meaning, perhaps one that the director did not intend to happen. Recall Barthes’ definition of this “obtuse” layer of meaning in “The Third Meaning” (1970).
hunger for flesh, the soldiers are not quite put on the same level, retaining aspects of humanity and aesthetic beauty that make their deaths more marked as a plot point as compared to all of the random zombies that are slain over the course of the film: they are bad men, but they are not portrayed as unilaterally monstrous in the same way that the zombies are. While characters engaging in post-apocalyptic sex have the potential to be radical and imaginative, forming alternative modes of affection amidst the stateless chaos, they instead engage in and enforce sex in such a way that it reiterates violent, military enforced cisgendered power dynamics.

The last scene of the film underlines characters’ return to State-like modes of living, while maintaining the trope of false escape. Jim “dies” and is revived, again, and when he awakens, another 28 days later, he, Selena, and Hannah are living in a cottage in the countryside. This, again, draws a connection between Jim and Christ, solidifying his propensity to be resurrected; first he’s kept alive by the State apparatus of the hospital, and then by a black female lover and a white girl who is positioned as a daughter to his proxy white paternity. The pastoral imagery in this scene suggests starting afresh, away from the wreckage of civilization, and feeds our temptation to read the end of the film as utopian. But if they have truly reached utopia, why would they then have to hail the jet of a foreign government to come “save” them? The escape is not over, and indeed, other aspects of life at the cottage, such as the fact that the women are sewing—a task that has been traditionally delegated to the domestic, female sphere—are troubling to the discerning eye.

What political purpose, then, does the figure of the zombie serve, if it does not successfully strive towards a queer futurity? It is tempting to read zombie apocalypse
as the beginning of a revolution, as the zombie plague is born out of the failings of the normative Nation and destroys much of the landscape of existing State institutions. I argue, however, that the notion of zombie plague comes out of and reinforces a reactionary politics that fears contagion, but more importantly, fears the loss of hegemonic State apparatuses that favor white, normative bodies. The figure of the Hollywood zombie, I posit, is constructed and reiterated as a reaction to events in history that are perceived as threats to the power of State machinery as defined on Foucault’s terms, ones concerned with the fascistic methods of select population regeneration and mass control of modern western states. The characters’ flight from the zombie, then, is not oriented outward from the normative Nation and State apparatuses, but rather away from zombie-induced anarchy and back towards remaining vestiges and newfound iterations of State control, which are redefined as “safety” in contrast to the chaos going on “outside.” The proposed end goal of a zombie-less salvation is held in front of characters’ noses like a carrot, but at the same time, the threat of the zombie is so terrifying that they are driven to recreate and re-empower reactionary State modes of surveillance and control out of fear. In constructing an unredeemable, inhuman monster that mirrors the cultural narrative of the abject body of color, zombie filmmakers express and reinforce our fear of this Other body, using it as a foil to reify the primacy of normative bodies, and the legitimacy of body-policing State mechanisms that work to maintain a normative and impermeable Nation.

Judith Butler explains the importance of constructing undesirable bodies as a foil to normative bodies in her text, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), beginning by
exploring the claim that all “bodies [are] in some way constructed.”\textsuperscript{111} She first addresses the critique that bodies can’t be constructs because they are a “fact” of life; just because something is a construct, she notes, does not mean it is not also a “fact” or a “necessity” without which “we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all.”\textsuperscript{112} Thus she expands the idea of constructs, naming those that are indispensible to us “constitutive” constructs\textsuperscript{113} and placing bodies in this category, as they are surely constructed, but also vital to our understanding of self. In this way, bodies are both a construction and a fact; she adds, however, that they “only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain […] regulatory systems,”\textsuperscript{114} drawing our attention back to the State systems that maintain these specific constructions of “good” and “bad” bodies.

We need not even go this far to identify both zombie and human characters within the zombie genre as constructs, as they are figments of filmmakers’ imaginations—or perhaps nightmares—and so cannot be said to be simply “facts of life” or “natural,” as goes the argument against reading non-fictional bodies as constructs. Every aspect of their bodies is consciously constructed to appear as it does in the films, and so the question becomes, to what end? Why construct a race of wholly unsympathetic, inhuman monsters from which a band of remaining humans must escape? Butler argues that “unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies” are constructed precisely in order to produce “intelligible bodies.”\textsuperscript{115} She elaborates,

\textsuperscript{111} Judith Butler, \textit{Bodies That Matter}, ix.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, x.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
noting that the “illegible domain […] haunts the [legible] domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside,“\textsuperscript{116} rendering normative bodies legitimate only through the constructed illegitimacy of non-normative bodies. We see this in \textit{28 Days Later} through the privileging of Jim’s normative, white, male body over the blackened bodies of the monkey, Selena, and the chained zombie; non-normative bodies in the film must either be subsumed into normative roles, as with Selena, or abhorred and slain, as with the infected, in order to maintain the hierarchical binary suggested by Butler. It is this clear definition of the domain of non-normative bodies that allows Jim to occupy and represent the domain of normative bodies.

I finish with Butler to emphasize \textit{28 Days Later}’s disavowal of non-normative bodies as the underlying ethos that precludes any possibility for a “salvation” outside of a return to the familiar shelter of normative State machinery. The State both creates the zombie threat through their scientific experimentation and provides a false sense of safety in its promise of a return to an impermeable Nation that permits only a certain kind of life. Rather than imagining outside of pre-apocalypse systems, characters in \textit{28 Days Later} privilege violent iterations of State control in their desperate desire to rediscover a sense of normality.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
Alternate Endings:
Challenging the Notion of Ending
in Narratives of Epidemic

“AIDS is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing knowledge about the human body.”

Simon Watney, “The Spectacle of AIDS”

“Is the photograph a visual elegy of those individuals who have already died? Or does the photograph critically interrupt and disrupt the mainstream discourse of AIDS, presenting us with an image which signifies in the words of art historian Douglas Crimp both ‘mourning and militancy’?”

Kelly T Keating, “The Absent Body: Felix González-Torres, AIDS, Homosexuality and Representation”

By now, we’ve seen zombies degenerate from being able to pass for humans in Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956), to having blue skin in Dawn of the Dead (1978), to having red eyes and projectile vomiting blood in 28 Days Later (2002), becoming more of an absolute death sentence for all of humanity with each iteration. The zombie genre has become increasingly informed by normative U.S. “end of the world” paranoia and the xenophobia surrounding the unachievable impermeable Nation; zombie media is defined by its preoccupation with the pessimistic and cataclysmic narrative of ending, which is portrayed as inevitable in the face of epidemic. In the previous two chapters, I’ve shown how this pessimism is embodied
by the doomed, commodity-clogged existence in *Dawn*, as well as the closing of all openings towards queer futurity in *28 Days Later*.

However, no piece of zombie media does the end of the world quite like the television show *The Walking Dead* (2010). Zombies in *The Walking Dead* actively fall apart; they are torn limb from limb and jaw from face, resulting in the most horrifyingly decaying zombie bodies to date. These zombies are a striking visual representation of continuous ending: they end and end until they are just a collection of twitching body parts, and yet, somehow, the show goes on. *The Walking Dead* is a curious addition to a genre that finds its entertainment value in the concept of ending, as it spans four seasons (and counting), rather than being confined to the length of a film. With the seriality of the television medium comes the need to sustain the zombie narrative over an extended period of time, and therein lies the problem; ratings for *The Walking Dead* have gone down as viewers get tired of the end of the world being stretched over so many episodes. Zombie films are entertaining because you come to identify with the main characters, watch most of them die or become infected, and see a select few continue their tenuous existence by making off in a helicopter, jet, or some other transport—and then the movie ends. With a television show, you can only kill off so many people before even the death of beloved characters is so expected that it ceases to be entertaining, and you can only keep the main characters alive for so long before it becomes unrealistic and tedious within the confines of the genre. Despite dropping ratings, though, the show has been consistently praised for its cinematography and visual effects, including its gruesomely rotting zombies.
As the first popular zombie television show and the most recent iteration of the zombie genre, *The Walking Dead* begs the question: is this it? If *The Walking Dead* represents the end game of the zombie genre, what is it exactly about the show or our own desire for zombie narratives that keeps us watching the end of the world, over and over again? In this chapter, I argue that it is precisely this foreclosing on and disavowal of any reparative representation of a post-epidemic future that captures the current American zeitgeist and explains the recent resurgence in the popularity of zombies. This reading of narratives of epidemic as unwaveringly apocalyptic is grounded in America’s history of dealing with real illness and contagion. Through a comparison of visual representations of zombies, especially in *The Walking Dead*, and images produced in the late 1970s and into the 1990s surrounding the AIDS outbreak in the US, I contend that when faced with epidemic, the normative, reactionary response of American representation is one of covering over and recoding sick bodies in a way that is legible with and reinforces established norms, binaries and hierarchies.

To push back against the normative reading of epidemic as unilaterally world-ending, I turn to images produced by artists who lived with AIDS and whose loved ones were living and dying with AIDS. The body of the zombie recalls these portrayals of bodies with AIDS, but it is fictionalized in such a way that we as viewers feel comfortable seeing it reproduced again and again as entertainment—as opposed to the body with AIDS, which is covered over and made invisible in mainstream representation due to the disgust and bodily fear it incurs in normative, heterosexual circles. Although they echo each other visually in some respects, the
figure of the zombie and the figures in the images about AIDS are doing radically
different work in terms of their representation of a nationally-felt emotion: while the
zombie represents a reactionary disavowal of and disinterest in any sort of futurity,
the AIDS images I will be discussing function as a rejection of “ending,” even (or
especially) in the face of epidemic. These images complicate concepts of time,
mortality, and permanence in their representation not only of dying bodies, but more
importantly, of the artist’s bodies and the bodies of their lovers. Thus, I argue that
these images do important work in combating the American ethos of pessimism and
apathy as represented by the zombie genre, making the sick body visible in a way that
leaves room for public mourning, queer community-building, and hope for the future.

One way that we as a nation have actively covered over the AIDS narrative is
through a silencing of the lived experiences of people with AIDS, and a disinterest in
hearing these stories. David Wojnarowicz illustrates and comments on this silencing
in his short film entitled *A Fire In My Belly* (1987), which Wojnarowicz
dedicated to his friend and lover, photographer Peter Hujar, who died of
AIDS related illness the same year it was released. The film is experimental and at
times abstract, but it speaks in clear terms to the American refusal to hear or give recognition to AIDS narratives except as
cautionary tales. The still I will be discussing originally appeared in *A Fire In My
Belly, and was reproduced in the documentary *Silence = Death* (1990), a documentary that focuses on several New York artists and their public and private responses to AIDS. The still shows a man with his lips sewn together.

For my analysis of this image, I am comparing it to the following still from *The Walking Dead*, which shows a zombie whose jaw has been torn off. While both figures have been rendered unable to speak, the silence represented in the first image is not the same silence, or lack thereof, produced by the jawless zombie. The jawless zombie moans incessantly and yet does not mourn its\textsuperscript{117} missing jaw, as zombies lost the ability to use language after *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. It is even inaccurate, then, to say that the jawless zombie has been rendered unable to speak, as it was never able to speak, and for that matter, never had anything to say. In the last chapter, I explored the

\textsuperscript{117} I am using the pronoun “it” self-consciously here, as it is important that the modern zombie is genderless and yet offers no commentary on the transcendence of gender. While we could probably venture a guess as to what this jawless zombie might have been, with regard to gender, in its former life, this gender is always in the past tense. If we create and perform our gender based at least partially in our own language, and our own articulation of our gender, the zombie does not possess the linguistic tools to have a gender. Unlike the cyborg, though, the zombie does not represent a way of being that is beyond gender, but rather one that is so inhuman that it is below gender. This genderlessness, often represented by visibly rotting secondary sex characteristics, is seen as indicative of a lack of humanity, and allows uninfected humans to kill both formerly “female” and formerly “male” zombies with impunity.
unsympathetic nature of the modern zombie; its unsympathetic nature has much to do with its lack of language, as we tend to understand sentience and humanity in terms of language or other modes of communication. Thus, whether a human has hacked off its jaw, or it was gnawed off by another zombie, the removal of the zombie’s jaw is not legible as an “injustice” or a “silencing” by an outside agent, firstly because the zombie is wholly unsympathetic and we want it to be destroyed, and secondly because the zombie is not much changed by becoming jawless. The zombie, as an always already speechless monster, represents an end to language, and the jawless zombie is the punctuation mark to this end: an even further iteration and continuation of ending that we as viewers take pleasure in watching.

Wojnarowicz’s still stands in stark contrast to the jawless zombie in that the rendering speechless of the subject holds a great deal more meaning. By showing a man with his lips sewn up, especially under the title *Silence = Death*, Wojnarowicz mourns a past lover, protests a present moment, and heralds an imagined future. The silencing of this man is meaningful on many levels: first, while the zombie does not lose much by the rending open of its bloody maw, the subject of the still has lost his ability to speak, representing both the fact that an outside agent has silenced his lived experiences, and that that silencing represents a larger refusal to accept linguistically articulated identities, such as queerness. The mainstream representation of people with AIDS reduces them to bodies without speech; they are loaded guns; they are a dangerously leaky body, but they are never people who speak, dream, and make art. I read Wojnarowicz’s still as a revealing of this injustice, and as a refusal to conform to the narrative of the silent, contagious body. By reclaiming and self-inflicting this
silence (via the subject of the still), it becomes a rejection and a remembrance of the coercive silencing of himself and his community, as well as a projection towards a future in which they are no longer silenced.

While Wojnarowicz’s image speaks to the silencing of the AIDS community, “Thek Working on The Tomb Figure,” taken by Peter Hujar in 1967 and printed in 2010, makes public the relationship between the artist and his own imagined death. While death-by-AIDS is portrayed not only as inevitable, but also as linear in normative representations, in this image, we see the artist Paul Thek working on a life size wax sculpture of his own imagined-dead body, fashioning a reclamation and (re)creation of his own death as art. The sculpture’s radical power lies in its complication of temporality through the portrayal of an end that has not yet come to pass, as well as Hujar’s thoughtful rendering of his friend and lover in the act of making art.

In contrast with Hujar’s image, I am introducing a photograph taken on the set of The Walking Dead, which shows the main character, Sherriff Rick, with one of the
iconic zombies from the first season. Through this comparison, I will be exploring the relationship between living human and dead body as it is represented in these two images.

This photograph from the set of *The Walking Dead*, probably taken right before or after the actor playing Rick “killed” the actress playing the zombie, illustrates the clearly defined adversarial relationship between human and zombie in *The Walking Dead*. The photograph derives its entertainment value from the difference in appearance and signification between the characters of Rick and the zombie, rendering their physical proximity and the expressions on their faces comical. The zombie is dead, rotting, dirty, naked, brown, and strikingly terrifying, while Rick is alive, able bodied, clean, clothed, white, and unremarkable. The fact that Rick is uniformed signifies his status as a participant in and regulator of normative society, especially as this status is contrasted with the naked lawlessness of the zombie. The zombie’s clearly defined Otherness sets Rick in stark contrast, emphasizing the “neutrality” of his body as a normative body. This photograph is a visual representation of Butler’s theory that the normative body needs to be circumscribed by the non-normative body in order to be legible as valid and acceptable; the construction of a legible “good” character requires
the existence of an illegible “bad” character, and similarly, the construction of a legible “alive” body requires the construction of an illegible “dead” body. The zombie represents ending in contagion and death, while Rick represents health and life: and never the twain shall meet.

“The Tomb Figure,” however, blurs the binary relationship between death/sickness and life/health. In Hujar’s image of Thek and the cast of Thek, there is not one “clean” body and one “dirty” body; they are the same body, iterated in living flesh and in generative plaster. I call the mold of Thek’s body “generative” because, while the material itself is not living, it continues to generate thought and imagination in the way that all art has the potential to do.

Indeed, the contrast between Thek’s semi-realist sculpture and the highly sensationalized portrayal of the zombie reveals two vastly different conceptions of the relationship between life and death. While the zombie’s state of “undeath” seems to suggest a third option besides life and death, not only is this third option subsumed into the second, but the trajectory of the zombie’s “undeath” is so predetermined that it cannot be an agent of meaning-making. The zombie is always already dead; Hollywood zombies exist only to be killed by the living characters, and their entire undead existence is so decidedly iterated towards the anticipation of a second death that it cannot stand alone as a state of being; for the Hollywood zombie, “undeath” is synonymous with death, rather than a new category of existence. Zombies cannot be the agents of a radical representation of life and death as they have no authorial power over their own existence; their march towards death is slower, but their end is even
more inevitable and unalterable than that of humans as they have no power over its deployment.

Conversely, Thek demonstrates his control over the depiction and function of his own death, constructing it as he sees fit, and using it to send a message that ripples into the future. By making a life-size representation of his own imagined dead body, Thek embodies a radical queer conception of death as not necessarily mutually exclusive from life; he reclaims the body with AIDS as at once his own living body, and as a projected dead body that has not yet come into existence. Thus, even though he will ultimately die of AIDS related illness in 1988, Thek’s auguring and construction of his own dead body allows him to reclaim and expand, temporally, the meaning of his body, even into death.

In addition, while the identity of the photographer of Rick and the zombie is irrelevant, the identity of Thek’s photographer and their relationship to one another adds another layer of meaning onto the photograph. Hujar’s act of photographing his friend and creating this thoughtful image of Thek in the act of making art speaks to the creation of (queer) community through photography, and the interest these artists had in telling each other’s stories. The portrayal is not exploitative, and does not even seek to garner any public approval; my reading finds kinship with the biographical statement about Hujar on the website where his art is reproduced, which states that Hujar had a “completely uncompromising attitude towards work and life” and was characterized by “his ‘difficult’ personality and refusal to pander to the marketplace.”118 Whereas the zombie is created solely for the audience’s pleasure,

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118 Artsy.net
Hujar’s photograph holds meaning beyond its marketability, acting as a personal and communal elegy, catharsis, and imaginative medium for the queer community affected by AIDS.

Similarly, “Silhouette Dreams,” taken by Joel Wateres in 1998 as part of series entitled “escape, visual aids redux,” resists the normative conception of “manhood” and its relationship to queerness, AIDS, and death. Here we see the silhouette of a naked man, standing in a wide-legged stance against an orange sky. I am contrasting Wateres’ photograph with an image that was used in marketing for The Walking Dead; the image shows a uniformed Rick in near-silhouette, standing in front of a prison on top of an overturned school bus, pointing his gun off into the distance.
While both of these images show a man silhouetted (or near-silhouetted) against a backdrop, the men’s clothing (or lack thereof), the manner in which they wield phallic imagery, and the setting in which they are staged all play a part in creating two very different portrayals of the male figure within epidemic. Rick, again, is uniformed, and here he is even surrounded by vestiges of State institutions in the form of the school bus and the prison. His stance suggests the planting of a flag; he exudes a sense of ownership over his surroundings, claiming these institutions as his own amidst the rubble of the apocalypse. The gun, too, is important in this image, as it represents an extension of the normative phallus to enact State-sanctioned death. Contagion functions here as the invisible threat towards which Rick points his gun/phallus, and death is what he is warding off. This image of Rick, then, suggests a definition of post-apocalyptic manhood that is based in claiming cleared space in the name of the normative Nation, resurrecting State institutions, and exerting the oppressive power of the phallus upon any who dare get in his way.

Wateres’s image, however, tells a different story of manhood in the face of contagion and death. As indicated by the name of the series in which it appears (“escape, visual aids redux”), “Silhouette Dreams” plays a part in a narrative of escape. However, this is not the reactionary, backwards escape of 28 Days Later, nor is it the banal, drawn-out escape of The Walking Dead; the photo is triumphant, and even though we might assume that the photographic subject is living with AIDS, the photograph celebrates him in all his living, naked glory. Not only is he not wearing clothing that suggests remnants of State systems, ala Rick in his uniform, but his nakedness is pointed, drawing the viewer’s eye to his flaccid penis. The penis, as
opposed to Rick’s gun, is not erect, nor is it suggestive of any sort of violence, and instead hangs, symbolic of manhood, but not of penetration, oppression, or death. The anonymity of the man, too, allows for a sense of community even in a single figure, as he could stand in for any man affected by AIDS. The background, as compared to the background of the other image, is less prescriptive in that it does not contain any props or other signifiers. The man’s silhouette is framed by the vibrant orange of a sunset as he gazes off into the distance. The sunset allows for creative interpretation and imagining; I read echoes of Muñoz’s queer futurity here in Wateres’s portrayal of a “horizon,” as well as in his employment of sunset imagery as a form of “beautiful ending.” This photograph is at once melancholic and hopeful, constructing a male figure who is at once dying and gazing into the future.

While all of these images fight back against normative conceptions of sickness and death, “Untitled (Peter Hujar), Detail” (1989) by Wojnarowicz, and “Untitled” by Felix González-Torres (1991) propose an entirely new mode of being after having experienced death, based in the necessity of mourning. Here, I compare three images of beds to explore the signification of the bed with regard to how different artists handle death.
First, I return to *28 Days Later*, examining the image of Jim in the hospital bed. In the last chapter, I spoke about the hospital scene as an example of science endorsing and perpetuating the existence of a specific type of normative citizen; for the purposes of this chapter, however, I will focus on the hospital bed itself as the beginning of a narrative of recovery and continued life.

Death is everywhere in *28 Days Later*, but the urgency of the apocalypse precludes the characters’ ability to mourn any of these deaths, even when the dead person is someone close to them. Characters in the film do not linger on the death of their loved ones for too long—they can’t; they have to keep moving—instead, focusing on the continuance of a “normal” life at any cost. This mid-apocalyptic narrative of the return to “normal” life begins with Jim waking up in the hospital bed, and ends with Jim waking up in the bed in the idyllic country house. These beds, then, are representative of a narrative of recovery and the continuation of a specific kind of life. Waking up is both an utterly “normal” event, as well as being indicative of the (tenuous) state of still being alive; each time Jim wakes up in a bed, it gives the viewer hope that life may someday become “normal” again, and people will recommence waking up and going to sleep in their beds like they did for thousands of years before the apocalypse struck. Each time Jim is resurrected, he seems less and less vulnerable, and he is made more secure in his life through mimicking State structures that perpetuate his invulnerability. The act of waking up in a bed such as Jim’s is comfortingly mundane, and yet it triggers an existence that is fueled by and returns back to State apparatuses of power, and the violent enforcement of said
Wojnarowicz’s and González-Torres’ images, however, do not equate beds with the recovery of a “normal” life, but rather with narratives of mourning and loss. In “Untitled (Peter Hujar), Detail,” Wojnarowicz captures his lover, Hujar, in the process of dying in a hospital bed. While there are certainly similarities between Hujar’s body here and Jim’s body in the previous image—they are both in hospital beds, they are both thin and have dark hair—Hujar is not on his way out of the bed like Jim; his bed is a deathbed. I read Wojnarowicz’s decision to portray his dying lover in bed as a rejection of recovery narratives such as Jim’s, pushing back against the idea that recovery is the only meaningful event that can follow illness. Wojnarowicz chooses to portray Hujar’s impending death as meaningful in and of itself and as a representation of death with AIDS.

Similarly, in “Untitled,” González-Torres finds meaning in an empty bed, which is meant to represent the remembrance of those lost to AIDS. The most
apparent difference in this photograph is the lack of a physical body in the bed; while both the still of Jim and the image of Hujar use the body to portray either recovery or death, González-Torres invokes the ghostly imprints of bodies on the bed’s sheets rather than portraying the actual bodies.

This loss of the body makes his mourning even more profound, as the object of his mourning is so far gone that it cannot even make an appearance in the photograph. Moreover, the fact that the ghostly bodies are faceless lends them an anonymous and universal quality, allowing the image to be meaningful to anyone who has lost someone to AIDS. This sense of universality is widened even further by the public setting of this particular iteration of the image; the image I have chosen is on a billboard, making González-Torres’ mourning even more public, forcing it into a public awareness that is resistant to viewing images relating to AIDS.

Thus, there is a striking difference in the significance of the symbol of the bed in Wojnarowicz’s and González-Torres’ images as compared to the still of Jim; while
Jim’s bed is representative of a restarting of life, Wojnarowicz’s and González-Torres’s beds are representative of the mourning of a past or passing life. Butler discusses mourning’s role as part of a radical politics of remembrance in *Undoing Gender* (2004) when she asks, “Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, remaining exposed to its apparent tolerability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution from grief through violence?”<sup>119</sup> Both she and I would say, yes, there is something to be gained: while Jim’s resolution of his grief over the loss of his former life is resolved through participating in violent State apparatuses, Wojnarowicz’s and González-Torres’ grief cannot be and does not strive to be resolved, and so evades violence. “We cannot ‘rectify’ this situation,” says Butler; instead of trying to “foreclose [our] vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration,”<sup>120</sup> we mourn. Artistic mournings such as Wojnarowicz’s image of Hujar and González-Torres’ image of the empty bed serve as a public reminder of “our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another”<sup>121</sup>—a reminder that demands to be seen and felt, perhaps even by those who would not normally seek out such images.

While Jim and other human protagonists in zombie films search for a safe haven where they can begin a process of recovery that is woven tightly into a politics of forgetting and moving backwards towards a reactionary State, Wojnarowicz and González-Torres advocate instead for politics of remembrance and mourning that allows for openings towards a queer futurity. Butler hints at the queer futurity that

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<sup>119</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 23.
<sup>120</sup> Ibid.
<sup>121</sup> Ibid.
comes out of her definition of grieving, explaining that to “grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to a simple passivity or powerlessness. It is, rather, to allow oneself to extrapolate from this experience of vulnerability to the vulnerability that others suffer.”\textsuperscript{122} Thus, grieving is not violent in the way that Jim’s search for “salvation” is violent, nor does it cause stagnation in the way that the mall causes stagnation; grieving allows for extrapolation, and a widening of one’s own experience to encompass and understand the experiences of others. While zombie films are built upon the negation and extermination of a clearly defined Other, artistic mourning of AIDS is built upon a universal understanding of grief that does rely on the alienation of an Other. Indeed, Butler posits that in grieving, we are “given over to an other.” “This makes us vulnerable to violence,”\textsuperscript{123} she notes, which is why giving oneself over to an other is foreclosed by zombie film protagonists, who are always in fear of losing their bodily integrity. A reparative reading of grieving, however, such as the one being done by Wojnarowicz’s and González-Torres’ images, reveals that communal grief “also [makes us open to] to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other.”\textsuperscript{124} By “tarrying with” the idea of death in their bed images, rather than pushing it away, Wojnarowicz and González-Torres expose another layer of mourning: one that fosters a sense of (queer) community and collective remembrance.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
Thus, Thek, Hujar, Wojnarowicz, and González-Torres push back against the popularized (linear) narrative of sickness and death, searching for a language with which to simultaneously mourn oft-forgotten bodies, and celebrate the love and camaraderie that left an imprint on each artist’s memory. While the zombie exists as a cautionary tale, art created by people living with AIDS exists rather as an elegy, presenting an alternate ending for bodies in times of epidemic.
**Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis, we’ve tracked the development of the zombie as Hollywood cinema has pushed it further and further away from itself: first painting over the zombie narrative with a thick layer of exoticism, then imbuing it with all the ills of consumerism and mobilizing it to drive humans back towards normative State mechanisms, finally using its unrecognizable corpse to overwrite narratives of epidemic. After analyzing the zombie’s largely pessimistic cinematic portrayal, I became desperate to uncover a reparative reading of this monster, one that would not foreclose all openings towards queer futurity. In the final chapter, I began to read glimmers of hope in the art created by those living with AIDS; rather than aligning themselves with the conceptions of sickness and death popularized by the zombie genre, their images cherish mourning the dead as a beautiful way both of remembering the past and imagining the future. These artists are able to play with normative conceptions of temporality and ending, resurrecting the dead through what I am calling “rememorative resistance,” or, a form of remembering that pushes back against erasure. Rememorative resistance cannot be limited to the sphere of visual art, however, as the expression of memory is so inextricably tied up in language. In this section of my thesis, I proffer my own contribution to this movement through a renaming of the zombie figure, as well as through my own poeisis and mobilization of the zombified body in verse.

In *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (2005), Derrida expounds on the importance of names in allowing us to mourn: “When it goes as far as the death of the name,” he writes, “as far as the extinction of the proper name that a
date, bereaved commemoration, still remains, loss cannot be worse. It crosses the boundary where mourning itself is denied us, the interiorization of the other in memory (Erinnerung), the preserving of the other in a sepulcher or epitaph.”¹²⁵ Thus, when we call zombies “the walking dead,” and the bringers of “plague” and “apocalypse,” these names deprive us of our ability to mourn zombie bodies. Derrida presents a way out, however, noting that “once dead, and without sepulcher, these words of mourning, themselves incinerated, may still come back. They come back then as phantoms.”¹²⁶ In naming my thesis The Dreaming Dead, I employ the verb “dreaming” to lend a spectral agency to the dead, who are usually only given the verbs “walking,” “attacking,” “eating,” and so forth, limiting their capacity not only for cognition, but for whimsy. The name The Dreaming Dead recalls the Haitian concept of the dead as still being with us, and the possibility to re-mobilize the oppressed subject, if only in our dreams.¹²⁷ The word “recalling” is important here, too, as it denotes both remembering and calling forth, summoning: resurrection.

Moreover, by writing the following poem, “Elegy for the Not Yet Dead,” I resist the narrative that has been written onto those of us who have been dubbed the zombies of society—the “soon to be dead,” the “better off dead.” Rather than embracing the unilateral pessimism of the “always already dead” Hollywood

¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁷ The recalling of the “not yet dead” that I am proposing would not be a return to a Haitian origin, as any attempt to recapture the aura of the Haitian zombie by a U.S. American reader would be playing into the same violent appropriation enacted by Hollywood filmmakers. Rather, I position my renaming and repainting of this zombified figure as relative to and conscious of the Haitian zombie, while also in conversation with my own experiences as an individual and as a member of queer and non-normative communities.
zombies, who are named thus in order to justify their deaths, I conjure a radical
reimagination of zombified, ghostly, and otherwise monstrous figures, renaming them
(or us) the “not yet dead” in order to instill a sense of hope even a narrative riddled
with death.

“Elegy for the Not Yet Dead” recounts the anticipated suicide of the speaker’s
lover to explore the relationship between impending death and mourning, between
tenuous life and grief. People living with mental illness are often drawn as being
sick, as having “infected” thoughts that lead unequivocally to suicide; my poem
grapples with the idea that some people are assumed to be “always already” dying,
turning that language around to ask how we should mourn when death has not yet
come to pass. Perhaps, I propose, loving someone is synonymous with being haunted
by them, and the anticipated death of a loved one makes us “vulnerable to […]
another range of touch”128 and another mode of loving. In my poem, I recall bodies
that have come in contact with ectoplasm and lived to tell the tale: bodies that have
looked death in the eye and whispered, “not yet!”

Elegy for the Not Yet Dead

“If she killed herself, how would you feel?”
My therapist asks me this question, as if that is the correct verb tense,
as if the thought of you, not yet dead, isn’t already boiling inside me,
eroding the lining of my stomach—

any minute now I’m going to vomit.

I’ll let the answer pour out of the corners of my mouth,
or open a vein and bleed myself dry all over the DSM-5
the same way you taught me to lay my innards bare
next to yours on our bed,
rearranging them to make new imprints in the sheets,
dismembering and remembering our bodies.

Is this what Cummings meant when he said
I like my body when it is with your
body?

We are the walking dead
—the writing dead, the kissing dead, the dreaming dead—
and loving us is a lesson called
How to Mourn The Not Yet Dead,
how to grieve for the maniacs, the depressives,
the scratchers, the pullers, the schizoaffective-bipolar-psychotic-breakers,
taught from birth that we are excruciating impossibilities
oriented towards the death spelled out for us in statistics
and movies, and in our fathers telling us,
“Don’t think that I’m okay with this.”
And is this what Derrida meant when he said we have to learn to live with ghosts?

You haunt me, and I mourn you,
and you mourn me, and I haunt you,

and I remember you at dawn,
huddled over an overflowing ashtray,

and you remember me at dusk,
smiling because we looked so beautifully monstrous,

both of us lit from below
by the glowing ember of your cigarette.
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