

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

Bridging Work - Film Studies for Mrs FH

In September, one of the first films for study will be *Pans Labyrinth* (2006) by the Spanish director, Guillermo Del Toro.

You need to complete independent research for all sections listed below. You should make handwritten or typed notes and collect powerful imagery printed from the internet.

Research and make notes on:

1. The director himself, **Guillermo Del Toro**.



2. The Spanish artist **Goya** and include images of his work. You are advised to focus on **3 specific periods** in this artist's lifetime:

Fantasy and Invention
Black Paintings
The Disasters of War



3. **General Franco** (Spanish dictator from 1939 to 1975) and the **Spanish Civil War** (1936-1939).



We will be focusing on Franco's Spain just after the war – 1944. Any specific research into this year could prove enlightening as we watch the film.

Please note: you are NOT required to view the film.

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

Bridging Work for Film Studies (Mrs Salguero)

The first film you will be studying with me is *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). Of all the films we will be studying, this is one you are quite likely to have seen but if you haven't, don't worry **you don't need to have seen the film before the course starts.**

The following tasks will help you understand some of the background to the film. When you watch a film for pleasure, these aren't necessarily things you think about but they will be useful as we start to study it.



1. I'd like you to read through the 'The Zombie in Film' document to get a better understanding of the genre. Some of you might not really like the zombie genre, some of you might LOVE them, but this essay will hopefully make you realise that there is more to zombie films than just horror and gore. Zombies are often used as a metaphor for other issues in society and this essay explores the different things zombies have represented in cinema. As you are reading it, highlight anything you find interesting – we will discuss it when the course starts.

After you've read this, you could also do a bit of research yourselves on the zombie in cinema. It would be interesting to see what you find.

2. *Shaun of the Dead* is playfully referred to as a zom-rom-com. In other words, a zombie romantic comedy. So it *is* a zombie film but, in many ways, it could also just be described as a typical romantic comedy.

So, your next task is to try and pin down the different **conventions** of each genre (so the zombie genre and the rom-com genre). In other words, what would you expect to see in terms of storyline, characters, setting etc. You could use your own knowledge and the internet to help with this but look at a range of websites as they might differ in some ways. By looking at a range you will get a consensus. I'd like you to make note of your findings, in your own words, so we can share ideas when we start the course.

3. Next, I'd like you to get a bit of info on the **production** of the film. Answer the questions on the 'Production research task' to find out more about the production background of the film.

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

The Zombie in Film

[Dave Paul Strohecker](#) on February 27, 2012

THE ZOMBIE IN FILM: FROM HAITIAN FOLKLORE TO APOCALYPTIC ANXIETIES

If you are alive these days, and not already part of the undead masses yourself, you probably have noticed a staggering increase of zombie references in film, television, pop culture, videogames and the internet. For instance, the big screen and small screen have both hosted a plethora of zombie films including the more popular blockbusters [28 Days Later](#) (2002), [Shaun of the Dead](#) (2004), and [I Am Legend](#) (2007). In television, we have seen the recent success of AMC's [The Walking Dead](#), based on the [comic book series](#) of the same name. In pop culture, we have seen the viral video of penitentiary inmates dancing to [Michael Jackson's "Thriller"](#) and even the popular television sitcom [Glee](#) host its own rendition of the dance. And if you are on a college campus like myself, you have probably seen undergraduates playing "[Zombies Vs. Humans](#)," a game of tag in which "human" players must defend against the horde of "zombie" players by "stunning" them with Nerf weapons and tube socks. In videogames, we have seen the success of the *Resident Evil* franchise, eventually culminating in a series of films starring [Mila Jovovich](#), as well as more recent games like [Left 4 Dead](#) and [Dead Rising](#). Finally, the internet is awash with zombie culture. From post-apocalyptic [zombie societies](#) to zombie [fansites](#) and [blogs](#).

Part 1: The Early Cinematic Zombie

What is the zombie and where does it come from? Bishop's (2010:20) "taxonomy" of the dead" is a useful for articulating the different conceptualizations of the zombie as it has appeared in film. In my opinion, however, the zombie can be reduced to three main types: the somnambulist (ie: mind control slave-zombie), the cannibalistic corpse (ie: undead eaters), and the infected living (eg: the "rage virus" of *28 Days Later*).

What makes the zombie unique from other movie monsters is its unique place of origin. Whereas Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman all have ties to the Gothic literary tradition, the zombie stands apart in having a relatively recent (and proximal) origin. Theorists of zombie culture (such as [Kyle Bishop](#) or [Jamie Russell](#)), attribute the origin of the zombie to Haitian folklore and the hybrid religion of voodoo. But the zombie didn't make its way into American culture until the 1920s and 30s, when sensationalist travel narratives were popular with Western readers. Specifically, [W.B. Seabrook's](#) book *The Magic Island*, is often credited as the first popular text to describe the Haitian zombie. Additionally, the work of [Zora Neale Hurston](#) (specifically her 1937 book *Tell My Horse*) explores the folklore surrounding the zombie in Haitian mythology.

With the development of the motion picture, the zombie became a staple of horror, and a popular movie monster. The first major zombie film was Halperin and Halperin's (1932) [White Zombie](#), which depicted a Haitian voodoo priest capturing the female protagonist as a zombie slave. Other early zombie films include: [Revolt of the Zombies](#) (1936), [King of the Zombies](#) (1941), and [I Walked with a Zombie](#) (1943). What is important to note is that the

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

zombie of these films was not the cannibalistic creature we now know it as. These zombies were people put under a spell, the spell of voodoo and mystical tradition. In these films, the true terror is *not* being killed by zombies, but of *becoming* a zombie oneself.

What all these films have in common is their depiction of Voodoo and Haitian culture more generally as dangerous, menacing, and superstitious. Those who study colonial history are keen to note that the messages contained in these films are less than subtle, and present stereotyped versions of Haitian culture aimed largely at satisfying a predominantly white audience. Many of these films also contain an all white cast, with several members in blackface serving as comedic relief for the more “serious” scenes.

In the 1950s, zombie films came to the American shores. At this time of Cold War anxiety, films oriented around mind control and invasion from afar resonated with audiences. Films like [Invisible Invaders](#) (1952) presented the dangers lurking nextdoor, as family, friends, and neighbors turned on one another. In this film, a mad scientist uses technology to secure power over men’s brains. In films such as these, fears of loss of individuality and loss of control over the self become predominant. This mirrors the changes of suburban America at this time, as expansion into the suburbs and the development of mass-production led to new forms of consumption and identity creation. Films like [The Last Man on Earth](#) (1964) portray the fight for individuality as Vincent Price, as the last man on earth, must fight off the onslaught of night-walking, vampire/zombie hybrids.

Also, after the devastation of the atomic age was realized in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, new anxieties developed surrounding science and technology, the limitations of human progress, and the dangers posed by new forms of energy we did not yet fully understand. Films like [Plan 9 From Outer Space](#) (1959) root the zombie in terms of these fears, portraying the inevitable apocalypse as arising out of humanity’s own hubris. Developments in science and technology, especially the desire to control nature through new forms of energy, lead extraterrestrials to intervene to stop humanity’s inevitable acquisition of these dangerous weapons of mass destruction. The aliens resurrect the dead in order to destroy the living. In these dramatic premonitions of the future, humanity is said to be facing retribution for its sins. In the 1970s, these fears would only be magnified...

As you can see, the zombie as movie monster represents a very fluid metaphor or “artefact” (Bruns 2008) upon which our worst fears and anxieties can be grafted. Throughout time, the meaning of the zombie has changed, but so has our fears.

Part 2: Romero and the Politicized Zombie

Romero’s 1968 classic, [Night of the Living Dead](#), revolutionized the zombie metaphor. His “flesh eaters” have since become a staple of the genre and the social criticism laced within his early films have become a tradition in subsequent zombie films. Prior to Romero’s take on the zombie genre, zombies largely reflected the spirit of the times in which these films were made. Hence, the fears of racial miscegenation found in [White Zombie](#) (1932) and the fears of mind control found in [Invisible Invaders](#) (1952). However, Romero changed these trends when he made the zombie into something more than simply an automaton of mind control or voodoo mysticism; Romero introduced the “flesh-eater” into the zombie lexicon, pushing the genre further into the macabre and raising the possibility of a politicized zombie figure.

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

In fact *Night of the Living Dead* was created as a critique of the violence and devastation of Vietnam, with the dead returning to life as a result of radiation emitted from a government “Venus probe” sent to space. In addition, Romero made his zombies into a form of contagion: A single bite from a zombie will similarly kill and turn one into a zombie, thereby playing into fears of loved ones and strangers turning on one another. Since Romero’s film, the zombie has usually been associated with cannibal corpses that have risen from the grave to devour the living.

What is interesting to note about Romero’s film is its [not-so-subtle use of race relations to depict the tensions of the Civil Rights era](#). Although Romero himself has stated that his casting of a Black man as the lead role had nothing to do with race, the impact was felt by audiences, who saw the film as ahead of its time. To make this allegory all the more palpable, Romero included still photography at the end of the film, in which militant white police officers drag the corpse of Duane, the lead character, by meathooks, accompanied by canines and armed civilians. These photos, shocking in their graphic violence, are reminiscent of white lynch mobs in the southern United States.

Romero took his social criticism one step further in his second zombie film, [Dawn of the Dead](#) (1978). In this film, protagonists bunker down in a shopping mall as zombies invade from outside. The images of zombies mindlessly walking, groping, and drooling over consumer goods provides a stark image of the cult of consumerism and American capitalism.

Similarly, the Italian zombie horror film [Let Sleeping Corpses Lie](#) (1974) reflects fears of environmental degradation and pollution. In this film, the zombie epidemic is caused by an experimental pest-control machine, which sends radio waves into the ground. Although it solves the local pest problem for farmers, it also reanimates the dead in a nearby cemetery. Once again we see the fears of scientific progress and environmental degradation leading to the zombie apocalypse.

Finally, [The Plague of the Zombies](#) (1966) captures themes of colonialism, tyranny, and proletariat exploitation. Set in the mid 1800s, a mysterious plague caused by voodoo magic leads the rural proletariat into a zombie revolution, eventually overtaking their corrupt patriarch and devouring him.

In short, the films of the 1970s became extremely political, as the zombie became a metaphor for various social anxieties that were most salient at this time, including environmental degradation, science and technology, rising inequality, energy crises, and consumer culture.

With the 1980s, the zombie turned into a comedic figure. The films became more formulaic and less dramatic, mainly as a result of low-budget production houses capitalizing on the success of early zombie films. These exploitation films revolved around ever-increasing levels of gore and nudity in order to attract young audiences with shock value. Films like [Return of the Living Dead](#) (1985), [Dead Alive](#) (1992), and [Redneck Zombies](#) (1989) capture this era of [Grindhouse cinema](#).

Nonetheless, the zombie films of this era still contain social commentary. For instance, themes of drug abuse and teen promiscuity feature prominently in these films, mirroring the social context of the 1980s, particularly Reagan’s “War on Drugs” and the AIDS epidemic.

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

Similarly, Romero's third zombie installment, [*Day of the Dead*](#) (1985), is credited as a criticism of Cold War international relations and the U.S. military-industrial complex.

As we can see from the examples above, Romero successfully turned the zombie from brainless automaton into a premier source of social and cultural criticism. The cannibalistic nature of his "flesh eaters" and the precedents he set for the genre helped to transform the zombie into powerful figure for social commentary.

Part 3: The Zombie Renaissance

Scholars have called the post-9/11 era the "Zombie Renaissance" due to the torrent of zombie films produced at this time and the paradigmatic changes introduced to the zombie as movie monster (Bishop 2010). The first blockbuster film of this era, Danny Boyle's [*28 Days Later*](#) (2002) is often credited to raising the stakes in zombie films. This film became a powerful drama oriented around the zombie apocalypse, something that has since been mimicked in recent films and especially in [*AMC's recent television series The Walking Dead*](#).

Perhaps most importantly, Boyle's film is also credited in the creation of a new breed of zombie, the fast-moving, disease-infected living type I outlined at the onset of this presentation. These zombies are no longer depressed automatons, but enraged, feral, and overcome with madness. They sprint rather than shuffle; and more than brains they seek to spread the infection further, spewing blood and bile onto their victims in addition to devouring them.

28 Days Later also set the stage for a dramatic expansion of the zombie narrative, both in terms of special effects and in scope. In the film, the entire world is said to have succumbed to the "rage virus" and the protagonists must struggle to survive without the safety of social institutions. In fact, the very social institutions established to protect humanity become threats to survival, as the protagonists find out when they bunker down with renegade soldiers who attempt to rape and kill them.

The themes of social decay portrayed so eloquently in *28 Days Later* have since become a staple of the zombie genre. This is made most salient in films that draw direct parallels to global terrorism and social unrest. Zombie films like [*Dawn of the Dead*](#) (the 2004 remake of the Romero classic) take this to a new level, portraying dystopian anarchy on a grand scale that could not be achieved in early renditions of the zombie apocalypse. With characters left to fend for themselves, these "everyman" tales become gripping stories of individualism and resilience, thereby resonating with Western audiences.

But the social criticism of earlier zombie films was not lost in these recent films. Romero, particularly, has been keen to maintain explicit social commentary in his recent films. His more recent, [*Land of the Dead*](#) (2005) has often been credited as an indictment of the Bush era corporate-political inbreeding, in which the rich close themselves off in the opulent Fiddler's Green while the masses wallow in filth on the streets below, forever at risk of zombie invasion. In addition, the very structures enacted to protect us actually become our own undoing, as the barricades constructed to keep out the zombie horde ultimately serve to prevent the characters' escape.

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

In recent years we have also seen a resurgence of the zombie as a comedic element. Films like *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Dance of the Dead* (2008) portray scathing social commentary while using the zombie survival narrative as comedic relief. Similarly, the film *Fido* (2006) portrays historical revisionism in its portrayal of 1950s America, in which racial tensions are replaced with tensions between domesticated zombie slaves and their human masters.

In my opinion, zombie serves as a fluid and powerful metaphor for articulating our deepest cultural anxieties and social fears. Borrowing Axel Bruns (2007) concept of the “artefact,” an incomplete product that has neither an absolute beginning nor end, we can articulate the zombie as a collectively-produced cultural artefact. Its life cycle continues to grow and change with each successive film, spawning new creatures, deviations, and forking into new domains. In this sense, the zombie is a resilient metaphor that allows various ideas to be grafted upon it. As Peter Dendle (2008) has so eloquently argued, the zombie thereby serves as a “barometer” of our collective anxieties at different points in history. In addition, the zombie apocalypse and the survival narrative of many of these films provides a magnificent medium from which to make political and social statements, a vantage point from which contemporary (non-zombie) society can be dichotomized. The stories of survival contained in these films always contains implicit a criticism of the prevailing social order and the dystopian future that awaits us.

Finally, the zombie has acquired a powerful cultural currency since 9/11. It has spawned powerful new narratives of society and the individual, and invigorated gun enthusiasts and doomsdayers with models for survival (Dendle 2008). It has led to a distinct subculture of horror fans that identify with the zombie, inspiring “zombie walks” across the country and spurring fan communities across the globe. Given that the collective consciousness continues to identify so strongly with the zombie narrative, we will probably only see more zombie related media and activities emerging in the near future. In fact, we already have college courses and anthologies dedicated to the zombie. In this sense, the zombie will live on as part of our cultural understanding of mass society, offering us an image of the future but also a critique of the present state of the social order.

Selected References:

- Bishop, E. 2010. *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Dendle, P. 2007. “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety.” In N. Scott (Ed.), *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*. New York: Rodopi. Pp. 33-43.
- Pagano, D. 2008. “The Space of Apocalypse in Zombie Cinema.” In S. McIntosh and M. Leverette (Ed.), *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. Pp.71-86.

BRIDGING WORK and ACADEMIC READING

Independent research into the production of *Shaun of the Dead* (2004)

- Who is the director? What other films has he directed? What else can you find out about him?
- Which production companies helped make the film? What can you find out about any of them?
- British Board of Film Classification – what rating is it?
- What awards did it win?
- Cost of production – how much did it cost to make?
- Box office figures – how much money has it made?

Academic Reading List.		
Author: DP Strohecker	Read the academic article: <i>The Zombie in Film</i>	(This article has been provided as part of your Bridging work for this subject)
Author: Laura Mulvey	Research: Male Gaze Theory	Mulvey's iconic thesis is titled: <i>Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema</i> . You will be able to find summaries on the internet. <u>Expand your research</u> by researching Female Gaze and Gay/Queer Gaze.
Author: Todorov	Research: Classic Narrative Theory	<u>Expand your research</u> into narrative theory by researching the term: binary opposition
Contributors to this theory: Francois Truffaut, Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael (for a counter argument), Andre Bazin, Alexandre Astruc	Research: Auteur theory	Try searching the internet for: auteur theory and filmmaking to gain an overview. You could also access youtube to watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXyj0pVNHh4
Postmodernism challenges the basic assumptions of Modernism	Research: Postmodern Theory	Try searching the internet for: characteristics of postmodernism in film to gain an overview of this theory and its relevance to Film Studies. <u>Expand your research</u> by exploring the differences between Modernism and Postmodernism.