ABSTRACT

Title of Document: COMMUNICATING FEAR IN FILM MUSIC: A SOCIOPHOBIC ANALYSIS OF ZOMBIE FILM SOUNDTRACKS

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The horror film soundtrack is a complex web of narratological, ethnographic, and semiological factors all related to the social tensions intimated by a film. This study examines four major periods in the zombie's film career—the Voodoo zombie of the 1930s and 1940s, the invasion narratives of the late 1960s, the post-apocalyptic survivalist fantasies of the 1970s and 1980s, and the modern post-9/11 zombie—to track how certain musical sounds and styles are indexed with the content of zombie films. Two main musical threads link the individual films' characterization of the zombie and the setting: Othering via different types of musical exoticism, and the use of sonic excess to pronounce sociophobic themes.

COMMUNICATING FEAR IN FILM MUSIC:
A SOCIOPHOBIC ANALYSIS OF ZOMBIE FILM SOUNDTRACKS

by

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Introduction

In a 2010 video interview with the online technology magazine *WIRED*, the godfather of modern horror cinema, George A. Romero, challenged contemporary horror directors: "The biggest disappointment, to me, with modern horror is that nobody's using it as allegory, at all. I mean, that's what it's there for. [Even] nursery rhymes are *political*."[1] Hyperbole perhaps, but this statement reminds us that even horror films engage with social tensions. Their cultural importance was confirmed in 1999 when Romero's first zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), was selected by the Library of Congress to be preserved forever in the National Film Registry.

As horror film scholar Kevin Wetmore, Jr. notes, "a film is always the product of far more than the filmmaker's intentions" and a culture's deep-seated fears can manifest themselves through horror films, with or without the director's intent.[2] In this sense, a horror film can be understood as a record of a society's fears, rather then simply a record of what the director thinks is scary about society. The earliest zombie films in the 1930s, for example, capitalized on racial tensions in America, yet their methods are insidious; a modern viewer may understand these films as racist, rather than as works concerned with issues of race. Additionally, all films—horror or otherwise—"do not just mean, they

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[1] George A. Romero interviewed by Annaliza Savage, "'Godfather of the Dead' George A. Romero Talks Zombies," *WIRED* (June 15, 2010), accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.wired.com/underwire/2010/06/george-a-romero-zombies/.

[2] Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., *Back from the Dead: Remakes of the Romero Zombie Films as Markers of Their Times* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 3.

generate meaning."[3] It is important therefore to consider not just the filmmaker's intentions, but how the public receives the film. In the same interview for *WIRED*, Romero himself admits that much of *Night of the Living Dead's* social impact was completely unrelated to his narrative: the climactic murder of the black protagonist at the hands of a white mob resonated with an audience who had days earlier mourned the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Why Zombies?

The purpose of this study is to expose and analyze the ways that horror film soundtracks communicate cultural fears to their audiences. This research is inspired by anthropologist David Scruton's concept of sociophobics: "the study of human fears as they occur and are experienced in the context of the sociocultural systems humans have created."[4] At its heart, this study is a sociophobic examination of the ways in which music represents the various fears depicted in horror films and the fears actually felt by audiences. To date, the small body of horror film music scholarship has addressed only historic details or cataloged the typical tactics of spooky soundtracks. This study will avoid discussing the more visceral aural shocks used in horror films (a sudden burst of noise to signal a monster's attack, for instance) and instead will adopt a more anthropological approach that tracks how certain musical sounds and styles are indexed with the content of zombie films.

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[3] Wetmore, 3.

[4] David L. Scruton, "The Anthropology of an Emotion," in *Sociophobics: The Anthropology of Fear*, ed. David L. Scruton (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), 9.

But why zombie films? The initial impulse to limit the study to zombie film soundtracks was provided by the current zombie renaissance. The zombie is a pop culture phenomenon currently enjoying countless movies from amateurs and professional studios, a hugely successful television show (AMC's *The Walking Dead*), numerous video game franchises (Capcom's *Resident Evil*, PopCap Games' *Plants vs. Zombies,* Valve's *Left 4 Dead*), books (Max Brooks's *The Zombie Survival Guide*, Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*), and even social events (Run for Your Lives Zombie 5k, zombie-themed weddings). There is clearly something about the zombie that has elevated the monster to such ubiquity. An examination of the zombie's history, however, reveals that this is just one of several surges in its popularity, and that each wave coincided with a period of social unrest. No other member of the monster pantheon seems to function as a barometer of social tension quite like the zombie, a creature that can step in for the everyman. As Romero states in the documentary *The American Nightmare* (2000), "The zombie, for me, was always the blue collar kind of monster. He was us."[5]

The zombie's film career began in 1932 with Victor Halperin's *White Zombie*, a sensationalized Hollywood appropriation of Haitian Vodou. This creature is a far cry from the undead flesh-eater that modern audiences will recognize, as it is essentially a mindless slave that follows commands from a Vodou priest. This iteration of the zombie tapped into mainstream America's fears of racial mixing, miscegenation, and civil rights. George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) spurred the second wave of popularity

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[5] George Romero in *The American Nightmare*, DVD, directed by Adam Simon (2000; Los Angeles: Minerva Pictures, 2004).

and established the zombie as an aggressive revenant that assimilated the living into an ever-growing undead horde. The zombie's violent reimagining can be seen as a direct result of the onslaught of brutal imagery surrounding the conflict in Vietnam. Ten years later, Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) used zombified denizens of a shopping mall to critique consumer culture. The film's post-apocalyptic scenario enflamed the imaginations of Italian horror directors struggling through the "Years of Lead," a period in which opposing extremist factions committed several terrorist acts in public areas. These Italian directors would go on to make some of the most violent zombie films imaginable, films that worked as cathartic releases of social pressure. Finally, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and a series of highly publicized outbreaks of infectious disease, zombie films have had their biggest surge of popularity. Films such as *28 Days Later* (2002) and the wildly successful *Resident Evil* franchise (2002–) have doubled down on these contemporary apocalypse anxieties by reimagining the creature as the result of a weaponized virus that has fallen into the wrong hands.

The music used in these films is, of course, sometimes a simple reflection of contemporary popular trends. But it is too easy to read the history of the genre as a simple series of stylistic updates. For instance, a fairly by-the-numbers chase scene in *Shock Waves* (1977) is scored with a plodding octatonic motif on a lone synthesizer, while a roughly equivalent scene in *Resident Evil* (2002) is given an industrial metal treatment by Marilyn Manson. From a purely narratological outlook, Manson has accompanied a tense scene with tense music; his music can thus be read as a simple update to the soundtracks of antecedent zombie films. From an extramusical or ethnographic perspective, however, Manson has added a wealth of new musical data that communicates a unique type of

terror to the audience. First, his industrial metal soundtrack is far more intense than the lone synthesizer from *Shock Waves*. This change represents the more aggressive type of zombie seen in modern movies; these creatures do not lurch like the shambling corpses from the 1970s, they are animalistic predators. Industrial metal also carries a certain tie to, as heavy metal scholar Robert Walser puts it, "the dark side of the modern capitalist security state: war, greed, patriarchy, surveillance, and control."[6] This connotation is fitting for *Resident Evil*, a zombie film wherein the zombies are the product of one such modern capitalist security state.

A broad range of zombie film soundtracks was chosen to find such connections, and in order to avoid a purely *auteur*-centered overview. In film analysis, *auteur* theory regards certain films as permeated by the director's creative voice. Directors commonly analyzed from this perspective are Alfred Hitchcock, Jean Renoir, and, for a more contemporary example, Wes Anderson. This idea does not necessarily ignore the industrial practice behind filmmaking; it simply attributes all aspects of the film to the director's vision. *Auteur* theory is handy when discussing the work of outspoken horror directors such as George Romero or Dario Argento, but this study looks beyond the directors and recognizes that a film's interpretation is often much different from a director's intention.

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[6] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 163.

Zombie Taxonomy

Heated debates frequently arise in the communities of zombie film scholarship and fandom regarding what should be classified as a zombie flick. Indeed, most—if not all—of the films discussed in this study can be problematized. Many of the original Golden Age films have even been retroactively classified by fans as zombie films because the monster's taxonomy was nebulous at the time of production. A lumbering, brain-hungry horde of the undead is the *de facto* conceptualization of the zombie, but this is a problematic mixture of two films that feature two very different monsters. The "lumbering horde" concept is owed to George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968); however, Romero's script refers to these creatures as "ghouls" and they eat entrails, showing no predilection for brains. The fast-moving and surprisingly intelligent zombies of O'Bannon's *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) are the first iteration to feature a cerebrum-centric diet (they also coined the infamous shibboleth, "Braaaains!"). Recent films, such as *28 Days Later* (2002), have stretched the limits of acceptability even further by featuring monsters that are no longer undead, but are living beings infected with a virus.

Noting how Romero's zombie is a synthesis of tropes from earlier science fiction and horror, this study remains flexible and will prioritize a film's thematic concerns before splitting hairs over the more tenuous criteria of a monster's origin or dietary needs. Still, only films that have been widely understood as zombie films have been selected for inclusion in this study (using a selection process that considers a variety of sources from scholarship, fandom, film criticism, and commentary from the creators). These sources are not always in agreement, but it is generally easy to find consensus;

returning to the example of *28 Days Later*, it is only a small dissenting faction of zombie fandom that is compelled to argue in online forums regarding the film's classification as a zombie movie.

The following four chapters will provide a sociophobic analysis of the soundtracks—including both original scores and borrowed music—that accompany representative films from different periods of the zombie's cinematic career. Chapter one discusses how the music from Hollywood's Voodoo zombie films of the 1930s and 1940s reinforces the films' underlying racial and imperialist tensions. In order to demonstrate the musical and thematic similarities, three films depicting the zombie as a racial Other will be examined in this context: Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), Jean Yarbrough's *King of the Zombies* (1941), and Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Chapter two focuses primarily on George Romero's seminal zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), a gore-filled zombie invasion narrative that captured the zeitgeist of 1960s America. This film's nihilistic viewpoint suggested the zombie as a type of political Other and inspired a number of films with similar themes. Three other films will also be examined in this chapter: Bob Clark's *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1972) and *Deathdream* (1974), and David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975). Chapter three discusses the two different scores for the second installment of Romero's zombie franchise, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). The film's American release has a score that stresses the director's satirical conceit—an indictment of American consumer culture set in a mall populated by zombies—while the European release was given a different score, at the behest of its producer Dario Argento, to emphasize the survivalist aspects of the film's narrative. The final chapter discusses the recent film music trends of the zombie

renaissance, as heard in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002). This film uses the zombie as a vehicle for addressing social fears such as the AIDS epidemic, terrorism, and the posthuman condition.

Literature Review

The current study primarily draws on theories developed in two fields: film music and the horror film genre. Within these two bodies of research there are also two important subdivisions regarding, respectively, music in the horror film generally, and the zombie film in particular.

Film Music Scholarship

Beginning in the 1980s, film music scholarship underwent a boom in output and has steadily continued to grow. This surge began with a focus on the inner logic and narratological capabilities of the craft and has recently developed a more anthropological aim that incorporates theories from other fields in the humanities, such as ethnomusicology and semiotics. Earlier scholarship tended to focus on the more practical matter of film music creation.[7]

A purely narratological study will not address how supercultural anxieties are signified by musical elements, so this project will also draw on techniques from ethnomusicology and music semiology. Still, no tool necessarily outweighs the others in

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[7] See, for example, Edith Lang and George West, *Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures* (New York: The Boston Music Company, 1920; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970); Erno Rapée, *Encyclopaedia of Music for Pictures* (New York: Baldwin, 1925).

importance and, more often than not, they are used in conjunction. For example, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) shocked contemporary audiences with perversely manipulated references to familiar musical styles during critical scenes. To understand why and how the music shocked audiences, one must understand contemporary culture (ethnography), the signification of particular musical structures (semiotics), and how the music functions in the overall film (narratology).

One of the first important studies of film music, broadly defined, is Claudia Gorbman's seminal work, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*.[8] It is from this study that many of the basic techniques of film music studies are drawn. As many of Gorbman's terms are unfamiliar to scholars outside of film music, and many of them will be used in this study, it is worth summarizing some of her key ideas.

A film's diegesis is the spatiotemporal reality in which the narrative occurs. Of course, a film is not a virtual reality meant for the viewer to explore; the diegesis only presents enough information to propel the narrative. The viewer is given the details needed (generally a mixture of disparate shots edited together) to infer the totality of the film world. In short, the diegesis is the world in which the action of the film occurs. Music can, of course, exist in this narrative diegesis (a radio playing or a band performing, for example). But music is more often non-diegetic, in other words, it exists outside of the film's reality and is only heard by the audience as background scoring.

Either of these types of music (diegetic or non-diegetic) can help to establish an affective relationship with the diegetic events: music can be sympathetic, ironic,

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[8] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

anempathetic, or express any other emotion. Lyrics, genre, and form all play important roles in constructing such relationships. Of course some music does not easily fit easily into the categories of diegetic and non-diegetic. Gorbman, for example, recognizes a sort of metadiegetic music that blurs the boundaries. For instance, a crazed killer may hear a tune in his head while committing crimes, but it is unclear whether this sound can be considered part of the film's established reality. Opening and closing credits usually are scored and are generally labeled as extradiegetic, existing outside of the film's narrative world.

Gorbman's approach is important to this study because it provides the tools for dissecting and analyzing films and film music in a purely narratological sense. Mark Slobin's *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, on the other hand, was influential in demonstrating ethnographic avenues of inquiry.[9] Slobin's collection of writings is based on the idea that "every film is ethnographic, and every soundtrack acts like an ethnomusicologist."[10] A film's soundtrack, diegetic and non-diegetic, is a musical representation of the human society that exists within the filmic reality. Analysis of a soundtrack thus provides insight regarding the values of what Slobin calls the superculture: the dominant hegemonic cultural institution that produced the film and "needs to *describe* a community's music culture, but also wants to *exert control* over it."[11] Many film soundtracks describe their respective cultures with a system of musical

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[9] Mark Slobin, ed., *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

[10] Ibid., 3-4.

[11] Ibid., 6.

symbols that are extroversive, meaning that they have come to represent something extramusical (such as a ukulele indexing Hawaiian culture or plodding parallel fifths signifying "Injuns"). Introversive semiotics—symbols that are constructed within the inner logic of a musical composition—are also found in films, but tend to be discussed less often due to their lack of recognition among members of a general film audience. Examples of introversive symbols are conventional harmonic progressions, cadences, and chord types that an enculturated ear will understand. These symbols can be used to great effect if, for instance, their logic flows uninterrupted alongside the visuals or if they are suddenly denied resolution by an unexpected narrative development (such as a peaceful cadence being interrupted by a car crash). The current study will examine both types of symbols and draw on several additional concepts from Slobin's work.

Mass media musicologist Philip Tagg's research in music semiology follows similar lines though it applies a more scientific methodology. Tagg and Robert Clarida worked together on the book *Ten Little Title Tunes: Towards a Musicology of the Mass Media*, a massive endeavor that seeks to understand the "nexus of relations" between musical structures and reception.[12] For this study, a musical structure is defined as a cultural entity, or as Tagg puts it "an identifiable part of a musical continuum that may be referred to or designated in either *constructional* or *receptional* terms."[13] Constructional terms are those that relate to the tools used to create the music (theory, orchestration, etc.) while receptional terms are those that hold meaning to the audience. For example, in

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[12] Philip Tagg and Robert Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes: Towards a Musicology of the Mass Media* (New York: Mass Media Scholars' Press, 2003), 94.

[13] Ibid.

Tagg and Clarida's analysis of the *Sportsnight* theme, it is noted that the "repeated-note morse code figure" played by xylophone and trumpet (a constructional element) elicited a semiotic association with a strong sense of urgency and speed (a receptional element) in their group of test subjects.[14]

To identify musical structures, Tagg and Clarida play ten pieces of music for a group of subjects to scrutinize. Nine of the tunes are from television and film while one instrumental rock piece (not featured in a film) is used as a joker in the deck. The listening subjects write responses to the musical selections and then, if regularities are found, a link between signifier (constructional elements) and signified (the meaning suggested by responses) can be investigated. To explore this connection between constructional and receptional elements, an interobjective comparison is conducted between the original analysis object and other recordings that feature similar musical structures. For instance, after reviewing the listening subjects' responses to the *Miami Vice* theme, Tagg and Clarida played the theme from *Paper Dolls* to see if the similar tempo and instrumentation yielded comparable receptional terms.[15] This study is obviously limited in scope to the one group of listening subjects, but it takes a bold step forward in terms of understanding musical semiotics that will be useful to the current investigation.

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[14] Tagg, 487.

[15] Ibid., 647.

Horror Film Music Scholarship

Considering that film music scholarship only began to blossom in the 1980s, it is no wonder that research dedicated to the horror film soundtrack is limited. Still, it is becoming less difficult to find studies on the music of particular film genres or analyses of film music in regards to gender, race, and other social constructions. Most early studies of horror film music focused on the classical Hollywood era and its notable composers, but these studies rarely go beyond historical information and lack in-depth analysis, especially in regards to how the music functions to create terror.[16] The scholarly works that inspired this study are all fairly recent (from the early 2000s and on) and represent film music scholarship that has interfaced with theories presented in horror scholarship.

K. J. Donnelly's *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* provides an overview of the general conventions of horror film music and presents a concise history that touches on the styles of several mainstream composers. Donnelly argues that horror film scoring functions on an overtly "linguistic and functional" level with devices that an audience will understand immediately.[17] These devices include effects such as the stinger (a loud and sudden musical blast that shocks the audience); tension building ostinatos, drones, and tremolos; unresolved dissonance; and eerie timbres (such as *sul ponticello*

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[16] See, for example, Randall D. Larson, *Music from the House of Hammer: Music in the Hammer Horror Films, 1950–1980* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996); William H. Rosar, "Music for the MONSTERS: Universal Pictures' Horror Film Scores of the Thirties," *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 40 (Fall 1983): 390–421.

[17] K. J. Donnelly, "Demonic Possession: Horror Film Music," in *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 91.

strings or gothic organs). Because horror films create an environment that is meant to terrify the audience, the score "follows less the traditional leitmotif symphonic structure of the classical film score than creates a sound architecture combining a concern for ambience with intermittent shock effects."[18] Essentially, Donnelly claims that the score for a horror film is primarily concerned with eliciting horror—as opposed to providing other narratological cues—and it can function as "a central component of the materiality" of a monster.[19] Robynn Stilwell echoes this sentiment by noting that an audience is unable to mute the horrific sounds of a monster, although they can cover their eyes.[20]

The body of literature surrounding music in horror films is steadily growing, but at this time there are only a few in-depth studies that tackle issues beyond the music's broad stylistic features and its general history. Neil Lerner's *Music in The Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, a collection of essays by several scholars, has begun to fill this lacuna with discussions of particular musical devices, such as the use of organ and children's voices, and particular films across a wide timespan, such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), *The Last House On the Left* (1972), *The Fog* (1980), and *The Others* (2001).[21] Isabella van Elferen's *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* examines how sonic characteristics of the Gothic genre have manifested themselves within certain horror film

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[18] Donnelly, 94.

[19] Ibid., 93.

[20] Robynn Stilwell, "Sound and Empathy: Subjectivity, Gender and the Cinematic Soundscape," in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. K. J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 171.

[21] Neil Lerner, ed., *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

scores (as well as in television and videogames).[22] Joseph Tompkins' article "What's the Deal with Soundtrack Albums? Metal Music and the Customized Aesthetics of Contemporary Horror" delves into the commercial motivations behind the construction of soundtrack albums for horror films as "key site[s] for effectively managing and containing processes of consumption."[23] These articles, in an attempt to better understand how horror movie scores instill a sense of horror, all fuse elements of film music studies with theories discussed in horror scholarship.

Horror Scholarship

Horror scholarship is a voluminous field that concerns the construction and reception of a variety of texts, such as film, literature, comic books, video games, and visual art. This study will focus primarily on ideas developed in horror film research, which borrows heavily from the scholarship on horror literature. The critical discussion surrounding the horror genre augments musical analysis by providing insight into how the films (and their music) effectively horrify their audience. Without this information it would be difficult to ascertain how music functions beyond a narratological perspective. Additionally, the analytic methods from horror scholarship have informed the literature surrounding the development of the zombie and are thus crucial to this study.

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[22] Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

[23] Joseph Tompkins, "What's the Deal with Soundtrack Albums? Metal Music and the Customized Aesthetics of Contemporary Horror," *Cinema Journal* 49 (Fall 2009): 68.

Robin Wood is largely responsible for initiating critical discourse on the horror film, a genre previously maligned as the preserve of adolescents and antisocials. Wood's theories are tied to a junction of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis that exposes and analyzes the "surplus repression" of a society's dominant ideology: in the case of the Western world, bourgeois capitalism and the patriarchal nuclear family.[24] Repression is the enculturated dismissal of naturally occurring behaviors and conditions that menace the values of mainstream civilization.

In the case of horror films, monsters are the Other: a representation of a threat against the superculture that must either be destroyed or assimilated. Monsters are also a representation of "what is repressed (but not destroyed) in the self" and thus horror films are centered on "the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses."[25] This struggle creates an interesting duality of self-identification and fear because of "the [monster's] fulfillment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere."[26] Some of the frequently expressed themes in horror films are the celebration of female sexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, as well as a concern for the proletariat and other cultures and ethnic groups. Early zombie films, for example, cast the monster as a racial Other—represented by a sensationalized version of Haitian Vodou—that preys on the white

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[24] Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 107.

[25] Ibid., 111.

[26] Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 80.

audience's fear of losing supercultural control to a minority uprising. Later zombie films such as *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Fido* (2006), and *Make-Out with Violence* (2008) problematize the barrier between Other and Self by humanizing the zombie through a demonstration of its ability to learn simple tasks, being victimized by unjust human behaviors, and even developing a semblance of morality. *Land of the Dead* (2005) even casts the zombie horde as a downtrodden proletariat that (led by a black zombie wearing his laborer uniform) invades the home of the bourgeois who capitalized on the zombie invasion.

As a small addition to Wood's theory, Darryl Jones notes that often a horror film may reinforce a particular aspect of the dominant ideology, such as how a mad scientist's transgressions "[reinforce] traditional Christian views of creation and the place of humanity."[27] It is typical for horror films to ultimately either reinstate the status quo or to satisfactorily oppress the deviant behavior, but leave its demise uncertain (It's dead . . . Or is it?). This trope is particularly evident in early zombie films that involve white characters dabbling in Voodoo magic in order to obtain an object of desire.

Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* attempts to answer the paradox of horror: "why do we subject ourselves to fictions that will horrify us?"[28] Carroll claims that Wood's preoccupation with valorizing the "emancipatory and uplifting aspects of monsters" ignores their role as functional element in a narrative.[29] Horror films employ a

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[27] Darryl Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2002), 54

[28] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 10.

[29] Ibid., 160.

rhetorical framework centered on an attempt to know the unknowable: to identify something that defies a culture's conceptual scheme. The monster's violation of classification norms is generally disturbing; however, the audience derives pleasure from the discoveries that occur onscreen. Carroll does not necessarily suggest that the particulars of a monster are insignificant: he simply is looking for a more general understanding of the horror genre, or art-horror, as he prefers to call it. Still, he is wary of the vogue for psychoanalysis in scholarship; Freud has reflexively informed the genre so it is undoubtedly apropos to use his methods for analysis.

With regard to the current study, perhaps the most relevant body of horror scholarship is David L. Scruton's discussion of sociophobic analysis. Scruton defines sociophobics as "the study of human fears as they occur and are experienced in the context of the sociocultural systems humans have created."[30] This theory does not necessarily reject any claims made by Wood or Carroll; rather, it is a macroscopic focus on widespread social anxieties and how they permeate a culture's texts and effect audience reception. This type of consideration has become an axiomatic truth in horror scholarship and has proven itself valuable in understanding why certain horror films resonate with audiences, or as best-selling horror author Stephen King puts it: "When the horror movies wear their various sociopolitical hats—the B-picture as tabloid editorial—they often serve as an extraordinarily accurate barometer of those things that trouble the night-thoughts of a whole society."[31]

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[30] Scruton, 9.

Zombie Scholarship

The scholarship regarding zombie films is largely focused on how various iterations of zombies represent different cultural anxieties. One undeniably important figure (whose films will be discussed in detail in this study) is George Romero, the director and writer of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and its subsequent franchise, whose zombie films valorized the genre for academic and critical scrutiny via overt social commentary. Much zombie scholarship uses Romero's films as essential landmarks for the development of the genre. This study will examine Romero's works, but an effort has been made to analyze a broad spectrum of zombie films in order to identify the sociophobic relevance of the scores.

Jamie Russell's *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* is an indispensable guide that presents a well-rounded and insightful analysis of the monster's film manifestations.[32] This book goes to great lengths to thoroughly present not only the milestone films that influenced the course of mainstream zombie films, but to give attention to the smaller movements that scholars often ignore. Russell's analysis of Italian zombie films of the 1970s and 1980s is particularly inspired and contains thought-provoking quotes from the filmmakers. Russell is nearly the only scholar who spends any energy on the zombie's presence in Asian horror cinema or the popular Resident Evil franchise. The Resident Evil movies are action-horror films based on the videogame

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[31] Stephen King, *Stephen King's Danse macabre* (New York: Everest House, 1981), 131; quoted in Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., *Back from the Dead: Remakes of the Romero Zombie Films as Markers of Their Times* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011.

[32] Jamie Russell, *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* (Godalming, England: FAB Press, 2005).

series that kept the zombie in the popular imagination through much of the 1990s; however, many scholars ignore the series due to its videogame pedigree and emphasis on action and computer-generated imagery. In terms of music, Russell makes only an occasional remark when the score catches his attention. Still, these moments in which a non-musicologist's ears perk up are telling and may direct a researcher to important analytical sites. Russell's work is only limited in usefulness by its age; released in 2005, the book can only speculate on the direction of the current zombie renaissance.

Kyle William Bishop's 2009 dissertation "Dead Man *Still* Walking: A Critical Investigation Into the Rise and Fall . . . And Rise of Zombie Cinema" provides another source of valuable information regarding the development of the film zombie.[33] The Marxist and psychoanalytical themes proposed by Wood are at the forefront of Bishop's analysis, but he also spends much time describing the contemporaneous sociophobics manifest in zombie films. Bishop organizes his history into a compelling narrative with clearly defined identities, some of which are adopted in this study (Voodoo Zombie, Zombie Invasion Narrative, Zombie Social Metaphor). The only weakness of Bishop's categorizations is that less critical attention is given to zombies that fall outside of his narrative scope (basically, the United States). For instance, Bishop gives careful attention to George Romero's 2005 film *Land of the Dead* because it fits with his Zombie Protagonist narrative, but he gives relatively little attention to the posthuman anxieties of *28 Days Later* (2002) and essentially ignores the blockbuster *Resident Evil* franchise (2000–). Like Jamie Russell's work, this scholarship does not reflect the recent

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[33] Kyle William Bishop, "Dead Man *Still* Walking: A Critical Investigation Into the Rise and Fall . . . And Rise of Zombie Cinema" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2009).

developments made by films in the current zombie renaissance and it also lacks significant musical detail. It is worth adding that—for those unfamiliar with esoteric zombie lore—Bishop provides an excellent history of the zombie's Haitian folklife origins and a section devoted to zombie taxonomy.

Peter Dendle's *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* is another indispensible research tool.[34] Dendle's exhaustive compendium provides synopses and evaluations for over two hundred zombie films from around the world and spanning from the 1930s to 1998. Like most zombie scholarship this work is limited by its age, but it is helpful for deciding which films are worthy of scrutiny. Dendle's *Encyclopedia* makes no attempt to establish a particular narrative, though the introduction provides a concise history of zombie cinema and lays out the general trends.

A final note should be made with regard to the notion of fluid texts within zombie films. John Bryant defines a fluid text as "any written work that exists in multiple versions due to revisions (authorial, editorial, cultural) upon which we may construct an interpretation."[35] Essentially, the text is described as fluid because it simultaneously exists in multiple states. Analyzing a text with regard to its multiple versions "supplies the groundwork for interpretation through the filter of revision and textual versions" and can be particularly useful considering the volatile state of certain zombie films. Additionally, the current age of DVD extras and rereleases (director's cuts, unrated editions, alternate endings, etc.) and the multitude of viewing formats (movie theatre,

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[34] Peter Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

[35] John Bryant, "Witness and Access: The Uses of the Fluid Text," *Textual Cultures* 2 (Spring 2007): 17.

television, laptop, cellphone, etc.) make it difficult to ascertain any true version of a film. Tying into sociophobics, it should be known that every effort was taken to view the same cut of a film that the contemporary audience would have viewed. This is the only way to accurately begin to understand an audience's reception.

The wanton gore of zombie films has a history of irritating censors and thus forcing directors to release different cuts of their product. To make matters more complicated still, many of these variants bear different titles entirely. A perfect example of this phenomenon is the 1974 Spanish-Italian film *Non si deve profanare il sonno dei morti* (*Let Sleeping Corpses Lie)* which is alternatively known as *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* (UK), *Don't Open the Window* (USA)*, Invasion der Zombies* (Germany), *Zumbi 3* (Brazil), and various other titles. As noted earlier, George Romero's landmark zombie film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) features two distinctly different scores for the US version and the European release. This study will analyze variants in film scores, although of the films selected, there are only a few that seem to offer significantly different musical accompaniment.

Conclusion

In order to analyze the sociophobic relevance of the soundtracks to zombie films it will be necessary to combine ideas from musicology, ethnomusicology, sociology, film studies, and horror studies. These multiple perspectives are essential in identifying cultural fears and understanding how and why they are implemented in film music. As discussed in the brief comparison between *Shock Waves* and *Resident Evil*, each perspective will yield different information in terms of how to read a specific film. It is

the aim of this study to strike a balance between these different foci in order to comprehend how contemporaneous audiences would have considered these works.

Chapter 1: The Voodoo Zombie

Introduction

The soundtracks of the earliest zombie films focused on establishing the monster's status as an Other. This characterization is achieved in two ways: the employment of exoticism and the juxtaposition of diegetic and non-diegetic soundspaces. Musical exoticism is generally conveyed with the hallmarks of Western exoticism, such as pentatonic melodies and the insistent rhythms of primitivism, or by using indigenous music such as Haitian drumming, chants, and even Calypso. With regard to the soundspace, the musical representation of the protagonists (always a member of the Western superculture) dominates the non-diegetic realm while the Other is sequestered into the diegesis. This division clearly illustrates the struggle for control between the Other (the zombie and, by extension, all native populations) and the white imperialist superculture. By examining three films—Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), Jacques Tourner's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), and Jean Yarbrough's *King of the Zombies* (1941)—these two types of aural Othering will be demonstrated. It should be noted that *King of the Zombies* is a hybrid of horror and comedy and, although this study is focused on horror films, it is worth briefly investigating how the film uses jazz as an additional musical representation of the zombie's Otherness.

The Zombi of Haitian Folklore and Hollywood's Voodoo Zombie

Though the classic Hollywood version of the zombie has no predecessor in literary fiction, it is based on Caribbean travel literature that describes Haitian folklife,

particularly the Vodoun religion.[1] Alfred Métraux, in his comprehensive research on Haitian Vodou, explains that Vodou is a syncretic religion that melds Christianity, the religion brought to the island by Spanish and French colonists, and West African mysticism, brought by slaves along the Atlantic trade route.[2] The *Code noir* decreed by Louis XIV in 1685 established that open practice of African religious rituals was to be suppressed by slaveholders, so practitioners adapted by holding clandestine services and disguising their *loa* (spirits worshipped by the Vodoun) as figures from Christianity, such as the Virgin Mary or the saints.[3] Bishop describes the complex origin of the *zombi* as a hybrid of Vodou's pagan origins (the human soul as tangible), Christian theology (resurrection of the dead), and the institution of slavery.[4]

In Vodou mythology, a *zombi* is created by a *bokor*, a sorcerer in command of dark forces and considered capable of stealing one's soul and establishing dominion over the empty body after resurrection. The *bokor* does not generally create a *zombi* on his own accord, however: a third party usually hires the *bokor* to perform the zombification ritual on a person who has transgressed community norms. As horror scholar Shawn McIntosh puts it, "Haitian peasants greatly fear being removed from 'the many' and

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[1] Many readers are likely more familiar with Vodou spelled as Voodoo. Practitioners of Haitian Vodou have made efforts to disassociate their religion from the voodooism depicted in popular culture (early Hollywood zombie films, for instance) and to differentiate themselves from other forms of the religion. Vodou was recognized as an official religion by the Haitian government in 2003. In 2012, the Library of Congress officially changed its subject heading to Vodou.

[2] Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (New York: Shocken Books, 1972), 15.

[3] Bishop, 66.

[4] Ibid., 67.

becoming 'the one'"; this anxiety is unrelated to how a modern viewer fears the physical powers of the undead.[5] Interestingly, the Vodou practitioners who believe in the *zombi* "find the fate all the more frightening and abhorrent because of their Christian faith in agency and a life after death (i.e., heaven)," not because they fear a *zombi* will inflict harm upon them.[6] The *zombi* (and early Hollywood film zombies) is simply a depersonalized slave that represents fear of eternal anguish and "[bears] little resemblance to the increasingly animalistic zombies of recent decades."[7]

Vodou was virtually unknown to the American public until William Seabrook's 1929 travelogue *The Magic Island* captured the imagination of readers with its description of exotic lands, strange customs, and, of course, the mysterious *zombi*. Bishop posits that part of the Caribbean's appeal was that it represented an exotic land of the Other to Americans; a land that was unique, but closer to home and more "real" for an American audience than, say, the vampire's Transylvania.[8] The Caribbean was essentially the "West's East" insofar as it provided Americans with a mysterious territory which they could both romanticize and dread.[9] In 1932 the first wave of fiction based on zombie folklore came to the American public in the form of a novel, a play, and a film.

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[5] Shawn McIntosh, "The Evolution of the Zombie: The Monster That Keeps Coming Back," in *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*, eds. Shawn McIntosh and Marc Leverette (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 3.

[6] Bishop, 79

[7] Peter Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 3.

[8] Bishop, 101.

[9] Ibid.

The novel was H. Bedford-Jones's *Drums of Damballa*, a narrative that "focuses primarily on the atrocities of vodooism" and contains an encounter with a soulless *zombi*.[10] The play was Kenneth Webb's *Zombie*, a commercial failure that established the "half-live, half-dead" visual depiction of the zombie in popular culture.[11] The film, Victor Halperin's *White Zombie*, is the monster's cinematic debut and it provides an example of how the early Hollywood zombie was characterized.[12] The film is set in Haiti, or a fictionalized island that closely resembles it (after all, it was shot at Universal Studios with outdoor scenes filmed in Los Angeles' Bronson Canyon), and is based on the Haitian *zombi*. The film was a moderate box office success for an independent film, perhaps due to Béla Lugosi's celebrity, but it fell into relative obscurity until it was rereleased in the 1980s.

The *zombi* is depicted appropriately as an automaton under the control of the *bokor*. The central fear invoked is not of the *zombi*'s physical menace—it is passive after all—but of the very thought of being zombified and losing personal autonomy.[13] The zombie does not actively threaten any characters in any of the Voodoo zombie films; rather it is a silent slave who works on a plantation and performs basic tasks for its *bokor*.

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[10] Bishop, 90.

[11] Ibid., 90–91.

[12] *White Zombie*, directed by Victor Halperin (1932; Tulsa, OK: VCI Entertainment, 2013), Blu-ray.

[13] Edward Lowry and Richard deCordova, "Enunciation and the Production of Horror in *White Zombie*," in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004). This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of *White Zombie*'s visual "paradigm of possessor/possessed."

Koven claims that *White Zombie* (and most zombie films of the 1930s and 1940s) functions as a melodrama centered around the white characters and should not be confused with the monster movies being offered by Universal during the same period, such as *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and many others.[14] These early zombie films still qualify as horror, but they draw more on the Gothic tradition than on the Hollywood vogue of creature features.[15]

The melodrama that characterizes these early zombie films is what Ellen Draper calls "zombie women films," in which a white heroine "becomes, or is threatened with becoming, a zombie, in conjunction with enslavement by a villain."[16] *White Zombie* is a perfect example of this type of film with its plot of a white outsider enlisting a *bokor* to win him the heart of another man's fiancé (figure 1). Of course, things go awry when the *bokor* decides to keep the enslaved woman as his property. This plot excited North American audiences with its exoticism, but—as any good horror film should—it succeeds by aiming directly at the heart of their insecurities. The "zombie women films" play on the imperialist paranoia and racist guilt of the audience by depicting a "crucial transposition of the zombie from enslaved black victim vitiated by white colonization to virginal white victim menaced by black erotic rites."[17]

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[14] Mikel J. Koven, "The Folklore of the Zombie Film," in *Zombie Culture*, 30.

[15] In addition to the films discussed in this chapter, the Voodoo zombie can be seen in *Ouanga* (1936), *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936), *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), and *Voodoo Man* (1944).

[16] Ellen Draper, "Zombie Women When the Gaze is Male," *Wide Angle* 10, no. 3 (1988), 54.

Figure 1. A Voodoo zombie carries a "virginal white victim" to its *bokor* in *I Walked with a Zombie*.

Musical Exoticism in the Voodoo Zombie Film

The music of these early zombie films conforms to contemporaneous industry practice. Early horror films were typically scored with a mixture of original compositions, borrowed classical works, and canned music made to accompany silent films. Mark Slobin describes the principal stylistic idiom for early Hollywood film music as "The Steiner superculture": a mixture of postromanticism, French impressionism, and "the jaunty modernism of the European cabaret tradition" synthesized by the Austrian

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[17] Edna Aizenberg, "'I Walked with a Zombie': The Pleasures and Perils of Postcolonial Hybridity," *World Literature Today* 73 (Summer 1999), 462.

émigré composer Max Steiner.[18] That being said, film music initially received minimal implementation because it lacked established procedures and there was a concern over non-diegetic music confusing audiences. For example, Universal's *Dracula* (1930) has only two instances of music: the main title music (an excerpt from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*) and diegetic concert hall music (the prelude to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and parts of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*) which has its source clearly shown on screen, as the vampire enters a concert hall.[19]

Voodoo zombie films reflect these early trends, but contain a significantly larger amount of music than other early horror films. This can be explained in part by the Caribbean setting, which calls for exotic musical ideas. In Gary D. Rhodes's exhaustive survey of *White Zombie* he suggests that perhaps it was the "limited dialogue" that caused the film to anticipate the greater use of music that swept Hollywood in 1933.[20] Most other film monsters are capable of speech, or at least expressive utterances, so it is compelling to imagine that the silent nature of zombies led Victor Halperin to employ more music than a horror film would usually warrant. A problem with this theory is that the zombies get relatively little screen time in *White Zombie*; the narrative is primarily concerned with interactions between the living, while the zombies are merely servants.

Normally, an independent production such as *White Zombie* would have been unable to afford such a large amount of music due to copyright restrictions and unionized

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[18] Slobin, 5–6.

[19] Rosar, 392.

[20] Gary D. Rhodes, *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 108.

performer rates, but music supervisor Abe Meyer convinced the union musicians of Los Angeles to lower their pay rate for independent productions.[21] With a significant chunk of financial burden removed, Meyer created a "bizarre pastiche of passages" from composers such as Mussorgsky, Gaston Borch, and Hugo Reisenfeld, all of which was newly performed and recorded for the film.[22] Again, this is a drastic change from the conservative use of canned music in *Dracula*.

Later films of the "zombie women" era, such as *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), have several original compositions in the typical Hollywood style of film scoring established by composers such as Max Steiner and Erich Korngold.[23] The film was distributed by RKO Pictures and scored by their musical director and go-to composer for horror and *film noir* scores, Roy Webb (1888–1982).[24] Before scoring films, Webb made his mark as a Broadway composer, but he was well versed in the Steiner superculture's postromantic language thanks to his years of studying classical music at Columbia University. The Caribbean setting of Voodoo zombie films naturally demanded that Webb search for exotic music to represent the land of the Other; of course, exoticism was no stranger to a composer familiar with the music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Webb's score for *I Walked with a Zombie* is a salad bowl of

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[21] Rhodes, 108.

[22] Ibid., 109.

[23] *I Walked with a Zombie*, directed by Jacques Tourneur (1943; N.p.: Turner Entertainment, 2005), DVD.

[24] "Christopher Palmer Collection of Roy Webb Scores," Syracuse University Libraries, last modified August 31, 2005, accessed March 15, 2014, http://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/p/palmer_c.htm.

exoticism, featuring pentatonic flourishes, shimmery beds of strings, and nondirectional harmonies that resemble the symphonic works of Debussy. The influence of Stravinsky's primitivism is also made clear through the regular employment of ostinatos and double reed melodies. The zombie theme, for example, contains a high bassoon melody (invoking the introduction of *Le Sacre du printemps*) set above a lurching, dissonant ostinato played by clarinets and piano (figure 2). This use of primitivism and exoticism reinforces the imperialist tensions at the heart of these films' dramas.

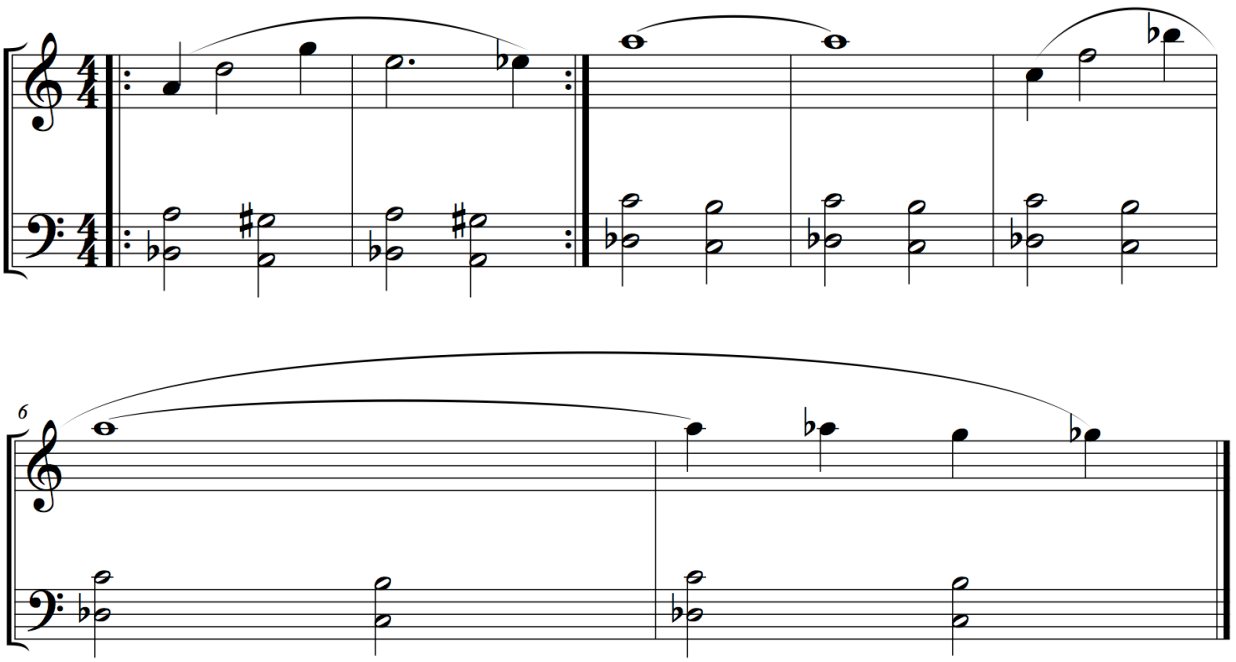

Figure 2. Excerpt of Roy Webb's "Zombie" from *I Walked with a* Zombie. The top line is bassoon lead and the bottom line is a reduced accompaniment.

Although this study is primarily concerned with films from the horror genre, it is worth briefly touching on *King of the Zombies* (1941), a Monogram Pictures horror

comedy.[25] The film, directed by Jean Yarbrough, was part of a modestly sized subgenre of Hollywood horror comedies, including *The Cat and the Canary* (1939), *The Ghost Breakers* (1940), and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). *King of the Zombies* is of interest because it uses jungle swing, a type of racially exploitative musical exoticism, for its opening credit sequence. Duke Ellington is credited for crafting this sensationalized exoticism that appealed to the whites only clientele of Harlem's Cotton Club in the late 1920s. The club—a hot spot due to regular celebrity appearances and its serving of alcohol during Prohibition—featured several shows that portrayed blacks as jungle dwelling brutes or dimwitted plantation workers. Musical verisimilitude was not a primary concern for the club patrons who simply wanted to use black culture as a form of escape from their own society. The opening credit music of *King of the Zombies* is the quintessential example of jungle swing with its syncopated tribal drumming and aggressive pentatonic horn lines (figure 3).

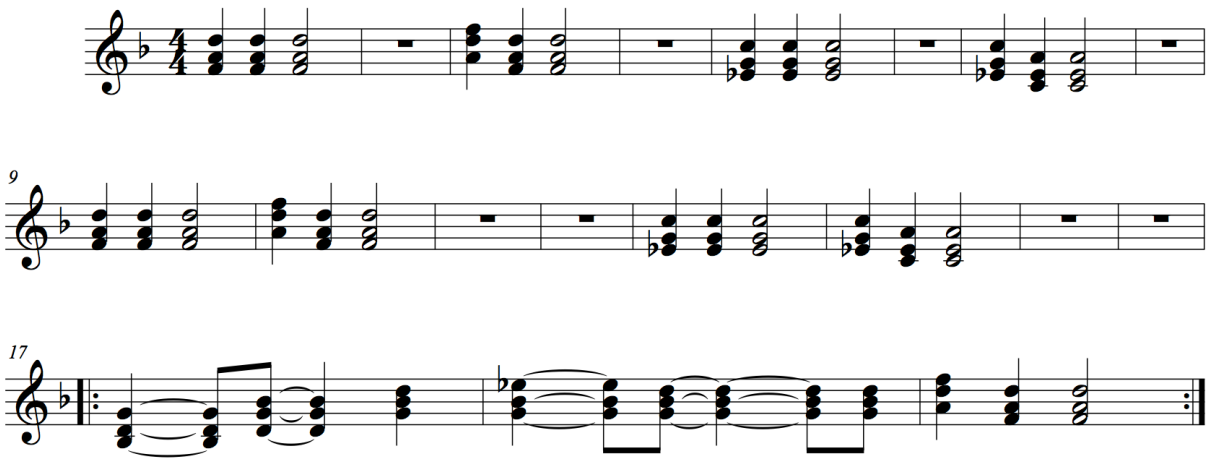

Figure 3. Opening credit music for *King of the Zombies*

[25] *King of the Zombies*, directed by Jean Yarbrough (1941; Philadelphia: Alpha Video, 2002), DVD.

It is important to consider jungle swing's inception as exploitative entertainment for whites when discussing its use in *King of the Zombies*. The vast majority of the comedy in this film comes from the bumbling black manservant of the two white protagonists. Gags rely on the superstitious manservant's cowardice and simple-minded ignorance. In fact, the minstrel character is so easily fooled that he believes himself zombified even though the *bokor*'s magic fails to turn him (when the *bokor* tells him he is dead, he exclaims, "I is?!"). The true irony is that this minstrel character is continually more informed than the white protagonists, but the heroes are rigid characters who must assert their supercultural presence in the land of the Other. The audience is meant to laugh at the minstrel character and be relieved when the white heroes ultimately dismantle the Voodoo operation. Jungle swing perfectly sets the tone for this dalliance into the exotic land of Voodoo, though the rest of the score is the typical orchestral exoticism heard in films such as *I Walked with a Zombie*. Still, jungle swing's use during the opening credits reinforces the sense of supercultural norms and establishes an association with whites-only establishments of Harlem. Orchestral exoticism would carry a more distinguished brand of Otherness unfit for a horror comedy by virtue of its more serious pedigree.

Still, some films aimed for a greater degree of authenticity in their musical representation of Haitians and the Vodoun religion. Guy Bevier Williams, a Universal Studios employee who specialized in ethnic music, was hired to create the opening music for *White Zombie*.[26] His piece, "Chant," is a mixture of native drumming and chanted

vocables that plays during a roadside burial. Rhodes takes note of the fact that, despite well-intentioned efforts of authenticity, Williams's work is still a "poorly researched conception of Haitian music" unsurprisingly processed by the casual audience as true Haitian music and, as one reviewer simply put it, "weird."[27]

Music representative of the superculture is also used to characterize the heroine and her struggle against being conquered and assimilated by the Other. In *White Zombie*, after Madeleine is zombified by Murder Legendre (the *bokor* played by Béla Lugosi), she sits at the piano with a petrified gaze and performs Franz Liszt's *Liebestraum*. This performance is important because it demonstrates that the natives have not yet conquered the virginal white victim and that the supercultural hegemony persists. Despite her soulless condition, her expressive performance of Liszt reinforces her purity and gender: the Romantic love dream betrays her undying dedication to her white husband and the piano represents her connection to European culture and femininity. After all, the piano was considered the quintessential instrument for refined Western ladies to learn in the nineteenth century and much of the eighteenth. The film is likely set in the early twentieth century, though no direct indication is given, so it seems reasonable to assume that a contemporaneous audience would recognize the piano as such a supercultural icon. A similar scene occurs in *I Walked with a Zombie,* in which the heroine, Betsy, overhears Mr. Holland, a tortured soul living with his zombified wife on a Caribbean plantation, playing Fryderyk Chopin's Étude Op. 10, no. 3. The music allows Betsy to empathize

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[26] Rhodes, 110.

[27] Ibid., 111.

(and fall in love) with Mr. Holland. This idea is made especially clear by Roy Webb's aching non-diegetic orchestration of the etude that underscores a later dialogue between the two characters.

Segregating the Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Soundspaces

The lack of a significant musical character given to the natives (with the exception of extroversive semiotic signals such as distant tribal drumming) can be considered an example of erasure. As Slobin writes, the exclusion of characters from the soundspace "carries major cultural meaning" that the audience may not consciously notice.[28] This is an example of how the superculture subtly disseminates its values through the film via its influence on the soundscape. The white characters, represented diegetically and non-diegetically, clearly dominate the soundscape, while the natives rarely escape the confines of the diegesis. *White Zombie*'s "Chant" is but one of several examples of how musical representations of the subaltern community are relegated to the diegetic soundscape, unable to frame or comment on the narrative like the Western music that controls the non-diegetic realm. Furthermore, when the Other is granted non-diegetic musical representation the level of verisimilitude is no greater than European exoticism and primitivism or jungle swing (commercially successful, white-friendly representations of outside cultures).

Still, the diegetic music of the natives is often portrayed as a menace to the white characters that must be rebuked. In *White Zombie* the sound of distant drumming—which

[28] Slobin, 23.

foreshadows the heroine's zombification—upsets the female protagonist as she prepares for her wedding and she commands her servants to shut the windows. When native drumming interrupts a conversation between white characters in *I Walked with a Zombie*, Wesley Rand—brother of the island's sugar plantation owner—mockingly announces, "The jungle drums. Mysterious. Eerie." Finally, in *King of the Zombies* the white protagonists respond indifferently to the sounds of drumming as they wander the jungle, though their black manservant is terrified.

The lone calypso performer (Trinidadian musician Sir Lancelot) in *I Walked with a Zombie* serves as a rare example of the natives receiving a diegetic musical voice besides the occasional jungle drums. Sir Lancelot performs in the background as Betsy (the heroine) and Wesley Rand chat in a street side restaurant. After finishing the first song in his set, Sir Lancelot begins singing "Shame and Sorrow," a tune with subversive lyrics that discusses the sordid past (including the use of dark Voodoo magic) of Wesley's family. The superculture's segregation of the soundspace has been challenged by the diegetic tune that uses the Rand family as a subject. The refrain, proclaiming "shame and sorrow for the family," is a particularly cavalier line that suggests the native population considers themselves on equal footing with the Rand family (otherwise they would not dare utter such an indictment for fear of punishment):

There was a family that lived on the isle
Of St. Sebastian a long, long while
The head of the family was a Holland man
And the younger brother, his name was Rand
Ah, woe, ah, me, shame and sorrow for the family
The Holland man he kept in a tower
A wife as pretty as a big white flower
She saw the brother and she stole his heart
And that's how the badness and the trouble start
The wife and the brother they want to go
But the Holland man, he tell them no
The wife fall down and the evil came
And it burned her mind in the fever flame
Ah, woe, ah, me, shame and sorrow for the family
Her eyes are empty and she cannot talk
And a nurse has come to make her walk
The brothers are lonely and the nurse is young
And now you must see that my song is sung
Ah, woe, ah, me, shame and sorrow for the family.

Wesley has the performer silenced after half the song has been performed, but, after Wesley falls into a drunken slumber, Sir Lancelot walks up to Betsy and completes the piece. He is likely trying to warn Betsy to end her involvement with the family before any harm comes to her.

Though the diegetic music of the natives is still used as a threat to the dominant force, this example demonstrates how *I Walked with a Zombie* gives the natives a stronger voice than other Voodoo zombie films. The film still uses the typical jungle drums as the primary aural representation of the natives, but gives them an actual voice and demonstrates that they are quite aware of the white man's activities. The final verse also suggests that the song is intended to spread throughout the island to alert natives of developments in the white people's melodrama. This is perhaps the main reason why

Bishop contends that the film "provides audiences with a more accurate and culturally sensitive view of West Indian society."[29]

One final scene from *White Zombie* deserves special attention because traditional black music non-diegetically (and quite atypically) scores a scene that sympathetically depicts the white romantic leads. A wordless version of Robert Nathaniel Dett's (1882–1943) hymn "Listen to the Lambs" (1914) underscores two of the *bokor*'s maids discussing the pathetic state of zombified Madeleine as she walks to her window to gaze outward. Dett was a Canadian composer of African descent known for romantic choral and piano works that incorporated African American folk songs and spirituals. The melody of "Listen to the Lambs" alternates between male and female voices and crescendos as Neil, Madeleine's husband, spots her from the beach. In addition to the unorthodox musical selection, this scene features bold image overlay effects that depict the two lovers simultaneously searching for one another. The visual spectacle and music combine to form one of the more poignant and memorable scenes of the film.

It is difficult to speculate why Dett's hymn was selected for this scene, but circumstances suggest Halperin and Meyer must have had a specific reason in mind because it is the only copyrighted material in a soundtrack composed of public domain works.[30] The hymn plays during a scene that demonstrates Madeleine's eternal love for her husband despite the sovereign control of the Other, so perhaps there is more symbolic weight attached to the music than is immediately apparent. The Christian origins of the hymn may be suggestive of black culture assimilating to white control, and the music

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[29] Bishop, 47.

[30] Rhodes, 110.

could thus be read as a glimmer of "hope" for the white protagonists—the resurfacing of supercultural norms in the domain of the Other. Rhodes offers no definite conclusion regarding the placement of "Listen to the Lambs," but he does note that its sheet music sold well in the 1920s and would likely have been familiar "to at least some 1932 audiences."[31]

Conclusion

While the themes of later zombie films may drift away from race, these Voodoo zombie soundtracks demonstrate the basic methods of musical Othering that will be heard in all the monster's later films. Western exoticism will be replaced by other styles as the zombie begins to represent different types of Others and as conventions for film scoring evolve. Chapter two will focus almost entirely on different types of musical exoticism that represent the zombie, including tape manipulation, Eastern scales, and the use of synthesizers. The segregation of the soundspace does not seem to be an enduring tradition (many later zombie films simply do not have outlets for diegetic musical performance because they are post-apocalyptic survival tales), though the play between diegetic and non-diegetic realms is used to great effect in some films.

[31] Rhodes, 110.

Chapter 2: The Zombie Invasion Narrative

Introduction

At first glance, the transition from Voodoo zombie to the monster's modern conceptualization is an abrupt revision. George Romero's milestone zombie film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) is a cinematic outlier that captured the zeitgeist of its era and initiated a Golden Age of zombie films. The dark nihilism of Romero's film, however, owes much to themes explored in contemporaneous science fiction films and the conventions of B-grade horror movies. This chapter demonstrates the ways that musical elements in *Night of the Living Dead* are borrowed from earlier horror and science fiction films, and the ways these elements are repurposed to address the concerns of Vietnam-era American society.

Night of the Living Dead has attracted scholars because it reflects the cultural anxieties prevalent in the United States during the 1960s. Indeed, the music used in the film represents the general feeling of disenfranchisement in America by subverting the film scoring trends typically heard in horror films of the 1950s. *Night of the Living Dead* has a nihilistic outlook betrayed by its iconoclastic reference to scoring conventions for drive-thru horror films targeted at a juvenile audience. Silence also plays a critical role in establishing the film's realism and survivalist tension. A complete lack of music in scenes where a viewer might expect scoring undermines audience expectations and puts the film's social commentary in stark relief. The influence of *Night of the Living Dead* on the soundtracks of subsequent zombie films from the first wave of the genre's Golden Age

(1968–1977)—David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) and Bob Clark's *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1973) and *Deathdream* (1972)—will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

Period of Transition: The Zombie of the 1950s and Early 1960s

Zombie scholar Peter Dendle refers to the period of 1952–1966 as a "strange transitional time for the screen zombie."[1] The Voodoo zombie and the Haitian motif had lost the novelty and freshness of Otherness that sustained them through the 1930s and 1940s, and so filmmakers began to search for a new identity to attach to the monster. For example, *Zombies of Mora-Tau* (1957) pits a team of deep-sea divers against a group of underwater zombies who guard their ship's treasure, while "The Incredible Doktor Markesan" (a 1962 episode of the televised American horror anthology *Thriller*) presents audiences with the first glimpse of the rotting cadavers—a bold *memento mori*—that have become the most popular representation of the zombie. Often, the term zombie will be applied to a different creature entirely—Martians are the titular "zombies" in *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (1952)—or the term may cheekily refer to a brain-dead character, such as the adolescents under the influence of a hypnotic drug in *Teenage Zombies* (1957).

The most significant trope developed during this period was the invasion narrative found in science fiction and vampire films. These films created a terrifying environment by pitting outnumbered humans against a force that assimilates or replaces them. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) has an extraterrestrial life form invade human

[1] Dendle, 4.

society and attempt to repopulate the earth with emotionless, uncanny clones. *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) concerns a world entirely conquered by vampires, except for a single man who struggles to understand these monsters and retain his humanity.

Kyle William Bishop cites Freud's *Unheimlich*, "an uncanny similarity between the familiar and the unfamiliar," as key to the invasion narrative's success at eliciting dread and paranoia from audiences.[2] The "uncanny similarity" lies in the various monsters' convincing human appearances that allow the viewer to relate to the creatures, despite their actions (figure 4). Roth writes of how this trope also invites several allegorical readings that would resonate with the socio-political fears that plagued audiences, most notably the spread of Communism and the McCarthy hearings.[3] Just as the Second Red Scare warned Americans via a fear campaign that Soviet agents were attempting to infiltrate the United States, the uncanny monsters—whether alien, vampire, zombie, or anything else—could lurk behind the faces of one's neighbors or loved ones.

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[2] Bishop, 141.

[3] Marty Roth, "Twice Two: 'The Fly' and 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers,'" *Discourse* 22 (Winter 2000), 109.

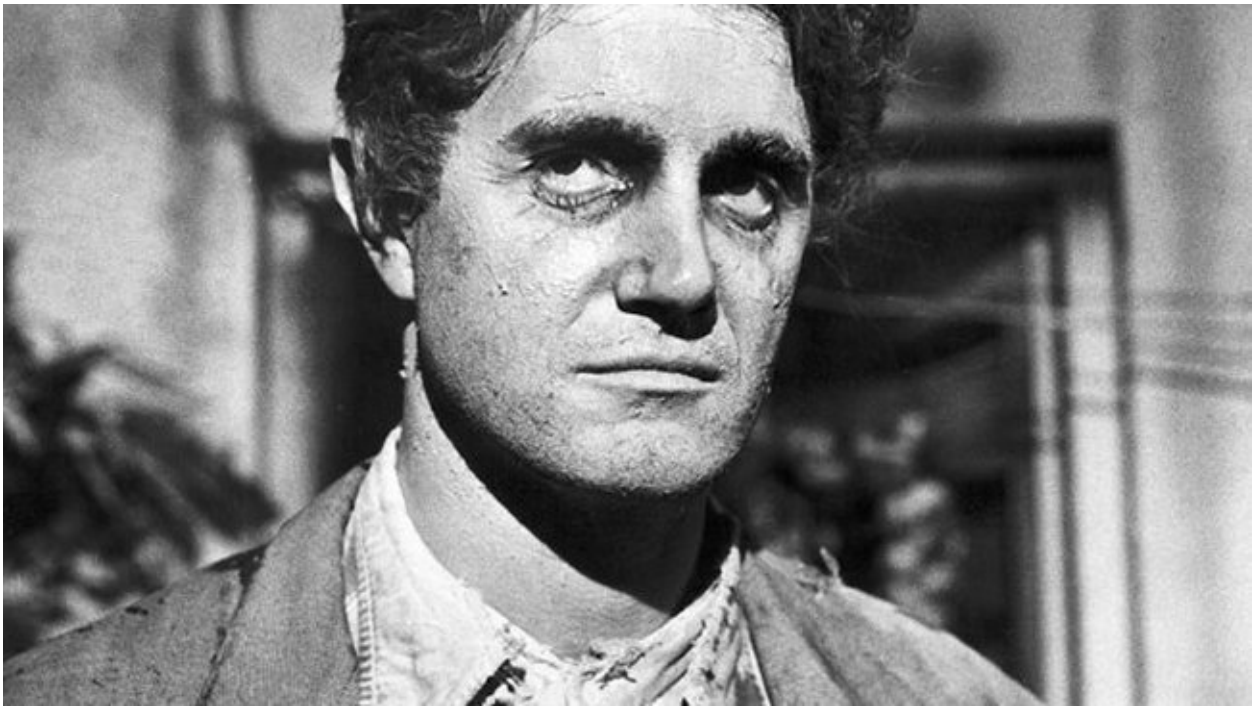

Figure 4. The uncanny visage of a vampire in *The Last Man on Earth*.

The music used in science fiction invasion narratives often depicts the extreme Otherness and potential threat of the invaders by drawing on unconventional timbres. For instance, Bernard Herrmann's score for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) calls for a tremendous wealth of sounds—including two theremins, two Hammond organs, electric strings, three vibraphones, electric guitar, tam-tam, and suspended cymbals—and combines them into a variety of textures.[4] It is important to note, however, that the music in invasion narratives is not significantly different from other science fiction and horror films of the time. *Teenage Zombies*, for example, uses the theremin to create a sense of unease when the titular teenagers explore an island where zombification gas is secretly

[4] Rebecca Leydon, "Hooked on Aetherophonics," in *Off the Planet: Music, Sound and Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 32.

being manufactured. In fact, Philip Hayward characterizes the entirety of science fiction film music from 1945–1960 as containing a "prominence of discordant and/or unusual aspects of orchestration/instrumentation to convey otherworldly/futuristic themes."[5] The musical conventions developed in the Golden Age of the 1950s would become an important reference point for horror film music as new elements, such as borrowed popular songs and electronic music, were introduced.

The Zombie Invasion Narrative: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

In 1968 George A. Romero reinvented the zombie subgenre with his low-budget independent film *Night of the Living Dead*, the first zombie invasion narrative.[6] Of course, the monsters are referred to as ghouls in the film because, in Romero's words, "back then zombies were still those boys in the Caribbean . . . So I never thought of [my ghouls] as zombies. I thought they were just back from the dead."[7] Nonetheless, Romero's ghoul has become the *de facto* modern zombie. The film's story focuses on a group of strangers who find shelter from a zombie invasion in a farmhouse. No reason is given for the arrival of the zombies, but it is clear that their bite causes the victim's death and subsequent reanimation.[8]

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[5] Philip Hayward, "Sci-Fidelity," in *Off the Planet*, 2.

[6] *Night of the Living Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (1968; Universal City, CA: Gaiam Vivendi Entertainment, 2001), DVD.

[7] "Exclusive George Romero Interview," Horror-Movies.ca, accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.horror-movies.ca/george-romero-interview/

[8] A radio broadcast in the film postulates that radiation from a space probe that has returned to Earth from Venus is causing the dead to rise, but this is never confirmed.

Despite the presence of these creatures, the true monster in *Night of the Living Dead* is humanity itself. The group of survivors is forced into a "claustrophobic situation [that] invariably reiterates societal problems and tensions, particularly those of patriarchy, gender, and race," and these issues lead to nearly every character's death.[9] Some of these tensions are subtle, such as when Barbra (a young white woman) first meets Ben (an African American man) in the abandoned farmhouse. Although her brother Johnny died in the previous scene, Barbra lies to Ben and claims that Johnny is her partner and he is looking for her. This is a proactive ploy to keep Ben, a threatening black man, at bay.[10] Still, most of the film's tensions revolve around character interactions with Harry Cooper, the domineering middle-aged white father and representative for the supercultural hegemony (figure 5). For example, Ben (a strong and well-spoken African American man) and Harry initiate a series of power struggles as soon as they meet. Once Ben begins to earn the trust of the other survivors, Harry condemns the group, isolates his family in the basement, and offers no quarter or assistance to the others.

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[9] Bishop, 171.

[10] Stephen Harper, "Night of the Living Dead: Reappraising an Undead Classic," *Bright Lights Film Journal* 50 (November 2005): accessed January 7, 2014, http://brightlightsfilm.com/50/night.php#.Uswv7WRDtN0.

Figure 5. Tempers flare between Ben and Harry.

Of course, one cannot ignore how the film's unprecedented level of gore helps accentuate the visceral narrative and its social themes (figure 6). The camera does not cut away or pan back to a comfortable distance when zombies cannibalize the bodies of fallen survivors. This yields disquieting results in the many instances when the film breaks the rules adhered to by its contemporaries: the two young lovers (whom convention demands survive) are devoured in horrific detail; graphic inter-familial violence is shown when a zombified little girl cannibalizes her dead father and then murders her mother; and even the quasi-protagonist unceremoniously dies at the end when he is mistaken for a zombie and shot by militia.

Figure 6. The film reaches a new level of gore.

As Romero says, "It was 1968, man. *Everybody* had a message."[11] The film was released during a time when Americans bore witness to unprecedented levels of televised violence such as coverage of the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the massacre of over 300 civilians at My Lai by American troops.[12] Additionally, the American people watched anti-war protestors violently removed from occupied buildings by police, they bore witness to the assassination of figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and even "hippie ideals were irremediably tarnished when Manson family commune members were convicted of the Tate–LaBianca murders."[13] Despite some early

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[11] Romero in Paul R. Gagne, *The Zombies That Ate Pittsburgh: The Films of George A. Romero* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1987), 38.

[12] Ben Hervey, *Night of the Living Dead* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 22.

[13] Ibid., 23.

reviews that condemned its violence, the film struck a nerve with viewers and went from midnight showings in grindhouses to screenings at Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art to international release in twenty-five languages.[14] With its meager $114,000 budget the film earned a domestic box office gross of $12 million and $18 million internationally.

Borrowed Music in *Night of the Living Dead*

Most of the music in *Night of the Living Dead* is used to reinforce the uncompromising brutality of its narrative via perverse subversions of Hollywood film music clichés. All the film's music is taken from the Capitol Records Hi-Q Library 'D' series (a collection of canned music appropriate for 1950s horror and science-fiction films), but the sound effects crew, Karl Hardman and Marilyn Eastman, manipulated the music by altering the speed of the recordings or using electronic effects such as reverb and echo.[15] The resulting music often bears an uncanny resemblance (Freud's *Unheimlich*) to conventional horror scoring and morbidly toys with the viewer's mind, juxtaposing the familiar and the unfamiliar. Most of the selected music is representative of schlock horror and science fiction film music from the 1950s—some selections were even featured in the aforementioned *Teenagers from Outer Space* (1959)—and thus are fertile ground for the film's "jarring mix of nostalgia and iconoclasm."[16]

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[14] Hervey, 17.

[15] Yowp, "Capitol Hi-Q—Cartoon Music for Huck and Yogi," *YOWP: Stuff About Early Hanna-Barbera Cartoons*, December 25, 2009, accessed March 13, 2014, http://yowpyowp.blogspot.com/2009/12/capitol-hi-q-cartoon-music-for-huck-and.html.

[16] Hervey, 29.

The perverse transformation of older horror film music is perfectly depicted in the opening graveyard scene when Barbra's brother Johnny is unceremoniously killed while attempting to protect her from a zombie attacker. Typical of the genre, sustained string harmonics with plodding low accompaniment prelude the attack, and an obligatory horn stinger occurs when the zombie lunges toward Barbra. Unexpectedly, the stinger is sustained and slowly decays for over twenty seconds as Johnny heroically struggles with the zombie. The familiar sound of orchestral brass grows increasingly alien as it decays over a seemingly interminable length of time. Ultimately, the sound resembles a texture more at home in avant-garde electroacoustic works by Pierre Schaeffer or Iannis Xenakis, a far cry from the postromantic Steiner superculture of early Hollywood film music. During this moment of struggle, the music of *Night of the Living Dead* abandons any sense of Western harmony or melody.

Contemporary audiences would have experienced a disorienting shock from the film's cavalier rejection of horror music conventions. As Roger Ebert noted in his 1969 review, "The kids in the audience were stunned. There was almost complete silence. The movie had stopped being delightfully scary about halfway through, and had become unexpectedly terrifying."[17] Earlier horror films served as a form of escapist entertainment that would shock and titillate audiences, but Romero's film was a dark response to the cultural climate. Stingers are meant to sting, not linger uncomfortably. Borrowing a concept from Tagg and Clarida, the stinger is a constructional element that elicits a particular semiotic association. *Night of the Living Dead's* subversion of this musical idea

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[17] Roger Ebert, Review for *Night of the Living Dead*, *Chicago-Sun Tribune*, January 5, 1969.

can be linked with the grotesque imagery of Vietnam that flooded American television broadcasts. On a side note, this phenomenon demonstrates the importance of examining contemporaneous reviews because modern ears will understand *Night of the Living Dead*'s aural assault as a typical constructional element of *today's* horror soundtrack. The subversive qualities of the exaggerated stinger are easily overlooked since cacophonous textures are now garden-variety and signify a generalized state of horror.

Another example of the film playing with expectations occurs in the opening scene, where the score defies conventions by omitting music at the climax of the battle between Johnny and a zombie. The last few seconds of the skirmish are without music and leave Johnny's death—sounded only by the dull thud of his head against a tombstone—presented in an unsympathetic and decidedly non-Hollywood manner. A contemporaneous audience would expect non-diegetic musical commentary to act as a comfortable intermediary between film and viewer by confirming this scene as tragic. Here, however, only the diegetic sounds of the struggle, crude and guttural, are heard. A thunderclap, perhaps satirically indexing the Gothic tradition and Hollywood horror clichés, sounds as Barbra's horrified reaction is framed. As she flees from the zombie, the "appropriate" (Wagnerian brass chords stab on every beat while a shrill *tremolando* is sustained by strings) and unmanipulated damsel-being-chased-by-monster music plays and, in conjunction with the visuals, establishes a scene typical of contemporary horror films. This Hollywood-style music helps viewers briefly deny the visceral shock of Johnny's murder and find comfort in familiar territory, just like Barbra running toward an abandoned farmhouse for shelter.

While the moments discussed above are examples of the uncanny and represent a transition from and subversion of typical scenarios in horror movies (the zombification of traditional horror music, in a sense), it is in the darkest scenes that one finds the heaviest manipulation of music and sound design. In a last-ditch effort to escape the house, three of the survivors make a failed attempt to fuel their getaway truck at a nearby gas pump before returning to pick up the remainder of the group. The encroaching zombie horde causes the trio to panic and their sloppy refueling ends in a blaze of fire that explodes the truck, killing the two young lovers and sending the lone survivor back to the farmhouse on foot. The sound of zombies devouring the lovers' roasted flesh is underscored by a surreal electronic soundscape built around a synthesizer throbbing out a heartbeat motif. The accompanying visuals are the film's most grotesque and feature close-ups of the zombies feasting on entrails. The synthesized heartbeat is a curious complement because it fuses and simultaneously indexes contradictory ideas: the Other, *à la* the use of electronic music in 1950s science fiction films, and the Self, represented by the heartbeat rhythm. The visuals echo this thematic dissonance and ambiguity by providing a shot from the first-person perspective of the dead lovers as they are eaten and then jumping back to several shots of the zombies. The music effectively unites the zombies and their supper in a nihilistic view of society as an animalistic nightmare. In his study of Romero's films, Tony Williams refers to this type of scene as intimating a "naturalist determinism . . . [that reduces] everything to its basest form of animal and materialist existence."[18]

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[18] Tony Williams, *The Cinema of George A. Romero: Knight of the Living Dead* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 31.

Silence in *Night of the Living Dead*

In addition to Johnny's unceremonious and unscored death, a lack of music is integral to establishing the dreadful atmosphere inside the farmhouse. No music is given to the lengthy expanses of time dedicated to footage of the survivors fortifying the farmhouse, discussing their pasts, butting heads, and watching television broadcasts for invasion updates. Music would mitigate the drudgery by placing a fantastical buffer between film and viewer, while silence exacerbates Romero's survivalist reality of claustrophobic tension and tedium. In this sense, the viewer is also denied any music that telegraphs the motivations of the strangers or ascribes to them a basic character archetype. Likewise, the narrative thoroughly avoids an overly simplistic presentation of the characters and even lacks a true protagonist once the survivors meet up in the farmhouse. Even Ben, perhaps the closest thing to a traditional good guy, has an authoritarian personality and succumbs to his own wrath when he beats Harry in the midst of a zombie assault. Ben Hervey takes special note of this nihilistic sentiment in his *Night of the Living Dead* companion for the British Film Institute: "With whom do we sympathise, if anyone?"[19]

Silence also plays a critical role during action scenes such as the tragic *dénouement* when Helen is brutally slain by her young zombified daughter, Karen. The audience is denied the comforts of a non-diegetic musical frame as Karen, with trowel raised above her head, approaches her mother Helen, lying powerless on the basement floor (figure 7). Just like the unaccompanied thud of Johnny's head on a gravestone, the

[19] Hervey, 86.

audience is unapologetically subjected to the gruesome sounds of the trowel being plunged repeatedly into Helen's chest. As a way of setting the film's arguably most depraved scene in relief, Helen's screams are subjected to large amounts of echo, reverb, and pitch manipulation to create an expressionistic soundscape that Hervey calls "a darkly shimmering clamour of horror, agony, and ecstasy."[20]

Figure 7. No music accompanies Karen's murder of her mother.

The First Wave of the "Golden Age"

Night of the Living Dead revolutionized the subgenre and spurred the creative energies of filmmakers in Spain, Italy, England, Mexico, and the United States; the time

[20] Hervey, 102.

was nigh for what Dendle calls the "Golden Age" of zombie cinema (1968–1983).[21] This classical era of zombie invasion films can be split into two waves of filmmakers' responses to *Night of the Living Dead* and Romero's follow-up, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). This section will focus on the first wave while the second is covered after the next chapter's analysis of *Dawn of the Dead*.

The first wave (1968–1977) is characterized by an enthusiastic use of zombies in a variety of settings recalling the transitional period of 1952–1966. It is important to note that zombie films were attractive projects because they were significantly cheaper to make than other creature features; they could be shot indoors, used minimal sets, needed just a few actors, and required no special effects beyond makeup and lots of fake blood.[22] For instance, *Shanks* (1974) is centered on a puppeteer, played by Marcel Marceau, who reanimates the dead and controls them like marionettes. Quite remarkably (for a film quickly pulled from theatres), Alex North's dreamy and carnivalesque music for *Shanks* received an Oscar nomination for Original Dramatic Score, but *The Godfather II* (Nino Rota and Carmine Coppola) took the award. Another example, *Shock Waves* (1977), features genetically engineered Nazi zombies who escape from the sunken U-boat that entombed them. Even zombified Knights Templar rise from their accursed sepulcher to stalk modern-day victims in Amando de Ossorio's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971).

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[21] Dendle, 7.

[22] McIntosh, 10.

The Zombie as Political Other

Additionally, many young directors and writers followed in Romero's footsteps by using the zombie as a vehicle for social commentary. The prevailing theme was a "scathingly satirical take on the bankruptcy of the counterculture" inspired by the nihilism of *Night of the Living Dead*.[23] The music in these films functions to reinforce subversive commentary and borrows several devices heard in *Night of the Living Dead*. Silence does not play as critical a role in these films, but Romero's twisting of predictable musical formulas becomes a central musical device for all three films discussed below.

Bob Clark's *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1973) is a tale of college-age friends—caricatures of various subcultures, such as hippies and jocks—who get more than they bargained for after half-heartedly assisting Alan, a self-proclaimed nihilist, perform a necromancy ritual.[24] Alan's goals are to brazenly prove there is no God and to shatter his friends' conception of existence. When the dead inevitably rise from their graves to confirm Alan's dark proclamations, he proves unable to walk the walk. He cowardly abandons his friends in order to protect himself, though he is ultimately consumed like so much raw meat.

The music prior to the undead assault is reminiscent of the soundtracks from the 1950s B-grade horror that *Night of the Living Dead* had manipulated. These schlocky tunes represent a pre-Romero world that pseudo-intellectual Alan would deem childish and lacking in the chic air of disillusion. In other words, it is exactly the music that

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[23] Russell, 72.

[24] *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, directed by Bob Clark (1973; Tulsa, OK: VCI Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

Alan—and the disaffected counterculture at-large—would deem a delightfully ironic accompaniment to the end of days. Of course, Alan is oblivious to the grand irony unveiled in the film's climax as the zombies rise in response to his summons. Borrowing further from Romero's film, the climax of Carl Zittrer's score takes the sonic assault of *Night of the Living Dead's* protracted stinger to further extremes by overloading a delay processor with a cacophony of synthesizer noise. A delay processor that has its feedback set to maximum will quickly overload and result in an aggressive, rapid-fire jackhammer sound. This violent sound is the aural accompaniment to shots of the undead chasing and feasting upon Alan *et al*.

In David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) a mad doctor's parasites infect the denizens of an apartment building, but instead of turning their hosts into flesh-eating monsters, infected humans become sex-crazed maniacs that spread the parasite further.[25] As Jamie Russell points out, "Made in the gap between the 1960s love-in and AIDS era fear and loathing, *Shivers* was ahead of its time with zombie-esque ghouls whose existence satirises the Free Love generation's belief in better living through orgasmic pleasure."[26] Though the gratuitous violence and sex in *Shivers* may look relatively tame to modern gorehounds, the film was uncommonly explicit for its time. These graphic images are juxtaposed with a prosaic soundtrack of stock music, their union becoming an unexpected source of the film's strength. Indifferent to the orgiastic outbreak, a disconcerting natural order is intimated by the music's anempathetic adherence to genre

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[25] *Shivers*, directed by David Cronenberg (1975; Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 1998), DVD.

[26] Russell, 74.

norms. Indeed, Mary B. Campbell points out that Cronenberg's "generic creations . . . have the complex structure and distressing power of 'serious' art, without the strategies of subversion and ironic rearrangement" that directors—like Romero in *Night of the Living Dead*—exploit in order to shock the audience.[27]

The film opens with luxurious orchestral fare playing over a slideshow that advertises the apartment building. Afterwards, the viewer is introduced to the interior of the actual building via a couple that is interested in renting a room. The camera jarringly switches between the couple chatting with the hotel manager and scenes of an older man struggling with a young woman who is attempting to flee his apartment. Initially, the nature of this struggle is ambiguous because there is no musical accompaniment. One could be watching horseplay, a physical assault, rape, or perhaps even a murder. The equal screen time divvied between the two scenarios makes matters even more dubious. Eventually, a non-diegetic heartbeat motif is heard—confirming the older man's murderous intent—as the young woman is asphyxiated.

As he proceeds to strip and dissect the young woman on his kitchen table, the typical musemes of non-diegetic horror film filter in: sustained string harmonics, intermittent atonal flourishes from reeds and mallet percussion, whistle tones and flutter tongue on the flute, mysterious vibraphone chords, and even a few jabs from a brass section. The various musical structures are methodically introduced in a way that reflects the surgical care of the older man. It is eventually revealed that the old man is the mad doctor who manufactured the parasite and the young woman was his personal Typhoid

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[27] Mary B. Campbell, "Biological Alchemy and the Films of David Cronenberg," in *Planks of Reason*, 333.

Mary for spreading contagion in the apartment. Cronenberg uses the genre-specific musical structures to prey on the audience's unease regarding the scientific community by linking the rigid structure of genre with the cold calculating nature of the scientist's immoral transgressions. Additionally, the garden-variety musical structures of the horror genre make the film's extreme violence stand out. This sonic palette blankets the rest of *Shivers* except for the film's climax where its ultimate nihilistic statement is declared.

In the final scene, the apartment's on-site doctor (the last uninfected protagonist) is chased into a pool by the sybaritic horde. He is physically and mentally overwhelmed, resigned to watch in horror as his infected girlfriend approaches him to transmit the parasite with a kiss. While they kiss in slow motion, a synthesizer drone languidly sweeps through a band pass filter from High to Low. This produces an inverted take on *Night of the Living Dead's* elongated stinger and expresses the doctor's fear giving way to acceptance. After the synthesizer fades out, the camera lingers for a moment on the rampant hedonism. This resembles the film's outset, where the distinction between sex and violence is ambiguous because the musical cues that dictate a scene's affect have vanished. Finally, the luxurious orchestral music from the opening credits is reused for the closing credits while the horde makes its way toward the city. Though the visuals are different, Cronenberg has used music to equate the introduction of the film with the finale. The film's nihilistic view is that the sexually liberated counterculture (the zombie-like horde) is as hopeless as the demonized establishment (the mad scientist and the smarmy apartment owner).

Unlike the jabs taken at the counterculture by *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* and *Shivers*, *Deathdream* (1972) is a critique of the military-industrial complex.[28] Essentially, it is the tale of a soldier who brings the war back home and attempts to maintain a semi-normal life, but the true evil he witnessed makes him unable to rejoin American society.[29] Andy, a young soldier who dies in Vietnam, is inexplicably restored to an undead state by his mother's grief. Once Andy returns home he must wrestle with an existential crisis and a ghoulish thirst for blood that leaves a trail of bodies. The police eventually track him down and—seeing that he has no place among the living—Andy lurches into a shallow grave he has secretly been digging in the town graveyard and dies.

Carl Zittrer's score is structured around three themes that represent the land of the Other (both Vietnam and the realm of the dead), the grieving of loved ones, and Andy's loss of humanity. For the sake of clarity, the themes will be called the Other theme, the Grief theme, and the Corruption theme. The Other theme is a vaguely Eastern pentatonic synthesizer melody harmonized at a perfect fifth and employing gratuitous portamento. This theme is heard in two key moments: when Andy dies in Vietnam—establishing the music as representative of death and foreign lands—and when he returns to the grave. The Grief theme is an aching string quartet piece heard when the family is attempting to cope with the loss of Andy. It features a hymn-like melody and open harmonies, two features characteristic of an American sound.

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[28] *Deathdream*, directed by Bob Clark (1972; Hollywood: Blue Underground, 2004), DVD.

[29] Russell, 75.

The Corruption theme is really a number of twisted variations on the Grief theme that occur in scenes that address Andy's inability to reintegrate with the living. The most frequently occurring variant of the Corruption theme is a solo piano rendition of the Grief theme melody that is harmonized at the minor second. This perversion of the typical American sound functions broadly as a criticism of the establishment. Indeed, once Andy returns to the grave the Grief theme does not play over the credits to suggest that balance has been restored. The credits are instead scored with an extended recording of the Corruption theme (the minor-seconds variation) that plays over an industrial soundscape suggestive of American values being lost within the machinations of the military-industrial complex.

Conclusion

The musical accompaniment for the zombie went from defining the Other with exotic music, as in Voodoo zombie films, to exposing feelings of alienation—Otherness—in one's own society. These feelings were brought on by the McCarthy-era fear campaigns, the flood of violent images from the Vietnam War, and the assassinations of political figures. *Night of the Living Dead* expressed this disillusionment by perverting typical musical cues from the Western canon in a way that resembles Freud's concept of the *Unheimlich*. Uncanny sounds have since become *de rigueur* for zombie films; Chapter four, for example, will examine how the alien electric guitar textures of post-rock will be used to characterize the twenty-first century zombie. Silence also grew to play a critical role in zombie films, especially those that focus on survivalist themes. A lack of music reinforces a zombie film's visceral reality by eliminating any sense of non-

diegetic commentary that comfortably reminds the viewer that they are merely watching an escapist fantasy.

Chapter 3: Dawn of the Dead

Introduction

The second wave of the Golden Age was initiated in 1978 by the second film in George Romero's zombie franchise, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978).[1] This film, a sequel to *Night of the Living Dead*, maintains the claustrophobia-induced social tension of the first, but it adds two elements that characterize the second wave: a post-apocalyptic setting and an abundance of gore. (*Night of the Living Dead* was gory, but these films push the envelope to incomparable extremes). In a 1997 interview with BBC2's *Forbidden Weekend*, Romero claims that he considered this film an "eighties update [to *Night of the Living Dead*] . . . not only texturally on the surface of the film, but [in regards to] the differences in the head[s] of the people."[2] To this end, the gore and post-apocalyptic setting serve to bolster the film's *ad absurdum* critique of American consumer culture. While Romero's overt politics won the film much praise, the second wave it engendered in Italy was fascinated with exploring the collapse of society without an obvious political bent.

Musically, *Dawn of the Dead* is a tricky subject because the domestic and international foreign-language releases have two different scores (among other edits) that drastically alter the film. Romero first released the film for review at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival with a score consisting entirely of canned music from the De Wolfe Music

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[1] *Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (1978; Beverly Hills, CA: Anchor Bay, 2000), DVD.

[2] Interview with George A. Romero, "George Romero and Dawn of the Dead–1997–Interview," *BBC2 Forbidden Weekend*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VhkhQSdi-I (accessed November 20, 2013).

Library (a British production company specializing in library music). Italian horror director and producer, Dario Argento, was placed in charge of the international cut and he replaced the entire soundtrack with a score composed by the Italian progressive rock band Goblin.[3] The international cut was released nearly eight months prior to the domestic version, which was mired in censorship setbacks. During this interval, Romero opted to incorporate a handful of Goblin's prog selections—albeit quite differently from how Argento used them—for his release.

This chapter will begin by analyzing how *Dawn of the Dead's* domestic soundtrack engages with the film's exploration of American consumerism. The international cut and the ensuing second wave of the Golden Age in Italy will be discussed next as they are musically and thematically connected, but do not share the domestic release's conceit. Finally, the discussion will return to the United States where the zombie—now an established pop culture figure—became the subject of a number of campy features during the 1980s. Interestingly, this subcultural embrace of the zombie (and zombie-related music) returns to the thematic concerns of Romero's domestic version of *Dawn of the Dead*.

The Zombification of America: *Dawn of the Dead* (1978)

Dawn of the Dead (1978) occurs after the events of *Night of the Living Dead* and concerns a motley band of survivors who escape from an overrun city to find shelter from the zombie threat inside a shopping mall. Unfortunately, the building is already populated

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[3] *Zombi: Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George Romero (1978; Beverly Hills, CA: Anchor Bay, 2005), DVD.

by a meandering swarm of zombies that has flocked to the mall because, as one of the survivors hypothesizes, "[They have] some kind of instinct. Memory of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives." Romero echoes this sentiment in his BBC2 interview: "My impression [of a mall], walking through there, going through this sort of ritualistic unnatural consuming experience was that we really do become zombies in here."[4]

Having eradicated the zombie presence from the mall interior, the humans live in a relatively safe environment that is replete with food, drink, and entertainment. Still, they eventually grow bored with their material wealth and "behave in a listless manner paralleling the zombies who once inhabited the mall."[5] Ultimately, a motorcycle gang raids the mall and the survivors decide to protect their acquired property through violence. The zombie horde enters the mall during the chaos to devour the motorcycle gang and the survivors (except for two that escape on a helicopter). As Bishop summarizes:

> The metaphor is simple: Americans in the 1970s are the true zombies, slaves to the master of consumerism, mindlessly migrating to stores and shopping malls for the almost instinctual consumption of goods . . . Having been essentially brainwashed by American capitalist ideology, the human protagonists of *Dawn of the Dead* find it impossible to see the shattered world around them in any terms other than those of possession and consumption—and this misplaced drive ultimately proves strong enough to put all their lives in jeopardy.[6]

In a 1979 interview with film critic Roger Ebert, Romero revealingly states: "With *Dawn*, I wanted the slick look, I wanted to bring out the nature of the shopping

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[4] Interview with George A. Romero, *BBC2 Forbidden Weekend*.

[5] Williams, 93.

[6] Bishop, 195.

center, the retail displays, the mannequins. There are times when maybe you reflect that the mannequins are more attractive but less real—less sympathetic, even—than the zombies."[7] Music is an essential component of this satiric conceit and Romero explores the liminal area between human and zombie-cum-brainwashed-consumer with different types of commoditized music. Several scenes depict characters using commercial music recordings to establish an ambience that allows them to ignore reality. Perhaps the film's most enduring image, droves of zombified shoppers loitering throughout the mall, would lose its bite if not for the anempathetic accompaniment of Muzak from the mall speakers. Finally, the action and transitional scenes are given a slick and sophisticated sheen thanks to an original soundtrack by the Italian band Goblin. Their flashy prog rock is a fitting thematic complement that allows *Dawn of the Dead* to have its cake and eat it, too; the film, with tongue planted firmly in cheek, indulges in the sonic excess of the very films produced by the consumer culture it criticizes. In fact, the film imparts sympathy for the zombie, a choice that installs a jarring cognitive dissonance since the survivors callously eliminate innumerable zombies in action sequences scored by Goblin.

It is mostly in expository scenes that Romero retains his selections from the De Wolfe library to bring out the film's true pathos. For instance, while fleeing toward the mall in a stolen helicopter, the survivors look below to see a redneck posse drunkenly hunting down zombies with the aid of a boisterous army squad. The zombies are weakened by starvation and present little threat to the rambunctious hunting party, but the men take great joy in shooting the pathetic creatures, turning former human beings into

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[7] George A. Romero interviewed by Rogert Ebert, "Interview with George Romero," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 29, 1979.

targets for marksmanship challenges. A member of the posse switches on the radio to The Pretty Thing's "'Cause I'm a Man" (recorded for the De Wolfe Library), a country western song with satirical lyrics that posit the hunting party as more barbarous than the zombies. A character celebrating the virtues of his life as an abusive deadbeat sings the lyrics:

> I never wake up early in the morning
> Don't get home 'til late at night
> Don't believe in overworking
> And I never treat a woman right
> 'Cause I'm a man
> 'Cause I'm a man
>
> I like to be the center of attraction
> Let the people know just who I am
> Like my movie shows with lots of action
> Take my beer straight from the can
> 'Cause I'm a man
> 'Cause I'm a man.

In the scene's context, the music exists somewhere between the diegetic and non-diegetic realms because it is prefaced by radio static (suggestive of a hunter tuning the radio to a country station), but no sound source is evident, and the volume stays at a consistent level despite how various shots should effect spatial characteristics of the sound. This ambiguity allows the music to function as ironic meta-commentary by portraying the hunters as mindless consumers who superficially listen to country-western music because it is appropriate for their demographic (otherwise, these lyrics would prove insulting). Incidentally, the reference to "movie shows with lots of action" can function as an intertextual reference to the commercial sheen of *Dawn of the Dead's* hyper-violent action sequences that Romero scored with Goblin tunes.

The raiders' ultimate attack on the mall features similar musical symbolism that trades the angst-filled climax of *Night of the Living Dead* for carnivalesque sadism. A martial bugle call—assumed as non-diegetic due to the lack of a visual indication of any bugle—sounds as the raiders approach the mall in *Mad Max*-style vehicles. This adds an ironic level of pomp and circumstance by virtue of the bugle call's association with the military (order) or perhaps a fox hunt (elite social status). Once the raiders penetrate the mall's defenses they pillage its goods, vandalize the shops, and humiliate the zombies by throwing pies and spraying seltzer water in their faces. Appropriately, this barbaric action is accompanied by non-diegetic mechanical circus music that evokes expressionist mania.

The mall also provides a handy venue for diegetic musical commentary thanks to the built-in speaker system to which the survivors quickly restore power. This anempathetic diegetic music (meaning that the music does not reinforce the emotional direction of the scene) can function as a source of comedy, biting social critique, or, more often than not, both. In fact, the film's utilization of Muzak proves to be one of its most memorable aspects and is frequently referenced in reviews. Roger Ebert's 1979 review sums up the general reaction: "It's impossible, for example, to watch the zombies marching through a shopping mall, accompanied by Muzak, and not find a satiric statement on the mildly trance-like state Muzak is supposed to inspire in shoppers. It's disturbing to see images of horror juxtaposed with the gaudy artifacts of a lawn furniture display."[8]A perfect example is the silly waltz that floods the mall when the speakers are initially reactivated. The zombies react with dumbfound excitement and provide slapstick relief, such as struggling with escalators and falling into a wishing fountain (figure 8).

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[8] Ebert, "Interview with George Romero."

Arguably the most famous scene in the film occurs during the end credits when footage of zombies retaking the mall is cheekily set to Herbert Chappell's high watermark in vacuous mood music, "The Gonk" (Figure 9). The polka-like melody is played on xylophone (and trumpet for the repeat) over an oom-pah accompaniment from horns and guitar. A ragtime piano plays a brief B-section that consists of schmaltzy tremolos in the right hand. If the electronic soundscape accompanying *Night of the Living Dead's* cannibalistic feast helped the film reach a new level of cinematic nihilism, "The Gonk's" perversely saccharine qualities help *Dawn of the Dead* make a similar—if more sardonic—statement.

Figure 8. Zombies provide slapstick relief to the strains of "The Gonk."

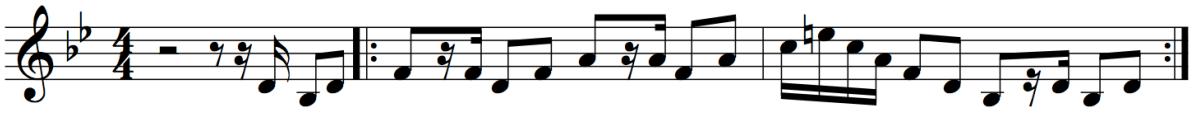

Figure 9. The main melody from “The Gonk.”

The survivors’ attempts at establishing normal lives within the mall are also characterized by the music they use for ambience. Stephen and Francine, a couple of survivors expecting a baby, have a romantic dinner at a mall restaurant—complete with kitschy cocktail music—as they attempt to ignore the grim reality and focus on starting a family. The diegetic music is inexplicably silenced as Stephen presents an engagement ring to Francine. Suddenly confronted with a meaningful situation, she realizes how artificial their lives have become and rejects his proposal by claiming, “Not now. It wouldn’t be real.” In a later scene, a soothing classical guitar record is played in their makeshift home while they distract themselves with a game of cards. This stress-reliever quickly fails and a domestic squabble explodes, though the music (tellingly entitled “Domestic Breakdown” in the soundtrack) continues undisturbed.

Romero’s Use of Goblin

As mentioned earlier, Romero self-reflexively decorates action scenes with Goblin’s exciting prog rock as a way of problematizing the audience’s delight in watching pitiful zombies being dispatched *en masse*. Much like the repurposed B-movie soundtracks used in *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero uses Goblin’s action-packed tunes as an artifice to make audiences question how deeply their morals have been debased by American consumer culture.

Romero first plays Goblin's music when the survivors escape from the city and cross via helicopter into the realm of the Other—a wild countryside overrun by zombies—to arrive at the shopping mall. Goblin's "*L'alba dei morti viventi*" is an immediate shift away from the stock De Wolfe music that accompanies the first twenty minutes of the film. The tune begins with a toccata-like synthesizer melody played over a pedal tone heartbeat motif on electric bass and drums. As the pedal tone rises a minor third, dramatic musical hits (cymbal crashes, choir pad swells, and thick electric guitar power chords) are synched with quick cuts between various shots of the mall interior and exterior. *Night of the Living Dead* lacked stylish synchronization between visual cuts and music because it aimed for a grittier and less polished aesthetic, but *Dawn of the Dead* satirically revels in these commercial aspects.

Crucially, "*L'alba dei morti viventi*" makes a return when Roger, a hotheaded former SWAT officer, begins to enjoy killing zombies during an action sequence (scored by Goblin's "*La Caccia*," to be discussed later). In an attempt to park semi-trailer trucks in front of the mall entrances to block access by zombies, the survivors bravely drive the trucks through the zombie-filled parking lots. This naturally leads to the slaughter of several zombies and Roger quickly starts to consider them less as former humans and more as fodder. While momentarily outside of his truck, a zombie nearly lands a bite on Roger and he grows incensed. The gloomy plod of "*L'alba dei morti viventi*" slowly crescendos as a desensitized Roger gleefully enacts retribution by running over zombies with his semi-trailer truck. Sure enough, Roger's inhuman behavior gets him bitten—and thus turned into a zombie—when he underestimates the tenacity of the horde. These

narrative developments begin to link the hip appeal of Goblin's music with an adverse side effect of consumer culture: desensitization.

Later in the film, Romero uses Goblin's rock-inspired, "*La Caccia*," to accompany an energetic sequence in which the survivors lock the zombies out of the mall (this occurs after the semi-trailer trucks have been put in place). "*La Caccia*"—arguably the most cheery cut by Goblin used in this film—is a major key, straight-ahead rock instrumental with shimmery guitar arpeggios doubled by synth strings. Appropriately, it plays during the most sanguine action sequence of the film: if the survivors can manage to remove the zombie threat, they can live in uninterrupted consumer bliss. After a fair share of tense "will-they-make-it" moments that titillate the audience, the plan is a total success; however, victory rings hollow due to a switch to sobering music from the De Wolfe Library.

"Sympathy for the Dead," a piece of non-diegetic music from the De Wolfe Library, begins directly after the survivors lock the zombies out of the mall and it deserves special mention for providing the film's most poignant moment of reflective *gravitas*. Although the majority of the zombies are now locked outside the mall, a few stragglers remain inside and the survivors must hunt them down. This type of situation requires the survivors to face the zombies on a more personal level than earlier when adrenaline was high and the undead were being dispatched too quickly to count. A somber harpsichord accompanies a solo flute while the audience watches—from the perspective of a rifle's crosshairs—a survivor snipe a zombie. The shooter cannot help but study the zombie's uncanny visage before squeezing the trigger and ending its undeath (figure 10). The music breaks into a funerary procession with the addition of

strings and bass drum while the survivors survey the massacre they just committed. Stylistically, this piece is an unexpected musical outlier that sobers the audience after one of the more gratuitously violent scenes and symbolizes the survivors losing grip on their own humanity.

Figure 10. “Sympathy for the Dead” plays as Peter studies a zombie before firing.

The Italian Second Wave of Zombie Films

While Romero used Goblin’s music to comment on the social effects of American commercialization, Dario Argento’s employment of Goblin resonated with Italian audiences in a different way. This section will begin by discussing the cultural context of 1970s Italy and a variety of films that tapped into social anxieties before the explosion of zombie films. Next, Argento and Goblin’s history of collaboration—prior to *Dawn of the Dead*—will be considered so that certain traits of *Dawn of the Dead’s* soundtrack can be appreciated. Finally, the influence of Goblin and Argento’s work will be discussed by

analyzing the soundtracks from later Italian zombie films of the second wave by Lucio Fulci.

From the late 1960s until the early 1980s, Italy suffered a severe recession that led to violent civil strife. This period, known as the Years of Lead (named after the many bullets fired), was marked by left- and right-wing paramilitary groups performing terrorist acts, such as assassinations, bombings, and open street warfare. These groups' supposed strategy of tension—meant to maintain a neo-fascist social order through fear tactics—had a profoundly negative effect on the Italian people. As Christopher Duggan notes in *A Concise History of Italy*:

> The spread of urbanization, higher living standards, greater access to education, and fresh opportunities for leisure helped to raise expectations and made the shortcomings of the state seem worse than ever. In 1970, according to a European survey 72 percent of Italians were "highly" or "completely" dissatisfied with the way their democracy operated. In 1976 the figure was more than 80 percent, compared with around 46 percent dissatisfaction in Britain and under 20 percent in Germany, and an average for the European Community as a whole of 45 percent. Terrorism in the North, and in the South a growth in organised crime, were among the causes and effects of this lack of confidence in the institutions.[9]

A variety of violent and sexually exploitative film genres tapped into these feelings of civil dissatisfaction to find commercial success in grindhouse theatres. Due to the strain put on Italy's movie industry by the recession, these genres were typically rip-offs of American horror and exploitation genres, but tailored for an Italian audience.[10] For example, America's pornographic women-in-prison genre was borrowed by Italians

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[9] Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 274; quoted in Brad O'Brien, "*Vita*, *Amore*, *e Morte*—and Lots of Gore: The Italian Zombie Film," in *Zombie Culture*, 61.

[10] Daniel G. Shipka, "Perverse Titillation: A History of European Exploitation Films, 1960–1980" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2007), 95.

and refashioned into the nunsploitation genre, wherein lesbian Catholic nuns would rebel against their sadomasochistic mother superior.

It should be noted that prior to the zombie film boom, the 1970s Italian grindhouse subgenre of cannibal films had a significant corpus of works. These films—thematically similar to zombie films—exploited contemporary Italians' dubious attitudes toward immigration during the recession by depicting a primitive group of cannibals terrorizing hapless tourists or anthropologists. The cannibals are musically suggested by the hallmarks of primitivism (ostinatos, polyrhythmic percussion grooves, brief pentatonic melodies) while the protagonists are invariably represented with Western orchestral music. Of course, the cannibal genre became outmoded once *Dawn of the Dead* was released in Italy and many crewmembers—especially make-up artists—headed to the greener pastures of zombie films.[11] But before discussing *Dawn of the Dead*, Argento and Goblin's collaborations in an important grindhouse subgenre should be examined because they will provide insight regarding the music composed for *Dawn of the Dead*.

Dario Argento and Goblin's Early Collaborations

Dario Argento and Goblin began their longstanding partnership when he enlisted them to score his film *Profondo Rosso* (1975) (known as *Deep Red* in the United States), a seminal work in the Italian *giallo* genre.[12] The *giallo* film is an Italian exploitation

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[11] Russell, 129.

[12] *Deep Red*, directed by Dario Argento (1975; Hollywood: Blue Underground, 2011), Blu-ray.

genre that mirrored the rise of violence in the early 1960s and it is the progenitor for the largely-American slasher film genre.[13] It is essentially an urban thriller that features otherworldly plot devices, a serial killer haunted by psychosexual trauma, and a generous helping of erotica. The genre's fashionable urban setting naturally called for a more contemporary sound and Argento sought cutting-edge progressive rock and jazz to help his film push the limits of the genre.[14] Furthermore, Argento was known for the dominant role that music played in his films: he worked closely with the musicians and often contributed ideas (including several notable collaborations with Italian composer Ennio Morricone); he played unsettling music during shooting to scare his actors; and he even explored the possibility of customizing the sound system wherever his films were screened.[15] After rejecting the majority of a score from jazz pianist and composer Giorio Gaslini (it was too conservative) and failing to procure British psychedelic/progressive rock band Pink Floyd, Argento settled on the lesser-known group Cherry 5 (rechristened as Goblin during this project).[16] Goblin's soundtrack—replete with grooves in odd time signatures, angular melodies, virtuosic instrumental solos, and an array of keyboards and synthesizers—was the perfect mix of grit and hipness that Argento sought.

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[13] Shipka, 75.

[14] Tony Mitchell, "Prog Rock, the Horror Film and Sonic Excess: Dario Argento, Morricone and Goblin," in *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (London: Equinox, 2009), 88.

[15] Mitchell, 88.

[16] James Gracey, *Dario Argento* (Harpenden, Herts: Kamera Books, 2010), 65.

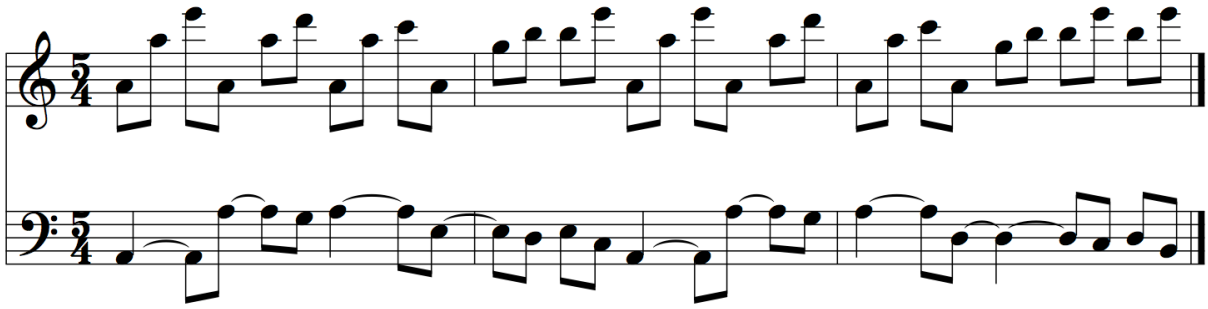

Figure 11. Goblin's opening keyboard and bass groove from *Profondo Rosso*.

Figure 11 is the opening groove from *Profondo Rosso* and serves as a perfect example of Goblin's typical sound. The opening guitar and harpsichord riff (quickly joined by the contrapuntal bass line) immediately betrays a progressive rock influence with its 5/4 time signature. An ascending synthesizer line joins the groove with a shrill tone that grows more abrasive with each step of its two-octave climb. After a disorienting 9/8 transition the piece explodes into a grand 4/4 psychedelic groove with drums and a booming gothic organ. This opening riff is repeated with the inclusion of drums and organ and the piece eventually concludes with a dramatic organ cadenza that ends on a Picardy third. Interestingly, this exciting music—practically screaming to be stylishly synched with visuals—is used only to accompany the opening credits, which are displayed as white text against a black background. Even when the film's title appears there is no musical acknowledgement.

Indeed, while music saturates most of *Profondo Rosso*, very little direct synchronization exists between visuals and music, such as stingers or Mickey Mousing (character movements synchronized with the soundtrack); this lack of expected music creates a mood-driven "operatic approach [that] strains the notionally rational frame of

the *giallo*" and amplifies the genre's exploitative thrills.[17] This "sonic excess," a phrase coined by Tony Mitchell, struck a nerve with weary 1970s Italian audiences who relished the cathartic energy.[18] Essentially, Goblin's score was the aggressive yet sleek aural equivalent to the film's visual exploitation of sex and violence. Argento was so pleased with Goblin's work that he had them score the entirety of his next and most acclaimed film, *Suspiria* (1977), before shooting a single scene. Small wonder that Argento, in charge of the European cut of *Dawn of the Dead*, immediately turned to Goblin to help him rework the film for a European audience.

Differences Between Argento and Romero's Soundtracks

True to form, Argento's European cut basks in sonic excess and omits nearly every overt musical reference to consumer culture found in the English-language version. In this sense, Argento's cut has more in common musically with Romero's first zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead*. The European soundtrack is focused on the post-apocalyptic survivalist theme and suggests the naturalist determination of *Night of the Living Dead*, while *Dawn of the Dead's* American soundtrack is influenced by Romero's moral imperative. Argento does not care whose side the audience is rooting for (survivors, raiders, zombies) nor is he interested in presenting a moralistic tale: his film is simply about survival, a topic that Italians during the Years of Lead understood well.

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[17] Kim Newman, "Thirty Years in Another Town: The History of Italian Exploitation," in *Monthly Film Bulletin* 53, no. 624 (January 1986): 23; quoted in Tony Mitchell, "Prog Rock, the Horror Film and Sonic Excess: Dario Argento, Morricone and Goblin," in *Terror Tracks*, 96.

[18] Mitchell, 88.

Still, Romero's script and direction are based on his indictment of American commercialization, so, while Argento's use of music may deviate thematically from Romero's conceit, the European cut undoubtedly touches on the same issues. In a few instances, Argento does make critical edits to the film that subtly alter characterization, but these alterations do not result in a complete thematic overhaul. To pinpoint the directors' different musical perspectives, select examples of Argento's scoring will now be compared to Romero's music.

Goblin's peaceful folk instrumental "*Tirassegno*" (which translates to "target shooting") replaces "'Cause I'm a Man" as the underscoring for the redneck posse and army brigade shooting zombies in the countryside. There is an obvious irony suggested by the dissonance between the tune's blunt title and its blissful musical arrangement (slide guitar and fiddle trade solos over a simple hand drum and acoustic guitar accompaniment), but Argento alters three important elements and largely mutes the cynical attitude Romero suggests in his version: the dialogue leading up to the scene is edited; the music is clearly presented as non-diegetic; and there are no lyrics in Goblin's tune. In Romero's version, the survivor's look down from their helicopter and witness the massacring of zombies. One survivor remarks, "I bet the rednecks are loving this," and thus the film and audience adopt a perspective of jaded cynicism toward humanity and, crucially, pity for the zombie. The diegetic radio transmission of "'Cause I'm a Man" and the scathingly satirical lyrics then function to reinforce the film's indictment of human nature. The survivor's key line of dialogue is edited out of Argento's version and so the subversive notion of sympathy for the zombies is never presented. Furthermore, "*Tirassegno*" is clearly non-diegetic and as such loses one of its strongest ironic

elements: the characterization of the rednecks as brain-dead consumers who unwittingly listen to a song that condemns their own culture. The relaxed pace of "*Tirassegno,*" as opposed to the harder edge of "'Cause I'm a Man," also makes the footage of the militia seem much more organized than in Romero's cut; the rambunctious rednecks hardly seem so rambunctious. If the film's music is intimating any type of message during this scene, it seems only to suggest that the audience simply enjoy watching a few zombie headshots alongside the rednecks.

When the survivors arrive at the mall, Argento puts much less effort into characterizing the mall with music than Romero's version does. Instead of synchronizing shots of the mall with Goblin's "*L'alba dei morti viventi,*" Argento uses a pensive synthesizer soundscape. A compilation of various synthesizer sounds from "*L'alba*" set over a menacing bass pedal tone heightens the tension while the survivors scout the area. Romero's tight shots of the mall coupled with Goblin's dramatic music imbue the mall with a sense of religious majesty and establish it as a central character. Argento abandons this ambitious characterization for pure survivalist tension; he utilizes a kaleidoscopic collage of alien timbres that ebbs and flows in volume, an unnerving accompaniment that a stinger can spring from without warning. Granted, Argento includes a single hit from "*L'alba*" when a survivor peeks in a skylight to reveal the mall interior. The guitar and chorus undoubtedly suggest the characters may have found salvation, but this is not comparable to Romero's suggestion of the mall as a temple of consumerism. Argento only plays one dramatic musical hit when the mall interior is shown to suggest that the characters see it as salvation from the zombies; Romero adorns multiple exterior shots with musical hits to suggest that the mall *is* salvation. The difference is that Argento uses

non-diegetic music to operatically communicate the characters' feelings and Romero uses non-diegetic music to comment on the scenario.

Argento's musical characterization of the conflict between the survivors and the raiders serves to further demonstrate how he trades all the consumer culture commentary for post-apocalyptic survival drama. The audience first learns of the raider presence (and their intention of raiding the mall) when they are revealed to be spying on one survivor teaching another how to fly the helicopter. Romero scores the flying lesson with lush orchestral strings, woodwinds, and harp while the sudden appearance of the raiders is signaled by low Wagnerian brass harmonies (typical bad guy music). Argento leaves the helicopter lesson unscored and simply has two distorted power chords pronounce the raider presence to the audience. Obviously, the power chords convey the message of sudden danger, but they lack a central semiotic distinction found in Romero's orchestral music; the minimalist electric guitar chords do not necessarily characterize the raiders as villainous *per se*: they are represented solely as a potential threat to the survivor's livelihood. Even the simple fact that there are two chords representing exactly two immediate threats (the two raiders) suggests a fight-or-flight urgency that precedes matters of good and evil. Romero's raiders are presented as villains in a textbook manner that falls just short of twiddling their moustaches, but Argento—and beleaguered Italian audiences—knows that all humans, especially in desperate times when survival is the paramount concern, are capable of atrocious behavior.

Goblin's "*Torte in faccia*" (Pie in the face)—a stylistic parallel to Romero's carnivalesque canned music—plays as the raiders pillage the shops in the mall and humiliate the zombies with pies and seltzer water. The European cut of the film has given

the audience no reason to sympathize with the zombies and is more focused on direct survivalist action, so the scene reads as a brief comic excursion. In fact, one of the survivors takes a moment to watch from his hidden vantage point and chuckle as the raiders make merry (in Romero's version the survivor watches with no indication of enjoyment, but Argento has inserted footage unused by Romero). Though Argento uses essentially the same music as Romero, he uses this non-diegetic realm to equate the perspectives of the raiders and the survivors; both groups are merely trying to survive in this post-apocalyptic wasteland.

Continuing with this theme, Argento uses no music to accompany the violent conflict between the raiders and survivors beyond "*Torte in faccia*." Only diegetic sounds of battle accompany the conflict between the two factions and the zombification (and subsequent mercy killing) of Stephen, one of the last three survivors and the father of an unborn child. This is, of course, to highlight Argento's preoccupation with survivalism. Romero accompanies the combat with the same Wagnerian bombast that introduced the raiders (again clearly suggesting a battle between good and evil, the virtuous survivors and the barbaric raiders) and the shot revealing zombie Stephen is scored by a delay-soaked version of "The Gonk" (a subtle nod to the manipulation of stock music from *Night of the Living Dead*).

The final scene of the film presents one of the most striking differences in the soundtracks and overall thematic content. The raiders have fled the mall after zombies overran it and the final two survivors are holed up in their makeshift living space. Zombified Stephen leads the zombie horde to the living space and one survivor, pregnant Francine, climbs to the roof to escape via helicopter, while the other, Peter, stays behind

to commit suicide. At the last second, Peter decides to stay with Francine to help her survive and he fights his way to the roof and jumps aboard the helicopter. The film ends as the two fly off to an uncertain future. In Romero's version, Peter's decision to live is heralded by a heroic brass fanfare with martial drums. If the film has not yet made clear the distinction between heroes and villains, this music leaves no doubt. Peter is musically declared a hero for choosing to leave the twisted church of consumerism and help Francine survive in the real world. Still, after he fights his way aboard the helicopter, the credits roll and Romero gets one last laugh: several shots of zombies loitering throughout the mall to "The Gonk."

Argento chooses to score Peter's decision to live with Goblin's "Zaratozom," an energetic 6/8 rocker with a harmonized lead electric guitar solo and insistent synthesizer throb. This is not the first time that "Zarazotom" has occurred in Argento's cut: it also plays while the raiders storm the mall. On first listen, the bluesy hard rock sound of "Zarazotom" seems a perfect fit for a ragtag band of motorcycle raiders; however, this association is problematized as the music is now used to accompany a protagonist making a clearly heroic decision. In this sense, "Zarazotom" can be seen a theme for survival, not a musical representation of good or evil. Furthermore, "Zarazotom" plays continuously throughout Peter's struggle toward the helicopter, the helicopter's flight away from the mall, and the entirety of the closing credits. Argento's final statement effectively concerns survival and thus he omits Romero's tongue-in-cheek credit sequence. "Zarazotom" cleverly unites not only the raiders and survivors, but, by playing as the audience gets up to reenter the world, it suggests that the filmgoer is a survivor, as well.

Conclusion

Many American fans and scholars of *Dawn of the Dead* tend to view Argento's cut as a dumbed-down action movie and his use of Goblin as "inappropriate."[19] This perfectly sums up the thematic and cultural difference between the two films: Romero created a slick, commercial zombie film to satirize American consumer culture while Argento created an even slicker, commercial zombie film that embraces Italian exploitation film culture. Even though Argento makes a few edits to the actual film (generally cuts to reduce the running time), it is the musical differences that steer the European version away from Romero's meditations on consumerism and toward a post-apocalyptic survivalist fantasy. The sociophobic significance of both films is thus indebted to their soundtracks. In the case of the domestic release, for example, fans on online forums still rave about the two most striking aspects of the film: the music and the gore. "The Gonk" has even become a cultural touchstone for current geek culture and has been used as the theme song for Cartoon Network's postmodern sketch comedy show *Robot Chicken*. Zack Snyder's 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead* does not feature "The Gonk," but the film uses Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry Be Happy" in a similar manner. The remake also features a delightfully tacky lounge version of Disturbed's 2004 heavy metal single, "Down with the Sickness," (courtesy of Richard Cheese and Lounge Against the Machine) that cheekily reiterates the first film's commercial preoccupation. Goblin, well into the fortieth year of their career, are currently touring North America to sold-out venues packed with fans of their film work.

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[19] Williams, 98.

Thanks to Argento' cut of *Dawn of the Dead*, Italy was engulfed in a zombie craze that lasted into the 1980s. These films are characterized by a focus on the post-apocalyptic scenario—after all, the Years of Lead continued into the early 1980s—depicted in *Dawn of the Dead*, though they have little to offer in terms of commentary on consumer culture. As a matter of fact, the gore and apocalyptic subject matter in the films only grew more extreme. For example, Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (1979) contains images of worm-ridden zombies and an infamous scene with a young woman's eye being slowly pierced by splintered wood.[20] Goblin continued to compose for horror films, but there were several line-up changes in the band due to internal difficulties and many founding members decided to go solo. As a result, Fabio Frizzi, an Italian composer who worked with Goblin in the past, scored most of the notable Italian zombie films post-*Dawn of the Dead*, such as *Zombi 2* (1979), *City of the Living Dead* (1980), and *The Beyond* (1981). His scores show a tremendous influence from Goblin and demonstrate just how in-demand their signature sound was to Italian horror auteurs.

The Golden Age effectively ended in 1983 once Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video was aired on MTV. This horror film spoof imbued the zombie with a camp sensibility that made it, as Jamie Russell says, a "living room-friendly ghoul."[21] This led to a body of sexually and racially exploitative, low budget spoofs that play fast and loose with zombie lore. A perfect example is Troma's *Redneck Zombies* (1987) in which a backwoods family transforms into zombies (after drinking moonshine they created from

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[20] Though *Zombi 2* is labeled as a sequel there is no first film. *Dawn of the Dead* was called *Zombi* when released in Italy. *Zombi 2's* distributors merely wanted to capitalize on the success of Romero's film.

[21] Russell, 153.

nuclear waste) and terrorizes a hapless group of campers. Many scholars look on this period with thinly veiled, if not overt, disdain. Bishop, in an uncharacteristically dismissive fashion, goes so far to say that "most of the zombie fare from the 1980s and '90s is lackluster at best, attempting little to no cultural work and providing scholars with nothing of substance to analyze."[22]

Perhaps some of this critical ire stems from the fact that the whimsical, campy environment was inhospitable to Romero's third zombie film, *Day of the Dead* (1985), which received mixed reviews and was his lowest grossing film. Dendle suggests that its "slower, more contemplative brand of horror was no longer in fashion," a conclusion that seems apt considering *Day of the Dead* was released the same year as the quintessential zombedies *The Return of the Living Dead* and *Re-Animator*, two popular films that satisfied "mid-'80s horror expectations [of] high-impact gore, frequent shocks, memorable one-liners, and above all, a sense that none of it should be taken too seriously."[23] Still, Bishop tempers his earlier indictment and posits that the spoofs effectively humanize the zombies by deflecting their horror and giving them "limited sentience, barely articulate speech, and . . . hunger for human brains"; they now have a motive and the capability for expressing their desire.[24] Unfortunately, once the spoofs, zombedies, and splatstick films ran their course, the zombie subgenre fell into relative obscurity during the 1990s. The music that accompanied these films is not included in the

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[22] Bishop, 275.

[23] Dendle, 9.

[24] Bishop, 275.

current study because of the problematic cross-pollination of idioms from comedy soundtracks and the fact that these films venture too far afield of the horror genre for inclusion.

Chapter 4: Recent Trends

Introduction

The zombie vanished from American movie theaters for most of the 1990s due to its post-Golden Age descent into zombedies, where its power to scare was largely rendered mute. The monster was kept on life-support by several low-budget direct-to-video American releases, but it was Japanese video game developer Capcom that would revive the zombie in the East with the survival-horror game *Resident Evil* (1996) for the Sony PlayStation. The game, an homage to zombie films by Romero and Fulci, put the player in the role of a special agent investigating a series of strange murders in the fictional Midwest American town of Raccoon City.[1] The video game was a massive success in Japan and in the West, and it bore sequels that continue to be released. In 2002, the first *Resident Evil* film was released (based on the first video game's plot) and, despite a poor critical reception, it was a box office success that would also spur several sequels. That same year, Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) was released—though it was not released in America until June 27, 2003—and the current zombie renaissance began.

Zombie films now seem to be released almost daily and they concern a tremendous range of subject matter and scenarios. As mentioned in the introduction, there are now zombie films, books, video games, television shows, comics, and even zombie-themed bands. These works not only explore new directions for the zombie, they revisit any of a multitude of previous iterations—such as the *zombie* of Haitian Vodou—and add

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[1] Russell, 171.

to their respective lore (often in a campy self-reflexive manner). In the same way, the music that represents the zombie has grown into a tradition of different musics that reference the creature's various iterations.

To identify and analyze the new musical trends present in the current wave of zombie films this chapter will examine *28 Days Later*.[2] Considering the breadth of recent zombie films, this selection may seem limited; however, this film explores two important concepts that characterize the modern zombie: the zombie is now a man-made monster and it is an animalistic killer. *Resident Evil's* monstrosities were also manufactured killing machines, but that franchise is planted squarely in the action film genre; the zombies are so much fodder for the heroes to gun down while the real menace are the superhuman bio-freaks. *28 Days Later* was far more influential (spawning a sequel, books, comics, and, most importantly, popularizing the fast zombie) and tapped into the cultural zeitgeist with its subject matter and unique soundtrack.

The film's original score and borrowed music help characterize the modern post-apocalypse, the newly ferocious zombies, and the film's preoccupation with moral considerations. The two main musical ideas are the use of post-rock to represent the post-human condition (discussed later in the chapter) and the infected zombies, while the human voice—heard in both the original score and in borrowed selections of classical music—represents the purity of the protagonists and the restoration of supercultural values. After discussing the musical trends within *28 Days Later*, the chapter will end with some closing thoughts regarding the direction of future research.

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[2] *28 Days Later*, directed by Danny Boyle (2002; Los Angeles: Fox Searchlight, 2007), Blu-ray.

The Post-9/11 Zombie: *28 Days Later* (2002)

Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) is credited with initiating the zombie renaissance and fashioning a new identity for the subgenre that resonated with modern anxieties.[3] The plot centers on Jim, a former bicycle courier, who wakes up in a London hospital and discovers that a viral outbreak has caused a global catastrophe and collapsed society. The highly contagious virus is a man-made product that is unwittingly released by animal rights activists who break into a research facility to free captive chimpanzees. Jim joins with Selena (his love interest) and the father-daughter duo, Frank and Hannah. After hearing a pre-recorded radio broadcast advertising a safe haven at a blockade near Manchester, the group decides to travel there for shelter and security. Unfortunately, Frank becomes infected along the way and the soldiers at the blockade have plans to rebuild society by making Selena and Hannah into sexual slaves. Jim barely escapes the military compound with his life and returns to rescue the girls by unleashing zombies (called "infected" in the film) against the compound and killing the soldiers with guerilla tactics. The three escape and live in a remote cottage until, ending on a happy note, they draw the attention of a jet searching for survivors.

The film's depiction of a devastated London and Manchester struck a nerve with audiences who immediately drew parallels to the recent tragedy of September 11, 2001. Still, the film was written and filming had begun before the 2001 terrorist attack. Boyle and screenwriter Alex Garland used images of international crises—such as Cambodian killing fields and the devastation following an earthquake in China—to help them realize

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[3] Bishop, 21.

the film's post-apocalyptic United Kingdom.[4] The missing persons flyers featured in the film are the image that seems to have drawn the most significant parallels to New York City post-9/11, but Boyle and Garland were actually inspired by flyers in Cambodia (figure 12). The film's gritty aesthetic is intensified by the digital video format that lends a particular rawness and immediacy to the narrative.

Figure 12. Jim stands before a "Missing Persons" board in a devastated London.

The new characterization of the zombie also taps into fears of deadly epidemics, technology, and terrorism. The zombie of *28 Days Later* is not technically a reanimated corpse, but rather a human infected with a man-made virus. Contemporary anxiety over media reports on diseases such as AIDS, SARS, Ebola, and the avian flu are brought to mind by this concept. The virus is highly contagious—it is transmitted by a bite or

[4] Danny Boyle and Alex Garland, Audio Commentary, *28 Days Later*.

exposure to infected blood—and a victim becomes a zombie within seconds. This leaves survivors no time to say goodbye to their friends (as in the Romero films where the turning process is drawn out), as they need to be dispatched immediately before becoming an active threat. Furthermore, the zombies represent a "trespass of science" that plays on societal unease regarding the post-human condition.[5] Post-humanism concerns the redefinition of the relationship between human body and mind that is spurred by technological advances—involving anything from iPhones to cybernetic organisms—and has been a topic approached in sci-fi films such as *A.I.* (2001) and *I Robot* (2004). Essentially, the current superculture (or perhaps *Homo sapiens*, at large) is experiencing an existential crisis due to technological developments in artificial intelligence and augmentations performed on living beings, such as genetic engineering.

Also, unlike Romero's lumbering ghouls, these zombies are individually dangerous. Each of these rage-filled monsters is "a swift, powerful and ferocious predator that makes . . . direct, purposeful beelines towards the living" (figure 13).[6] Kevin J. Witmore remarks on how these zombies function as an excellent metaphor for terrorists because they "cannot be reasoned with, cannot be negotiated with, [and] they seek only to replicate themselves."[7] He goes on by explaining that the war on terror is "unwinnable by

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[5] Martin Rogers, "Hybridity and Post-Human Anxiety in *28 Days Later*," in *Zombie Culture*, 122.

[6] Nick Muntean and Matthew Thomas Payne, "Attack of the Livid Dead: Recalibrating Terror in the Post-September 11 Zombie Film," in *The War on Terror and American Popular Culture*, eds. Andrew Schopp and Matthew B. Hill (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 246.

[7] Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 160.

definition" because it is a war waged on a tactic, not a particular enemy, and thus can only be measured a success insofar as "nothing has happened (yet)."[8] This places Americans in a constant state of fear that is represented by the individual zombie now pregnant with destructive capabilities, much like the anonymous suicide bombers and disturbed gunmen covered frequently by the news media. Fast moving zombies have become a popular, though not ubiquitous, choice for many post-9/11 zombie films such as *Zombieland* (2009) and Zack Snyder's remake of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (2004).

Figure 13. The animalistic "infected" of *28 Weeks Later* (2007).

[8] Wetmore, 163–164.

Post-rock in *28 Days Later*

28 Days Later's soundtrack consists of original music by John Murphy, borrowed classical compositions, and a handful of alternative and post-rock recordings. Murphy's compositions range from ambient electronic soundscapes to aggressive rock arrangements with layers of multi-tracked guitars. His composition "In the House–In a Heartbeat" would return in the sequel and find its way onto a variety of other soundtracks, including *Kick-Ass* and *Kick-Ass 2*, the Xbox Live Arcade Game *The Dishwasher: Vampire Smile*. It also became a go-to recording for BBC programs in need of suspenseful music. Murphy would go on to score *28 Weeks Later* and Danny Boyle's sci-fi horror film, *Sunshine* (2007).

28 Days Later's musical representation of the zombie and the post-apocalyptic world uses the style of post-rock. Post-rock, like indie-rock and so many other splinter factions in the rock genre, is difficult to pin down stylistically. As a case in point, the term is used to describe a variety of bands and artists in Grove's *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, but it is never properly defined in its own entry (though genres such as art rock, indie rock, and punk rock are elaborated upon). In a 1994 issue of *The Wire*, rock critic and scholar Simon Reynolds defined post-rock as a style of music that "[uses] rock instrumentation for non-rock purposes, using guitars as facilitators of timbre and textures rather than riffs and power chords."[9] This definition suggests that post-rock is a descendant of The Velvet Underground's improvisatory drones and *musique concrete's* influence on the rock scene. But, Reynolds makes a very important remark on post-rock that helps to explain its significance in relation to the modern zombie: "Perhaps the really

[9] Simon Reynolds, "The Ambient Rock Pool," *The Wire* (May 1994), 29.

provocative area for future development lies . . . in cyborg rock; not the wholehearted embrace of Techno's methodology, but some kind of interface between real time, hands-on playing and the use of digital effects and enhancement."[10] The sounds of post-rock possess an uncanny similarity to rock music, but the timbres and textures feel unnatural to the average listener. One can argue that rock music is already highly mediated by technology (amplifiers, electric guitars, recording studios), but that is beside the point; the general audience views rock's instrumentation and production methods as normal, while post-rock's production methods represent a less comprehensible and more cyborg strain of music.

When Jim first leaves the hospital, the Canadian post-rock band Godspeed You! Black Emperor's "East Hastings" (named after a skid row area of Vancouver) provides a chilling accompaniment to his apocalyptic revelation. The piece is a maddening crescendo of orchestral strings, percussion played by two drummers, found sounds, and electric guitar textures that parallels the sense of panic overwhelming Jim. Of course, the film begins with a prologue that shows the animal rights activists freeing the contaminated primates, so—while Jim is still piecing together the details of society's downfall—the audience is fully aware of science's catalytic transgression; this means that the audience will make an immediate connection between Godspeed You! Black Emperor's post-rock timbres and the post-human nightmare world. Boyle reflects on the impact the band's doomsaying music and aesthetic had upon the film's creation: "I always try to have a soundtrack in my mind. Like when we did [the 1996 film] *Trainspotting*, it was [British electronic group] Underworld. For me, the soundtrack to *28*

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[10] Reynolds, 32.

Days Later was Godspeed. The whole film was cut to Godspeed in my head."[11] Indeed, Godspeed You! Black Emperor's "agoraphobically cosmic" aural palette seems to be John Murphy's artistic touchstone for this film, as his original music uses a similar arrangement (it would be easy to mistake the notoriously low-profile band's music as Murphy's own because they refused to have their music sold as part of the film's soundtrack).[12]

The zombies are naturally represented by an aggressive post-rock *leitmotif*: heavily distorted electric guitars playing an ascending four-note octatonic motive that is followed by an ascending four-note chromatic motive (figure 14). The octatonic scale has a long history of being related to fantastical characters, such as the otherworldly villains of Stravinsky's early ballets, so it is no stretch for Murphy to apply it to the zombie. The tense ever-ascending scale can likewise be understood as a representation of the infection's spread, or of the growing ubiquity of post-humanity. In this sense, the *leitmotif* is an elegant mixture of semiotic code (the zombie's association with the otherworldly) and narratological tool (the ascending octatonic scale can effectively build tension in action scenes, such as when Jim and Selena are chased up multiple flights of stairs by zombies). The zombie *leitmotif* also lacks acoustic instruments and is thus

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[11] Boyle, quoted in Kitty Empire, "Get Used to the Limelight," *The Observer* (November 9, 2002), accessed March 13, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2002/nov/10/features.review27.

[12] Jason Heller, "Picking a Path Through the Nebulous Terrain of Post-Rock," *A.V. Club* (June 20, 2013), accessed March 13, 2014. http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.avclub.com/article/picking-a-path-through-the-nebulous-terrain-of-pos-99239.

associated with a more cyborg strain of music than the mixture of orchestral and rock instruments heard in Godspeed You! Black Emperor's "East Hastings."

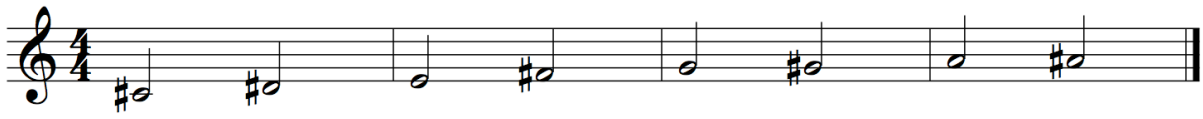

Figure 14. The infected theme.

On a similar note, the soldiers are human characters that have not been infected by the rage virus, yet they have effectively lost their humanity by sacrificing their morals in order to survive the post-apocalypse. When Jim and his companions first meet the soldiers, the music immediately suggests that something is not quite right through a descending trumpet line amidst a bed of glassy synthesizer pads. The trumpet stands out because it is a timbre that has not been featured in the film so far and it bears a martial association that is reinforced by the newly introduced soldiers. But, this trumpet is not playing a military fanfare or "The Last Post" (the UK equivalent to "Taps") to suggest that these men are heroes; it plays a four-note descending line (F–E–D–C), an eerie counterpoint to the zombie theme. The trumpet theme is awash with reverb and gradually is subsumed by the ambient soundscape until it is no longer. The military theme returns when the soldiers take Jim into the woods for his execution (they feel it is their duty to kill Jim so that they can repopulate society by impregnating Selena and Hannah) and it again depicts how the once-proud organization has fallen from grace. Additionally, the pathetic trumpet sound is nearly subsumed by the collage of alien synthesizers; this

seems to imply that these characters (while not necessarily infected) are still becoming assimilated and losing their humanity to the post-human condition.

With regard to the protagonists, the human voice (representative of purity) is given a similar treatment. A human voice—either a digital reproduction or a heavily manipulated sample—emerges from the backdrop of ambient synthesizer drones at key moments when Jim and his impromptu family assert supercultural values or when a protagonist performs a virtuous behavior. For instance, after Jim refuses to side with the soldiers and allow Selena and Hannah to be used as sex slaves (a choice that will lead to his execution), a human voice sings a wisp of a melody in relief of the synthesized background drone. This serene voice also accompanies Jim and his friends as they camp in some countryside ruins while traveling to the military blockade. The significance here is that they have left the infected city and are beginning to behave like a traditional family. This restoration of supercultural values is tied to the use of the human voice, a decidedly organic instrument that contrasts with the electronic timbres representing the zombies and post-human world.

A final example of this theme that warrants discussion due to its narrative significance occurs when Frank is infected during the course of their trek to the military blockade. Murphy's composition "Frank's Death – Soldiers (Requiem in D minor)" begins with an angelic human voice that is cut off by a series of ascending four-note passages played by strings and voice (beginning with double basses and working up to violins and voice as the scene progresses). The four-note ascending motives recall the zombie *leitmotif*, but Frank is a dignified human character and his motive remains diatonic in the key of D minor, avoiding the perverse octatonicism associated with the

zombies. As Frank's infection spreads, descending four-note cells appear in counterpoint to the ascending motives; this represents his fading humanity and the rage that gradually is taking control. Interestingly, the descending four-note motive is similar to the falling trumpet line that represents the soldiers' loss of humanity. It is also worth noting that his infection—and ensuing death—is scored only with acoustic instruments (strings and voice) and not the electronic sounds of the Other.

Classical Music in *28 Days Later*

The classical music borrowed in the film—all sacred and featuring the voice—is used to characterize Jim and his friends as pure of heart, or at least as having retained their humanity in times of darkness. It does so obviously by virtue of its sacredness and relative antiquity, but also by its stark contrast to the film's other more contemporary musical content (post-rock, in particular). This music provides a feeling of hopefulness and represents a nostalgic longing for a time before the infection. For instance, when Jim visits his family home to check for survivors the Christian hymn "Abide with Me" (set to the tune of William Henry Monk's "Eventide" [1862]) serves as non-diegetic accompaniment. The piece is performed by a solo female voice, and the intimate acoustics give the impression that the voice is close to the listener. It becomes easy to imagine that this tune might be playing in Jim's head for comfort as he climbs the stairs to his parents' bedroom with trepidation. The lyrics beseech the Lord to protect and give strength to the speaker in times of strife ("Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.") and provide the perfect prayer for the "everyman" Jim, now lost in the hell created by the hubris of science.

When Jim meets up with other survivors, a sense of family is established and the sacred music grows more lushly orchestrated, though still thoroughly solemn in nature. The famous Bach/Gounod "Ave Maria" plays as the group drives an abandoned taxi toward the military blockade and suggests the group's humility and hopefulness ("Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death"). Additionally, the group's sympathy for the dead is suggested when "In Paradisum" from Faure's Requiem in D minor plays as they witness Manchester burning in the distance. No earlier zombie movie has put such an effort toward establishing this profound a sense of righteousness in the protagonists and *28 Days Later's* use of music is a key factor in this characterization. Most earlier zombie films enjoyed a nihilistic streak (Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* featured a little girl who killed her bickering parents) and several have downright celebrated the massacre of the living (think of any Italian zombie film from the second wave of the Golden Age).

Borrowed Indie-rock and the End Credits of *28 Days Later*

There are two moments in the film that problematize the binary of pure classical music and corrupt post-rock: the incorporation of American indie rock band Grandaddy's song "A.M. 180" and John Murphy's sanguine instrumental rock for the end credits. "A.M. 180" is a jubilant, if naïve, indie-pop song that non-diegetically accompanies Jim and his friends as they giddily stock up at an abandoned supermarket en route to the military blockade. At first blush, the song—driven by a cartoony keyboard lead—recalls *Dawn of the Dead's* (1978) iconic "The Gonk" and its association with consumer culture (figure 15). This impression is, of course, reinforced by the fact that the characters are

having a shopping spree during a zombie crisis; however, the lyrics—something "The Gonk" lacked—provide a sense of nostalgic innocence mixed with self-awareness. Notice the simple-minded lyrics and the absurd activities suggested by the singer.

> If you come down
> We'll go to town
> I haven't been there for years
> But I'd be fine
> Wasting our time
> Not doing anything here
> Just doing nothing
>
> We'll sit for days
> And talk about things
> Important to us like whatever
> We'll defuse bombs
> Walk marathons
> And take home whatever together
>
> Whatever together [*repeat four times*]

The lyrics are concerned with relationships and the idea of home, reminding us that these characters are attempting to make the best of a situation (hence the mantra-like repetition of "whatever together"). The equation of "defus[ing] bombs," "walk[ing] marathons," and "whatever" may seem childish, but—considering the hell that these characters have survived—the lyrics read as self-reflexive. Grandaddy's singer, Jason Lytle, reinforces this sentiment in delivering the lyrics with a *blasé* sense of cadence and a whispery voice that is the antithesis of exciting, commercially viable rock music. Additionally, these is no indication that Jim and his friends are planning on staying in the supermarket to grow listless like the survivors of *Dawn of the Dead*, so the music makes the scene read as a euphoric excursion.

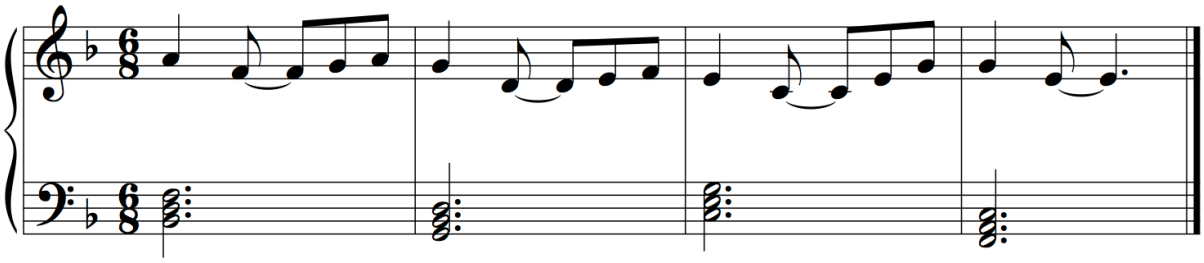

Figure 15. The opening keyboard riff and chordal accompaniment for "A.M. 180."

John Murphy's uplifting music for the end credits similarly troubles the post-rock/classical music binary by presenting a consonant hybridization of the post-rock aesthetic and a more accessible, dance-inspired groove. The instrumentation is typical for a rock band (guitar, bass, and drums), though—true to post-rock fashion—the guitars do more textural work and the lead is colored by heavy compression and reverb so that it sounds less like an electric guitar and more like bells. The syncopated lead guitar riff imparts the song with a dance-like vitality that is generally absent in post-rock, a genre that largely abandons a sense of meter and rhythm for its coloristic preoccupation, and thus revives the neglected human element (figure 16). Ultimately, Murphy's final composition for the film, a cross-pollination between post-rock and pop, seems to echo the characters' determination to survive in an imperfect world; to come to terms with being somewhere between the absolutes of purity and corruption. In this respect, Murphy's tune would hit home for audiences because of the contemporaneous rise in popularity of accessible post-rock and post-rock-inspired bands, such as Explosions in the Sky (whose music was featured in the successful sports drama *Friday Night Lights* (2004) and its ensuing television show), Snow Patrol (whose 2006 single "Chasing Cars"

reached number 5 on the US Billboard Hot 100), and Sigur Rós (whose 1999 album, *Ágætis byrjun*, propelled them to international fame and had their music used in Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* [2004] as well as Cameron Crowe's *Vanilla Sky* [2001]). Indeed, it seems that Murphy's music for the end credits, typical to horror movie fashion, subtly reinstates supercultural norms through its cultural associations.

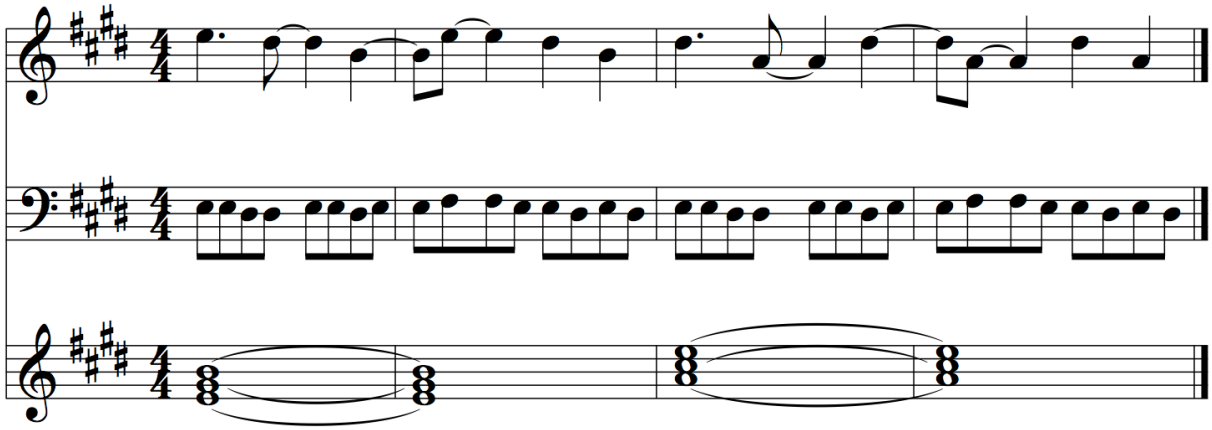

Figure 16. End credits for *28 Days Later*. The lines from top to bottom are lead guitar, bass, and harmony.

Conclusion

The most recent trends in zombie films are still largely indebted to the impact of *28 Days Later*, but the scale of the zombie renaissance is so great that audiences are treated to a mix of releases that revisit past zombie iterations and others that push the subgenre forward in new directions. Romero's recent work—*Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009)—is still characterized by overt socio-political themes (though they reflect recent social issues such as immigration

and media saturation) and experiments with recent horror film conventions, such as the first-person "found footage" perspective that is used in *[Rec]* (2007) and *Cloverfield* (2008). *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Zombieland* (2009) continue in the spirit of the zombedies and splatstick films of the eighties, though they use slow and fast zombies, respectively. AMC's *The Walking Dead* (based on Robert Kirkman's ongoing graphic novel) gives the zombie a strong presence on the small screen and keeps the traditional post-apocalyptic survival fantasy alive in the popular imagination. This study has been the first step toward understanding the sociophobic significance of the great variety of music now used in these different portrayals of the zombie. In light of the several zombie film archetypes, it would be difficult to examine the sociophobic considerations behind the musical representations of the modern zombie without a strong understanding of the creature's film history.

Therein lies the importance of this study. Much of the music heard in horror films is loaded with generic idioms that an audience takes for granted and assumes to have been in practice since time immemorial. But, many of these assumptions are based purely on a familiarity with recent horror films and only a passing familiarity with older ones. To make matters worse, much of the average viewer's understanding of earlier horror film music is colored by the postmodern referentiality of recent horror films. It is important to analyze how and why these musical idioms have been used throughout the history of horror film because unchallenged assumptions lead to a skewed idea of history. A modern viewer could easily assume that horror movies have always employed cacophonous soundscapes for moments of violence, but this hasty inference would overlook *Night of the Living Dead*, which broke ground with its protracted stinger that

helped the film disturb the comfortable boundary between fantasy and reality. Similarly, horror film music from the 1970s and 1980s is quickly dismissed as cheesy thanks to the zombedies and because it sounds dated by today's standard. (Outside of the hip hop world, time has not been kind to early adopters of sampling technology). There is almost no research regarding the music from this era of zombie films except for a handful of scholarly works and online fan sites that bear frequently contradictory information.

So, what are the main threads that have been identified throughout the history of the zombie's musical representation in film? The principle theme that has musically connected the different zombie iterations is Othering via various types of musical exoticism. The Voodoo zombie was represented by the Steiner superculture's exotic devices, such as pounding primitive rhythms, pentatonic melodies, reedy textures, and the employ of the octatonic and whole-tone scales. Appropriately, the superculture was represented by more refined European music (think of the Liszt and Chopin piano works that reinforced the zombie women's place in white society). In Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* stock recordings of frivolous horror music for 1950s B-movies was Othered by a number of effects, such as delay, echo, and reverb. The uncanny, yet exotic, music proved disquieting to contemporaneous audiences and captured the 1960s American angst. The post-rock soundtrack of *28 Days Later* also used the music's uncanny resemblance to rock—as well as its cyborg association—to resonate with the audience's discomfort surrounding the post-human condition. Additionally, the film's juxtaposition between post-rock and acoustic instrumentation recalls the musical dichotomy between Other and superculture that was first heard in Voodoo zombie films. Interestingly, Romero used Goblin's slick soundtrack for *Dawn of the Dead* to suggest a more insidious

form of Othering: the commercially viable music was used to represent the dehumanization (and eventual zombification) of Roger. This musical choice was made to reflect the film's sharp commentary of American consumer culture.

Another theme is the zombie film's use of sonic excess to pronounce sociophobic themes. The most obvious example is *Night of the Living Dead's* prolonged stinger which broke the conventions of horror film scores by turning a mechanism for cheap thrills into an interminable death knell that denied audiences any escape from harsh reality. Dario Argento's European cut of *Dawn of the Dead* used Goblin's prog-rock score to highlight the film's violence with an operatic fancy. This musical decision helped the film serve as a pressure release for Italian audiences living through the Years of Lead in the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, the domestic cut of *Dawn of the Dead* used some of Goblin's compositions, but Romero used the band's excess-driven music to suggest the evils of commercialism. In *28 Days Later* the intense electric guitar textures of the zombie theme suggest the new aggressive nature of the zombie and bring to mind fears of terrorism. Also, the rising octatonic motive and slowly growing number of guitars in the texture is suggestive of the contagious outbreak—a growing concern in modern society—that the film posits. Table 1 succinctly presents these themes:

	Representation of Other	**Representation of superculture**	**Example of sonic excess**
I Walked with a Zombie (1942)	Western orchestral exoticism (non-diegetic), tribal music and Calypso (diegetic)	Western classical music, the piano	N/A
Night of the Living Dead (1968)	Manipulated stock recordings, electronic soundscapes, silence	Canned 1950s horror and science fiction soundtracks	Protracted stinger, silence during scenes of violence
Dawn of the Dead (US) (1978)	Muzak, Goblin's prog-rock	Muzak, Goblin's prog-rock	Musical hits synched with shots of mall, Goblin played during scenes of violence
Dawn of the Dead (Italy) (1978)	Goblin's prog-rock	Goblin's more peaceful selections ("*Tirassegno")*	Entire soundtrack provides near-operatic level of drama
28 Days Later (2002)	Post-rock textures and timbres, non-diatonic scales (octatonic, chromatic)	Sacred vocal music, the voice, acoustic timbres	Infected theme

Table 1. A brief summarization (with examples) of the two main themes presented in this study: the musical representation of the Other/superculture and the use of sonic excess to pronounce sociophobic themes.

Several parts of the zombie's film career were outside of this study's scope but deserve consideration, especially considering their impact on current zombie films. The zombedies and splatstick comedies of the 1980s were left out of this study because only films within the horror genre were admitted. Still, one cannot deny the sociophobic relevance of these films. *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) is a particularly interesting film that focuses on a group of punks and borrows music from the psychobilly and horror punk genres. The psychobilly genre is a joining of the nonconformist roots of punk and rockabilly, two decidedly working-class genres, to create a subculture that embraces

hedonism, apoliticism, and a rejection of normalcy. Annelise Sklar suggests that the zombie, the most blue-collar member of the movie monster pantheon, has become the mascot for the subculture because "like punk and other counterculture currents, horror films teach us the shortcomings of normalcy, but the only other option they offer, if one chooses to reject conventional Western reality, is the antithetical character of monstrosity."[13] Further research into the zombie's role in psychobilly music and psychobilly culture would make for a fascinating study.

The zombie legacy also includes a considerable body of Japanese films that were omitted from this study because the selection of films was limited to the West. It would be difficult to account for sociophobic resonance without a familiarity with Japanese film music procedures. Certain semiotic cues that a Japanese audience would hear in the soundtrack could easily go unnoticed by a Western ear. Still, these films have a fairly low viewership in the West and are essentially being watched by only the most die-hard of zombie aficionados, which means these films have an arguably lesser impact on the genre at-large. This situation may easily change if services such as Netflix continue to boost Asian horror offerings.

A number of zombie video game scores were also left out of this study because they are generally constructed under very different principles than film scores. Film music is typically composed linearly, as it is synched with a sequence of images. Modern video game music is often created in a non-linear fashion that facilitates dynamic player choices. Valve's zombie-themed first-person shooters *Left 4 Dead* (2008) and *Left 4*

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[13] Annelise Sklar, "Can't Sleep When You're Dead: Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll, and the Undead in Psychobilly" in *Zombie Culture*, 143.

Dead 2 (2009) are two such examples of video games that feature procedural narratives (basically, the game creates content on the fly so that it never plays exactly the same). Again, these video games were left out of this study because they went beyond the limits of its scope; however, it would be fascinating to see what elements of film scores have been borrowed by games, and vice versa.

It should also be noted that this study of sociophobics could be taken outside of the zombie film context. There is no reason why, say, the werewolf or vampire cannot receive the same treatment; the zombie was selected simply based on its popularity spikes that coincide with periods of social unrest and its unique status as a monster essentially born in the twentieth century. It would be interesting to see if there are common musical threads between the representations of various monsters in the cinematic pantheon. Perhaps this study's spotlight on one monster identifies but one part of a larger picture that will gradually come into focus with further research.

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